

2013

LenORE: Poe and Baudelaire at Play

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The College of Wooster

LenORE: POE AND BAUDELAIRE AT PLAY

By
Carolyn M. Fado

Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements of Independent Study
Comparative Literature 451-452

Supervised by
Dr. Carolyn A. Durham
Comparative Literature Program

March 25, 2013

Acknowledgements

First of all, this project would not have been possible if it weren't for Dr. Carolyn Durham and Cara Haxo, whom I would like to thank:

Dr. Carolyn Durham for all of her guidance over the past four semesters, for always pushing me to do my best work, and for introducing me to the work of Charles Baudelaire.

Cara Haxo for collaborating with me and writing music based on this play.

I would also like to thank:

My grandparents and my parents for their support of my academic pursuits.

Gillian Lee from the writing center for helping me with my critical introduction.

Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire for writing work which has inspired my own.

Dr. John Gabriele and my peers from my first-year seminar "Staging the Self and Society" for introducing me to Comparative Literature and theatrical analysis.

The College of Wooster as a whole.

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Critical Introduction

I remember the look of horror on my advisor's face when I told her about the character of the orangutan. This creature had the potential to be humorous. The orangutan worked for Edgar Allan Poe's detective story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," in which the reader discovers that the orangutan caused the murder. I spent a couple of weeks in the orangutan's defense, but I ultimately cut him out. His abrupt and farcical entrance clashed with the tone of the rest of my play and made me risk losing the trust of my spectator. Perhaps this surprise ending only works once, and Poe has already done it.

The orangutan is not the only aspect of my thesis that has changed. Throughout the process of writing a Senior Independent Study in Comparative Literature, I have come to appreciate that a final piece will never be as I initially planned. About two-and-a-half years ago, before I even knew that I would be studying Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire, my friend Cara Haxo and I made a proposal to the Music Department and the Comparative Literature Program to collaborate on an Independent Study project in which we would "combine music and theatre." Since then the role of music has changed from being fully intertwined with the script to becoming a song cycle based on the play. Cara wrote *L'imagination de LenORE*, a song cycle in six movements for soprano baritone and chamber ensemble, which is inspired by the work of Poe and Baudelaire. She wrote a musical interpretation of many of the key points of my script, focusing on the characters of Lenore and Jean Transsen.

Like the music, the script for this project has changed. A year ago, my play was to be titled *Tu Know End*, or *Tu Say: Tu Know End*, and the protagonist was to be a bilingual poet who struggled with dementia. As he lost his memory, the poet would speak

in nonsensical combinations of French and English that were to include lines from famous French and English poems. The spectators would see the poet's memories, in which he would speak clear French and English, and they would also see how the poet appeared to the other characters, who saw him as an old man who was losing his grasp on reality. Ultimately, these two worlds of memory and present reality would be blurred as the poet became increasingly confused. This is not the final work I wrote.

The final project is *LenORE*, a play about a doctoral student, Lenore, who begins to lose her grasp on reality as she immerses herself in the work of Poe and Baudelaire. I developed the character of Lenore last summer as I was struggling to figure out how best to incorporate comparative analysis within my script. I took a self-reflexive approach by creating a character who writes the critical thesis, a feminist analysis of Poe's and Baudelaire's work, that I would have written had I not been embarking on a creative project. Another character, Pierre, is creating the film that I would have wanted to make had I chosen to write a screenplay instead of a stage play. Through my characters, I have partially fulfilled my desire to write the Independent Study project that I never wrote. I have had the opportunity to include screenplays and critical analyses within my play through their voices.

Even though I integrated many different artistic genres within my play, I do have a background in playwriting. My theatre experience at the College has helped me understand the role of the playwright in theater. Seeing my work on-stage has reminded me of the many aspects that contribute to performance. I submitted "Memory-Morrow," the one act play I wrote for a playwriting course, to Horizon Theatre's New South Young Playwright's Festival, and I won the opportunity to see a professional staged reading of

my work. At The College of Wooster, “Memory-Morrow” was performed in the 2012 Festival of New Plays. Playwrights write a blueprint of what will be staged, and this work can be interpreted in various ways in performance.

My thesis did not need to be staged. In considering whether or not to write it to be staged, I studied the *théâtre dans un fauteuil* movement, which includes the work of Alfred de Musset, who wrote theatre for the purpose of being read, not staged. By freeing myself from the staging, I could free myself from some of the limitations of theatre, such as technical restrictions. I could have frequent set changes and more entrances and exits than might be feasible for a production. I could assume a talented cast that would know both French and English. Ultimately, however, I did write a play that could theoretically be staged. I paid more attention to the staging than did Baudelaire, who said of the little theatre he wrote, “I confess I have not given a thought to the staging” (qtd. in Barthes 29).¹ With the incorporation of a film screen on-stage, I did not need as many set changes. I feasibly depicted both reality and illusion by dividing the stage into stage right, Lenore’s imagination, and stage left, the real Parisian café.

In addition to helping me decide whether or not to stage my project, my literary study of theatre has been useful in other ways. My first year seminar class, “Staging the Self and Society,” introduced me to plays that were influential to my thesis, such as *En Attendant Godot* by Samuel Beckett. As my project originally focused on a man who was losing his ability to distinguish between French and English, I initially played with the absurdity of language. Some of the man’s dialogue was nonsensical, similar to Lucky’s monologue in *En Attendant Godot*. Back when I considered including the character of the orangutan, I looked at the farcical humor of *Ubu Roi*, a play by Alfred Jarry with near-

impossible stage directions and frequent set changes. In my final piece, I used less humor, though I hope that Lenore's insanity and obsession with her own death are darkly humorous.

A course in French theatre helped provide me with background knowledge of the development of theatre in France. I studied seventeenth-century works of Jean Racine and Pierre Corneille that taught me about the *règles* of French theatre, such as the three unities. Theatre from this period was supposed to take place in a single setting (*l'unité de lieu*), unfold within a time-span of 24 hours (*l'unité de temps*), and centralize action on-stage (*l'unité d'action*). In *LenORE*, I generally respect the three unities on the left side of the stage (the real Parisian café). The setting remains the café, the time could be within 24 hours, and the spectator mostly sees Pierre and Lenore conversing. Stage right and center stage, the spaces of Lenore's imagination, adopt a different theatrical style that is more visceral, musical, and physical. As a result of the unification of action, French plays focused on human interaction. The psychological insight of Racine's plays *Andromaque* and *Phèdre* was inspirational. For *Andromaque* and *Phèdre*, infatuation becomes psychologically disastrous. Like Racine's characters, Lenore is also obsessive. She becomes fixated on the death of women. She contemplates her family background of death in the female line and compares this to the death of female characters in Poe's and Baudelaire's work. You will see what becomes of Lenore.

I also looked to other sources to decide how to include Poe's and Baudelaire's work within *LenORE*. Ann-Marie MacDonald's combination of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* with her own words in *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* served as a model. In MacDonald's play, the scholar Constance is transported inside Shakespeare's

plays *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*. Within the world of Shakespeare's text, MacDonald plays with the language and meaning to modernize it. In the balcony scene, Juliet becomes attracted to Constance. The dilemma changes from a family feud to Juliet's sex. MacDonald manipulates Shakespeare's words to accommodate this new dilemma. MacDonald's Juliet says "*I know not how to tell thee who I am. / My sex, dear boy, is hateful to myself, / because it is an enemy to thee*" (67). The words in italics are Shakespeare's; the rest are MacDonald's. MacDonald writes in Shakespearean language and in iambic pentameter; her text blends in with Shakespeare's, which becomes humorous as the spectator realizes that what sounds like Shakespeare's words are not in fact his. As I wrote *LenORE*, I blended the words of Poe and of Baudelaire with my own, and I copied MacDonald's method of using italics to denote someone else's text. I also strove to bring Poe's and Baudelaire's text into a more modern context, via the voices of my characters—a woman (Lenore) and a man (Pierre) from the twenty-first century.

Poe and Baudelaire form an interesting basis for a comparative literature major because there are perhaps no two authors, each from a different cultural background, who are more connected. Poe (1809 – 1849) and Baudelaire (1821 – 1867) led similar lives, though one lived in France and the other in the United States. Both poets struggled financially as they attempted to make a living by writing. Of particular interest to my project is the importance of their mothers. As Patrick Quinn writes, "one salient fact in the lives of both is the persistent importance that their mothers had for them" (137). Baudelaire recognized the importance of maternal figures when he dedicated his translation of Poe's short stories, *Histoires extraordinaires*, to Poe's aunt, Maria Clemm, who was also the mother of his wife Virginia. Maria Clemm was like a mother to Poe as

well. Baudelaire refers to Maria Clemm as “la mère enthousiaste et dévouée” (Baudelaire 17). Below this dedication, Baudelaire translated Poe’s poem “To My Mother,” which Poe had written to Maria Clemm. Poe shows devotion to her when he writes, “I feel that, in the Heavens above, / The angels, whispering to one another, / Can find, among their burning terms of love, / None so devotional as that of ‘Mother’” (*Portable Poe* 632). Because of the importance of the poets’ mothers, I decided to make Lenore’s female ancestors prominent, as you will see.

Not only are the lives of the two poets similar, but so is their work, as Baudelaire acknowledges himself. He wrote in a letter, “la première fois que j’ai ouvert un livre de [Poe], j’ai vu, avec épouvant et ravissement, non seulement des sujets rêvés par moi, mais des phrases pensées par moi, et écrites par lui vingt ans auparavant” (*Corr. IV* 277). Scholars such as Émile Lauvrière have accused Baudelaire of borrowing from Poe. Lauvrière writes, “Baudelaire s’est approprié toutes les theories poétiques de Poe jusqu’à les faire pleinement siennes” (437). As I wrote *LenORE*, I felt better about appropriating the work of these two poets because I knew that Baudelaire had been greatly inspired by Poe. Lavière lists the similarities between the two poets’ work as “états de grâce extatique, rôle primordial de l’imagination intuitive, rôle essentiel du raisonnement analytique, rôle proéminent de la musique, absurdité des longs poèmes épiques ou autres, absurdité du didactisme rationnel ou moral, création rythmique du Beau mystique” (437). From these similarities, I will focus on the *Beau*, particularly on how it relates to women, and also on the “rôle proéminent de la musique.”

Célestin Pierre Cambiaire also writes about the importance of beauty to both poets: “like Poe Baudelaire gives to Beauty the leading part in poetry” (107). For both,

beauty is not what one might expect. Their work deals with subjects such as death and poverty. The duality of beauty is evident in the title of Baudelaire's collection of poems in verse, *Les Fleurs du mal*. The *mise-en-relation* of flowers and evil may seem to be comparing two opposites, but for Baudelaire, beauty is evil as well as divine. In his poem "Hymne à la beauté" he begins by asking a question about beauty, "viens-tu du ciel profond ou sors-tu de l'abîme, / Ô Beauté ?" (*Fleurs* 43). Later in the poem, he calls the "regard" of beauty both "infernal" and "divin" (43). In *LenORE*, I attempted to portray this duality of beauty. My character Morella, who would be considered beautiful, has blood on her face. She is infernal in that she is supposed to be dead, but she is still an attractive young woman who has sexual power over the male characters.

For both Poe and Baudelaire, beauty often takes the form of a beautiful woman who dies. In his essay "The Philosophy of Composition," Poe writes that the death of a beautiful woman is "unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world, and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover" (165). In this essay, Poe describes the process of writing "The Raven," in which the narrator laments the loss of Lenore. In another poem by the title "Lenore," the narrator also writes about the death of a young beautiful woman, and we see both the infernal and the divine. Lenore is "the queenliest dead" (*Portable Poe* 611). The narrator refers to those that have survived Lenore on earth as "fiends" (611). Lenore is an angel, rising from the "damned Earth" to Heaven (611). Baudelaire also portrays both women and death in several of his poems. For example, in "A une passante" words that are related to death are put in context with la Passante. Initially, this woman is described as "en grand deuil, douleur majesteuse" (*Fleurs* 124). Her leg is "de statue," which implies that she cannot move, and

the narrator can no longer see her after “un éclair.” The pleasure the narrator feels from looking at her is described as “le plaisir qui tue,” which shows that la Passante is powerful in her connection to death (124). Nevertheless, the reader only knows what the narrator reveals about her. The readers learn that she is grieving and might wonder why. “L’ouragan” “germe” in her eye (124). Her “jambe de statue” contrasts with the definition of her as “agile” (124). The reader sees enough of la Passante through the narrator’s eyes to become curious for further explanation.

To illustrate more similarities between Baudelaire’s and Poe’s conception of the trope of a beautiful dead woman, one can compare Poe’s short story “Morella” and Baudelaire’s prose poem “Laquelle est la vraie.” The similarities of these works struck me so much that I decided to combine them into a scene of my play. In each text, the poets show the doubling of a female character. In “Laquelle est la vraie,” the narrator buries a woman who “remplissait l’atmosphère de l’idéal,” and a woman who looks exactly like her appears after the burial (*Spleen* 121). In “Morella,” the title character is reincarnated through her daughter. Both works are narrated from a male perspective. Karen Weeks writes that “the romanticized woman is much more significant in her impact on Poe’s narrators than in her own right” (148). I find this to be true of both “Morella” and “Laquelle est la vraie.” Morella renders the narrator happy by “attaching herself to [him] alone” (*Portable Poe* 218). The narrator of “Laquelle est la vraie” takes ownership over Bénédicta by referring to her as his “trésor” (121).

Morella and Bénédicta are powerful, and their narrators try to control them. Morella has “gigantic” powers of mind and the narrator becomes her pupil (219). Poe may appear ahead of his time to have written such an intellectual female character in the

nineteenth century; nevertheless, Morella becomes increasingly hideous as the reader learns more about her mysterious knowledge. When describing their tutoring sessions, the narrator writes, “hour after hour, would I linger by her side, and dwell upon the music of her voice—until, at length, its melody was tainted with terror,—and there fell a shadow upon my soul... and thus... the most beautiful became the most hideous” (219). As the narrator feels “oppressed” by Morella’s manner, he begins to long for her demise (220-221). When she is reborn in their daughter, the narrator does what is within his power to prevent the daughter from becoming Morella. He does not tell her about her mother. He delays naming her until finally a “fiend” from within him speaks the name Morella at the baptismal ceremony (224). In “Laquelle est la vraie,” the narrator takes power over the ideal Bénédicta by burying her. Baudelaire emphasizes this by repeating “c’est moi qui l’ai enterrée” (121). The reader is unsure whether or not to trust Baudelaire’s narrator. When he writes “cette fille miraculeuse était trop belle pour vivre longtemps ; aussi est-elle morte quelques jours après que j’eus fait sa connaissance,” it seems possible that the narrator murdered her (121).

Even though the narrators try to control Bénédicta and Morella, these two women still retain power over the men. At the end of Baudelaire’s poem, the male narrator’s leg becomes stuck in the sepulture so that he remains permanently attached to “la fosse de l’idéal” (122). Poe’s Morella comes back to life in the form of her daughter exactly as she tells the narrator she will, and the narrator develops affection for this new daughter who dies exactly as Morella said he would (222). Nevertheless, the male voice still dominates all of Poe’s and Baudelaire’s work. The reader only knows what is significant to the narrator about Morella and Bénédicta or any other female character.

“Morella” and “Laquelle est la vraie” inspired the creation of two characters for my project, Jean Transsen and Morella. My Lenore’s imagination is personified by a man, Jean Transsen, who is based on Poe’s and Baudelaire’s narrators. As she immerses herself in the work of Poe and Baudelaire, she begins to imagine herself as a literary character from their work. Therefore, the voice of her imagination, a sort of personal narrator, is male, and she begins to imagine her own death. I was also inspired by the character of Morella; I created a character by the same name who is supposed to be dead but is not and is similar in appearance to her descendant, Lenore. Edgar, my Morella’s husband, mourns her as do the male narrators in Poe’s and Baudelaire’s work. Similar to Poe’s character, my Morella has power over men. In my play *LenORE*, I intended to convey themes pertaining to the female characters in Poe’s and Baudelaire’s work.

My Junior Independent Study provided a model for how to begin a feminist analysis of Poe’s and Baudelaire’s work. I wrote a comparative analysis of the portrayal of women in two films, *Chicago* (2002) directed by Rob Marshall and *Une femme est une femme* (1961) directed by Jean-Luc Godard. Godard’s film satirizes the American Hollywood musical and its representation of women. As I worked on Senior Independent Study, I found similarities between the films I had previously studied and the poetry and short stories I was studying. Godard’s Angela is a woman at the primal level; she wants to have a baby, and she is ready to sleep with her boyfriend’s friend to do this. She fits with Baudelaire’s description of women as “*naturelle, c’est-à-dire abominable*” (*Coeur* 77). In *Chicago*, the women kill their husbands. These femmes fatales are threatening, similar to Morella and Bénédicta who have control over mortality.

As someone who lacks a strong music background, I also found that studying these films was crucial to working on the collaborative part of my thesis. My experience is limited to playing piano and violin in high school. Reading about various musical film genres helped me think about how Cara and I could incorporate music into my storyline. *Une femme est une femme* mimics Hollywood dance numbers only a few times, and there is no other music. *Chicago* includes several musical dance numbers and the music occurs throughout the soundtrack. *Une femme est une femme* proved to be a more useful model than *Chicago* because I was not writing a musical, but rather a play that includes music.

The musicality of Poe's and Baudelaire's poetry was influential in Cara's and my decision to collaborate on a project that incorporates their work. Poe uses complex combinations of meter and rhyme. When discussing "The Raven" in his essay "The Philosophy of Composition," Poe writes, "nothing even remotely approaching this has ever been attempted" (166). Poe connects music to poetry in a letter: "music, when combined with a pleasurable idea, is poetry; music, without the idea, is simply music; the idea, without the music, is prose, from its very definitiveness" ("Letter" 503). Poe's attention to musicality is clear from his poems. Though Baudelaire does not explicitly connect poetry to music, his poems are musical. Claude Debussy set a number of Baudelaire's poems to music: "Le balcon," "Harmonie du soir," "Le jet d'eau," "Recueillement," and "La mort des amants."

As Cara and I decided which poems to set to music, "The Bells" and "L'Horloge" stood out to us. Poe's "The Bells" masters repetition, alliteration, meter, and rhyme so that the poem itself sounds like bells ringing. The onomatopoeic word "tintinnabulation" musically wells. The first stanza sounds merrier than the latter stanzas. The repetition of

“tinkle” makes the first stanza sound playful, and the “inkle” sound is furthered in the words “oversprinkle” and “twinkle ” (*Portable Poe* 634). In the third stanza, the sound of the poem becomes more forceful. The “eak” sound of “speak” and “shriek” is repeated. The “f” sound is repeated in “frantic” and “fire” (635). In the last stanza, sound is more elongated. The bells are “moaning” and “groaning.” The word “ghouls” stands out as the only word that does not rhyme at the end of the line. Because of this, I think that “The Bells” ends with a macabre sound. The lexical meaning of the words also becomes increasingly more macabre. In “L’Horloge” Baudelaire artfully manipulates the rhythm of the poem. He begins the poem forcefully, starting with the exclamation “Horloge !” (*Fleurs* 107). In the first line of his fourth stanza, Baudelaire forces the reader to pause several times when he writes “*remember ! Souviens-toi, prodigue ! Esto memor !*” (108). In the third stanza, enjambment breaks up a description of the rapid clock ticks of “souviens-toi,” with punctuation around words such as “rapide” and “maintenant.” When I read this stanza, I am reminded of the passage of time.

In addition to being musical, Poe’s and Baudelaire’s texts are theatrical. Poe’s poem “The Raven” has been performed on-screen in such works as Roger Corman’s (1963) and James McTeigue’s (2012) films of the same name as the poem. McTeigue’s film integrates several of Poe’s short stories and poems throughout. Baudelaire’s poems often tell a story and include dialogue and a description of setting, which are all key components of a play. Rosemary Lloyd cites Marie Maclean who argues that “the demands and concepts of the theatre underpin the structure of many of [Baudelaire’s] prose poems” (57). Movement and imagery are important to both Baudelaire’s poems and theatre. In “Laquelle est la vraie,” the reader is left with an image of the male narrator’s

leg stuck in the sepulture so that he is forever attached to “la fosse de l’idéal.” The psychology of the characters of Baudelaire and Poe is also theatrical because they play roles. In both “Laquelle est la vraie” and “Morella,” the prominent female character plays the role of the beautiful dead woman. These characters become plural as the male narrators believe that they see them outside of the grave. This doubling reminds me of the duality of the actor who is both actor and character. As the title “Laquelle est la vraie” implies, one of these identities should be real. In theatre, the actor is “real.”

In *LenORE*, I play with identity and reality. Lenore becomes lost in the world of Poe’s and Baudelaire’s literature. Her words become their words. The fictive becomes the real. In the beginning her imagination woos her into a literary mindset. Dear reader, let me invite you to turn the page and become lost in my literary world, which is also the world of Poe and Baudelaire.

LenORE

A play with music

Script by Carolyn Fado

Based on the work of Edgar Allan Poe and of Charles Baudelaire

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JEAN TRANSSEN, Lenore's imagination. He becomes increasingly more deathly in appearance. At the end, he resembles Poe's description of the Red Death, from the short story "The Mask of the Red Death." He sings.

LENORE/LEAH, A quixotic thesis student, who is researching the ideal women in the work of Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire. Leah is her real name, but she dubs herself Lenore. She plays JEANNE in the film sequence. She also briefly plays VIRGINIA, Poe's wife. 26 years old.

PIERRE, A cinéaste, working on a film about a group of female scholars who bring Poe and Baudelaire to the 21st century. He plays POE in the film sequence.

MORELLA, Lenore's cursed ancestor from the mid-nineteenth century. She died in childbirth, but all of her female descendants resemble her such that it is as though she never passed away. She plays DELPHIE in the film sequence. She also plays LENORE'S MOTHER.

SERVEUSE, A young waitress in the café. Played by the same actress as MORELLA.

EDGAR, Lenore's ancestor from the mid-nineteenth century. He may have murdered his crazy wife, Morella. He is paranoid because he fears that she is not actually dead and that he buried her alive. He plays BAUDELAIRE in the film sequence.

CAROLYN, A playwright. Played by the same actress as LENORE.

SETTING

Stage-left is a café in Paris, quartier Saint-Michel. Center-stage is JEAN TRANSSEN, who is the actorial manifestation of LENORE'S imagination. The world of Lenore's imagination is stage-right. Film screen is center-stage.

On-stage:

A café in Paris. Stage-left. Present.

Lenore's world. Stage-right. Ancestral past.

On-screen:

A bar in NYC. Present.

TIME

Present, though Lenore's imagination includes visions of her ancestors.

Text from Poe or Baudelaire is in italics (includes translated text).

THE OPENING CREDITS, ON-SCREEN

FADE IN:

INT. PARISIAN CAFÉ - DAY

LENORE, sitting alone at a table, writes her dissertation.

LENORE

(Says while writing)

Baudelaire a clamé la puissance de l'imagination, *la*
reine des facultés, pour créer un autre monde qui
transforme la réalité.

On the screen, the credit appears:

“LENORE” AND THE NAME OF THE ACTOR

DISSOLVE TO:

LENORE, WITH A SCRIPT IN HAND, READS THE PART OF JEANNE.

On the screen, the credit appears:

“JEANNE” AND THE NAME OF THE ACTOR

FADE TO:

INT. BAR IN NYC LOWER EAST SIDE - NIGHT

JEANNE, sitting at a bar stool, drinks.

CUT TO:

INT. PARISIAN CAFÉ - DAY

PIERRE talks with LENORE.

On the screen, the credit appears:

“PIERRE” AND THE NAME OF THE ACTOR

DISSOLVE TO:

PIERRE, WITH A SCRIPT IN HAND, READS THE PART OF BAUDELAIRE.

On the screen, the credit appears:

“CHARLES BAUDELAIRE”

FADE TO:

INT. BAR IN NYC LOWER EAST SIDE - NIGHT

POE and BAUDELAIRE drink at the bar. The camera zooms in on POE.

On the screen, the credit appears:

“EDGAR ALLAN POE”

CUT TO:

NOTE: The credit sequence continues. On-screen, names of the actors appear, along with shots of them. Shots of characters who are played by the same actor fade into each other:

SERVEUSE/Morella/DELPHIE... Actor name.
Shot of SERVEUSE bringing café au lait to PIERRE.
Shot of MORELLA coming out of the coffin.
Shot of DELPHIE at the NYC bar.

Edgar/BAUDELAIRE... Actor name.
Shot of EDGAR talking.
Shot of BAUDELAIRE at the NYC bar.

JEAN TRANSSEN... Actor name.
Shot of JEAN TRANSSEN singing.

Text from POE and BAUDELAIRE appears:

The great variety of melodious expression which is given out from the keys of a piano, might be made, in proper hands, the basis of an excellent fairy-tale. Let the poet press his finger steadily upon each key, keeping it down, and imagine each prolonged series of

undulations [sic] the history, of joy or of sorrow, related by a good or evil spirit imprisoned within. There are some of the notes which almost tell, of their own accord, true and intelligible histories.

-E.A. Poe

Le beau est toujours bizarre

-C. Baudelaire

The playwright's name appears on-screen:

“CAROLYN... THE PLAYWRIGHT”

CAROLYN (OFF-SCREEN)

Nous entrons en scène.

DISSOLVE TO:

SHOT OF THE MASKS.

Masks of various characters' faces, such as LENORE, MORELLA, LENORE'S MOTHER, and the Red Death. For a description of the Red Death see Poe's "The Mask of the Red Death" or page 82 of my script.

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT [1]

Stage-left is the interior of Café Le Départ Saint-Michel, where LENORE sits at a table and does not move. A book, L'Invitation au voyage hors de ce monde, is in her hands. JEAN TRANSSEN is center-stage. Stage-right is empty. LIGHTS UP stage-left.

LENORE

All the world's a library, where each reader dreams of entering another realm. This one wants to hear the raven tapping on her chamber door, and that one believes he can conquer the moulins, like a knight. I want to go on a voyage to *un pays superbe, un pays de Cocagne*.

(Pause)

It seems to me that mon imagination is always well where I am not, and this question of évation is one that we incessantly discuss.

Lights up center-stage, on JEAN TRANSSEN.

LENORE (CONT'D)

Mon imagination entre en scène et me parle.

JEAN TRANSSEN

(Singing)

*MON ENFANT, MA SOEUR,
DREAM OF THE PARADISE
OVER MANY A QUAIN AND CURIOUS VOLUME OF
FORGOTTEN LORE.
HERE, ALL IS BUT ORDER AND BEAUTÉ
LUXE, CALME ET VOLUPTÉ.*

LENORE

It would be nice to lose myself in the paradise of forgotten lore.

JEAN TRANSSEN
(Singing)

*ALL THE HEAVENS SEEM TO TWINKLE
WITH A CRYSTALLINE DELIGHT
IN A SORT OF RUNIC RHYME
TO THE TINTINNABULATION
THAT SO MUSICALLY WELLS
OVER MANY A QUAIN'T AND CURIOUS VOLUME OF
FORGOTTEN LORE.
HERE, ALL IS BUT ORDER AND BEAUTÉ
LUXE, CALME ET VOLUPTÉ*

LENORE
It would be nice to get lost in another world.

JEAN TRANSSEN
(Singing)

COME LIVE WITH ME
*OUT OF SPACE, OUT OF TIME
IN THE COUNTRY THAT RESEMBLES YOU,
YOU, THE BIEN-AIMÉE OF ALL THE NOVELS, THE
HEROINE OF ALL THE PLAYS, THE IDEAL "SHE" OF
ALL THE POETRY BOOKS.*

LENORE
This book looks rather enticing...

(LENORE freezes.)

JEAN TRANSSEN
(Singing)

COME LIVE WITH ME
*OUT OF SPACE, OUT OF TIME
HERE, ALL IS BUT ORDER AND BEAUTÉ
LUXE, CALME ET VOLUPTÉ.*

(JEAN TRANSSEN freezes.)

Lights down center-stage.

(Lenore unfreezes.)

LENORE

J'entre en scène.

(LENORE sets down the book. PIERRE enters.)

PIERRE

Salut, Leah. J'ai une idée.

Spotlight up on the film screen.

IMAGES OF JEANNE AND DELPHIE ON THE FILM SCREEN.

JEANNE and DELPHIE, played by LENORE and MORELLA, are characters from PIERRE'S film. They are twenty-first century scholars based on Jeanne Duval, l'amante de Baudelaire, and Delphine from "Femmes damnées."

LENORE

T'es venu après tout.

PIERRE

J'espère que tu ne m'as pas attendu trop longtemps...

LENORE

Si.

PIERRE

Je suis désolé, Leah. C'est que j'ai eu une idée géniale pour le film. Je ne voulais pas m'arrêter d'écrire.

LENORE

C'est pas grave, j'étais en train de lire, mais... Je rêvais. Je n'ai rien compris à mon livre.

PIERRE

Qu'est-ce qui ne va pas ?

(Beat)

C'est toujours difficile après la mort de quelqu'un qu'on aime.

LENORE

Dis donc, c'est quoi ton idée ?

PIERRE

Que Jeanne était déjà en couple avec Delphie...

LENORE

Intéressant.

BAUDELAIRE APPEARS ON THE FILM SCREEN.

BAUDELAIRE in the NYC bar, played by EDGAR.

PIERRE

Alors, c'est Charles Baudelaire qui séduit Jeanne, et Delphie est d'accord parce que, ben, c'est Charles Baudelaire. Et puis Jeanne a envie de mieux connaître ce poète parce que sa poésie est le sujet de sa thèse de doctorat.

LENORE

Donc, Jeanne me ressemble... Maintenant qu'elle écrit une thèse au sujet de Baudelaire.

PIERRE

Et de Poe.

POE ON THE FILM SCREEN.

POE in the NYC bar, played by PIERRE.

LENORE

Tout à fait. Maintenant je peux mieux m'identifier avec mon personnage.

PIERRE

C'est bien ce que j'ai pensé.

Film screen off. Spotlight down on the film screen.

(La SERVEUSE enters.)

PIERRE (CONT'D)

Mademoiselle !

SERVEUSE

Monsieur. Qu'est-ce que vous prenez ?

PIERRE

Un café au lait.

SERVEUSE

Et Madame ?

LENORE

Merci, rien de plus.

(La SERVEUSE exits.)

LENORE (CONT'D)

Je porte pas d'alliance. Pourquoi pense-t-elle que je sois mariée ?

The bells ring.

PIERRE

Je suis sûr qu'elle appelle tout le monde "madame."

(Pause)

Je crois qu'elle est féministe.

LENORE

Elle n'a pas l'air féministe.

PIERRE

C'est quoi l'air féministe ?

LENORE

Elle s'habille comme une serveuse de Hooters.

PIERRE

C'est quoi Hooters ?

LENORE

Un resto où les serveuses ne portent presque rien.

PIERRE

Les strip-teaseuses peuvent être féministes.

LENORE

Mais, regarde son visage, toi. Son maquillage.

PIERRE

Les féministes se maquillent.

LENORE

Pas comme ça.

PIERRE

(Jokingly)

Bon, c'est pour cacher les rides. Elle devrait être plus âgée que toi.

LENORE

(Flirtatiously)

T'es bien méchant.

The bells ring.

LENORE (CONT'D)

Mais, dis-donc, je suis trop jeune pour me marier.

PIERRE

On pourrait être mariés.

The bells ring. JEAN TRANSSEN speaks from center-stage, which is dark.

JEAN TRANSSEN

Oh, *the tintinnabulation that so musically wells from the bells, bells, bells...*

LENORE

Quoi, nous deux ?

(PIERRE freezes stage-left.)

Lights up center-stage.

LENORE (CONT'D)

As I think about the life we'd have together...

JEAN TRANSSEN

Keeping time, time, time

LENORE

Mon imagination me rappelle, in a sort of Runic rhyme.

JEAN TRANSSEN

(Singing)

*TROIS MILLE SIX CENTS FOIS PAR HEURE, LA SECONDE
CHUCHOTE : SOUVIENS-TOI ! -RAPIDE, AVEC SA VOIX
D'INSECTE, MAINTENANT DIT : JE SUIS AUTREFOIS*

(JEAN TRANSSSEN freezes...)

...as lights go down center-stage.

(PIERRE unfreezes.)

LENORE

Quoi, nous deux ? Nous nous marierons ?

PIERRE

Je préfère les hommes...

LENORE

C'est bien ce que je pensais...

PIERRE

...la plupart du temps.

LENORE

Maintenant, pour la pièce...

PIERRE

C'est un film.

LENORE

Oui, pour ton film. Tu ne m'as pas tout expliqué. Est-ce que Jeanne est amoureuse de Baudelaire ?

PIERRE

Il est amoureux d'elle.

LENORE

Mais elle n'est pas amoureuse de lui.

PIERRE

Ses oeuvres lui plaisent.

(He fumbles in his bag, takes out the script.)

LENORE

Qu'est-ce que tu fais ?

PIERRE

On va parler de ton personnage.

LENORE

Je comprends que Jeanne est basée sur Jeanne Duval, l'amante de Baudelaire. Mais Baudelaire...

PIERRE

T'es belle aujourd'hui...

LENORE

Tu crois ? Donc, Baudelaire est transporté à l'avenir par des intellectuelles... Et Jeanne en est une ?

PIERRE

Oui. Et elle ressemble tellement à Jeanne Duval que Baudelaire tombe amoureux d'elle. Et ils...

LENORE

Ça veut dire quoi, que tu aimes les hommes... La plupart du temps ?

PIERRE

Si je tombe sur une femme exceptionnelle...

The bells ring.

LENORE

Mais ce n'est pas encore...

PIERRE

Et toi, ça va ta vie amoureuse ?

LENORE

Tu sais que depuis la mort de ma mère, ça ne va plus.

PIERRE

Qu'est-ce qui se passe avec Alan ?

LENORE

Rien. Je suis ici. Il est à Baltimore. Je me suis enfuie à Paris.

PIERRE

Enfuie de lui ? D'Alan ?

LENORE

De mes propres émotions. Tu sais...

Lights up center-stage.

JEAN TRANSSEN
(Singing)

*SOUVIENS-TOI ! QUE LE TEMPS EST UN JOUEUR AVIDE,
KEEPING TIME, TIME, TIME.*

PIERRE
Quoi ? Que tu vas mourir ?

LENORE
Bien sûr que je vais mourir. Tout le monde meurt.

The bells ring.

PIERRE
Mais toi, tu penses que tu mourras jeune.

LENORE
Oui. C'est la raison pour laquelle nous nous sommes rompus.

PIERRE
Tu l'as largué ? Ou c'était lui ?

LENORE
Moi.

JEAN TRANSSEN
(Singing)

*HORLOGE! DIEU SINISTRE, EFFRAYANT, IMPASSIBLE
DONT LE DOIGT NOUS MENACE.*

PIERRE
T'es folle de penser à la mort.

LENORE
Je sais.

(Pause)
My imagination won't let me forget... How little time I have left.

JEAN TRANSSEN
(Singing)

REMEMBER! SOUVIENS-TOI! PRODIGUE! ESTO MEMOR!

LENORE
I can't forget until I forget everything...

JEAN TRANSSEN
(Singing)

*SOUVIENS-TOI
LES VIBRANTES DOULEURS DANS TON COEUR PLEIN
D'EFFROI SE PLANTERONT BIENTOT COMME DANS UNE
CIBLE ;
JE VAIS POMPER TA VIE AVEC MA TROMPE IMMONDE!*

PIERRE
T'es folle.

LENORE
Pierre, allons. On parle de mon personnage.

PIERRE
T'es une strip-teaseuse.

LENORE
Quoi ?

PIERRE
Pour subvenir à tes besoins, pour payer les frais d'inscription pour ton doctorat.

LENORE
Il faut que je travaille, d'accord. Mais... Pourquoi une strip-teaseuse ?

PIERRE
Parce que ton personnage est basée sur Jeanne Duval, l'amante de Charles Baudelaire.

LENORE
Elle n'était pas prostituée.

PIERRE
Une strip-teaseuse n'est pas une prostituée.

LENORE
Tout à fait--

PIERRE

--mais elle était libérée sexuellement. Ma version de Jeanne Duval va être une strip-teaseuse.

LENORE

Les strip-teaseuses ne sont pas libérées. Une strip-teaseuse est payée pour le sexe, comme une prostituée.

PIERRE

Je pense que, toi, tu confonds l'anglais avec le français. Une strip-teaseuse n'est pas une prostituée.

LENORE

Je sais bien parler français. Je suppose que ton idée marche. Comme le dit Baudelaire, la beauté doit être amoral. La profession de strip-teaseuse est amoral.

PIERRE

Voilà ! Baudelaire pense que la beauté est amoral. *“La femme est naturelle, c'est-à-dire abominable.”*

LENORE

C'est pour ça que tu aimes les hommes.

PIERRE

“J'ai toujours été étonné qu'on laissât les femmes entrer dans les églises. Quelle conversation peuvent-elles tenir avec Dieu ?”

LENORE

Tu penses que les femmes sont des salopes !

PIERRE

Leah ! C'est une citation de Baudelaire.

LENORE

Tu penses que je sais pas de quoi on parle...

PIERRE

Leah.

LENORE

Appelle-moi Lenore.

PIERRE

Lenore ?

LENORE

Je vais te quitter.

PIERRE

Comment ? Tu veux aller où ?

LENORE

Dans ma propre imagination. Je vais me perdre dans le lore. Tu sais le mot, lore, c'est un mot anglais.

PIERRE

(To the audience)

Elle est folle.

(LENORE opens a book titled *Le Port*. La
SERVEUSE enters with le café au lait and the bill.
Stage-left action freezes.)

Lights up stage-right.

LENORE

Je veux bien me perdre dans un monde imaginaire.

As Jean Transsen begins to sing:

IMAGES OF WAVES AND THE BEACH APPEAR ON THE FILM SCREEN.

JEAN TRANSSSEN

(Singing)

*UN PORT EST UN SÉJOUR CHARMANT POUR UNE ÂME
FATIGUÉE DES LUTTES DE LA VIE... IL Y A UNE SORTE
DE PLAISIR MYSTÉRIEUX ET ARISTOCRATIQUE POUR
CELUI QUI N'A PLUS NI CURIOSITÉ NI AMBITION, À
CONTEMPLER... TOUS CES MOUVEMENTS DE CEUX
QUI PARTENT ET DE CEUX QUI REVIENNENT, DE CEUX
QUI ONT ENCORE LA FORCE DE VOULOIR, LE DÉSIR DE
VOYAGER OU DE S'ENRICHIR.*

(EDGAR enters stage-right. He mutters
incoherently, carries a box, and wanders around,
remaining on stage-right.)

EDGAR
(To LENORE)

Morella? Morella?

(Stage-left action unfreezes.)

PIERRE

Leah ? Lenore ? T'es là ?

Stage-right:

EDGAR

I got rid of you! Morella, you're not supposed to be here.

(He drops the box. On-stage, ashes and a few masks fall out of it. One of the masks is of LENORE'S face. The other is of MORELLA'S face. There is also a mask of LENORE'S mother's face, but this last mask does not fall out. EDGAR picks up the masks and puts them in the box.)

Stage-left:

(La SERVEUSE sets le café au lait down on the table.)

SERVEUSE

Je suis désolée pour l'attente.

PIERRE

C'est pas grave. On parlait de mon film.

(LENORE glances back and forth from her book to la SERVEUSE to the film screen.)

SERVEUSE

Vous tournez un film ! C'est génial. Il s'agit de quoi dans votre film ?

PIERRE

De Poe et de Baudelaire.

SERVEUSE
(To LENORE)

Donc vous l'aidez ? Vous êtes cinéaste, vous aussi ?

LENORE
(Looking up from her book)

Pourquoi dites-vous cela ?

SERVEUSE

Je vois vos livres...

LENORE

C'est vrai que je suis toujours ici.

PIERRE

Dans le film, Poe et Baudelaire sont transportés à l'avenir. Ils sont à New York. Jeanne et Delphie sont des thésardes en littérature.

SERVEUSE

Il faut que je voie ça--

LENORE

Jeanne est une strip-teaseuse pour payer les frais d'inscription.

SERVEUSE

C'est intéressant... J'aime les oeuvres de Poe.

PIERRE

(Flirtatiously)

Moi aussi. Evidement. Baudelaire a traduit Poe, surtout ses histoires. C'est Mallarmé qui a traduit la poésie pour la plupart.

LENORE

(Muttering)

Et les autres.

SERVEUSE

(To PIERRE)

C'est intéressant.

PIERRE

Baudelaire a écrit une version du "Corbeau."

SERVEUSE

J'aime bien "Le Corbeau" !

PIERRE

Moi aussi.

SERVEUSE
C'est intéressant.

PIERRE
Vous voulez lire mon scénario ?

SERVEUSE
Mais oui ! J'aimerais bien.

(PIERRE takes out a script and hands it to
her. Their hands touch.)

SERVEUSE (CONT'D)
Merci. Je vais le lire ce soir.

PIERRE
D'accord. Et si vous avez des commentaires ou des suggestions... n'hésitez pas...

SERVEUSE
Ça a l'air super intéressant.

PIERRE
Merci.

LENORE
(To PIERRE)
Je ne peux pas me concentrer.

(She closes the book.)

SERVEUSE
(To LENORE)
Vous ne prenez toujours rien ?

LENORE
(Frustrated)
Merci. Rien.

(La SERVEUSE sets the bill down on the table and
exits.)

LENORE (CONT'D)
(Mocking la SERVEUSE)
Que c'est intéressant !

PIERRE
(Scolding)

Leah.

LENORE
Quoi. Elle a dit que c'était intéressant.

PIERRE
Mais...

LENORE
J'ai pensé que tu aimais les hommes.

PIERRE
Notre serveuse ne m'intéresse pas, Leah.

LENORE
Ok. Mais tu aimes les femmes ?

PIERRE
(Hesitantly)
Oui. Certaines-unes.

ON THE FILM SCREEN, THE MASK OF MORELLA/LA SERVEUSE'S FACE
APPEARS.

LENORE
(Looking at the film screen)
J'ai entendu le poème "Le Port."

PIERRE
Entendu ?

LENORE
Oui, tu l'as entendu ? Le poème de Baudelaire ? Et j'ai vu des vagues, la plage...
(Looks at screen)

Et...
(Looks at EDGAR. Shivers.)
Tu vois quelque chose ?

PIERRE
Où ?

LENORE

A l'autre bout de la pièce.

(Pointing to EDGAR.)

Là.

PIERRE

(Looking at Edgar)

Je vois un mur...

(Turns toward audience)

Mais, je vois bien quelque chose par là.

LENORE

Où ?

(PIERRE points at the audience)

LENORE (CONT'D)

C'est qu'il y a plein de monde dans le café ? Tu ne vois rien là ?

(She points to EDGAR, who is stage right. EDGAR exits.)

PIERRE

Non.

LENORE

Moi, je vais bientôt mour--

PIERRE

--Ne sois pas ridicule, Leah.

LENORE

Toutes les femmes dans ma famille meurent jeune... Les maudites de ma famille, LaRousse. Attends, LaRousse n'est pas le nom... C'est le nom du père de ma mère. Nous, les femmes de ma famille, deviennent folles avant de mourir. Ainsi ma mère... elle a pris les serviettes hygiéniques ensanglantées--

PIERRE

--Ton personnage !

LENORE

--de la poubelle dans la salle de bains. Elle les a coupés en petits morceaux et elle les a mis dans une boîte.

PIERRE

Allons. Ton personnage.

LENORE

Ben, tu m'as dit qu'elle était strip-teaseuse.

PIERRE

Et lesbienne.

LENORE

Ça c'est autre chose.

PIERRE

Elle a une liaison avec Delphie.

LENORE

Delphie, comme Delphine de “Femmes damnées.”

PIERRE

Tout à fait.

LENORE

Elle devient plus belle après sa mort.

PIERRE

Elle ne meurt pas.

LENORE

Enfin, dans les livres de Poe, les femmes qui sont mortes sont toujours les plus belles.

PIERRE

Mais, dans le film, il s'agit de Baudelaire.

LENORE

Poe arrive à la fin, non ? Puisque Baudelaire et Poe sont des semblables, des frères. Baudelaire l'a appelé “*mon frère, mon semblable !*”

PIERRE

D'abord, les femmes de Baudelaire et de Poe ne sont pas les mêmes.

LENORE

Non, pas tout à fait mais il y a des ressemblances. Dans la poésie de Baudelaire, la femme est associée à tout ce qui est naturel. Donc, elle est associée à la mort. Et en plus--

PIERRE

--Pour Baudelaire, les femmes sont naturelles, là je suis d'accord. Mais, selon sa théorie de la modernité, il n'est pas nécessaire que l'art soit associé à la nature. La poésie peut évoquer un monde artificiel.

LENORE

Chez les deux poètes, les femmes représentent un idéal qui n'est pas réalisable. Pense à Morella. Elle est assez effrayante, non ? Elle a un pouvoir sur la nature. Elle revient de la mort dans la forme de sa fille. Elle n'est pas Lenore, qui est déjà morte. Annabel Lee est si belle, si jeune et si morte. Morella est effrayante à cause de son pouvoir sur la vie et la mort. Moi, je n'ai aucun pouvoir sur la mort. Je suis destinée à mourir. Il n'y a rien à faire. Tu vas me trouver très belle après que je meurs.

PIERRE

Tu mélanges ta propre vie avec la littérature, et ça c'est dangereux. Il y a la réalité et il y a la fiction. Nous vivons dans la réalité.

LENORE

Mais, tu passes beaucoup de temps dans ton imagination.

PIERRE

Je sais quand même faire la différence.

LENORE

Mon imagination est réelle; elle existe. Que cela te plaise ou non, peu importe.

(Pause)

Baudelaire a clamé la puissance de l'imagination, la reine des facultés, pour créer un autre monde qui transforme la réalité. Ce monde devient réel.

PIERRE

Tu ne vas pas mourir.

LENORE

Tout le monde meurt. Je suis une femme. Je suis naturelle. Je vais mourir.

The lighting changes to red.

LENORE (CONT'D)

Je vais aller *au pays qui me ressemble. Un port est un séjour charmant pour une âme fatiguée des luttes de la vie.* Je partirai hors de ce monde.

(LENORE picks up the book *Mad Tryst*.)

BLACKOUT.

ACT [2]

Lights up stage-right. LENORE walks over toward stage-right but stops mid-stage. MORELLA is hidden in a coffin. JEAN TRANSSEN is center-stage. A film screen is center-stage. Lights are down stage left, which is still the café. PIERRE sits at the same table in the café.

(MORELLA sobs. LENORE looks around to see from where the noise is coming. She walks back to stage-right. The bells chime. MORELLA claws the coffin, crying out.)

JEAN TRANSSEN

Her cry, at first muffled and broken, sounds like the sobbing of a child, and then it quickly swells into one long, loud, and continuous scream.

(While JEAN talks, LENORE walks over to stage-left and sits down at a table in the café. She picks up the book *Mad Tryst*.)

Lights up stage-left.

PIERRE

Toi, tu vas répéter ou lire ?

(LENORE sets down *Mad Tryst*. She keeps looking back at stage-right.)

PIERRE (CONT'D)

Allons, revenons à ton personnage. Il faut que je m'en aille bientôt.

LENORE

Ah oui--pourquoi ?

PIERRE

J'ai besoin, très besoin, d'une cigarette.

LENORE

Ce n'est que ça ? Mais tu reviendras après.

(Pause)

Pierre ?

PIERRE

Recommençons.

LENORE

C'est où la caméra ?

PIERRE

(Pointing to the audience)

Les spectateurs sont là.

LENORE

Mais on fait un film. Elle est où la caméra ?

PIERRE

On commence. Je vais lire--

LENORE

Mais...

PIERRE

(Pointing to the script)

--Toi, tu commences ici. Je te donne la réplique. Je suis Charles Baudelaire.

LENORE

D'accord.

(Beat)

Lights down stage-right.

PIERRE

Leah, Lenore, c'est à toi de commencer.

LENORE

Je parle sur mon portable... À Delphie.

PIERRE

Oui.

LENORE

Mais qu'est-ce qui s'est passé avant ?

(LENORE takes out her phone.)

PIERRE

C'est après la conférence où Charles Baudelaire est apparu. Jeanne est au café. Elle téléphone à Delphie parce qu'elle voit Charles.

LENORE

(Reading from script)

Delphie. Hello?

(Not reading)

Ton scénario est en anglais ?

PIERRE

Oui, t'es à New York. Voyons.

LENORE

(Reading, holding the phone)

He's here.

PIERRE

Est-ce que tu peux rapprocher ton portable de ton oreille ?

(LENORE moves the phone to her ear.)

LENORE

J'ai pensé qu'on faisait une première lecture.

PIERRE

C'est pour les spectateurs.

LENORE

Lesquels ?

(PIERRE motions to the audience. LENORE puts the phone closer to her ear.)

LENORE (CONT'D)

(Reading, on the phone)

He looks lost.

PIERRE

(Reading, strong French accent)

Ma *Vénus noire*. You made me come here.

LENORE
(Reading)

I made you come here?

PIERRE
(Reading)

By the park and the tree, I found myself in this strange land with high buildings. And what is that device?

(He points to the phone.)

LENORE
(Reading)

I talk to people from far away on it.

(Not reading, to PIERRE)

Ce scénario est terrible ! Ça n'a rien à voir avec la vie de Poe et de Baudelaire.

PIERRE
(Making fun of her)

Merci, Madame qui fait sa thèse au sujet des femmes chez Poe et chez Baudelaire.

LENORE
Je ne suis pas une Madame.

(She pulls out *Le Spleen de Paris*.)

PIERRE
Qu'est-ce que tu lis maintenant ?

LENORE
Le Spleen de Paris.

Lights up stage-right.

(MORELLA claws the coffin. LENORE looks over at stage-right. PIERRE appears to notice she is distracted.)

PIERRE
(Trying to get LENORE'S attention)

Jeanne...

LENORE
Je ne suis plus certaine de rien.

PIERRE

Leah ?

(LENORE begins to cry. PIERRE comforts her. She kisses him. It lasts for a few seconds, until PIERRE pulls out.)

PIERRE (CONT'D)

Let's get back to the text.

LENORE

That's all you have to say?

(Pause)

Okay let's go back to the text.

(Pause)

Je me sens folle. Qu'est-ce que je deviens ? Qui suis-je ?

PIERRE

Ça n'est pas dans le texte. On ne joue pas Racine ici. Pick up my text.

(LENORE picks up *Le Spleen de Paris*.)

PIERRE (CONT'D)

Why are you reading le texte de Baudelaire et pas le mien ?

(MORELLA screams stage-right. Only LENORE hears it. She jumps up from her seat. PIERRE looks at her like she's insane.)

LENORE

I'm not sure which text is real anymore.

PIERRE

What do you mean? Neither is real.

LENORE

Baudelaire's text is true.

PIERRE

How can it be true? It's fiction.

LENORE

“Laquelle est la vraie?” Here. Look at it.

(She shows PIERRE her book.)

LENORE (CONT'D)

Read it.

PIERRE

(Reading)

J'ai connu une certaine Bénédicte, qui remplissait l'atmosphère d'idéal--

LENORE

(Having heard "Morella" instead of
"Bénédicte" in previous line)

Morella ? Pourquoi t'as changé son prénom ? La *fille miraculeuse* n'est pas Morella; elle s'appelle Bénédicte.

PIERRE

C'est qui Morella ?

LENORE

J'sais pas, c'est toi qui a dit Morella.

PIERRE

Non.

LENORE

Oh...

JEAN TRANSEN

Cette fille miraculeuse était trop belle pour vivre longtemps ; aussi est-elle morte, quelques...

*Lights down stage-left, except for spotlight on
Lenore.*

(EDGAR enters stage-right.)

JEAN TRANSEN (CONT'D)

...jours après que j'eus fait sa connaissance.

EDGAR

I buried her myself. It was one day when the spring spread its incense all the way to the cemeteries. I buried her myself, well and tight, in a casket of perfumed and impenetrable wood...

(The casket starts to swing open.)

EDGAR (CONT'D)

Morella?

MORELLA

Yes, your Morella.

JEAN TRANSSSEN

There was blood upon her white robes, and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame.

MORELLA

It's me, Morella! And as punishment for your insanity and blindness, you will love me as I am!

EDGAR

Never. *Nevermore.*

(EDGAR exits. Lights up all of stage-left.)

PIERRE

Lenore. T'es là ?

LENORE

Je suis là.

MORELLA

I am here.

(LENORE sobs again.)

PIERRE

Lenore. There are spectators here.

LENORE

What do you mean by spectators?

PIERRE

People are watching us.

(LENORE looks over at MORELLA.)

LENORE

I don't like this café.

PIERRE

Why not? We always work here.

LENORE

I see and hear things.

PIERRE

What sorts of things?

JEAN TRANSSEN

(Singing)

*HÉLAS! LA MORT QUI FAIT VIVRE ;
C'EST LE BUT DE LA VIE, ET C'EST LE SEUL ESPOIR
QUI, COMME UN ÉLIXIR, NOUS MONTE ET NOUS
ENIVRE...*

LENORE

I hear the bells of Notre Dame. Baudelaire writes by the Seine. No he's closer. I hear his voice. I hear his poems.

PIERRE

Have you been taking your antidepressants?

LENORE

They cloud up my mind.

PIERRE

(Scoldingly)

Leah.

(LENORE walks over to stage-right.)

MORELLA

My sister, my twin.

(MORELLA walks up to LENORE, who steps back
because MORELLA has bloody clothes.)

MORELLA (CONT'D)

Lenore.

LENORE

Est-ce qu'on se connaît ?

MORELLA

My child.

LENORE
(Fearfully)

You look like my mother.

MORELLA
I'm your... I'm your great-grandmother. Morella.

LENORE
You're the one we all see before we die.

(MORELLA smiles.)

MORELLA
You know about the curse.

LENORE
It's the reason I'm seeing you, isn't it?

MORELLA
The women from our line are destined to die young.

LENORE
And we go crazy before we die. My mother cut up her pads and stuck them in a shoebox. My grandmother almost drove my mother into a river so they could see Poseidon. My mother told me that story after she was starting to go crazy. I can't be sure if it's true or not. And, who knows what the others did?

MORELLA
One had an affair--

LENORE
So?

MORELLA
--with a woman. Her husband found out.

LENORE
That's only a problem in your century.

MORELLA
She was my great-granddaughter. Mora, she was called.

LENORE
So that makes you?

MORELLA

I'm from the mid-nineteenth century.

LENORE

Are you familiar with Edgar Allan Poe?

MORELLA

Yes.

LENORE

You're as beautiful as the women in Poe's work.

MORELLA

You come from a line of very beautiful women.

LENORE

Women who are beautiful because they die young. We never live long enough to become ugly.

MORELLA

I will live eternally.

LENORE

You look my age.

MORELLA

It's part of the curse.

LENORE

Who put this curse on me?

MORELLA

I was immortalized by a poet, by poets. Poe and Baudelaire wrote me into their texts.

JEAN TRANSSSEN

(Singing softly)

*IN JOY AND WOE--IN GOOD AND ILL--
MOTHER OF GOD, BE WITH ME STILL!...
NOW, WHEN STORMS OF FATE O'ERCAST
DARKLY MY PRESENT AND MY PAST,
LET MY FUTURE RADIANT SHINE
WITH SWEET HOPES OF THEE AND THINE!*

MORELLA

Poe wrote about me first. I was re-written by Baudelaire. Je vis plusieurs fois à cause d'eux, mais... j'étais *trop belle pour vivre longtemps*.

LENORE

(Shivering)

I was reading "Laquelle est la vraie"--and I could swear that you popped into my head. You were standing right over there.

MORELLA

My child, come join me. It's time.

LENORE

Where are we going?

PIERRE

Lenore. You should really be taking your meds. Leah!

MORELLA

Come. It's death that comforts us.

(LENORE walks over to PIERRE.)

LENORE

Please kiss me. Just to let me know that I'm alive and this is real.

PIERRE

I am attracted to men. You know that.

LENORE

I thought you said that you... tu es attiré par notre serveuse.

PIERRE

Ecoute, Leah. Tu rêves.

(MORELLA walks up behind LENORE.
MORELLA is center-stage, LENORE is stage-left
near center-stage. MORELLA touches LENORE'S
back.)

MORELLA

(Whispering in LENORE'S ear)

I'm real.

(LENORE turns around. MORELLA squeezes her cheeks to try to convince her that she is real.)

PIERRE

Can we please go back to the text Leah? Can we please go back to my text?

MORELLA

No. She's mine.

(PIERRE is looking at LENORE while MORELLA talks. MORELLA and LENORE are standing close together. It is unclear whether or not he can hear MORELLA.)

The bells ring.

JEAN TRANSSSEN

(To LENORE)

Viens, mon enfant. La bien-aimée de tous les livres.

LENORE

(To PIERRE)

My mother told me death would comfort her.

(Pause. PIERRE and LENORE look at each other.)

PIERRE

You go from wanting to kiss me to talking about your mother's death?

LENORE

I'm so tired.

PIERRE

So am I.

LENORE

If only I could sleep.

PIERRE

Sometimes I can't sleep when I'm upset.

LENORE

I'm not just upset!

PIERRE

Non ?

LENORE

Ma mère s'est suicidée.

PIERRE

Tu ne m'as pas dit !

LENORE

Elle a... she didn't want me to suffer from her craziness.

PIERRE

J'ai pensé qu'elle était malade.

ON THE FILM SCREEN, IMAGES OF BLOODY SANITARY NAPKINS IN A SHOEBOX.

LENORE

Elle était malade.

PIERRE

Elle s'est suicidée comment ?

LENORE

Elle a laissé un mot... dans lequel elle a dit, "Ma chérie, my dear..." I'm sorry I don't know what language I'm speaking anymore.

PIERRE

It doesn't matter. I know both.

LENORE

My mother left a note saying that she loves, that she loved me. She was killing herself to make life easier for me.

PIERRE

How did that make life easier for you?

LENORE

All the women in my family go crazy. My grandmother started to drive my mother into a river so that they could see Poseidon.

PIERRE

Tu dis n'importe quoi.

LENORE

My mom got out of the car while it was moving.

Et ta grand-mère ?!

PIERRE

She kept driving.

LENORE

Et après ?

PIERRE

(LENORE turns around to look at MORELLA.
LENORE shivers.)

Ça va ?

PIERRE (CONT'D)
(Looking at LENORE. He cannot see
MORELLA.)

Il faut que je travaille.

LENORE

Can we go back to the film?

PIERRE

(Pause)

LENORE
(Crying, speaking rapidly)
The work that I am doing is driving me crazy and the insanity of my thoughts is making me think I am losing my mind which is making me think that I... I'm sick too.

Okay, Leah. I understand.

PIERRE

Do you?

LENORE

The stage goes black momentarily.

(LENORE walks over to stage-right.)

Lights up stage-right.

(EDGAR enters, carrying a box. He drops the box in shock upon seeing LENORE.)

While EDGAR isn't looking, MORELLA opens the box and takes out two masks.)

EDGAR
(Looking back and forth between
MORELLA and LENORE)

Morella? Which one of you...?

(To LENORE)

Are you Morella?

LENORE

No. I'm not.

EDGAR

You have my eyes.

LENORE

Who are you?

EDGAR

Morella was my wife.

LENORE

Was?

EDGAR

She died.

LENORE

Aren't you...?

EDGAR

Aren't I...?

LENORE

You're dead too, right?

EDGAR

No.

LENORE

How could you possibly be alive?

(EDGAR looks around the stage. MORELLA manages to avoid his gaze.)

EDGAR
Where did I put it?
(Finding the box.)
Ah-ha.
(Looking through the ashes.)
Some are missing.

LENORE
What's missing?

EDGAR
Some of the faces.

*Spotlight on MORELLA, who has taken
LENORE'S place.*

(MORELLA puts on a mask to look like LENORE.)

MORELLA
(To LENORE)
Come, my child.

(LENORE gasps upon seeing her own face.)

MORELLA (CONT'D)
I will not hurt you.

(MORELLA hands LENORE a mask with
MORELLA'S face on it.)

*Full-stage lights. PIERRE is no longer in the
dark.*

(MORELLA walks over to stage-left.)

PIERRE
(To MORELLA)
Leah ?! C'est bien toi ? J'ai l'impression... enfin... C'est rien.

MORELLA
It's me, your Lenore.

PIERRE
Your hair looks lighter. Maybe it's the lighting.

Stage-right, EDGAR and LENORE:

EDGAR

It is you. Morella.

LENORE

I'm Lenore.

(EDGAR shudders.)

EDGAR

Morella told me when she died that I would see her again. And she keeps coming back in strange forms.

(Looking at the box)

Some of the faces are missing.

LENORE

Faces?

EDGAR

She died, and she told me I'd see her.

(Stage-left, MORELLA laughs. She is conversing with PIERRE, though we cannot hear what they are talking about.)

EDGAR (CONT'D)

(Looking at PIERRE and MORELLA)

Look at them. Look how full of life you are.

LENORE

I'm watching her. I'm not full of life.

EDGAR

Look how much fun you are having.

LENORE

You can see Pierre?

EDGAR

I'm in your head.

LENORE

I guess I am going insane.

(Stage-left, PIERRE and MORELLA kiss.)

LENORE (CONT'D)

Why doesn't Pierre notice she isn't me?

EDGAR

She is you. Morella disappears from her grave once it's time for one of her daughters to take her place.

LENORE

I'm not her daughter...

EDGAR

You're her great--

LENORE

(Watching stage-left)

She's taken my--She's taking my life!

We now hear the dialogue stage-left:

PIERRE

Let's go back to the script.

MORELLA

Excellent. Where should we start?

PIERRE

Let's start near the middle.

MORELLA

When Poe and Baudelaire meet?

PIERRE

Yes, around there.

(Fumbles with his script)

Turn to page thirty-six.

MORELLA

I don't see any of my lines on this page.

PIERRE

You're still in the scene.

MORELLA

Okay.

PIERRE

You know what? You can read Delphie. Let's read it together. I'll read Poe.

MORELLA

I thought I was Jeanne.

Stage-right:

LENORE

She does look and act just like me.

EDGAR

That's because she is you.

Stage-left:

PIERRE

It's easier for me if you read Delphie right now.

MORELLA

Alright.

PIERRE

Commençons. Poe and Baudelaire are at a bar in the Lower East side, where they talk about the ideal woman. But first--

MORELLA

--You, as Edgar Allan Poe, are trying to seduce Delphie.

PIERRE

That's right.

MORELLA

But she's not interested because she loves women.

PIERRE

Tout à fait. Let's start reading. It's my line.

(Reading)

*Thy beauty is to me
like those Nicéan barks of yore,
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, way-worn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.*

MORELLA
(Reading, as Delphie)

You're a poet?

The film screen lights up. Transition to the characters on-screen from PIERRE and MORELLA reading the script on-stage. In the film PIERRE plays POE, EDGAR plays BAUDELAIRE, MORELLA plays DELPHIE, and LENORE plays JEANNE.)

PIERRE
(Reading, as POE)

Edgar Allan Poe.

THE FILM SCREEN,
FADE IN:

INT. BAR IN NYC LOWER EAST SIDE - NIGHT

POE flirts with DELPHIE. Both are sitting at the bar.

DELPHIE/MORELLA
I like Edgar Allan Poe too. My girlfriend is writing her thesis on him, actually.

POE/PIERRE
*On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece,
And the grandeur that was Rome.*

DELPHIE
Nice recitation.

POE
I'm not reciting.

DELPHIE
Sure.

CAMERA FOLLOWS DELPHIE'S SWAYING HIPS AS SHE WALKS AWAY FROM POE TO GO OVER TO JEANNE, WHO IS SITTING IN ANOTHER PART OF THE BAR.

BACK TO:

POE IN THE BAR.

Now alone, POE yells feebly after DELPHIE.

POE

Don't you like my poem?

BAUDELAIRE walks over to POE.

BAUDELAIRE

All women are animals. They are animalistic and therefore natural. The problem with a woman is that she isn't much more than her body.

BAUDELAIRE sits next to POE at a bar stool.

POE

The problem is that all beautiful women die.

BAUDELAIRE

Too beautiful to live for a long time.

POE

Exactly.

DELPHIE AND JEANNE KISS.

BAUDELAIRE

She took my Jeanne away from me.

POE

She's insane, loving a woman.

BAUDELAIRE

I almost called *Les Fleurs du mal Les Lesbiennes*.
The publisher made me change the title. I had to take
out some poems as well.

POE

My publisher barely pays me.

BAUDELAIRE

I write to my mother for money. Jeanne m'a dit
qu'elle me haïssait parce que je n'avais *même plus de*
quoi la nourrir.

BAUDELAIRE (CONT'D)

(Simultaneous)

Do you speak French?

POE

(Simultaneous)

I had trouble supporting my Virginia.

POE (CONT'D)

Oui je parle français. I find the French language
mysterious, tonally macabre even though some
critics say it fits my work better than English...

BAUDELAIRE

That's what translators are for.

POE

Mes oeuvres sont meilleures en anglais. Mais,
j'apprécie les traducteurs.

BAUDELAIRE and POE drink. POE takes a large swig.

POE

All beautiful women die young. My Virginia died.
My cousin. My mother died when I was two.

BAUDELAIRE

I just finished a poem about a beautiful girl who was
too beautiful to live for a long time. Une *fil*
miraculeuse qui était *trop belle pour vivre*
longtemps.

POE

The death of a beautiful woman is unquestionably
the most poetical topic in the world.

BAUDELAIRE

I've pondered *weak and weary over many a quaint
and curious volume* of your lore.

BAUDELAIRE shakes POE'S hand.

BAUDELAIRE (CONT'D)

Charles Baudelaire. I have been working on a
translation of "Morella."

POE

Into French?

BAUDELAIRE

Oui.

BAUDELAIRE pulls out the story.

POE

Merci.

(Reading the story)

Vous me comprenez.

POE takes another sip of his drink.

POE (CONT'D)

We're similar.

BAUDELAIRE

Brothers.

POE

Mon frère, mon semblable.

POE continues reading.

DISSOLVE TO:

DELPHIE AND JEANNE TALKING INTIMATELY.

JEANNE

I'm dying.

DELPHIE

You aren't dying.

JEANNE

I see Poe and Baudelaire.

DELPHIE

That guy was quoting Poe to me too.

JEANNE

That's because he is Poe.

DELPHIE

(Laughing)

Sure.

JEANNE

I'm serious.

DELPHIE

You're writing your dissertation on them. It's natural to be preoccupied. I'm that way too. I swear I have conversations with Jane Austen all the time.

JEANNE

I kissed Charles Baudelaire.

DELPHIE

(Sarcastically)

Oh, you must be a slut.

JEANNE laughs.

DISSOLVE TO:

POE AND BAUDELAIRE.

POE finishes reading Baudelaire's translation and sets the story aside.

POE

T'es un *autre moi-même*.

DISSOLVE TO:

JEANNE LOOKS IN THE DIRECTION OF POE AND BAUDELAIRE.

JEANNE

Look how well they're getting on.

DELPHIE

Who?

JEANNE

Poe and Baudelaire. If you just listen you'll know it's them. They're having a bromance.

DELPHIE laughs.

JEANNE (CONT'D)

They're right over there.

PAN TO:

POE AND BAUDELAIRE TALK ANIMATEDLY.

We don't hear dialogue at first.

POE

Virginia and I lived a love that was more than love.
No other woman can compare.

BAUDELAIRE

What about Lenore?

BACK ON-STAGE:

*On-stage, spotlight up on LENORE in the
MORELLA mask.*

LENORE

(Looking at the film screen)

Edgar Allan Poe! Charles Baudelaire!

Spotlight down on LENORE.

BACK TO FILM:

POE

Lenore?

BAUDELAIRE

The queenliest dead that ever died so young.

POE

Lenore is based on my Virginia.

FADE TO BLACK.

BACK ON-STAGE:

Spotlight up on JEAN TRANSSEN.

JEAN TRANSSEN

(Singing)

*THE SWEET LENORE HATH "GONE BEFORE," WITH
HOPE, THAT FLEW BESIDE,
LEAVING THEE WILD FOR THE DEAR CHILD THAT
SHOULD HAVE BEEN THY BRIDE--
FOR HER, THE FAIR AND DEBONNAIRE, THAT NOW SO
LOWLY LIES,
THE LIFE UPON HER YELLOW HAIR BUT NOT WITHIN
HER EYES--
THE LIFE STILL THERE, UPON HER HAIR--THE DEATH
UPON HER EYES*

Spotlight down on JEAN TRANSSEN.

ON SCREEN,

FADE IN:

IMAGES OF VIRGINIA, POE'S WIFE.

VIRGINIA is played by the same actress who plays LENORE.

FADE OUT.

ON-STAGE:

Pierre talks in the dark.

PIERRE

Lenore ?

Spotlight up on MORELLA in the LENORE mask.

MORELLA

Je suis là. Je trouve que le scénario est très bien fait.

The bells ring. Spotlight down on MORELLA.

ON SCREEN,

FADE IN:

DELPHIE AND JEANNE GETTING UP.

JEANNE walks and we see BAUDELAIRE and POE in the background. BAUDELAIRE yells at her.

BAUDELAIRE

Viens, songe à la douceur. D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble. Jeanne!

BAUDELAIRE runs after JEANNE. JEANNE exits the bar, and the camera follows her through the streets of New York. POE begins to chase BAUDELAIRE, and DELPHIE runs after JEANNE.

The film screen remains illuminated and the chase continues throughout the on-stage dialogue that follows.

ON-STAGE:

Lights up stage-left on MORELLA and PIERRE.

PIERRE

Tu es plus attentive à présent.

MORELLA

J'aime mieux cette partie. Qu'est-ce qui se passe à la fin ?

PIERRE
Je pense, en fait, que t'avais raison.

MORELLA
Comment ?

PIERRE
Jeanne devrait mourir.

MORELLA
Moi, je vais mourir.

PIERRE
Pas toi, ton personnage.

Lights up center-stage on JEAN TRANSSEN.

JEAN TRANSSEN
(Singing)

HOPING FOR A NOVEL THEORY
WHILE YOU PONDER, WEAK AND WEARY
OVER MANY A CURIOUS VOLUME OF POETIC LORE,
BAUDELAIRE AND POE COME TO YOU,
RECREATE YOU, WRITE YOU TO BE
THE DYING, VOLUPTUOUS MAIDEN
WHO BECAME A TROPE IN LORE,
ALIVE IN DEATH FOREVERMORE.

LENORE
Silence ! Silence ! Je ne peux pas supporter cette confusion.

ON THE FILM SCREEN, JEANNE STOPS RUNNING TO CATCH HER BREATH.

*The action freezes on the film screen, as though
someone had pressed pause. Lights down on
JEAN TRANSSEN.*

THE FILM SCREEN
FADES TO BLACK.

MORELLA
(To LENORE)

We're in your head.

LENORE
Then I should be able to make you disappear!

(LENORE walks over to MORELLA. PIERRE is frozen stage-left and unaware of what is happening. LENORE takes off her MORELLA mask.)

MORELLA
Mon enfant.

(MORELLA takes off her mask. Her face is bloody.)

LENORE
(Looking at EDGAR and MORELLA)
You're still here.

(EDGAR looks at MORELLA, noticing her as the "real" MORELLA)

EDGAR
Morella...

MORELLA
It's me, your Morella! And *as punishment for your insanity and blindness, you will love me as I am!*

EDGAR
As you are?

MORELLA
I'm dead.

LENORE
And yet I can see you.

MORELLA
We're in your head, Leah Nora.

LENORE
Leah Nora? That's what my mom used to call me.

EDGAR
(To MORELLA)
You told me you would love me. Kiss me.

(MORELLA puts on a mask to make her look like
LENORE'S mom.)

LENORE
(To MORELLA, startled)
My mother?

EDGAR
Morella? Ella?

*On-stage, we now see flashbacks of LENORE'S
MOTHER, Ella, played by MORELLA.
MORELLA directs her dialogue toward the
audience, as though she is talking to a LEAH
who is not on-stage. Words, but no dialogue,
appear on the filmscreen.*

ON THE FILM SCREEN, THE WORDS "LEAH'S FIRST DATE" APPEAR.

JEAN TRANSSEN
Your first date.

MORELLA
Now, honey, when you two go out, make sure Richard behaves himself.

LENORE
You're talking like her.

MORELLA
Your father has a pistol in the cabinet, and I'm not afraid to use it, even though he might be.

LENORE
Please don't talk about the pistol.

MORELLA
Leah Nora, are you listening to me?

LENORE
Can you hear me?

MORELLA

I'm sorry, Leah. You know how nervous I get sometimes. It's your first big date!

LENORE

You can't hear what I'm saying now, can you?

MORELLA

I wouldn't really use the pistol on him.

LENORE

You'd use the pistol on yourself.

MORELLA

You know how mothers get sometimes.

LENORE

You aren't really here.

MORELLA

Oh, honey, you do look very nice. I just don't want Richard to take advantage of you. Oh, my baby girl is getting so big.

LENORE

You can't hear me.

MORELLA

Oh, honey, just give me a hug.

(MORELLA hugs a LEAH who is not apparent to the audience.)

LENORE

(To EDGAR)

What is wrong with my brain?

EDGAR

We're all in your head.

ON THE FILM SCREEN THE WORDS, "LEAH'S FIRST DRIVING LESSON" APPEAR.

JEAN TRANSSEN

Your first driving lesson.

ON THE FILM SCREEN, SHOTS OF THE ROAD FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A DRIVER.

MORELLA

Oh, my baby girl, you're getting so big. Getting your driver's license.

(Pause)

Leah, Leah--stay on the road honey!

LENORE

All that's left are memories and nothing more.

MORELLA

Leah--the light's red. Leah stop!

ON THE FILM SCREEN, THE CAR COMES TO A HALT, AS SEEN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE DRIVER.

LENORE

Some are vivid. Almost real.

THE FILM SCREEN,
FADE TO BLACK:

(MORELLA moves her head back and forth.)

LENORE (CONT'D)

She would move her head like that to try to get my attention.

MORELLA

Leah Nora LaRousse!

THE FILM SCREEN,
FADE-IN:

THE WORDS "PRESCHOOL LENORE."

JEAN TRANSSEN

Learning the ABCs.

MORELLA

ABCDEF... come on Leah Nora, sing with me...

Sound of preschool-aged LENORE singing the ABCs.

MORELLA (CONT'D)
(Singing along)

HIJK...

(Preschool-aged LENORE sings the XYZ.)

MORELLA (CONT'D)
It's not time for the ending just yet, sweetheart.

LENORE
(Thinking of her mother's death)
It was never time for the ending... for your ending.

ON THE FILM SCREEN, THE WORDS "MOM'S GOING OUT FOR THE NIGHT."

JEAN TRANSEN
Your mommy's going out for the night.

(MORELLA gets ready to "go out." She primps her hair, puts on lipstick, etc.)

YOUNG LENORE (OFF-STAGE)
You look so beautiful, Mommy!

MORELLA
Thanks, sweetie.

YOUNG LENORE (OFF-STAGE)
Mommy, Mommy. Who's going to read my bed-time story?

(LENORE looks around the stage.)

LENORE
Where is my voice coming from?

MORELLA
Grandpa will read to you.

YOUNG LENORE (OFF-STAGE)
But, Mommy! I want you to read me--

MORELLA

--Leah.

YOUNG LENORE (OFF-STAGE)

Just one story!

MORELLA

Okay, make it something quick.

YOUNG LENORE (OFF-STAGE)

“The Raven!” “The Raven!”

MORELLA

My child's reading such dark stories so young...

(Pause)

Okay, Leah.

(Singing)

*ONCE UPON A MIDNIGHT DREARY, WHILE I PONDERED
WEAK AND WEARY,
OVER MANY A QUAIN AND CURIOUS VOLUME OF
FORGOTTEN LORE
WHILE I NODDED, NEARLY NAPPING, SUDDENLY
THERE CAME A TAPPING,
AS OF SOME ONE GENTLY RAPPING, RAPPING AT MY
CHAMBER DOOR.
'TIS SOME VISITOR,' I MUTTERED, 'TAPPING AT MY
CHAMBER DOOR--
ONLY THIS, AND NOTHING MORE.'*

*AH, DISTINCTLY I REMEMBER IT WAS IN THE BLEAK
DECEMBER,
AND EACH SEPARATE DYING EMBER WROUGHT ITS
GHOST UPON THE FLOOR.
EAGERLY I WISHED THE MORROW;--VAINLY I HAD
SOUGHT TO BORROW
FROM MY BOOKS SURCEASE OF SORROW--SORROW
FOR THE LOST*

LENORE

Silence! Silence! Je ne peux pas--

Lights up on JEAN TRANSSEN.

JEAN TRANSSEN

--supporter cette confusion.

LENORE

Exactement.

Spotlight up on PIERRE.

PIERRE

Tu mélanges ta propre vie avec la littérature, et ça c'est dangereux.

Spotlight down on PIERRE.

(LENORE takes out a cigarette.)

JEAN TRANSSEN

Smoking in cafés is no longer permitted.

(LENORE drops the cigarette and stomps on it.)

MORELLA

(Taking off her ELLA, Lenore's mother,
mask)

The ideal woman is only a fictional role. And it's not just one woman, it's all of us.
Laquelle est la vraie Morella ? Is it you? Is it me? Is it your mother?

(Looking at EDGAR)

The love of my life doesn't even know which one of us is me.

LENORE

I'm hardly ideal.

MORELLA

Come join me.

LENORE

None of us are ideal. The ideal woman does not exist!

MORELLA

Elle existe dans le domaine littéraire.

LENORE

(To JEAN TRANSSEN)

Morella confond sa propre vie avec la littérature.

JEAN TRANSSEN

Elle se croit un personnage littéraire.

MORELLA

(Laughing)

I didn't choose to be a part of this script!

LENORE

What script?

MORELLA

You don't know about the script?

BLACKOUT

The film screen lights up.

FADE-IN:

INT. PARISIAN CAFÉ - DAY

CAROLYN, played by the same actress who plays LENORE, writes.

The caption appears:

“A MESSAGE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT.”

CAROLYN

(Singing)

ALL MY WANDERING THOUGHTS UNCERTAIN:
WHAT OF LIFE, WHAT OF FICTION?
WILL I WRITE MYSELF TO MADNESS?
REALITY NOW LINGERS HAZY,
*THRILLS ME, FILLS ME WITH SUCH TERRORS NEVER
FELT BEFORE.*

IN MY MIND I WONDER MAYBE,
YES, I THINK I'M GOING CRAZY,
INGENIOUS OR CRAZY,
TOO BEAUTIFUL,
NEVERMORE.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF ACT TWO. INTERMISSION.

ACT 3

SCENE 1

LENORE is on-stage in the café, which now takes up the entire stage. JEAN TRANSSSEN is off-stage. A day has passed since the end of Act 2. LENORE is writing her dissertation. La SERVEUSE enters. On the film screen are the words, "Le Lendemain."

SERVEUSE

Madame. Qu'est-ce que vous prenez ?

(LENORE stares at la SERVEUSE in shock, recognizing the resemblance between her and MORELLA.)

SERVEUSE (CONT'D)

Madame ?

LENORE

Un vin... blanc.

SERVEUSE

C'est tout ?

LENORE

Oui, c'est tout. Merci.

SERVEUSE

Votre ami ne vient pas aujourd'hui ?

LENORE

Il est en retard, comme toujours. Mais, tant mieux--moi, je peux écrire.

SERVEUSE

J'ai lu son scénario.

LENORE

(Mocking)

Que c'est intéressant.

(La SERVEUSE takes the script out of her pocket.)

SERVEUSE

Il m'a plu. Est-ce que vous pourriez le lui donner ? J'ai fait quelques suggestions.

(Giggling)

J'ai essayé d'écrire.

(Off-stage, a customer calls for la SERVEUSE.)

SERVEUSE (CONT'D)

(Setting the scénario on the table)

Excusez-moi.

(La SERVEUSE exits. LENORE goes back to writing. PIERRE enters.)

PIERRE

Salut. Leah. Lenore.

LENORE

Hi.

PIERRE

Ça va ?

LENORE

I'm becoming *insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity*. Didn't Edgar Allan Poe say something like that? "*I become insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity.*"

PIERRE

Are you going to be more focused than you were yesterday?

LENORE

I'll try.

PIERRE

Très bien.

LENORE

Did I make any sense yesterday?

PIERRE

What do you mean?

LENORE

Was I acting insane?

PIERRE

Leah... or do you want me to call you Lenore?

LENORE

Leah is fine.

PIERRE

Incroyable.

LENORE

Lenore is in the script. Leah is outside of the script.

PIERRE

What script?

LENORE

I am Leah, the good. I am not Lenore, the ideal woman that is written in lore.

PIERRE

What are you talking about? What script? My script? Lenore isn't in my script.

LENORE

I know. She's in the other script.

(PIERRE looks at the script that la SERVEUSE had
left on the table.)

PIERRE

What other script?

(Picking up the script from the table)

Is this it?

LENORE

That's yours. The waitress left it.

PIERRE

(Flattered)

She read my script!

LENORE

I'm talking about the one we're acting out. The one with
(She thinks of JEAN TRANSSEN.)
music and--

PIERRE

--The one we're acting out?

LENORE

I don't know how else to explain it.

(Beat)

PIERRE

So, how has your dissertation been going?

(LENORE laughs.)

PIERRE (CONT'D)

Does that mean it's going well?

LENORE

(Opening her bag)

I haven't done much...

(She takes out a pad of paper and starts reading through it.)

LENORE (CONT'D)

I haven't done much of the writing that is.

(She starts to write.)

JEAN TRANSSEN (OFF-STAGE)

(He is the voice of LENORE'S writing)

The ideal woman in Edgar Allan Poe's poetry and short stories is a trope that allows--at times Poe and Baudelaire's work may be construed as misogynistic.

LENORE

Where am I going with this?

JEAN TRANSSEN (OFF-STAGE)

Baudelaire called women--

LENORE

--No, this isn't any good.

JEAN TRANSSEN (OFF-STAGE)

In *Mon Coeur mis à nu*, Baudelaire explains the process of writing his plays--

LENORE

--I meant to say his poems. Baudelaire didn't write plays. No good ones that is. Poe wrote one play but it was a failure. He never finished it.

PIERRE

Leah?

LENORE

Sorry. I'm talking to myself again.

(Reading her work again)

I should use Morella as an example of a strong woman who has power over death.

PIERRE

At least you're working.

LENORE

(To PIERRE)

Thanks.

(Reading her work again)

Because Morella has power over death, she is perceived as a threat. At one point, the narrator writes:

JEAN TRANSSEN (OFF-STAGE)

Shall I then say that I longed with an earnest and consuming desire for the moment of Morella's decease?

LENORE

The narrator is even more attracted to Morella's daughter than he is to Morella. Of the daughter, he writes:

JEAN TRANSSEN (OFF-STAGE)

And she grew strangely in stature and intellect, and was the perfect resemblance of her who had departed, and I loved her with a love more fervent than I had believed it possible to feel for any denizen of earth.

LENORE

The daughter is attractive to the narrator, but she is only attractive to the narrator before her death approaches.

PIERRE

I thought you said that you would be more beautiful after you die?

LENORE

(To PIERRE)

That I would be more beautiful after I die?

PIERRE

I thought you'd said Jeanne should die because she is an ideal woman. No?

LENORE

Just listen and let me write! If you can listen to my thoughts...

(Pause)

Anyway, where was I? Ah, yes. Morella's daughter becomes hideous before she is about to die. The death of a woman appears to be threatening for the narrator, yet it also leads the narrator to be attracted to the woman. As Edgar Allan Poe once said, "*the death of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world.*"

PIERRE

Lenore, Leah. Your thesis is very interesting, but would you--

LENORE

--Chez Baudelaire, I also note--wait am I writing in français ou en anglais? In Baudelaire's poem "Laquelle est la vraie," la fille miraculeuse était

JEAN TRANSSSEN (OFF-STAGE)

Trop belle pour vivre.

(LENORE writes frantically.)

PIERRE

Leah. J'ai pensé qu'on était ici pour répéter le film.

(LENORE writes frantically.)

PIERRE (CONT'D)

(Frustrated with LENORE)

Okay. I guess I can find someone else for your part.

(LENORE writes frantically. PIERRE looks around at the audience members.)

PIERRE (CONT'D)

Who here would like to try out for the film?

(He walks towards the audience. LENORE looks up from her writing.)

LENORE

(Calling after him, holding up the script
left by la SERVEUSE)

Don't you want the script she left you?

(PIERRE turns and takes the script. Then he walks
off-stage and into the audience. JEAN TRANSSEN
enters. He is dressed like the Red Death from Poe's
"The Mask of the Red Death.")

JEAN TRANSSEN

*The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the
grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the
countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in
detecting the cheat.*

(EDGAR and MORELLA enter.)

LENORE

"The Mask of the Red Death."

EDGAR

It was the last face in my bag.

(MORELLA smiles.)

LENORE

I'm tired of facing death!

JEAN TRANSSEN/EDGAR/MORELLA

We're in your head.

LENORE

Back to your thesis, Lenore, Leah. Back to work.

(JEAN TRANSSEN takes the papers off of the
table. He drops them on the floor and steps on them.)

JEAN TRANSSEN

Why write about literature when you can take part in it?

MORELLA

Ever wonder why Pierre didn't kiss you but he kissed me?

LENORE
(To MORELLA)

I do wonder. I thought he was smarter than...

MORELLA
It's because you were one step closer to death and dying when I was you.

LENORE
When you were me? But you were just wearing a mask.

The lights flicker.

MORELLA
I'm in your head.

JEAN TRANSSEN
Pierre is recasting your role.

LENORE
Yes, my role as Jeanne.
(Gasps)
Not my role as Lenore.

JEAN TRANSSEN
Pierre is making the film.

LENORE
Who's making the play?

JEAN TRANSSEN
You know that.

EDGAR
How should she die? The Red Death?

MORELLA
She coughs blood.

*Lights down on-stage and MORELLA exits. The
film screen illuminates.*

FADE IN:

INT. BAR IN NYC LOWER EAST SIDE - NIGHT

POE and BAUDELAIRE sit at the bar.

POE

My mother and Virginia died from tuberculosis.

BAUDELAIRE

How did Lenore die?

POE

Lenore is a character.

BAUDELAIRE

But you know how she dies, don't you? Isn't she based on Virginia?

POE

How do you think she dies?

BAUDELAIRE

You do plan out your poems before you write?

POE

I write backwards. That's how I wrote "The Raven."

BAUDELAIRE

Did you start with Lenore's death?

POE

I determined the effect first.

BAUDELAIRE

What do you mean by the effect?

POE

The emotional effect. I wanted something universally understandable and beautiful. *Beauty of whatever kind, in its supreme development, invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears.*

BAUDELAIRE

Women are beautiful.

POE

Lenore is a beautiful woman, as such her death is melancholic.

BAUDELAIRE

La femme est fatalement suggestive ; elle vit d'une autre vie que la sienne propre ; elle vit spirituellement dans les imaginations qu'elle hante et qu'elle féconde.

POE

C'est vrai...

BAUDELAIRE

Alors, do you know how Lenore dies?

POE

What is important is that she die young and beautiful.

BAUDELAIRE

The way she dies is not important? You wouldn't imagine her cut up below the floorboards?

POE

No, I wouldn't.

END OF THE FILM
INTERLUDE.

On-stage lights up.

EDGAR

Your mother went insane.

THE FILM SCREEN SHOWS SHOEBOXES THAT ARE FILLED WITH BLOODY
SANITARY NAPKINS.

LENORE

(Looking at the film screen)

Anything but that.

(Looking at EDGAR)

Please.

EDGAR

Morella? Where did she go?

(EDGAR exits.)

JEAN TRANSSEN

(Singing, to LENORE)

MY BIEN-AIMÉE OF ALL THE NOVELS, MY HEROINE
OF ALL THE PLAYS, MY IDEAL "SHE" OF ALL THE
POETRY BOOKS.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 2

*Spotlight on PIERRE. JEAN TRANSSEN and
LENORE are in the same corner, but they are in
the dark.*

PIERRE

(Script in his hands)

What is this? This isn't my film! This is some play.

(Looking around the stage. He is
oblivious to JEAN TRANSSEN and
LENORE in the corner.)

Lenore? Leah? Lenore?

(Pause)

She wrote down all of our dialogue... all of our interaction from yesterday. Did she think it
would be a funny joke? And this script...

(La SERVEUSE enters, carrying the vin blanc for
LENORE.)

PIERRE (CONT'D)

Who is this Jean Transsen character?

(Noticing la SERVEUSE)

Bonjour.

SERVEUSE

Bonjour. J'ai bien aimé votre pièce.

Mon film ?	PIERRE
Votre scénario.	SERVEUSE
C'est toi qui l'as...?	PIERRE (Holding up the script)
Oui.	SERVEUSE
C'est pas le scénario de mon film.	PIERRE
C'est quoi, alors ?	SERVEUSE
Regarde, on a dit tout cela hier !	PIERRE (Pointing to a page in the script)
C'est curieux...	SERVEUSE
C'est tout ce que vous pouvez dire ?	PIERRE
On se vouvoie ou on se tutoie ?	SERVEUSE
Peu importe.	PIERRE
Mets-le sur la table.	(Looking at wine glass.)
	(He reads further ahead in the script.)
Ne le lis pas maintenant.	SERVEUSE
T'as écrit ce scénario ?	PIERRE

SERVEUSE

C'est toi qui me l'as donné.

PIERRE

Mais...

(Reading ahead.)

Je pense que c'est Lenore qui l'a écrit. J'en suis sûr, en fait. Elle dit toujours qu'elle va mourir, et... regarde

(Pointing toward the end of the script.)

“Elle me dit toujours qu'elle va bientôt mourir.”

SERVEUSE

(Looking at PIERRE like he's crazy)

Quoi ? Qui ?

PIERRE

Lenore.

SERVEUSE

La femme assise en face de toi, d'habitude ?

PIERRE

Ouais. Elle est folle.

*Spotlight down on PIERRE and SERVEUSE.
Lights up on JEAN TRANSSEN and LENORE.
LENORE is lying on the ground.*

JEAN TRANSSEN

It is all scripted. There is no real world. It was all composed beforehand. All the world's a stage.

(To LENORE)

There is an orchestra. The music is not in your mind. There is a script. The words are not yours. The words are not all written by the playwright. The words are Poe's and de Baudelaire and of others.

(Intimately to LENORE)

And you,

(Singing)

MY BIEN-AIMÉE OF ALL THE NOVELS, MY HEROINE
OF ALL THE PLAYS, MY IDEAL “SHE” OF ALL THE
POETRY BOOKS.

Full stage lights.

(LENORE stands up and walks over to PIERRE and
la SERVEUSE.)

PIERRE

Lenore ! T'as écrit ce scénario ?

LENORE
(To PIERRE)

Non. C'est pas ton film ?

PIERRE

Non.

(Pause)

Cette pièce, il dit tout ce que nous disons. Regarde !

*On the film screen, we see a repeat of a scene
previously shown.*

(Lenore watches the film.)

FADE IN:

INT. BAR IN NYC LOWER EAST SIDE - NIGHT

BAUDELAIRE

Alors, do you know how Lenore dies?

POE

What is important is that she die young and beautiful.

BAUDELAIRE

The way she dies is not important? You wouldn't
imagine her cut up below the floorboards?

POE

No, I wouldn't.

FADE TO BLACK.
END OF THE FILM.

(LENORE grabs the scénario from PIERRE.)

LENORE

Je veux bien savoir comment je meurs.

(Pause. LENORE reads the end.)

SERVEUSE

Qu'elle est dramatique.

(Pause, to LENORE)

Et alors ?

LENORE

Je ne sais pas.

PIERRE

(Trying to look at the script)

C'est parce que tu cherches la fin ? Il n'y a pas de fin.

LENORE

Pas encore.

JEAN TRANSSEN

Fade to black.

BLACKOUT.

Conclusion

For the character Lenore, the work of Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire becomes real and she becomes stuck “in lore,” as her name suggests. Like her, I immersed myself in the work of these two poets, and I became lost in their literary world throughout the writing process. After reading texts in both French and English, I soon forgot in which language I was thinking and I wrote in both. The words of Poe and Baudelaire came to my mind as I tried to write my own text. Throughout the writing process, I pondered how best to incorporate analysis of Poe and Baudelaire, develop the voices of my characters, and separate reality and illusion.

Writing a play about Poe’s and Baudelaire’s work intimidated me, especially because I was writing for a well-read bilingual audience that would be familiar with the work of these poets and most likely have their own interpretations. I did not want to isolate my spectators by portraying Poe and Baudelaire in ways with which they would not agree. Because of this, I chose to show Pierre and Lenore disagreeing in their analysis of the poets’ work. I also hope that I have found the appropriate balance between Poe’s and Baudelaire’s text and my own. In early drafts, Edgar and Lenore recited these poets’ work, but I decided to cut this to incorporate more of my own voice. If I become more developed as a poet, I would like to go back to this piece and write some of my own poems in a similar style to that of Poe and Baudelaire.

In addition to determining how to integrate the analysis of Poe’s and Baudelaire’s work, I also pondered how to develop the voices of my own characters. My goal was to write dialogue that was not repetitious, sounded realistic, and moved the story forward. Lenore repeats herself frequently about death, both about her own and that of the women in her family. While I wanted to convey Lenore’s obsession with death, I hope that she

comes across as humorous and not as repetitious. I also hope that all of my characters' dialogue sounds realistic. My choice to write in French, as opposed to my native language, made it challenging for me to create unique character voices. Instead of focusing on differentiating character voices, I focused on sounding like a well-educated native and avoiding *anglicismes*. If my French ability continues to improve, I would like to revisit the dialogue in this piece. Writing Edgar's and Morella's dialogue also underwent several revisions because they are from the nineteenth century. As figments of Lenore's imagination they do not need to speak perfect nineteenth-century English for the credibility of the play; nevertheless, their dialogue could be improved if I made it sound more similar to the work of Poe and Baudelaire. I also learned more about dual dialogue in the process of writing my thesis. When two characters are talking, the audience does not hear the dialogue of both characters. Originally, I had simultaneous dialogue that revealed important information the audience needed to hear; I learned that I needed to separate dialogue so the audience could understand it. I believe that my "final" piece meets my goal of dialogue that sounds realistic, is not repetitious, and that moves the story forward, but it can still be improved.

In addition to determining the voices of my characters, I also needed to decide how best to separate illusion and reality, or Lenore's imagination and her interaction in the real world of the café. To do this, I divided the stage and limited which characters would see whom. Because Jean Transsen depicts Lenore's imagination I knew that Lenore would be able to see him, whereas Pierre who exists in the realm of reality would not. As figments of Lenore's imagination, Jean Transsen and the characters on stage right can see Pierre.

The division of my stage may seem simple but it is not. I am beginning to doubt which is which. What is reality? What is illusion? In the beginning of the play, the division between the two is clear. Lenore and Pierre remain stage left in the real café, while Jean Transsen and Edgar stay in the illusory stage right. When Lenore listens to Jean Transsen, Pierre freezes to show that he cannot see him. Later in the piece, however, the illusory becomes the real. In the second act, Morella crosses over to stage left when she puts on a mask of Lenore's face. In the film interludes, Pierre, Edgar, Morella, and Lenore act together on-screen to unify reality and fiction by having each actor play multiple roles. These characters appear together even though Pierre is not supposed to know about the characters from Lenore's imagination, such as Edgar, who are not "real." Because of this, Pierre's film becomes connected to Lenore's imagination. Making Poe and Baudelaire characters in the film, but not on-stage, further blurs reality and illusion by mirroring the literary illusions that appear throughout the play. Pierre, from the real stage left, and Edgar, from Lenore's imagination, are named after Baudelaire and Poe, respectively. In both the real and fictive worlds, the words of Poe and Baudelaire are used as dialogue. I hope that my fusion of the real café, Pierre's film, and Lenore's imagination leads the audience to question the dichotomy between reality and illusion.

Instead of simplifying my play, I decided to make it artfully disjointed and postmodern. To do this I made sure that the structure of my piece was established in the first act. Music and film are used at the beginning so that the spectator knows that this play is not just a play. I allude to other literary works in Jean Transsen's and Lenore's dialogue in the first scene, which references Shakespeare, Cervantes, Poe, and Baudelaire. To foreshadow the fluidity of my characters' identities, I created an opening

credit sequence in which the characters fade into one another. From the beginning, I strove to lay the groundwork for a postmodern play.

Like my beginning, my ending needed revisions to unify my piece effectively. In my original ending, Lenore died on-stage as she told Pierre she would, although I also included self-reflective commentary in Jean Transsen's "it has all been scripted" monologue. When I had a rough draft of my script completed, I listened to my friends read my script and most of them could not tell that Lenore had died. I realized that I did not know what I was trying to achieve in the ending. To discover this, I thought of what unified my play as a whole, and I came back to postmodernism. It was unified in its reworking of literature. Ultimately, not just Lenore, but all of the characters are in lore and not just in the lore of Poe and Baudelaire. The characters are in the lore of my overall play, which is not entirely my own. In my final ending, my focus is no longer on whether or not Lenore dies; instead, I chose to show how literature builds upon itself. Lenore discovers she is in a play that is based on previous literature. Does she die? *Mon coeur est mis à nu*. Dear reader, *mon frère, mon semblable !*, it is up to you to decide.

Notes

1. Baudelaire worked on four projects: *Ideolus*, “an unfinished drama in alexandrines written about 1843... in collaboration with Ernest Praron” and three scenarios *La Fin de Don Juan*, *Le Marquis du 1^{er} Hourzards*, and *L’Ivrogne* (Barthes 25). Poe never completed his only known play *Politian*, which is set in sixteenth-century Rome and based on a true murder that occurred in Kentucky in the nineteenth century (Poe, “Scenes”).

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