LenORE: Poe and Baudelaire at Play

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LenORE: POE AND BAUDELAIRE AT PLAY

By
Carolyn M. Fado

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Dr. Carolyn A. Durham
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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). 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 pleinment 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 “damnéd 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 “tésor” (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 onomatopoetic 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


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:


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 évasion 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'T 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


*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 connaitre 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 CENT FOIS PAR HEURE, LA SECONDE CHUCHOTE : SOUVIENS-TOI ! -RAPIDE, AVEC SA VOIX D’INSECTE, MAINTENANT DIT : JE SUIS AUTREFOIS*
(JEAN TRANSSEN 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 œuvres 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

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 amorale. La profession de strip-teaseuse est amorale.

PIERRE
Voilà ! Baudelaire pense que la beauté est amorale. “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…

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
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 TRANSSEN
(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

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 œuvres de Poe.

PIERRE
(Flirtatiously)
Moi aussi. Évidemment. 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.

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 da ma famille, LaRousse. Attend, 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
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

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 reviendrais 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)

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
(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 Bénédicta, qui remplissait l'atmosphère d'idéal--

LENORE
(Having heard “Morella” instead of “Bénédicta” in previous line)

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

PIERRE

C'est qui Morella?

LENORE

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

Non.

LENORE

Oh…

JEAN TRANSSEN

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 TRANSSEN (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.)
Morella?

MORELLA

Yes, your Morella.

JEAN TRANSSEN

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 connaït ?

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 TRANSSEN
(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 TRANSSEN
(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.
PIERRE
Et ta grand-mère ?!

LENORE
She kept driving.

PIERRE
Et après ?

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

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

Ça va ?

LENORE
Il faut que je travaille.

PIERRE
Can we go back to the film?

(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.

PIERRE
Okay, Leah. I understand.

LENORE
Do you?

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.

56
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 haissait parce que je n'avais *même plus de quoi la nourrir.*

(Cont'd)
Do you speak French?

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 *fille 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?

MORELLA
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 TRANSSEN
Your mommy's going out for the night.

(MORELLA gets ready to “go out.” She prims 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.

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'T 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 TRANSSEN 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

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 TRANSSEN (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


(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

(Cont'd)

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

(Noticing la SERVEUSE)

Bonjour.

(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.
PIERRE
Mon film ?

SERVEUSE
Votre scénario.

PIERRE
(Holding up the script)
C'est toi qui l'as…?

SERVEUSE
Oui.

PIERRE
C'est pas le scénario de mon film.

SERVEUSE
C'est quoi, alors ?

PIERRE
(Pointing to a page in the script)
Regarde, on a dit tout cela hier !

SERVEUSE
C'est curieux…

PIERRE
C'est tout ce que vous pouvez dire ?

SERVEUSE
On se vouvoie ou on se tutoie ?

PIERRE
Peu importe. (Looking at wine glass.)
Mets-le sur la table.
(He reads further ahead in the script.)

SERVEUSE
Ne le lis pas maintenant.

PIERRE
T'as écrit ce scénario?
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 grabs the scénario from PIERRE.)

LENORE

Je veux bien savoir comment je meurs.

(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.

(LENOIRE 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 1er 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”).
Works Cited:


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