



KABUKI-WEST

**ACHILLES
MACBETH
RICHARD III**

**3 plays by
KAREN
SUNDE**

COVER Photo: copyright Juan Rodriguez-Torrent. "Witches 1 & 3." Paul Doniger's production at Pomperaug High School, CT. Witches Angelica Aconfora and Kristen Valera

What the Critics Say

MACBETH resounds with Kabuki's passion, fascination. **KABUKI MACBETH** works. In fact, it works far better than one could have reasonably expected. ...Surprisingly enough, in Sunde's adaptation, the Zen philosophy seems engrained into the story, not imposed on top of it. ...the images prove striking...more and more frightening as Macbeth's lust for power turns into obsession and finally madness." Tom Jacobs L.A.DAILY NEWS

"The best of two worlds... fascinatingly enjoyable Sunde's writing fluctuates between direct, modern statement and poetic imagery...the play works very well. This is a terrific show." William Glackin SACRAMENTO BEE, OAKLAND TRIBUNE

ACHILLES "the *essence* of passion. Sunde's play, which compresses the Homeric epic into manageable proportions, is lucid and direct. ... The play...makes you see and hear with awakened eyes and ears." Clifford A Ridley THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

"**ACHILLES** is a stunning production that succeeds on every level... it's moving as an antiwar statement, it's visually dazzling, and it crosses every chronological, national and gender boundary." Toby Zinman "Critic's Pick" PHILADELPHIA CITY PAPER

"...**OTHELLO**, with a superbly poetic, pared to the bone script by Karen Sunde that magically mixes Elizabethan warmth with haiku-like clarity has converted me. ...hypnotically beautiful, emotionally dizzying... It is a sinuous, flawless twining of dance, sound, and story. ...uses Shakespeare's basic story...adds new levels of complexity to the quintet of characters at its core. Hedy Weiss CHICAGO SUN-TIMES "...spare poetry...tells the story with economy...works very well with Sato's visual imagery." Richard Christiansen CHICAGO TRIBUNE

"Damn the cliches and full speed ahead. This is professional theater at its best. **KABUKI OTHELLO** is in almost every way possible a feast for the senses, and rendered so by an exquisitely realized three-sided collaboration of theater artisans. ... the impact...on the eye, the ear and the imagination is, in a word, stunning." Nels Nelson PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS

KABUKI LADY MACBETH "Sunde's script is very much about Lady Macbeth's loneliness and suppressed ambition as a woman in her society. ...a dazzling cultural hybrid, set to a beautifully distilled haiku-like script...a visual, physical and aural feast." Hedy Weiss CHICAGO SUN-TIMES. "Kabuki meets Shakespeare for magical Macbeth" Michael Phillips CHICAGO TRIBUNE

TAGS: Macbeth, Richard III, Achilles, Iliad, Thetis, experimental theatre, Shiva,

KABUKI-WEST

Three Plays

MACBETH + RICHARD III + ACHILLES

By

Karen Sunde

Conceived by Shozo Sato

Smashwords Edition

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INTRODUCTION

You may know these stories, but what's Kabuki? Ka-bu-ki means song-dance-drama. To picture it, let the sparse words trigger your imagination with music, color, dance, action – simple or not – from a flutter of fabric on a bare stage to the sensory feast of Grand Kabuki, any sort of performance can tell these stories. The directions suggest one staging among the many an imaginative reader can conjure.

Though originally commissioned for professional American actors working in a Japanese tradition, thereafter ordinary college, high school, even grade school students have taken exuberant delight (with their audiences) in creating their own versions of Kabuki plays I've written.

Danny Fruchter, founder of Peoples Light and Theatre in Malvern Pennsylvania first asked me to collaborate with Shozo Sato, who had been creating Western classic/Kabuki hybrids in Illinois. For our initial production, Kabuki Othello, I introduced a convention from ancient Greek drama – the Chorus – which became a feature of Sato/Sunde works. Five such plays have been commissioned by four different producers. Kabuki Othello and Kabuki Lady Macbeth are published and available from: www.dramaticpublishing.com

THESE THREE PLAYS

Kabuki Macbeth and Kabuki Richard III are permeated with Japanese themes filtered through Shakespeare stories, but for Achilles, I drew from Homer's The Iliad and adjacent myths, so its themes are universal, straddling East and West.

Considering these three stories together yields the sad conclusion that “killing entertains us”. While we may lament that in our contemporary media entertainment killing is commonplace, have we noticed how few of our classics have no killing? Killing for power, in particular, ranks high. Now, it could be that cavemen entertained themselves with stories of killing for survival instead of for power, and it could be the 21st century will eventually embrace more wholesome entertainment, but for now...Macbeth, Richard III, and Achilles all deal with the elation (and consequences) of killing. Macbeth’s story is familiar, and Kabuki Macbeth holds to that story, merely simplifying, and viewing it through an Eastern prism.

Richard’s Kabuki story is more “played with,” and here’s why: If you track the labyrinthine blood-trail that history calls The Wars of the Roses, you may smile at Shakespeare’s litany of enemy Queens in his Act IV “until a Richard kill’d him” which seems to say “Figure this out if you want; but I’m telling my story.”

Shakespeare makes Richard III the embodiment of evil because he was the last king killed in those wars, and killed by a Tudor who was Elizabeth I’s grandfather. Hah-so! Given that he must be evil personified, Shozo Sato said Richard’s essence is like that of Shiva, Hindu god of creation/destruction, which it was my task to write, while limiting the cast as usual, so it seemed to me those bloody Queens, usually chopped, make a fertile field on which to play this play. And so we do. What emerged to a stunning degree was the hidden family drama that was always lurking there. Old Britain could make the Borgias blush.

With Achilles a drama had to be culled from an epic narrative and surrounding mythology – eg, the adventure of Achilles conception, his half god/half man dilemma. Spectacular Kabuki helped, as did the Chorus, and audiences from west to east seemed pleased. Achilles’ premiere was uniquely cross-cultural: in the ancient Greek amphitheater at Kourion in Cyprus an American acting company performed a Greek legend in the style of Japanese Kabuki.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Kabuki Macbeth was commissioned and produced by John Houseman’s The Acting Company in New York, and performed on tour across the United States. Later produced at the Krannert Center, University of Illinois, and at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Kabuki Richard III was commissioned by Actor’s Theatre of Louisville, but subsequent budget constraints prevented their planned production.

Achilles: a Kabuki play was commissioned to emerge from Danny Fruchter’s “The Iliad Project” at the People’s Light and Theatre Company. This drama with dance, based on The Iliad and related myths, was presented Kabuki-style. It premiered in the Greek amphitheater at Kourion, Cyprus, played People’s Light and Theatre, Wilma Theatre, and the Festival Mythos in Philadelphia, as well as touring Cyprus, Hungary, and Japan.

Book: **A Gathering of Actors:** The People's Light and Theatre Company in Cyprus and

Hungary, by Peter Carnahan chronicles that first tour, with **Achilles'** development and rehearsals in the ancient Greek amphitheater at Kourion.

A company led by Shozo Sato from the Krannert Center at the University of Illinois, Urbana, went on tour to make a "Kabuki Homecoming" in Japan demonstrating the Americans' embrace of an intricate Japanese art form.

PRODUCTION – Or How To Do These Plays

You could call these plays "the song and dance of" Macbeth, Richard, Achilles; they resemble our musical theater. Performing Kabuki, the actors exaggerate and extend their voice tones, so the words must be simple, like lyrics, to facilitate clarity and foster an easy rapport with the audience.

In Kabuki performance, black-clad "Koken" are employed to change sets, manipulate props, perform any back-stage task in full view of the audience, scurrying as though invisible. I created my first Chorus by using Koken to perform that vital speaking role, and since then they tend to do double duty, and I call them "story-tellers who facilitate the action."

One of the Koken becomes the KI-PLAYER – who signals the opening of scenes and key moments by striking the "KI" (key) - wooden blocks - sharply, then in rapid succession, ending with three loud strikes to punctuate places where we might use a drum roll or a cymbal clash to say "ta-dah!" or here we go, or wasn't that something?

The "Mie" (mee-aye) pose, serves a similar purpose, but employs actors, instead of wooden blocks, It is an instant tableau the actor strikes, like a snapshot that says "got this?" In comedy, you could say we do a little Mie every time we do a comic "take" (reaction) toward the audience.

SETTINGS

The action is written to flow on an open stage with minimal settings. A lightweight curtain, hand-drawn by Koken may be employed, or not. A forestage is useful. Moveable set elements – eg: flowing fabric panels that can drop; a screen; a platform for reclining or levels. Whatever is needed, the black-dressed, scurrying Koken arrange it, like invisible elves.

Lights, costumes, music – the more colorful and dramatic, the better. Kabuki saturates the senses. Let your imagination run riot: Action scenes may expand into production numbers. Mime and dance may be used to embellish description.

TALKING THE TALK

Making sense of the words: Whether one character or several (Chorus) speak a sentence, the text is meant to flow like ordinary conversation, and to be as clear and direct – not artsy. Its arrangement on the page will help the actor make it easy. Technically, lines starting with a small letter mean the previous sentence is still going on. Lines starting with a capital letter mean a new sentence begins here. Ends of lines may signal a comma, a period, or none. As in life, the more fun you have with it, the better it works.

KABUKI MACBETH

PRODUCTION:

An open stage with a sliding screen or drape can suggest chamber. A low platform can be a settling or sleeping area. Shredded fabric, drawn or dropped in, can present a curtain-forest. Kimonos and armor are traditional, but the form invites experimentation.

CHARACTERS: 5 men, 4 women + Koken

WITCHES 1, 2, & 3

MACBETH

BANQUO, his friend

LADY MACBETH

MESSENGER

DONALBAIN, son of Duncan

DUNCAN, Shogun

MACDUFF, friend warrior

MALCOLM, son of Duncan

KOKEN, black-clad facilitators of the action

LADIES IN WAITING, LORDS, GHOSTS

DOUBLES: Messenger doubles as Macduff; Koken double as Lords, assassins; Witches double as Ladies in Waiting; all but the Macbeths double as Ghosts

KABUKI MACBETH

I i Forest. *Witches appear slowly from behind mist curtains.*

WITCHES

Hear the roar

howling

following whine

From where?

From where?

No wind

No smell of storm

A tree drips cold

The sky is down

Comes the roar
howling
following whine
From where?
From there

.
Now
in the still
far below—
Yes
The quiet shirr
of steel
of steel. of steel
slicing flesh

.
(Burst of howling and whine)

.
Hoo ooo
Aii eee
Thick dew oozing
bone scrapes bone
from mud they gape
no breath they take

.
They stop the wind
The sky will not wake
Hoo ooo
Aii eee

.
Hush
Here comes one rising
Crack – through the trees
rushing along

.
Hush, Hush, Hush
Hear him coming
leaping the earth
Let go the song:

.
(They begin their dance)

.
We come
from lonely reaches

to hang
in freezing mist

Round and round
the spinning whir
forth and back
the line will purr

Fulfilling the cycle
now rise and now fall
none can escape it
we ride one and all

Bound each to all others
and all
to the wheel
of Karma
Ha ahhh *(Shrieking laugh)*

(Banquo from off, calls—)

BANQUO: Macbeth!

WITCHES

Ha ahh!
Round and round
the spinning whir
forth and back
the line will purr...

BANQUO: *(Off, calling)* Macbeth

(Macbeth enters, fresh from a bath. Witches echo from concealment)

WITCHES: Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth...

MACBETH

I climb as though
without my legs
gliding from rock
to ledge

(Bellowing, from pleasure of climb)

Ho-oooh!

(Banquo enters, filthy from battle)

BANQUO

Macbeth!

They said you left
to cross the mountain
You must have risen
with the wind
What, have you bathed?

MACBETH

In springs that steam
between the rocks
bubbling hot
They heal

BANQUO

You stand there
pure as a babe

MACBETH: And you are tired?

BANQUO

Of course I am!
Battle fever
feeds you still
Soon as you cool
you'll groan

MACBETH *(Laughs, bellows)* Ho-oh

BANQUO: I've brought great news!

MACBETH: Ho – oooh!

BANQUO

Go on – yes, bellow!

I saw you far
across the field
Twenty to one

they had you close
they bore you down
and then
your sword began to swing

Still sweeping till reaching
the traitor himself
Kurokawa
Your arm rose and fell
He was gone
in the swell...
the mighty tyrant

What seized you?
How did you feel?

MACBETH

I felt...nothing
I had no plan
no worry
no...nothing

The sword
was my arm
was my heart
I was...nothing

BANQUO: You felt nothing!

MACBETH

Something still
something small
a power so sure
and such an ease
no more
than falling into sleep

BANQUO (*Laughs*)

You won't sleep long
when you learn
why I've come

WITCHES

Macbeth...
Macbeth...
Macbeth...

BANQUO: Oh! You have admirers here?

MACBETH: What are they?

WITCHES

Blessings, Macbeth
Blessings...
Blessings...

BANQUO *(To Witches)*

Move on
There's nothing for you here
but blood and battle sweat

MACBETH

They look like phantoms
in the mist

BANQUO: Macbeth, it's time for rewards!

WITCHES

Macbeth
great Lord of Kurokawa

MACBETH *(To Witches)*

Lucky try
but far shot
for he's dead
I'm Takatori

BANQUO

No!
That's what I came to say!
You're Kurokawa too
How could these women know?
You have his title now

Mountain wizards
is what they are

MACBETH: I have his title?

WITCHES

Feed the line slowly
no loose curl remains

BANQUO

Yes. Kurokawa's
And his land

WITCHES

Wind it and whirl it
Don't tangle the skein

MACBETH: I'm...Kurokawa?

BANQUO

Yes!
Now you have reason
to bellow

WITCHES: Round and Round...

MACBETH: What are they muttering?

WITCHES: the spinning whir...

BANQUO: They hit one fortune right

WITCHES: forth and back...

BANQUO

No doubt they want
to be employed

WITCHES: the line will purr

BANQUO: The Shogun...

MACBETH: is riding after?

BANQUO: Right away

MACBETH: I must—

WITCHES

Follow the thread
Take hold of the line

MACBETH: Get word to my wife

WITCHES

We weave
and you climb
Hand over hand
up sheer rock
you glide
Take hold of tomorrow
Let Karma guide

MACBETH (*Angry*)

Hah—
you claim to be Fate?
No!

You may see
something in the future
there are ways
but what I am
and what I do
are mine to say

Why else do I live a man?
Should I mark
the tracks you plot—
a chalk-footed rat?

When I'm done
you may chart my way
and call it Karma
Until then
I will make the turns
and call it me!

BANQUO

What's wrong?
Make peace
They're harmless creatures

MACBETH: We've stayed too long

BANQUO

Aha. Your blood has cooled
Your wounds begin to feel

WITCHES

Takatori
who is Kurokawa
will be more:

Shogun

(Like an echo, overlapping)

Shogun

Shogun

is the title
for Macbeth

BANQUO: Oho, do you hear?

MACBETH *(To himself)*

No

It's in the air

My name

has become so strong

BANQUO

If he

is to be Shogun...

don't be sly with me

Grandmother

tell my fortune too

WITCHES

Blessings Banquo

Blessings

Blessings Banquo

BANQUO

They know me as well!
Or did you name me?
Did you call me Banquo?

WITCHES: Out and again...

MACBETH (*to himself*): My name is in the air...

WITCHES: the spinning whir...

MACBETH
where these bold women
can snatch it down...

WITCHES: forth and back...

MACBETH
to weave their after-tale
of Karma

WITCHES
the line will purr:
He is Shogun
but you are
the father of many
Shogun
Many

BANQUO
Father of Shogun
Now that's better!
Which would you rather
my friend—
get it alone
or roll many sheets
in the getting?

(Witches disappear)

MACBETH (*To himself*)
My name is in the air
I put it there

BANQUO

Friend Takatori
who is Kurokawa—
are you here?
But laugh
it's no more than a game

MACBETH: Where did they go?

BANQUO

Oop
Bad sign
They dropped their prey
They may be here
and still not seen

MACBETH: Come

BANQUO

Yes
Let's go down
This air
is far too thin
for mortal men

(Laughter of Witches echoing)

I ii Foliage out. Shoji screens revealed. Lady Macbeth is seen behind open shoji screens.

LADY MACBETH

Waiting is not easy
but wait is what I do
day to night
year to year
waking only
by his light
when my husband comes

On the quiet side
of passion
I fill my valleys up
blending deepens
foaming spills

until he comes
to draw his cup

(Messenger enters, shown in by Lady in Waiting)

LADY IN WAITING

I wish to speak
with you
dear Lady
There is one who breathes
all red-faced
running
from our Lord
Will you hear him?

(Lady Macbeth nods. Messenger does a mime-dance relating the battle)

MESSENGER

Honored Lady Macbeth

I saw your Lord
in battle
saw from far
across the field
Twenty to one
they had him close
they bore him down
and then his sword
began to swing

The twenty went down
two, three to an arc
while his blade swept on
whipping chimes
on the wind
straight into sleet-driving arrows
One sped toward his neck
met his blade, lightning-fast
too fast for the thunder
that followed

Macbeth's horse staggered
beneath him

He slid free to the ground
Then a ball studded with spikes
spun on a chain to greet him
seeking his arm
leg or neck to entwine
so it's partnering blade
could sickle
that part from his whole

Then – I saw it
I swear, with these eyes–
Macbeth leapt from the ground
arcing through air
like the wind-god
howling a loud “Kurokawa!”

Then that mountainous traitor
blackened the sky
Kurokawa loomed
great as his crime
breathing the flame of disaster
belching a laugh-after-roar
he nodded to flick
the challenge away

Then he drove at Macbeth
with his seven foot spear
like an avalanche hurtling down
Macbeth stood still
watching the giant spear come
One lift of his arm
it was shattered
ice cracked in Spring
hacked-instant in pieces
it fell to the foot of Macbeth

One last sweep – Kurokawa stood headless
A spurting blood fountain
shot up instead

(Messenger has finished his dance. Bows and addresses Lady Macbeth)

Great honors race

behind this deed
Prepare your joy
Our hero comes
with titles fresh
Your own Macbeth
is new Lord Kurokawa

LADY MACBETH: Kurokawa!

(Her cry of astonished pleasure, then she is immediately demure again. The Messenger delivers a letter to the lady in waiting, which she, in turn delivers to Lady Macbeth, who reads it, then—)

LADY MACBETH

Wild women
Sang out from the rocks

Avert your eyes
so joy may hide
her shameless face

Go
give order for
the greatest feast
our fields can raise
The Shogun comes tonight

(Messenger bows and exits. Lady Macbeth takes a prayerful stance – palms out to receive)

LADY MACBETH

Wild women in the mist
I open to you now
Let power pour into me
Let desire
turn ripe flesh
to hot steel
I become
the pure tool
of my will
The Shogun comes tonight

(Witches enter, dance round Lady Macbeth, transforming her into a puppet)

WITCHES

You are ready
and you know the way
you feel the moment join
lives in motion
souls are met
actions lap
against a net
of time

Your time is now
Prepare to kill
To kill?
Prepare to kill

Tomorrow takes you
higher than you dream
and knowing
rises in your throat
that all is yours
and his
if you only
have the skill
and if you only choose
to kill

I iia Macbeth enters. *The witches depart. As soon as she sees him, Lady Macbeth bows.*

LADY MACBETH *(Teasing)*

When great Takatori
crept from my bed
who would expect
I'd have to accept
bold Kurokawa
in his stead

MACBETH: You'll have to take them both

LADY MACBETH: As my Lord wills

(Excited, they meet with an embrace or sign of passion)

MACBETH

The sword of Tao was mine

so pure my mastery
it shattered the air

LADY MACBETH

All you've done
is no more
than I knew
you could do

Your new title
is but one
from Shogun

MACBETH

Wild women sang out
from the rocks
as though emerging out of me—
“Macbeth will be Shogun”

LADY MACBETH: They sang the truth!

MACBETH: It was my mind that spoke

LADY MACBETH: Your Karma

MACBETH

No
They were nothing
but hags on the wind

LADY MACBETH

The power
of your fate
grows within me
Duncan comes to declare
you his heir

MACBETH: Tonight it will be

LADY MACBETH

The moment he names you
chimes a bell

MACBETH
My life begins
How may we shorten his?

LADY MACBETH
You've brought him
under my roof
I'm ready
my love, to serve

MACBETH: Tonight he names me his heir

LADY MACBETH
So well
will I play your mate
tomorrow, when sun
floods your pillow
a new Shogun wakes

I iii Screens part revealing banquet hall. *Procession begins: Macbeth and Lady Macbeth position themselves as welcoming hosts. Warriors, including Banquo, Macduff, Malcolm and Donalbain enter and take their places. Shogun Duncan is saluted, takes his central place. Duncan nods, and Donalbain begins to speak)*

DONALBAIN
As younger son
and least among you
I speak for my father
the Shogun Duncan

His happiness
a once dry well
now brims beyond
its upmost rim
The rot
that sucked him dry
has been removed

We thank Macbeth
who now bears titles
of the traitor
that he slew
called Kurokawa

My lord Macduff—
please tell the tale
as first you did

MACDUFF

Many saw
but none explained
his action
Magic
is what it was

(Other warriors pound floor, and make vocal sign of agreement)

BANQUO

Macduff's misled
It takes no special skill
to strike down traitors

MACDUFF

I am ready to wager
all I hold dear—
He struck with power
that was divine

DUNCAN: You all mistake

(All are startled, and turn obediently to hear the Shogun)

DUNCAN: Macbeth went mad

(All look to one another. Duncan speaks to Macbeth—)

DUNCAN

Come forth honored host
When you raised your sword
did you intend
to murder Kurokawa?

MACBETH: No, my Shogun

DUNCAN

Did you strike to win
to wear the praise

and titles you now bear

MACBETH: No

DUNCAN: Did you do it out of fear

MACBETH: I did not

DUNCAN

No

You lost yourself
gave up your mind

MACBETH: Great Shogun...

DUNCAN *(To warriors)*

The sword
of the samurai
is his soul
a sword pure-cast
of honor
Desires of self
constrain it
Only emptiness will serve
To be at one with all
he must be nothing

Macbeth broke through
his mind
and loosed
its hidden power
Such perfection
we do not gain
to kill
but it can punish evil

MACBETH: I am unworthy

DUNCAN

You are blessed
May you continue so
dear cousin

DUNCAN

Now
while my joy flows...

(Macbeth speaks low to Lady Macbeth)

MACBETH: Our plan is monstrous

DUNCAN

While we bask in favor
with the universal powers
let us turn the Shogunate:
I will name my heir

(Excited murmur among the Lords)

Step forth
away from your brother
away from boys' concerns
Come forth my son
Come...Malcolm

(All stir, surprised. Lady Macbeth drops her fan. Malcolm moves center)

BANQUO: Why does he name this limp twig?

MACDUFF: Do not question the Shogun.

DUNCAN

Malcolm
You are still
a Lord in training
but as time comes round
I will raise you
to the weight of Shogun
Will you serve?

MALCOLM: I will give my self and soul

DUNCAN

Go forth, my son
Receive salute

(Malcolm steps forward. All bow to him,)

ALL

We pledge to serve
in his turn
Lord Malcolm

LADY MACBETH

Come
Let's dance in celebration

(Lady Macbeth rises to meet her Ladies-in-Waiting as they file in and begin to dance for the company. Her focus is on Macbeth as he turns, dazed, away from the dancing)

BANQUO *(To Macbeth)*

Were the mountain hags mistaken?
Your name and Shogun
do not mix tonight

(Macbeth stumbles forward. Dance goes on behind him)

MACBETH

Why Malcolm?
Why did he name Malcolm
On the mountain
it was all so clear
I knew that it would be

(Lady Macbeth leaves the dancing, moves slowly toward him)

MACBETH

Kurokawa
I knew he'd say
and now
I answer to that name

My heart flew up
Where is the joy I felt?
Why can't I feel it now
when I hear 'Kurokawa'

It's ringing cold
because—

there was another word
and that was Shogun
I would be Shogun

LADY MACBETH: You leave the feast?

(Macbeth startled she is there, but bold—)

MACBETH: This changes all

LADY MACBETH: It changes nothing

MACBETH

A samurai lives for honor
Look— *(Indicating Duncan)*
He sits enrapt in goodness

LADY MACBETH

And drives a dagger
into your vassal's back

MACBETH

He is my Lord!
I gut my bowels
and yours
if harm should come to him

LADY MACBETH: And who is Macbeth?

MACBETH: Vassal to the Shogun

LADY MACBETH: You...

MACBETH: Enough!

I iiiia *Witch draws curtain to create space for the Macbeths in private.*

LADY MACBETH

Where has it gone
my love?

When last you came within
my chamber door

you wore
a royal helmet
It blazoned
in the firelight
of your conquering eye
You topped the world

Don't tell me now
to sleep with less

MACBETH: Be still!

LADY MACBETH
How will you still me—
with my grave?!

I am yourself
We, two forces
wound to one
I cry aloud
what your heart pounds
but cannot pound
to silence

MACBETH
You feel it well...
but do not know
the world of deeds

LADY MACBETH
Did I dream
wild women?

This day
your life erupted
into glory
Remember it!

MACBETH (*Quietly, excited*)
The world was mine
I felt the future
rising
in the mountain air

LADY MACBETH

To catch it
takes a man

I am your inside self
who cannot live
outside the house
that you provide
If you are not a man
then who am I!

I promise you
this feeble frame
on which is hung a woman
has steeled itself so far
that I could do this thing
alone

All parts that man and woman are
will blend in time
reverse in space
to serve you
Shall I strike?

MACBETH

Come—
the spirit I feel now
will lift me beyond nature
I'll top the world
with you my bride
my samurai
So step into the dance!

(Bouyed, they dance, or strike a triumphant tableau)

I iv **Curtain opens to reveal front of King Duncan's bedroom, closed sliding shoji doors;**
where Macbeth sits alone, meditating.

MACBETH

The moon will climb
behind the bending willow
The dark pool gleams

in sleep

*(Magnificent sword suddenly dangles in air, suspended from long bamboo pole held by Koken.
They or Witches manipulate it as it floats, teasingly guiding Macbeth to Duncan's room)*

MACBETH *(Seeing sword)*

Why are you here?

What do you want with me?

Go away
cease to be!

Oh gods, you're bright—
you soul of samurai:
Swing gaily on a cherry bough
Bloom in my boyhood dream
My spirit streams in yours
unmoved and pure...

(He reaches for the sword, but it eludes him, slipping just out of reach)

You dare me!

WITCHES *(Quietly, luring him)*

Feel the blade
bending soft core
sliver edge
beaten white
You cannot steam-slice stone
alone

MACBETH *(To sword)*

Your slender hilt without me aches
what my mind can fashion
my hand can reach
with this arm
This arm is your mate!

(He lunges for the sword; it evades him again)

WITCHES

Ash and ore
beat it pure
beat beat

twice ten
thrice ten
pure of the pure

Heat Heat
heat from flame
to the white
of a midsummer moon
Heat it white

MACBETH

Yes
when it's white
my strong heart
longing to burst
thrusts my flesh
to the core of the fire!

The samurai
will use his sword
only in service
of his Lord

(Burst of Witches' laughter—)

WITCHES: Hoo ooo Aii eee

MACBETH *(Angry)*

I lie, you say?
Do I lie?
My Lord is Shogun
so where is the lie?
The moment we join
that moment it's done
mighty Duncan will die
My Lord is Shogun
But the Shogun is I!

(He goes confidently after the sword. Macbeth follows the sword, grabs it. Witch opens sliding door, other Witches push Macbeth into room, close door behind him)

(Duncan's shadow appears on the screen, and Macbeth's shadow with the sword, then the fight between them goes on in silhouetted shadow. As the instant Duncan is wounded, red blood splashes over the white sliding doors.)

(Duncan breaks through sliding door, all red with blood-matted hair. Long red trousers may indicate a profusion of blood flow. Stylized dance-battle between Macbeth and Duncan until Duncan is killed.)

MACBETH *(Breathless)*

He stayed apart.
I don't know why
The blade refused to swing
My arm
that used to be as nothing
hung like lead

WITCHES

Poor Samurai
killed his sword
Is it dead?

MACBETH

My ease was gone
had run
I don't know why
it was so hard
to make him die
but now it's done

(Witches creep toward him, but keep a distance)

WITCHES

It's done
Macbeth
It's spun
Your honor is gone *(Echo overlaps)*
Your honor is gone
Your honor is gone

(Witches begin Noh Lion Dance in which they escort Lady Macbeth on stage)

LADY MACBETH: Why...do you have the sword!

MACBETH: It's done

LADY MACBETH

Why do you have the sword?
Take it in

MACBETH: I've won

LADY MACBETH
Take it in
It must stay beside him
Take it in
Lay it there

MACBETH: The bell—

LADY MACBETH
There is no bell
Go!
Before someone comes

MACBETH: It's done

LADY MACBETH
So
this is the bold face
of battle?

MACBETH: I...

LADY MACBETH
Is this
your blood-tasting
ecstasy?

MACBETH: I won't go

LADY MACBETH: Give it to me!

(She takes the sword and enters the room. Macbeth lifts his head, sensing something. Her shadow is seen moving inside the room)

WITCHES
So easily
a point of steel
slips into the skin

so easily
a drop
will slide to fill
the puncture

O foolish man
who slits the membrane
holding life
For from
one giddy drop
of blood
will spread a stain
that grows
that swells
into a never ending flood
of pain

(Lady Macbeth emerges with blood-covered hands and robe)

LADY MACBETH

The smell...
is thick
floats into eyes
The smell itself
chokes breath
The smell
sticks

(She looks at her hand, slowly tastes blood. She begins blood dance. Bells begin)

MACBETH

Hear the bell?
Who struck...
released the beam
that struck
the bell

The boom
That doesn't rise
it flows along the ground
it shudders
from the sleeping vault of unknown sound
it rumbles

through my flesh
and strums the bone
it penetrates
too desolate to pray
another day
another life has come

I make our fate

(Witches wild laughter)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

II i Front of curtain. Malcolm and Donalbain *face each other from opposite ends of the stage. They are numb with shock and grief.*

MALCOLM: Donalbain....

DONALBAIN: Malcolm...

MALCOLM: Our father...

DONALBAIN: Our father's dead

(They turn out toward audience)

DONALBAIN: How can it...

MALCOLM: How did...

DONALBAIN: Macbeth has said...

MALCOLM

He said
he killed the ones
who did the crime

DONALBAIN

Yes
Macbeth has said

What can we do

MALCOLM: Our father's dead

DONALBAIN: I fear for you.

MALCOLM: We both must fly

DONALBAIN: But not we two together

MALCOLM

How could our joy
dissolve

DONALBAIN

We wore it fresh
as nighttime dew

MALCOLM

How could we know
the glory of our father
had already set—
blazing
with the scarlet sun

DONALBAIN

My brother
take my hand
You must take care

MALCOLM: And so must you

DONALBAIN

I'll help you all I can
but we must fly

MALCOLM

And not we two
together

DONALBAIN: No

MALCOLM

Take my sword
as myself
to protect you

DONALBAIN

Take mine
so my spirit
goes with you

MALCOLM

I'll cross the water
to the island Kyushu

DONALBAIN: I'll go past mountains

MALCOLM

Home has no help
for Shogun's sons
where Shogun's beds
are butchery

(They exit in opposite directions)

II ii Banquet hall. Macbeth dressed in golden armor. Nobles warriors attend him. All very still. Responses are correct, but there is reluctance, not enthusiasm.

WARRIOR

Let all our voices
pledge once more
in this election

BANQUO: Who should it be but Macbeth?

ALL

Macbeth
Macbeth
Macbeth!

WARRIOR

For our Shogun
a deep salute

(All salute Macbeth appropriately, together. Witches then approach him ceremoniously with a

great antlered helmet. They crown him with it.)

WITCHES

You wear the power
of a mighty stag
He lords the forest
with his will
But when the cycle
of the year is up
he finds his glory shed
his forehead light
his thicket filled

(Macbeth stands in triumph. Lady Macbeth signals)

LADY MACBETH: Come. Let the dance begin.

(But no dance begins. Instead, Witches cluster around Macbeth. Others, repelled, back away)

MACBETH

Macduff—
You have wish to retire?

MACDUFF

I go
to gather my men
to make you secure

(Macduff exits as Lady Macbeth speaks)

LADY MACBETH

Our honored friends
excuse
the quiet celebration
The preparations...
wearied me

(Banquo emits a tight laugh as he backs away)

BANQUO

So, my friend
you are Shogun
Sooner than we could have dreamed

our mountain hags
were tried – and won
Could it be do you suppose
I should look
to making sons?

LADY MACBETH: What does he mean

(Banquo exits. Macbeth gestures sharply; Kuroko – Koken as assassins – surround him)

MACBETH
After him
and end his life

(Kuroko exit swiftly after Banquo)

MACBETH
End the father
end the sons

No flower will bloom
without a seed
without the source
no stream will feed
There's none
can wheel me
to the ground

WITCHES
Never fear
You will not fall
till the forest
comes down from high mountain
for none who bears
the sword of man
can harm Macbeth

MACBETH
Do you hear
my love
none who bears
the sword of man
can harm Macbeth

We are free!

WITCHES

Only take care of Macduff

Macduff (*Echoing*)

Macduff

He toys with you

and he's run

to serve young Malcolm

MACBETH

He's run

to young Malcolm

Whatever for?

To play at bouncing balls?

(Macbeth gestures sharply as before. Kuroko respond and exit just as another Kuroko enters with a bag dripping red. Kuroko displays a severed head to them)

MACBETH

Run after

Now my love

Who do you see?

LADY MACBETH (*Stonily, dazed*)

Your friend Banquo

His head

MACBETH

My friend Banquo's

come down

from high mountain

Shall we celebrate?

LADY MACBETH

Come

Let's to bed

MACBETH

They all

are jealous of me

Macduff!!

Magic

is what I was
he said

Macduff
is a shivering reed
who's seen
the steel of my arm
so let him snivel and run
What is he good for
but making sons
(Laughing, echoes himself)
but making sons
but making Sons

LADY MACBETH

Come
we cannot live
without the veil
of sleep

MACBETH

Oh no
I must be awake
There's much to do
when you're making Fate

(Kuroko enter with larger red dripping bag and dump it, displaying, at Lady Macbeth's feet, the bloodied heads of Lady Macduff and her two children.)

LADY MACBETH

The Lady Macduff?

And all her little ones

I'm tired
come with me
come...

*(Witches surround them, laughing. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth stand center, with heads spread before them. **Mie pose of all**)*

II iii The forest. *Lady Macbeth lies asleep. Macbeth sits over her.*

MACBETH

Softly
you drop the veil
of sleep
while I
remain outside
To grow
defenseless so
cannot be
not with me

But is it soft- ?
The day is gone
new blood runs clear
you wake newborn
while I
am still as stone
my mind propped wide
to hinder monstrous things
who crowd the day
the night the time between
until I am
as they

(He weeps then howls like a beast. Lady Macbeth stirs)

LADY MACBETH: He's asleep. Come

MACBETH: Who?

LADY MACBETH

No screaming
Hush...
We still can play
Come—

(She mimes playing ball with head of small child)

Little, little head
roll it
roll to me
little toss
shiny curls

tumble
roll to me

Oh-oh bumped his nose
no no – it bleeds
thick
wipe it quick
it bleeds

MACBETH

Your hands are clean.
Stop...stop

(She notices him as though for the first time)

LADY MACBETH

What, have you bathed?
You stand there pure...

(Affectionately, she moves to examine him, but finds that he has bathed in blood)

...from steaming springs
but thick
bubbling hot
and thick
it sticks
the smell...

(The smell is nauseating)

MACBETH: You're asleep. Wake up!

LADY MACBETH

Three little children
all undone
One two three
then we
have none

MACBETH: You're dreaming. Come...

LADY MACBETH

Kill

kill the Shogun
Ah – oop
here's another

MACBETH: Be still!

LADY MACBETH

Slice him slick
hack him quick
See how they run
After the brothers

MACBETH: Wake up! You'll be heard

LADY MACBETH

The smell
is thick
It chokes the eyes
Ahhmm
Are you afraid
to play?

MACBETH: Come...you must wake

(He leads her)

MACBETH *(Calling)*

Women wild
upon the mountain
Macbeth is calling
Come!

(Witches gather)

WITCHES: Who is calling– come!

MACBETH: You have done this!

WITCHES

Great Lord Takatori
Kurokawa
Shogun?

MACBETH

Help her!
She believed you
from the first

WITCHES

Macbeth—
great ruler of the world
what more
do you require?

MACBETH

We ask for cure:
I want to see
those gone before

(Ghosts of those Macbeth has killed begin to gather, Banquo and Duncan among them)

WITCHES

Come, come, come
from lonely reaches
where you hang in freezing mist
Come
sing him the song
of his life string
wind out the line
of his days
unfold the role
that he plays

MACBETH: I do not fear you. Come

BANQUO

No, you—
come with me
I'll show you
battlefields a-rot
with steaming limbs
in every brilliant gash
a tongue a voice that screams:
“Take Macbeth
It was him”

(Macbeth strikes, trying to fight ghosts that slither away from him)

MACBETH

Back to hell
and let us be
This time is mine
it was made for me

DUNCAN

I weep, Macbeth
Your honor
a lifetime winning
was in a moment lost

Man's glory
is a time
of high danger
Desire is obsession
Obsession loses all

Follow fast, Macbeth

(Macbeth fights more furiously)

DUNCAN

Desire is obsession
Obsession loses all

(Lady Macbeth is surrounded, willingly, without offering resistance, being strangled by ghosts)

LADY MACBETH

Macbeth...
Macbeth
Let go my soul...

(Macbeth tries to fight ghosts who surround her. They part for him. She is dead.)

MACBETH *(Quietly)*

I am yourself
she said
We—
two forces wound
to one

(Pause. Then speaks to her)

You should have come
astride me to the field
then you'd have known
what life is
and how it wets the ground

Well then, come down
from high mountain!
It's time
that forests came down
I stand here
Come root-tearing down!
If all grace deserts me
I'm left as I am
Come crush me
I stand here
stark man!

(Macduff appears)

MACBETH
Stand clear Macduff
I have killing
to do
My hand will bleach day
to forever

MACDUFF
After death
it may
But you have cleared
the earth
of mine
I stand alone
No day comes
until you're gone

MACBETH
Aha
if you can

I am never to die
by any who bears
the sword of man

MACDUFF

Die now
for I feel nothing
The sword
is my arm
is my heart
I am nothing

MACBETH: No!

MACDUFF

Do you fear me now?
The sword I hold
is not of man
It is my soul
It is honor

I am air
I am rock
I am you
I am all things

MACBETH: No

MACDUFF

I have no desire
I am ready to die
You are mine

*(They fight. Macbeth is killed, beheaded. His bloody head is speared atop a pike.)
(Macduff in Mie pose)*

II iiii **Witches take Macbeth's head** *in their arms, move downstage.*

WITCHES

Hoo ooo
Aii eee
Great Takatori
Kurokawa – Shogun

What has become of you?
What did you make him do?

It wasn't I
Nor either me
Did someone lie?
Did he believe?
Or did he choose
what he would choose
to do

Great Takatori
Kurokawa – Shogun
Who did he cry to
that moment
that last
What had he left
to gain
Parched wind is all
that remains

It wasn't I
Nor either me
Did someone lie?
Did he believe
Or did he choose
what he would choose
to do

Peace, now – be still
These things
are best unknown
Find peace
Over-glory
in the heart
will rot
and ripple through
the arc of time
but clean
replenished peace
can reign
when man
his selfish way
resigns

II iv Banquet hall. Malcolm seated on throne, center. Donalbain, Macduff, other noblemen seated. Celebration dance by Ladies-in-Waiting is in progress.

MACDUFF

Joy to you
great Shogun Malcolm
Smile on us now
Be as the sun
when it carelessly floods
the high mountain

We turn to you
longing for warmth
and pray
for the end
of dark days
Bless us now

MALCOLM

Macduff
my noble samurai
I thank you and promise
to you and all
who pledge faith to me—
eternal peace
a peace to the end
from now until
the seas rise and blend
with the skies

So let us taste joy
and pass it to each
and ask that together
we raise
loud thanks
to this breaking day
Let your voices blaze!

ALL: *(Loud)* Ay ay yah!

WITCHES

Come put your shoulder to the wheel

Come set the wheel
to spin
Just let tomorrow roll away
the wheel won't stop
the wheel won't stay
Today's the day you win

Donalbain (*Echoing*)
Donalbain
Donalbain...
Why is it Malcolm?
Why not you?
Why is the first-born
always first
Why must you stand behind
always on tiptoe
trying to glimpse
parading life
through your brother's prime

DONALBAIN
The seed
was not less potent
that shaped my royal line
The earth is left
much finer that's plowed a second time
Why is it Malcolm?
Why not me?
This thorn
has snagged my pride
for I am just as bright
and just as royal born

WITCHES (*Weaving around him*)
Follow the thread
Take hold of the line
We weave
and you climb
Hand over hand
up sheer rock
you glide
Take hold of tomorrow
Let Karma guide

DONALBAIN *(Excited)* I can be Shogun!!

(Witches offer two outcomes – the phrases may be mixed, or spoken at once, in opposition)

WITCHES 1

Hush! Hush...
Fulfilling your cycle
now rise and now fall
none can escape it
we ride one and all
bound each to all others
and all
to the wheel
of Karma
bound each to all others
and all
to the wheel
of Fate

WITCHES 2

But is it real?
And are you bound?
Or is it chance
he wins, you lose?
Or do you dance
the step you choose

Decide–
Do you believe?
But excuse us–
while we weave

END OF PLAY

KABUKI RICHARD III

PRODUCTION:

An open or proscenium stage to allow fluid transitions. Excess of color and beauty.
A light-weight curtain to be whisked open is customary, not essential.

CHARACTERS: 5 men, 5 women, Koken 2-6

Extended character backgrounds are given for those who wish to follow the feud. For “Shogun,” substitute “King,” for “Shogun’s Lady,” “Queen”

.
MARGARET (of Anjou) – former Shogun’s Lady (of Henry VI), ruthless

.
RICHARD – brother of dead Shogun (Edward IV), Protector to Shogun’s heir, ambitious

.
HASTINGS – Chief Lord to dead Shogun, faithful

.
BUCKINGHAM – Lord, serves Richard, ambitious

.
ELIZABETH – new widow; former Shogun’s Lady (of Edward IV), ripe

.
RIVERS – Elizabeth’s brother, Lord, Uncle to heir

.
GREY – Elizabeth’s brother, Lord, Uncle to heir

.
YORK – Mother of Richard & dead Shogun, widow of Richard of York

.
BETH – Elizabeth’s daughter, future Shogun’s Lady (grandmother of Elizabeth I)

.
ANNE – widow to Margaret’s son, future Shogun’s Lady (of Richard III)

.
PRINCE – Elizabeth’s son, dead Shogun’s heir (would be Edward V)

.
CHORUS – story-tellers who speak together; may include Koken, or any actors available; may also play LORDS.

.
KOKEN – facilitate the action. Dressed in black, they move sets, manipulate props in full view of audience, scurrying like invisible elves. Two will play NINJA

.
KI-PLAYER – Koken who signals the opening of scenes and key moments by striking the “KI” (key) or resounding wooden blocks.

.
DOUBLES: Beth may play the Prince. If not doubled, they’re onstage once together. Rivers, Grey, Buckingham and Hastings may all double as Lords.

KABUKI RICHARD III



Dancing Shiva

I i Prologue: *Flute. KI-Player kneels at edge of stage, and **strikes KI**, to begin play. Before the curtain, a once beautiful, now haggard, woman enters, faces audience.*

MARGARET

Margaret, I am
You may call me
a prophet
then I could laugh
A laugh is welcome
when the sky hangs black
The old have seen
everything

There was a time
my eyes danced
boldly
when I came riding
by land and by sea
from a far country
to marry a Prince
who grew to be
Shogun
But then came the killing
then the killing

began

I saw a youth
rise naked
smeared with ash
His name
this time on earth
is Richard
but Shiva
is his soul

Many don't believe me
but if they lived my life
they would believe
as I

The Shogun, my husband
my son, who was Prince—
both murdered
by Richard
So now I am widow
with my son's widow
my Anne
and we stand
remembering...
the youth I saw rise naked
from the ash
whose name
is Richard

This earth spreads a feast
Taste it all—
as long as you're strong
as long as you fight
again, again
until your loves
are hacked away
and then
trailing bloody flesh
they drag you through the market
of a bald country town
a woman left
as women are
with nothing

Still, I know
though many don't believe
that of the killing
finally
the gods will tire
And then rises Shiva
the young god Shiva
comes

I ii. Ki strikes; curtain opens; Richard alone *in a dim spot in what is gradually revealed as a vast cemetery – may be the “field” to which we return in the final scene.*

(Richard as a child, sitting on a mound of ashes [the ashes may be crouched Koken who emerge to dress him] He smears himself with ashes, plays with dangling bones on a necklace.)

MARGARET

He is last born son
of the one
created
to destroy me
So I killed his father
and they named him
Richard

Orphan grown
from all our wars
bred only to haunt
the little ground
still unstained
and so he became
Shiva

*(A mime-dance with the aid of Koken: Richard grows from a child, changing, brought to manhood, finally will strike a **Mie pose** as the God Shiva. Koken's hands and arms create the rings of fire and many arms of Shiva)*

CHORUS

There is a rhythm
at the center
of the world
we cannot see

Hold still and hear it

sink into feeling
the whispering beat

This rhythm came
before the Word
before the You or I

Waken to dance
Melt into the sky
For something to be born
something must die

RICHARD

High high!
Leaping licking fire
twirl out a world
spun on a snake stick
laughing as it curls
Fly fly!

(Richard gives a last leap and shout; quick and gleeful.. The Koken scurry away)

RICHARD

Fly hieeee!

I iii *Drums. Music. The funeral procession of Shogun Edward enters: First the urn carried on by Hastings and Buckingham. Immediately behind, the late Shogun's widow, Elizabeth, flanked by her two brothers, Lords Rivers and Grey. Behind them Lady York and granddaughter Beth. Each person carries a white rose*

RICHARD

She comes
The latest Shogun widow
Lady of the North
Look there
her lip is dragging
in the dust
as well it might—
my brother's bones
still hot among the ash
and she must know
North Lady cannot stand
alone

(Calling to her)
Elizabeth

(Richard spins round to greet them. Procession startled, stops. Urn will be set down)

RICHARD
My dear dead
brother's wife
I'm glad you went ahead
without me

ELIZABETH: *(Shocked)* Richard!

RICHARD
I see you've brothers
of your own
strong enough
to take your arm

Lord brother Rivers
(Nodding to each of them)
Lord brother Grey
you inlaws so kind
to bear our rose of white

ELIZABETH
How did you come
so soon...

RICHARD
Small wonder
I came at all

ELIZABETH: ...from so far North?

RICHARD
...without an invitation

But where is my angel nephew
Where is your son
Missing his father's last rites?

ELIZABETH

How did you know?
The Shogun
died so suddenly

HASTINGS: I sent the news to Richard

ELIZABETH: *(Surprised)* You, Lord Hastings?

RICHARD *(Gleeful)*
Aha. Lord Hastings
That's how it was
I asked you
Where is the Prince?

(Elizabeth and her brothers look at each other)

Hiee hiee!
You all look like
roosters returned
to find a fox
has called

YORK
Before the gods
be civil, Richard!
Pass on, pass on

(York signals the procession to begin again. As they speak, it does)

RICHARD
Ah, Mother
there you are behind

YORK
Yes, here I am
And you will
answer to me

RICHARD
When did vultures
earn the right
to wear a rose
that's white

Don't you know
what those in-laws plan?

YORK

I know my son
the Shogun Edward
who bore this world
all smiling on his shoulder
now is gone

RICHARD: I loved my brother too

YORK: Then show your knee!

RICHARD (*Bowing*)

Dear Mother
you still have me

YORK

You in place of him!
Can I arrange
a trade?

BETH (*Holding York*)

Grandmother please
You cannot bring
my father back
by hurting Richard

RICHARD

My angel niece
You wear our rose
with grace

BETH

Please help
Your mother has another son
Release him
Your brother Clarence
still imprisoned
in Zashiki-ro

RICHARD

Ah, yes
poor Clarence
still closed up
in Zashiki-ro
What was the reason?
Oh look there
see who's coming?

Yes, I remember
It was treason

(A second procession enters; only two women, bearing red roses: former Lady of the North [Shogun's wife], Margaret, and Anne, her daughter-in-law. They approach opposite Elizabeth, moving toward three downstage urns)

ELIZABETH: She dares come today!

(Margaret proceeds, as dialogue continues, to kneel by the three urns, of her husband, Shogun Henry, her son Edward, Anne's father, Warwick – all killed by Richard)

YORK

The ashes of her dead
lie already cold
No need to visit now
except to mock us

RICHARD: Hail, North Lady Margaret

(Margaret points her red rose at Richard as though it's her sword)

MARGARET

Viper!
You strike me
calling "Lady of the North"
She stole that crown from me
But now, Elizabeth
I take my turn
to gloat
Now it's you
has lost a husband Shogun

YORK *(Pointing her rose)*

She-devil!
You butchered mine!

As well as my first born son
Let this son die in peace
Leave Elizabeth alone

RICHARD

Put down your roses, Ladies!

(Richard takes York's white rose from her)

Have you not
enough loves dead
beneath this sign?

(Richard smiles at them all, then, with the rose extended, he moves to Anne, who has stayed aside, hiding herself)

The rose
is potent
beauty
Within its power
the warrior wilts
his senses crazed
his soul
intoxicate
with beauty
has no will
to war
Beware
the roses'
gaze

(As he finishes the dialogue, Richard holds the rose at Anne's chin)

(Anne lifts her face to look at Richard, swiftly raises her arm, and plunges a dagger toward his neck. He catches her wrist just in time to save himself)

RICHARD

I kiss your fingertips
sweet Anne

(With a shriek, Anne tries to bite Richard's hand that is holding her wrist)

RICHARD

Have you comfort, Margaret
in this tender wife
of your sweet son?

MARGARET

May her teeth bear poison
She's stripped of men
by your blade—
(Indicating the three urns)
of husband
of father
of husband's father Shogun

RICHARD

Then here she stands
in need
of all in all
And I am he

YORK: Richard!

MARGARET *(Laughs)*

Aha!
Let her strike
and you'll see

(Richard lets the dagger Anne holds move back to his throat)

RICHARD *(Seductively)*

Tender cousin
we two are braided
limb on limb
in blood
This thing you call
mother-in-law
axed my father
with the father of yours
raised their two comrade heads
on posts atop a wall

(Anne shrinks away, nauseated)

MARGARET

Look—
steeped in ashes
he still prowls
running women mad

(Richard forces Anne's dagger against his own throat)

RICHARD

Hold your blade steady
Let it breathe
against my flesh
Your father raised me
from a boy

ANNE *(Growling)*

And you
you killed...!

RICHARD

Now!
Sink your blade deep!
I killed him
all for you

ANNE: Ahhhh...!

(Anne cries out, staggers away from Richard)

RICHARD

You cannot do me in?
I'll do it for you
If you want me to

(Richard places himself formally, kneels, his sword laid out before him, preparing to commit seppuku [to disembowel himself]. The others back away. Anne prowls, watching him. When Richard is ready, he looks up for Anne's answer)

ANNE: I do

RICHARD

Then sit where
I can see myself
die

in your eyes

(Anne stands still, refusing to accommodate Richard)

RICHARD

In exchange
for my death
that much you must do

(Anne moves to kneel opposite Richard. He gazes at her, then tips his head back)

RICHARD

Those eyes
before me
in every battle
blazed
I let no man
who claimed you
live

None lives
but by devouring
life
and you
belong only
to me

Goodbye my Anne
We two
are no more
than orphans
teethed on war

(Richard breathes, gazes at Anne, then, in the instant he reaches for the knife, she lunges, falling forward, and covers the knife with her body, preventing him from using it)

(As Anne lies face down, Richard flings himself into a Shiva-pose over her, triumphant)

RICHARD: What have I done!

(KI strikes. Mie pose. Formal movement of procession resumes)

RICHARD

As we two wed
tonight
the roses blend
the white with the red
befriending
all bleeding lovers
Those who still breathe
above this earth
must warm each other

Mother?

(York moves numbly forward to take Anne from Richard. The others, watching amazed now line both sides of the stage, forming an up and downstage corridor)

(Anne straightens, pulls free from York, looks back at Richard. Richard bows to her. Anne turns regally and exits upstage through the corridor of onlookers. It is a mysterious transformation, as though she has already become his wife, Lady of the North)

(Both sides, Elizabeth, Margaret, and their parties, fall in line to follow Anne. Only Buckingham remains. He slaps a fan in slow applause, punctuating his speech to Richard, who is motionless facing the audience)

BUCKINGHAM

And she...
will be...
North Lady

(Hastings has hesitated, now turns out of the exiting procession, and comes toward them)

HASTINGS: Richard...

RICHARD: Eager Lord Hastings

HASTINGS *(Moving to him)*

Brilliant entrance!
You unraveled
their whole scheme
with just one pull
on a string
Elizabeth
with her brothers
intends to rule
the Prince

RICHARD: You are faithful, Hastings?

HASTINGS

To the Shogun
always
who, as your most loving brother
named you alone
Protector of his son

RICHARD

The Shogun—
may his rest bring him peace—
his Prince
and I
all thank you, Hastings

(Hastings bows, and scurries away to catch the procession)

BUCKINGHAM

He is faithful
to himself
as we all are
Lord Hastings expects more
from you
than he'll ever get
from Elizabeth

RICHARD: And you? Lord Buckingham

BUCKINGHAM

Humble Buckingham
serves the Shogun
you mean
to be

(Richard laughs loud, and draws a white cloth out into his hand)

BUCKINGHAM

Anne
who was wife
to a red-rose Prince
before you killed him

this time will not miss
the crown

RICHARD (*Drawing his dagger*)

Astute of you
And you expect...?

(Richard slices his palm, and holds it, bloody, toward Buckingham. Buckingham, startled, then answers Richard's gesture by holding out his own hand)

BUCKINGHAM

Would the land of...
Kyushu
be too grand a prize?

(Richard swiftly slices Buckingham's palm)

RICHARD

Not if I hear
my favorite brother Clarence
who's been closed up tight
in Zashiki-ro
these many lonely nights
is dead

(Buckingham startled, holds his bloody palm's wrist, looks at Richard)

BUCKINGHAM: You want Clarence dead?

RICHARD

Blood into blood
hand passes hand
All comes to those
who understand
a cunning partner
is worth
unmeasured land

*(Richard smacks his palm into Buckingham's. **Mie pose**)*

I iv Dark night. Field (*same set, no urns*) *Riders entering, will cross stage (may be mimed). It is Rivers and Grey, the two brothers of Elizabeth, with a boy, the Prince.*

PRINCE: When will I be Shogun?

RIVERS

As soon
as soon can be

PRINCE

That answer's for a child
which I no longer am
Uncle Rivers

GREY: You certainly are not

PRINCE

Then tell me, Uncle Grey
Who is my enemy?
Who must I hate?

*(As though on cue, a spear with a banner drops in front of them. All are startled, on guard,
draw their weapons)*

RIVERS: Who's there?

HASTINGS *(Entering)*

No one
you should challenge
Lord Rivers

GREY: Hastings?

HASTINGS

Not if you're doing
the Shogun's business

RIVERS

What do you mean?
The Shogun...died

HASTINGS

But you know
he named a Protector
before

BUCKINGHAM: *(Entering)* Release the Prince

RIVERS: I will not. No!

(They fight – Rivers, Hastings, Grey, Buckingham, Ninja guards who attend)

PRINCE: Uncles, Uncles...!

(Richard comes like a whirlwind, wheeling through, knocking all to the ground. Buckingham and Hastings scuttle aside)

PRINCE: Uncle...Richard!

(Richard comes easily to rest in a Shiva pose)

RICHARD: Secure them!

(Richard's ninjas brutally secure and exit with Rivers and Grey)

PRINCE

Richard...

What are you doing
with my other uncles?
My mother will be angry
with you

RICHARD

Good

You know politics
already

(Buckingham and Hastings laugh, and fall in formation behind Richard and the Prince, and the interrupted journey continues)

RICHARD

It is true
my tender Prince
her brothers
have position
through your mother
Your mother–
you may be glad, child–
is a woman

And a woman
must get position
through a man
For your mother
that man is your father
and he is dead

PRINCE

And so...
what will you do
with them?

RICHARD (*Chuckles*)

Quick learner you are
my budding young man

PRINCE: Where are we coming to?

RICHARD

Ah, see—
your sweet sister Beth
coming to greet you

PRINCE

This is Zashiki-ro
I don't like it here

BUCKINGHAM: (*Exiting*) But here you'll be safe

HASTINGS: Till you are safely Shogun

RICHARD

Call your sister
She's turning aside

PRINCE

Are you sure
I should speak to her?
She's only a woman

HASTINGS: Come in now, my Prince

(Hastings ushers the Prince off as Buckingham runs on. Beth stands at a distance, staring.)

Richard puts a hand up to welcome her – but she turns swiftly, and leaves)

RICHARD: What happened to Beth?

BUCKINGHAM: Not good

RICHARD: Go bid her come back

BUCKINGHAM

She came to visit
Her Uncle Clarence

RICHARD: Ahhh, yes, Clarence

BUCKINGHAM

And so
she found him–
already dead

(KI strikes. Double Mie Pose. Then Richard flips his hand; Buckingham hurries away.)

(Richard alone, to audience. He begins humorously, ironic, but winds into a frenzy)

RICHARD

Not good at all
So impolite

What should I do
with these Uncles?
Uncles everywhere
Tell me when
has any
ever nurtured
the ambition
to be Uncle!
But here we land
dumped side by side
none preferred
none granted any rank
but equal – Uncle!

I'll sweep us clean
of Uncles

One by one
remove them swiftly
saving mess
and futile screams
I sweep us clean
Stepping lightly
as I can
on every neck
Such sweet relief
in each fresh “crack”
I sweep us clean!

Poor country mine—
mute with your longing
drooping
wasted
weeping for one
strong enough to lead
So from out
this festering stew
I simplify
distill the finest
“He”
The last surviving
Uncle
must be me!

(KI strikes. Mie pose)

I v. Palace, raised floor in palace garden. Hastings enters, enjoying sun, birds

HASTINGS
Tender petals
will at last unfold
Soon all is well
in every tattered world
The morning
however long coming
must finally answer
the warbling bird

(A Lord enters swiftly. [Rivers or Grey actor doubling])

LORD

Lord Hastings...
you must not meet
The signs
Are bad today
Great turtle in the west
means danger

HASTINGS *(Laughs)*

Go away
If I worried
over every sign
nothing would ever get done
It's a beautiful morning
The Prince must be crowned

LORD

But North Lady's brothers
the Lords Rivers and Grey
both so swiftly killed?
Both done away

HASTINGS

These are swift times
my friend
Look within...
Only in quiet
decision
will balance be found

(Buckingham enters. Another Lord follows. They all proceed onto the floor and place themselves formally, nervously, for a meeting)

BUCKINGHAM: A bright day, Lords

LORD

Buckingham, tell us
how feels the Protector today?

BUCKINGHAM

Richard?
Sparkling as ever
though matters of state

concern him
naturally

HASTINGS

How did North Lady
take the news

BUCKINGHAM: The...who?

HASTINGS

The Lady of the North – Elizabeth –
of her brothers sudden deaths?

BUCKINGHAM (*Refusing Elizabeth's title*)

Ah, you mean
Elizabeth
the last Shogun's wife!

HASTINGS (*Uneasy*)

You stayed
too long abed

BUCKINGHAM

In bed or out
the world does roll

(They are seated. Richard enters regally)

RICHARD

Good morning, Lords
You all look fresh as dew

(Lords all salute him. He takes the head place)

LORDS: Richard. Protector of the Prince

RICHARD (*Cheerfully*)

Today we set the coronation
Yes?

BUCKINGHAM

We all know this
Lord Protector

But of who?

HASTINGS: Who? The Prince!

BUCKINGHAM

I see
you haven't heard
the rumors

HASTINGS: What rumors

LORD: From Elizabeth's party?

BUCKINGHAM: Rumors that our candidate...

HASTINGS: Candidate!

BUCKINGHAM

does not have blood
that's pure

HASTINGS: You're speaking treason!

RICHARD (*Soothingly*)

Peace, peace
Buckingham has merely heard
Elizabeth's marriage is not clear
and by that slip – so sad –
the Prince is illegitimate

(*Uproar in protest*)

LORD

Above a whisper
that speech
Is full of danger

HASTINGS: Ridiculous!

RICHARD

Peace, gentle Lords
Our decision
is a grave one

HASTINGS

The Shogun would not name
a son whose title wasn't clear!

BUCKINGHAM

Perhaps
a slippery marriage
needed cover

HASTINGS: By all my honor – No!

(Buckingham turns abruptly to Richard to draw him aside)

BUCKINGHAM

Most honorable Richard—
a circumstance
I must relate
to you alone

RICHARD *(Leaving them)*

Consider calmly
Councilors

(Buckingham and Richard move away, say nothing, but circle slowly on opposite sides, while watching the others. Lords buzz to each other, nervously)

LORD: *(Low)* Strange...was Richard angry?

HASTINGS: Has any of you seen Elizabeth?

LORD: I sent him apricots today

(As Buckingham and Richard join two Ninja follow them)

RICHARD

I am grieved
in my soul
to hear it
Seize the traitor
Now

(Ninja move swiftly and take rough hold of Hastings. Lords are thrown off guard)

RICHARD
Hastings—
whom I trusted—
has betrayed the state
by keeping secrets

HASTINGS: What secrets?

RICHARD
Be glad that I
preserve my calm

HASTINGS: What secrets!

RICHARD
Though you are stained
by such deep treason
in light of former service
I allow you now the honor
to take your life
by *seppuku* [“hari kari”]

(KI strike. Mie pose. All exit quickly in different directions)

I vi. Zashiki-ro. *Palace floor tipped to make a wall. Still in a garden, but outside the prison. Elizabeth enters, supported by York. She carries a small red bundle.*

ELIZABETH
Did they say
that I was
Lady of the North?
If I were Lady of the North
I’d say
“Send in my son”
and he would come
Ahah. It is not so

YORK
Did you never look ahead?
And now you know...
Oh – fine primed ambition
and a cloudless day

think they
can sail forever
imagining
no touch of fog
can raze the line
where earth meets sky
High High

See – this battered hulk
(Referring to herself)
that bobs afloat
through ages of raging wind
still nosing scraps
of family
borne to shore
Build womanhood on them

(They have arrived where a Ninja stands guard, and steps forward to block their way. Anne is entering from another direction)

NINJA: You cannot pass beyond

ELIZABETH

Of course I may pass
Is this not Zashiki-ro
and do you not know me?

YORK: Too well he knows

ELIZABETH: I've come to see my son

YORK: My grandson, I

ANNE: And I, my nephew Prince

(Holding out her red bundle)

ELIZABETH

I have the royal garment
for him here

(The Ninja does not move)

YORK: We may not visit—why?

NINJA: No one may pass

ELIZABETH: *(Startled)* I hear a laugh!

NINJA: What?

ELIZABETH

A touch of music
I think I hear his laugh

Whose order
can deny me
my own child!

NINJA

Only the highest
Protector of the Prince

(Anne crumbles, as though struck by a blow to the stomach)

YORK: Almighty Richard

ANNE: My husband

YORK

My last born son
What a blessing

ANNE

Stretch up here, Elizabeth
It may be you can
see him play

ELIZABETH: *(Bewildered)* The garment...

YORK: ...for the Prince to wear

ELIZABETH

So none
who have the joy
to see him

can forget
they are in presence
of the royal heir

ANNE

This man—
in kindness—
will take it in

YORK: Hah. What kindness

ELIZABETH: Will you take it?

NINJA: That much I can

(As Elizabeth kisses the bundle and hands it to the Ninja, another Ninja comes running. We seem to hear the cry of a child “Mother!” but it may not be real)

NINJA 2: The Lady Anne

ELIZABETH: I hear him calling me!

(Ninja 2 bows in front of Anne)

NINJA 2

You're called to be
Lady of the North

YORK

North Lady – she?
Elizabeth—
you must hide
Take sanctuary

NINJA

Richard commands
your presence
instantly
The coronation will proceed

ANNE: The coronation...how?

NINJA

You and he
are to be crowned
He the Shogun
and you his Lady

ANNE: Nooo!

(Anne gives a guttural cry, collapses. Mie of all)

END ACT I

ACT TWO

II i Anne wanders out. *It becomes gradually clear that she is dying.*

ANNE

I know it could
have been a dream
but still
I hear him calling
softly
“Lady Lady...Lady...
Why do I hear it
What is the voice
Oh let me rest
Aiiiee

Lady of the North
she filled my life–
haunting promise
beckoning grin
“You’re meant to be
that Lady of all women”
But now I see
that I was only meant
to cradle agonies–
again again
and should I
finally be she
I die

I married Richard
Since he touched me

I no longer
touch the ground
but walk some world
between
the one I know
and one I cannot know—
unknown forever—
a creature
made to move
inside of twilight
never laying down my head
but still
awaking never

No longer am I one
with those
who taste their food
I cannot say with others
“What a lovely breeze”
as though
my eyes can only see
disaster
that I always knew
was there

Richard needs me
that I know
He reaches toward me
suctioning my self
and soul
full off my bones
to nourish him
Each time he wakes
I know
my step is lighter
on the earth
My step is dim

(Anne collapses; engulfed by the next scene, she'll drag herself away)

II ii Raised floor full of dancers, celebrating the coronation. All the women may be used, except Anne, and all the men.

CHORUS

There is a rhythm
at the center
of the world
we cannot see

Hold still and hear it
sink into feeling
the whispering beat

MARGARET (*Moves apart*)

When all was still
within
your breast still
moved
out and in
flowing on the stream
of all
plunging to the sea
knowing – nothing is
that does not
move
with you

(Richard, gloriously dressed as Shogun, enters through the center. Dancers yield space to him, but his presence makes them dance more furiously. He strikes a Shiva pose)

CHORUS

Dance it down
Pound again
Push the veins

RICHARD

Your pulse explodes
like shot in crystal air
a spattered shriek
of bowels
ripped raw from sleep
There is nothing
that I would not dare
When horror floods
your brain
then push it higher

beat the beat
my sweet ones
dance the dream

CHORUS

This rhythm came
before the Word
before the You or I

RICHARD

Kaleidoscoping
beauty out of
terror's brutal scream
High High!

Leaping licking fire
twirl out a world
spun on a snake stick
laughing as it curls

MARGARET

Waken to dance
Melt into the sky
For something to be born
something must die

(All fall into a bow to Richard, their faces to the floor)

CHORUS

High high
Shogun Richard!

(Procession, with each coming to bow before Richard individually, begins)

RICHARD

You're choosing well
to do me grace
cleaning my footpath
with your face
Hee Hee
Now let me see
How many did I chase
as far as Hell

to get this place

(First to bow to him is his mother, York)

RICHARD

Is this your blessing?
Spittle under breath
How ungrateful when
I've made you once again
a Shogun's mother

You don't begrudge
poor Clarence' death
Between us family
what's another brother

(Other Lords bow low to Richard as he continues)

RICHARD

Why don't they up
and butcher me?!
Because they love me
They adore...
The more
atrocities I do
the more their admiration
grows
If now I make my stool
in this one's face
he'll swear he sniffs
a rose

To find the evil
men can do
don't search in books
Try bedrooms
backyards
chambers of the church
The worst among you
faint in disbelief
at what grotesque inhuman horrors
simple hearts have worked

(Elizabeth comes forward to bow. Her daughter Beth behind, won't move to Richard)

RICHARD

Ah Elizabeth
come out from hiding
to wish me...
what?
Happiness and wealth?
My Anne declines
to share
and fades away (so sad)
I require a North Lady in health
Whatever will I do
for heirs?

Is that my tender niece
back there
shying so
denying her wares?

BETH

I see you, Uncle
clear

RICHARD

Beth dear Beth
you risk my temper
Will not bend for me?
Well, well...
I owe you
so you take your fee

(Buckingham, the last to approach, bows ostentatiously)

BUCKINGHAM: Great Shogun

RICHARD *(Rises menacing)*

Buckingham
my very closest
friend

BUCKINGHAM

All we have achieved

will remind you
of the day
our two bloods kissed
in this...

(Buckingham draws out the white cloth bloodied with their pledge)

RICHARD: *(Furious)* All?

BUCKINGHAM

Great Lord
you remember
the title you promised
was mine:
Master of all lands
of Kyushu

RICHARD

I am Shogun
And foul whisperings say
my closest friend
has wantonly betrayed me

BUCKINGHAM: My Lord...how!

RICHARD

You didn't think
I'd sniff your trap?
What cleverness you show

BUCKINGHAM: *(Frightened)* What trap?

(But Richard instantly flips his mood as though it's forgotten, speaking casually)

RICHARD

I have a tickle
just here...

(Gestures down his throat)

Can you scratch it?

No?

Just so

there's a tiny bit
of something
catches those
who raise their voice
to cheer me

BUCKINGHAM: Do you refuse me my land?

RICHARD
A niggling bit
You left it there
to rattle in the dark—
this stone

BUCKINGHAM
You are Shogun
and we pledged:
my title
for the Shogunate

RICHARD
Annoying!
How it tugs me by the neck
chokes up the throat
of my acclaim—
this little stone

BUCKINGHAM (*Heavily*)
What stone...
is in your way

RICHARD (*Charming*)
A mite
for someone of the skill
you show
Just one small prince
inside Zashiki-ro

BUCKINGHAM: (*Backing away*) Great Shogun...

RICHARD
We are not
such great friends

then?

BUCKINGHAM *(Turning aside)*

Excuse me please
I must consider

RICHARD

Consider
Hah
A heart
that wavers once
is next day
mute
as stone

Secure him

(Ninja moves, takes hold of Buckingham. Richard rises, draws his sword)

RICHARD

The deepest
deeds in service to all
a leader does
alone

(KI strikes. Mie pose. Then darkness. Lights cross stage as Ninja drag an unwilling Buckingham. Behind them the palace is dismantled down to the bare prison)

NINJA

Come then
You must come

BUCKINGHAM

Give me time
This man we serve
must be a devil
Let me speak to him
again

NINJA 2

You're misled
most honorable
cheating friend

NINJA

Even children know—
a devil
is no more real
than an angel

(They disappear with their lights)

II iii Richard sits alone in a dim spot in a pose of meditation.

(The Prince, with a short sword, approaches stealthily behind him. He's wearing his long red royal garment, and holds his sword high, pointing at Richard's neck)

PRINCE

Your business here!
Or I will stop your life

(Richard startled, then breathes, drawing himself taller)

RICHARD *(Quietly)*

You imagine
you can stop my life?

PRINCE

Uncle Richard?
Why are you sitting here
cold
and alone
You've come to release me?

RICHARD: In time. In time

PRINCE: What were you doing

RICHARD: Remembering

PRINCE

Excuse
my interruption then
I must be on guard
for assassins

RICHARD

Will you escape them
when they come?

PRINCE

I will
I'm a true Shogun

(Richard laughs)

PRINCE: What were you remembering?

RICHARD

When your grandfather
was young as you...
there was a baby Shogun
left to reign
and round him grew
a swirl of blood
that has not stopped
since then

When your father was
as young as you
his father
who was also mine
fighting
in that endless tide of blood
came next in line
for Shogun
but then was born
a baby Prince

When I
was young as you
our father in all that blood
was four years drowned
I served your father
in the fight
and so
the flowing blood still grew
into a mighty undertow
and then you see

we slew that Shogun
and his Prince
who was
as young as me

(Silence. The Prince watches Richard eagerly, but Richard sits stony, morose)

PRINCE: I'll be good as you

(Prince stands, making a flourish with his sword)

RICHARD You will

PRINCE I wear the rose

RICHARD

The rose
is potent
beauty
Beware...

PRINCE

I am the worthy heir
of my father
and of you

RICHARD *(Laughs)*

I see
Another baby Shogun

PRINCE *(Angry)*

I'm no baby
Do you have your sword?

(Richard draws his sword)

RICHARD: Oh yes

PRINCE: Come then

(They fight – the boy against the warrior. They play)

RICHARD

This is the dance
my fine young Prince

PRINCE: I'll be Shogun!

(When Richard finally takes him, it may be surprising, but it is clear, neat murder)

RICHARD

A life at war
is no more
sport
than this

*(Richard kills the Prince. **Mie pose**)*

II iv The instant the Prince is killed, a scream and howling begins and builds into a hurricane. Lights flash bright, then sudden darkness.

(Set collapses, and we are in the field [cemetery] again. Richard has stayed center. The Prince is gone. The impression is of a great swirl of wind. Howl continues. Margaret appears in a spot. York and Elizabeth, from other spots, howl—)

ELIZABETH / YORK

My son...The child...
My son...The child...

(Howling continues behind her as Margaret speaks)

MARGARET

That's all
That's all
No more

RICHARD: You think so?

MARGARET

They gather against you
They come from all sides
The dance will destroy—
end the fire, water, wind
end the man that dares to murder
end the man that kills

RICHARD

Stupid women
It's you that set me on

ELIZABETH

I prepared a sweet life
set it free
but thirsty fangs
lay waiting
Kill him
Kill!

RICHARD

When you all drop still-borns
death is coming soon
Death starts in the womb

YORK

My jagged nails
would scrape this womb
to strips of skin
rather than give birth to you
again
Kill him
Kill!

RICHARD

Be one
Take part
Together bend
and share your fall
I am the order
all in all

MARGARET

Abortive last dregs
of your mother's
worn-out sack
Vomiting precious wine...

RICHARD

See the exquisite pattern
snowflake...

MARGARET: ...you mutilate your line

RICHARD

...follow to where it falls
soft
on the fresh torn
belly of a doe
Crimson splatter
on the snow
I didn't start these wars

(York turns on Margaret, grabs her, circles)

YORK

No...
It's you
usurping outsider
You
you foreign worm!

MARGARET

I had a son
died so
And so did she
and so...
I say no more

YORK

You butchered mine before!

(Elizabeth grabs York, circling)

ELIZABETH

You disdained me
as mate
for your son
and so this other
snake-spawn of yours has...

YORK *(To Elizabeth)*

You common
glutinous fly
You shoved in

your own family

RICHARD *(Delighted)*

How!

Rabid dames
carry on the war

How strange
that only women
stand alive?

Full-grown females
impotence complete

Except to howl
your consequence
is nil

Off-cast would-be
Ladies of the North
you're much too
insignificant
to kill

(Yowl, as women fly to attack Richard, then yowl stops abruptly at appearance of Beth.)

(Beth stands at a distance, looking young, innocent, holding out her arms. Draped across them is the red royal garment of the Prince. Seeing it, Elizabeth and York drop to kneel face down, keening for the dead Prince. Richard, too, is stunned by the image. Margaret backs away)

MARGARET

The forces
gather against you
Richard
It won't be long

RICHARD

My angel niece
Elizabeth?

(Richard turns his attention from gazing at Beth to her mother, who still kneels. As Richard approaches her to make his move, Margaret, aside, moans for them all)

MARGARET

The center of faith
is a desert now
The lord of the animals
roams

extinguishing our forms
all illusions into ash
laughing as we weep
behind his mask

(Beth backing off)

RICHARD

We must take good care
of your daughter

(Elizabeth looks up at Richard, frightened)

ELIZABETH: I have no daughter

RICHARD: Do not mock me

ELIZABETH: None

RICHARD: Now that she has no father...

ELIZABETH: None!

RICHARD

...and I have always been
her loving Uncle

ELIZABETH

Loving...
as you were Uncle
to her baby brother?

RICHARD *(Seductively)*

Elizabeth—
you feel the life
that surges new
within
Its essence
is not in myself alone
but centered
in a spark
that flies...between

Where should it fly?
Into another house?

.
Sensual contact
is the human's path
into a holy life
Ecstasy
is next to being
God
I must have a wife

.
ELIZABETH

You mean...
You want me to...

.
RICHARD

Not you
Your daughter

.
ELIZABETH: My daughter

.
RICHARD

I want her
for my wife

.
ELIZABETH

You!
Killer of her brother?
Of her uncle?

.
RICHARD: Dear Uncle Clarence

.
ELIZABETH: Killer of her aunt!

.
RICHARD: The Aunt I deny

.
ELIZABETH

You killed your wife Anne
as surely
as you killed my son

.
RICHARD

And I

dear one
am Shogun

So my wife
however blushing
she may be
will still be
Lady of the North
(Close to her)
You labored all your life
to have that place
Why not let it stay
with one of yours?
Rejoice!
You have a daughter
She may have a son
and he may be
another day
Shogun

(Pause. Then Elizabeth turns primly, and gives Richard her hand)

ELIZABETH *(Summoning)*
My daughter—
Beth?

(The instant Elizabeth turns to the place where Beth stood, with a flash, instead of Beth, there stands the Prince – turning into place, perhaps bloody)

ELIZABETH
My son—
his ghost!

(Behind the Prince, comes a procession of ghosts – first Anne, then Buckingham, Hastings, Lords, all the company. The Prince speaks as ghosts swirl in behind him)

PRINCE
We gasp between
two ages
both cast back to shore
The last – not dead
is dying
The next—

without strength
to be born

RICHARD

No!
You breathe no more
Stay there

PRINCE: None else is left alive

(The ghosts drift swiftly to surround Richard. He counters, terrified)

RICHARD

I needed you
and you obliged
dissolving
each after each
into me
thus
molding my career
So now
you cannot hold
this course
The world ends here!

PRINCE: There always comes another

RICHARD

No!
I've no remorse
There is no turning back

PRINCE: Then why do you fear?

(Lightning. The ghosts attack Richard. Movement of battle – synthesizer ghost battle. Ghosts create ring of fire. Richard is killed. Total silence. Richard, dead in the center, will slowly revive, to finally appear as Shiva. Anne, Margaret and company softly in chorus speak as the transformation begins to take place–)

ANNE

Our native earth
may stain all red
but still
life will renew itself

from clay
Destruction and creation
from earth's core
will rise and flow forth
come what may

CHORUS

Take part
in that of which you are
a part
A whisper
in the wind between
the howl of birth and death
Kaleidoscoping beauty
out of terror's brutal scream

ANNE

Cold sun slides
without a sound
behind dark mountain
but strikes its flame
again
at dawn

(Richard, now become Shiva, begins to dance)

CHORUS

There is a rhythm
at the center
of the world
we cannot see
Hold still and hear it
sink into feeling
the whispering beat

MARGARET

When all was still
within
your breast still moved
out and in

CHORUS

...flowing on the stream

of all
plunging back to sea

MARGARET

...knowing
nothing is
that does not move
with you and me

ANNE

You need not weep forever
You can find relief
when you learn you are the source
of all your grief
Your demon loses his force
when you remove your belief
You create every evil
you see

PRINCE

Believe in joy
and joy is yours
All will be as you see it to be
Evil cannot survive
when you don't keep it alive
with your fear

CHORUS

This rhythm came
before the Word
before the You or I

PRINCE

Banish fear
and you will fly
Your way is clear

ANNE

Dance your dance as lightly
as any girl or boy
Beat your beat in perfect time
marking only joy

CHORUS

Waken to dance
melt into the sky
For something to be born
something must die
Waken to dance
Melt into the skies

PRINCE

Wherever joy is born
evil dies

*(Richard, dancing in full splendor, strikes Shiva pose. **Final company MIE**)*

END OF PLAY

ACHILLES

A Kabuki Play

A company of players tell, sing, dance and enact the story

SET: Presents the "plain of Troy" which takes on many moods.

Achilles' tent will be the main scenic item, it's appearance and disappearance incorporated into the company's action. All scenes flow seamlessly from one into another.

CHARACTERS: 5 men, 2 women, Chorus of women and men

BRISEIS – Narrator. Achilles' war prize

PATROKLOS – Greek warrior. Achilles' best friend

AGAMEMNON – King; Commander of Greek armies

ACHILLES – greatest Greek warrior

THETIS – Achilles' mother, Goddess of the Sea

PRIAM – King of Troy

HECTOR – Priam's son, greatest Trojan warrior

CHORUS: by turns they play:

SOLDIERS – both Greek and Trojan

CHRYSEIS – Agamemnon's war prize; daughter of high priest.

LYCAON (boy) – Priam's son, young soldier

GOD VOICES – Athena and Apollo

RIVER VOICE – the River speaks

KOKEN – "enablers" of the story; stage-hands



Photo by Jorge Lascar: Amphitheater at Kourion, Cyprus

ACHILLES

First we see only Briseis, the narrator, isolated in a pin spot. Up-scrim unseen is a chorus of Greek soldiers led by Patroklos, speaking like a whispered echo

BRISEIS

I am Briseis
only a woman

And so
my grasp of truth
is in shadow
my story, only a part
You will forgive me?

In all of my life before
I knew
its purpose was living
but one day I grew
to know
the purpose of life
is war

SOLDIERS *(Whispered)*

...is war
the purpose of life
is war

(Very gradually, the soldiers become visible in dim silhouette)

BRISEIS: When the war started

SOLDIERS: or why

BRISEIS: no one knows

SOLDIERS: No one knows.

BRISEIS: They say it was a woman...

SOLDIERS: Helen!

BRISEIS

...running from her husband
with the second son of Priam
the king

So she
though a queen before
in the end will be
like me

no more
than a prize of war

SOLDIERS: *(Strong)* A prize of war.

BRISEIS

My life before
was a garden—
fine parents ruling the valley
three brothers standing
like tassled grain
so tall—

but all

were cut down
cut clean
one dark summer's eve
when I
became the prize
of Achilles

(Space opens with night behind scrim; Chorus may create crickets, owl, stillness. As Briseis' story goes on, goat bleats, neighing horse, isolated sounds of a raid punctuate her description.)

BRISEIS

A goat bleat
in midnight air
came first
Then came the clash of bronze

BRISEIS and SOLDIERS: *(Whisper)* What moves on the mountain?

(Briseis, or shadows on scrim, may mime waking her husband, and etc—)

BRISEIS

I touched
my soft-breathing husband
gathered a fleece
round my shoulders
stepped to the door

Torch light
flickered
on white walls below
Voices rose
startled
from sleep

I saw my brother
slight in his tunic
struggling with another
all armed

SOLDIERS: Another all armed

BRISEIS

Then a grunt and a fall—

a sword blade came free
laying open the deep belly
of my brother
there on white stones

SOLDIERS

As the others came running
too late for all three

BRISEIS

My throat
opened to scream
but a hand sealed my mouth—
my sweet husband breathing
"Be still. Stay still"
and seizing his sword from the wall

(Chorus creates sounds of raid – donkey brays, swords clashing, muffled yells)

SOLDIERS

Donkeys brayed
Armor came clanking

BRISEIS

"No," I cried, "Stay!"
but too late
Already a torch blazed
cross his face
Gleaming silver filled our door
I staggered
my eyes frozen open

A sword's point
caught my sweet's chin
uprooting his teeth
splitting his tongue
twisting up into his brain

Blood rushed down that sword
I saw it and then saw no more
But I heard as I fell
a soft voice

PATROKLOS

"Don't weep, pretty child
I'll see you married now
to a prince, a young god..."

SOLDIERS and PATROKLOS

...the finest
in all the world wide"

BRISEIS

That voice was Patroklos
the kindest of men

SOLDIERS: And the silver death-bringing god...

BRISEIS:...was Achilles

(Immediate shout from the soldiers, with drum beat)

SOLDIERS: Achilles. Call Achilles!

PATROKLOS

Achilles the champion
Our fastest, our best
Achilles!

(Soldiers sway with drum beat, becoming fully lit upstage of scrim, Agamemnon at their head)

SOLDIERS

Nine long years of seige
but Troy's wall
still stands
(Shout)
Agamemnon!

Nine long years of seige
but Troy's wall
still stands
Agamemnon!

PATROKLOS

Men and ships came
All the kingdoms of Greece

for Agamemnon

SOLDIERS

Nine long years of seige
but Troy's wall
still stands
Agamemnon!

PATROKLOS

We came for the woman
came for revenge
with Agamemnon!

SOLDIERS

Agamemnon
King of Mycenae
golden kingdom of Greece

PATROKLOS

We came with Agamemnon
came for his brother's wife
for Helen of Sparta

SOLDIERS: Now Helen of Troy!

BRISEIS:

The armies were bored
they had nothing to show

SOLDIERS: No reward!

BRISEIS: So they ravished our mountain

SOLDIERS

We ravished the mountain
for prizes
nights of pleasure
a dancing feast

BRISEIS

Now I am the prize of Achilles
but Patroklos
dear friend

promised true

Achilles took me
not rudely
without anger
through my tears

SOLDIERS

Nights of pleasure
spoil and prizes
a dancing feast

BRISEIS

Still, the best prize
is Agamemnon's

SOLDIERS

The blushing daughter
of a powerful priest!

(Sudden bright image, upscrim, of Chryseis, the priest's daughter)

*(Chorus: noisy partying gradually overwhelmed, stilled by single **ominous tone** as dawn rises)*

PATROKLOS

But at dawn
when the rose-flame ball
lifts through the mist
its trail burning purple
straight across waves
straight up the sand

SOLDIERS

But at dawn
something new
breaks on land

(Chryseis' image is disappearing)

BRISEIS:

A whisper
a fearful word
comes wafting

from tent into tent

(Soldiers begins whispers that will swell)

PATROKLOS

A whisper
wakens the living
to quiver
to hide
to draw tent-flaps tight

BRISEIS: But too late

SOLDIERS: *(Barely audible)* The plague...the plague

BRISEIS and PATROKLOS

The whisper
the fearful word
still hurries on
licentiously curling
like mist before dawn

SOLDIERS: The plague. It's the plague!

(The scrim lifts; the Soldiers, plague-stricken, swarm – a living fresco of victims. Briseis, surrounded, moves upstage, hidden behind Soldiers who writhe–)

SOLDIERS *(Individuals and Chorus)*

Some god has sent us this
Infection!
Stay away!
What can we do?
Stay away!
No, save us! Save us!
Stay away!

(Achilles entering; Soldiers swarm to the side, giving Achilles a grand entrance)

SOLDIERS

Achilles! Call Achilles!
Achilles the champion
the fastest, the best
Call “Achilles”

and all Trojans
even Hector the mighty
hide behind walls
Achilles!

*(Achilles is within reach; some gasping victims try to reach him, while others hold them back.
Soldiers plead—)*

Help us, save us, heal us please!

(Achilles stops, aware of their reaching for him: instant silence)

ACHILLES

They are soldiers
Do not hold them from me

(A hesitation, then one soldier speaks)

SOLDIER

Great Achilles
They have the plague

(Loud murmuring, as soldiers verify their condition)

ACHILLES

Then their need is great
Do you think I fear plague?

SOLDIERS

Great Achilles
fleet as wind
loved by the gods
Tell Agamemnon
Beg him for us
You can speak
and you can save

It is Agamemnon
the omens tell us
it is he
who brought the plague

(Agamemnon enters self-satisfied, leads Chryseis the priest's daughter, her eyes shyly averted)

(Achilles gestures sharply; soldiers surround him. He bends to listen to them. Agamemnon stops, imperiously)

AGAMEMNON

What is this howling
this chaos?
And who says
I am the cause!

SOLDIERS: Help us, save us, heal us, please!

SOLDIER

Great Agamemnon
leader of the armies
they have the plague!

AGAMEMNON

I can see what they have
Clean it up
whatever it takes!
No attack can be launched
not even defense
in this state

(The soldier bows, but looks helplessly to Achilles)

ACHILLES

Great leader
a way has been whispered

AGAMEMNON: To rid us of this plague?

ACHILLES

One way
But the soldiers have fear

AGAMEMNON

Damn their fear!
What is the way?

ACHILLES: A beautiful girl

AGAMEMNON: *(Startled, but pleased)* My prize?

ACHILLES: She's the daughter of a priest?

AGAMEMNON: And amazingly adept

ACHILLES: Her father came to beg for her?

AGAMEMNON

Pathetic, yes
He offered ransom

ACHILLES: And you refused?

AGAMEMNON: I threw him out

ACHILLES

You refused
And we have plague

AGAMEMNON: What?

ACHILLES and **SOLDIERS:** And so we have plague

(Agamemnon swells with anger, eyes flashing with rage)

AGAMEMNON

No!
Damnable priests
They prophesy
nothing but evil!
It cannot be so

ACHILLES: There is one way to know

AGAMEMNON: *(Explodes)* No!

(The soldiers, dismayed, groan, cough, seem worse. Agamemnon, looks them over, then at Chryseis, knowing the omen is true)

ACHILLES: Send her home

(Agamemnon is furious, anguished, but draws himself up proudly)

AGAMEMNON

Let no one say
Agamemnon
does not tend his troops

(Chryseis looks up hopefully, steps forward)

If she must go
I'll let her go

(The soldiers rouse feebly, joyful. Chryseis bows gratefully to Achilles)

AGAMEMNON *(Furious)*

But you
must find me another!

(Achilles, mild until now, turns on Agamemnon, suddenly angry)

ACHILLES

Insatiate dog
How!?
We have no standing pool
of women

(From the soldiers, Patroklos steps toward Achilles, worried, a restraining hand out, while Achilles goes on raging)

ACHILLES

All prizes
have been given
Do you intend
to take one back?

(Agamemnon smiles at Patroklos, nods toward Chryseis)

AGAMEMNON

Release her
Send her home
Accept no ransom

(Joy from all. Two soldiers make a way for Chryseis as she begins to move out. But Achilles, wary, senses Agamemnon's intention)

ACHILLES

Return her
to her father now
and get another
when we ravish Troy

Unless you think
we never will?

(Agamemnon, still smiling, ignores Achilles' challenge. Chryseis is gone)

AGAMEMNON

So you keep your prize
while I give up mine?
No. Let the Greeks
find me another...

or I take Briseis

(Achilles, restrained until now, explodes)

ACHILLES

My prize?!
Arrogant snake
You're full of nothing
but lust and greed
Why should I fight for you?
I'll leave!

AGAMEMNON

Then leave!
What do I need
with a strutting
acid-tongued pup?
You set yourself
equal to me?
Now feel the power of Agamemnon
King of kings
Give her up!

(Enraged, Achilles roars and draws his sword. But just as he raises it to strike, his head jerks backward; he is frozen in dazzling light)

VOICE OF ATHENA: *(Amplified)* Stop your sword!

(Light and sound projections as Briseis narrates the supernatural moment)

ACHILLES: *(To the light)* Let go!

BRISEIS

Down swept Athena
golden daughter of Zeus
unseen by all
but her dear Achilles
With her terrible eyes
ablaze
she yanked his fiery hair

VOICE OF ATHENA

Put back your sword
Slash him only with words
Another day
he will pay
Obey!

(Achilles head is released. Alarmed, Patroklos has his hand on Achilles as he speaks to Agamemnon. Achilles lowers his sword, still gazing upward)

PATROKLOS

Wise Agamemnon
Though you have more power
do not take the girl
that was given to him
And Achilles, you...

ACHILLES

The Goddess stopped my hand.
I would have killed him, Patroklos

(Agamemnon stands calm, smiling)

AGAMEMNON

Soft-voiced Patroklos
this quarrelsome boy
does not deserve you

(Achilles whirls on Agamemnon)

ACHILLES

Wine-sot! Dog-face
without any gut!

PATROKLOS

Achilles, please
You owe him allegiance!

ACHILLES

He's not my Lord!
I am a Prince!

(Challenging Agamemnon)

Do you ever
stand in frontlines
of the battle?
When do you venture
on a raid?

AGAMEMNON: *(Warmly, to Patroklos)* Why not leave him?

ACHILLES

Never!
Never do you dare
a fight!

PATROKLOS *(Sadly)*

Achilles
You're making
the Trojans rejoice

ACHILLES *(Spins on Patroklos)*

I have no quarrel with Trojans!
What have Trojans done to me?
Have they raided my cattle, my horses
Have they cut my harvests
from off the rich plain?
No!
I came to battle

for this man's revenge
and he, he alone
offends me

(Achilles whirls on Agamemnon in a towering rage, raising his scepter in the air. Soldiers cower, terrified at Achilles' rage)

ACHILLES

Thief!!

By this scepter
which will nevermore sprout leaf
or shoot or bud
being once carved from its tree

I swear
in the day of your distress
when you come to fall
at the hand of Hector
you will look and not find me
you will know not what to do
you will tear your heart with rage
for the day you insulted
the greatest of the Greeks

(Achilles hurls his scepter to the ground. Stunned pause. Soldier who took Chryseis away runs on excited, but stops, frightened by the stony silence)

SOLDIER *(Announcing)*

His daughter is delivered
safe to the priest

(Soldiers straighten, feeling beginning of relief from plague, but all still riveted on Achilles' glare at Agamemnon)

AGAMEMNON *(Looking at Achilles)*

Patroklos?

Give me his girl

(Patroklos looks at Achilles, who doesn't flinch)

ACHILLES *(Softly)*

Yes

It is fit

It was you who first

brought her to me—

Bring Briseis

(Patroklos troubled, moves to get Briseis. Soldiers part, and Briseis is revealed happily approaching Achilles, who looks longingly at her, then turns away)

(Patroklos holds out his hand and Briseis steps forward to go with him, but when she sees she's where he's leading her, she sadly turns to gaze back at Achilles when she is handed to Agamemnon)

(Achilles refuses to watch as Agamemnon exits with Briseis, in grand procession. The soldiers, relieved the plague is lifting, follow Agamemnon, cheering)

(The stage grows darker and darker while Achilles is left alone; he is now at the edge of the sea in a storm. Sounds of waves crashing, and rolling surf)

(Alone, a gigantic roar erupts from Achilles. When he has roared to the peak of his anguish, he weeps. When his weeping becomes deep and loud, he calls—)

ACHILLES

Thetis. *(Waits)* Thetis!

(The surf becomes louder, and Achilles calls his loudest—)

Mother!!

(Sudden quiet, then softer wave music. Then, out of dark sea and mist, Thetis comes dancing. A grand, mysterious entrance. Sea may be created only by lighting and sound, or by colored streamers, flowing fabric, and mime)

(When Thetis sings, the Chorus may echo her, singing from offstage. When he sees Thetis coming, Achilles joins her dancing beside the waves)

THETIS

Seek no answer
from the sea
The rolling mother of all
knows not why
she needs no reason
to be

She only flows
bounded by

dappled sway
deep streaming light
dancing bright
through indigo
turquoise
marine

Seek no answer
from the sea
she knows not why
she needs no reason
to be

Only flow
in tomorrow
Let it embrace you
leaving no trace
of today

Seek no answer
from the sea
Only flow
Be still and know
your future
in her endless
sigh

(Thetis teases Achilles back and forth with the dance, says laughing--)

THETIS

There once was a boy
who ran off to the sea
Was it you?

But he ran and he ran
so fast
faster than even the wind
had seen
a boy run

Then he sang and he sang
so well
better than even the birds

had heard
a boy sing

So they whispered
he must be a God...
What does this boy
want with me?

(Achilles, drawn away from his sorrow, laughing, suddenly remembers his anguish, and sits abruptly, rude—)

ACHILLES

Why do you ask
what you know?

THETIS

You seldom call
You've become such a man

ACHILLES: Agamemnon...

THETIS: He's no one beside you

ACHILLES

He dishonored me!
He stole my Briseis
The woman. My prize

(Thetis suddenly frightened, leans to stroke Achilles)

THETIS

Calm. Oh, be calm
Not too much anger
dear son
born in pain
only to die
do not choose
to be taken too soon
by the greedy God
ruby-stained War
Calm. Oh, be calm

ACHILLES

Like waves at dusk, Mother
I'm glass-smooth
And I will not fight

THETIS (*Joyful*)
You'll leave the war?
You'll go home!

ACHILLES
Perhaps I will
but first I need
a deed you alone
can do

(She is over-joyed, embraces, cradles him)

THETIS
I can save you from all
but death

ACHILLES
It's a promise, then?
You'll do this favor for me?

THETIS: Whatever you need

ACHILLES
Then make sure
the Greeks lose

THETIS: (*Frightened*) Your own side lose?

ACHILLES: Someone must lose

THETIS: Then Hector wins

ACHILLES: Hector is worthy

THETIS
But I fear him
Him beyond all

(As though from out of her mind, Hector appears, upstage, a powerful, mysterious figure. She

sways, beginning her exit)

THETIS

Seek no answer
from the sea...

ACHILLES: Is he stronger than me?

THETIS: None is stronger than you

ACHILLES: *(Bitterly)* No one mortal

THETIS

But him
you must fear

ACHILLES: I must fear?

THETIS

Soon after he dies
so will you.

ACHILLES *(Sharply)*
But I have your promise?
The Greeks will lose

THETIS *(Sad, vanishing)*

You do
I know not why
the Trojans will rise
I only flow
Be still and know

(A bold battle cry, and Trojan soldiers come running on, to surround Hector)

TROJAN SOLDIERS: *(Marching chant)* Hector! Hector!

(Upstage of them, in kingly state, appears Priam, looking on. In great spirits, they take battle stances, tumble, march)

THETIS *(Voice amplified)*

With the ancient pride
of Priam their King

the Trojans will rise
and a thousand spears clash
with one trumpeting voice
to boldly rejoice

PRIAM

My brilliant son, Hector—
Rejoice!

(Thetis and Achilles are gone)

HECTOR

My honored father
We Trojans strike harder than Greeks
here under the eyes
of our children
and wives

SOLDIERS

Hector! Hector! Hector!
His face grows dark
as sudden night
his eyes flash fire
like lightening in a storm
as we strike
in a raging pack
close on the cry
of Hector

PRIAM

Strike as you will
fulfilling
my ancient pride
for Achilles
sits coolly
aside!

(A great cheering battle cry; then sounds of battle, as the stage darkens and the soldiers swirl into the fight. Last seen – roaring Hector as Priam salutes him)

(Isolated light on Briseis. Behind her, the tent of Achilles is swirled into place)

BRISEIS

A prize is passed on
and no one asks
Is there a difference
'tween tent and tent?
Oh yes

The tent of Achilles
yes, I remember

If I woke with pain
on my heart
for the arbor of clustered grapes
over my hearth-room door
or the three olive trees
on the hill
there came music
soft from beyond the drape
delicate music
smoothing my tear-stained face

(Achilles may enter like a dream)

Light gathered round
his face and limbs
moving on him
like an easy cloud

I shied
like a kid
behind its mother
In the sunset's wash
of orange gold
the murmur and sudden laugh
of old stories told
new politics and plans
were never denied me

He minded not
my listening
would even stop
to explain
though I
was only a woman

(Dawn. Achilles sits alone, playing a harp, in his tent)

BRISEIS

But now I am gone
and he sits with his harp
alone...

(Scene expands to Achilles' idle soldiers sluggishly cleaning their weapons)

BRISEIS

...while his soldiers
grow old
their purpose in life
no longer sharp
out of battle

(Briseis disappears when the soldiers speak, surly and bored)

SOLDIER 1

Watch where you swing
that thing

SOLDIER 2

Aw, go soak yours
in brine

SOLDIER 3

You, pretty face
were in my dream

SOLDIER 1: And you in mine

SOLDIER 3

That old watchdog at home
was screwing your wife

(They fight, but Achilles strikes a strong chord and begins a story-song—)

ACHILLES

Sing a song
of Peleus
chosen by the gods

SOLDIER 2: Chosen for what?

ACHILLES

To play a slippery game
under a blistering
moon

SOLDIER 3: Chosen why?

ACHILLES

Why is a long
winding tale
Why is a falling
of stars

SOLDIER 1

Then sing "Peelus"
the song of your father

SOLDIER 2

Sing Peelus
sire to Achilles

ACHILLES

Deep beneath
flowing crystal
way down under
clear green waves
quietly was born
a thing of such grace
that the king of the gods
came near to lose his place

SOLDIER 3: That isn't Peelus

SOLDIER 1

That's Thetis
his mother

ACHILLES

She knew only
the melody of waters

the wisdom of the sands
no trace of the powers
her grace could command

Old man of the ocean
he saw Thetis first
could barely contain
the mighty thirst
she aroused
He wanted marriage

SOLDIER 3: That's Poseidon?

ACHILLES

But already his brother
the king of the skies
had seen the lightning
in Thetis' eyes
She must be his bride

SOLDIER 1

That's Zeus
but come to Peleus!

ACHILLES

The stage was set for battle
rival kings of sea and sky
while the female
commanding all
cared for nothing
but the tides

But before
the sky-god winner
could claim Thetis
for his bride
a potent sign
swept down to drown
these love-crazed rites

SOLDIER 3 (*Boldly, as oracle*)

A son of Thetis
will be mightier

than his father!

SOLDIER 2: Hah. That will limp his stick!

ACHILLES

If Zeus so wed
the poor sky-god
would live in dread
of being overthrown
by his own
son

He could not have her

And furthermore
to be sure
he must forestall
by any means at all
Thetis from bearing sons
of power

SOLDIER 3: Get Peleus!

ACHILLES

Yes, Peleus
A fine man
but mortal
A son greater
than Peleus
would threaten
no god

(Soldiers begin to mime the story; it may be danced in silhouette on the scrim)

SOLDIER 1

So the gods
showed this mortal

SOLDIER 2: Peleus!

SOLDIER 3: Where to wait

ACHILLES

Behind a jutting rock

on a tiny island
unknown to men
Sandy cove
cave underwater
inlet sparkling
turquoise
“She'll come naked
to bathe at noon”
they told him
so Peleus would wait

They had warned him
to blind his eyes
for in seeing her
he would lose
the strength to attack

When she came swimming near
he did not forget
and pulled a weed-clogged net
before his eyes
When he heard Thetis climb
onto the rock
he dived
and caught her by surprise
She struggled mightily
turning first...

SOLDIER 2: Into a dolphin!

ACHILLES: Huge, leaping off the rock

SOLDIER 3: But he clung fast

ACHILLES
She turned next
into an octopus
squeezing
the life from him

SOLDIER 1: But he still breathed

ACHILLES

She turned then into
a slippery serpent
then a spiny clawing lobster
then an ink-spitting fish

So for hours and hours
he clung gasping
sticky, stung
covered with ink
until she yielded
lying at last
herself
within his arms
and they slaked passion then
rolling foam-tossed
in the waves

SOLDIER 2: Come to the wedding gifts now

SOLDIER 3: Come to the son!

(Achilles looks up suddenly, seeing Patroklos exhausted, at the tent's entrance)

SOLDIER 1: Patroklos!

SOLDIER 2: How goes the war?

PATROKLOS

Not well

(Soldiers cheer)

For the Greeks

SOLDIER 1: *(Confused)* What?

SOLDIERS: Tell! Tell!

PATROKLOS: I don't have that much breath

ACHILLES: But they'd like to hear

PATROKLOS

How can they hear?
Roaring surf
against the dry shore
is not so loud
as the deafening scream of death
released by our armies

ACHILLES: That's well.

(Soldiers gasp, staring at Achilles)

PATROKLOS: Achilles, you must come to fight!

(Achilles turns away)

SOLDIER 1: Was Hector there?

PATROKLOS: Hector ran

SOLDIER 2: He ran?

PATROKLOS
Close on the heels
of our fleeing Greeks
like a lion snapping their backs
butchering the last
spurring the rest
with terror

(Achilles laughs. Soldiers shrink from Achilles toward Patroklos—)

SOLDIER 2 and 3: Tell, tell!

PATROKLOS
I saw Chromios caught in his buttock
The spearhead drove
past pelvis bone
into his bladder

He dropped to his knees
with a gasp
then extending like a worm
let his dark blood

drench the earth

SOLDIERS: *(Reacting lustily)* Uuuhaah!

PATROKLOS *(To Achilles)*

That was Chromios
composer of sweet verses
Do you still laugh?

(Achilles does not respond; Patroklos presses–)

PATROKLOS

Abas, only joy of his father
was struck on the forehead
over the nose
smashing the bones
so both eyes dropped
and lay in the dirt
at his feet

(Soldiers terrified, but afraid to cry, giggle like children at a horror movie)

ACHILLES: Patroklos, what are you doing?

(But Patroklos expands, like a comic giving his audience more–)

PATROKLOS

Hector even speared Phaistos
planter of seedlings
who stumbled
on the rim of his own shield
running
to get to the ships
so “pop” – with nothing but his belly
Phaistos received Hector’s spear
then like a helpless turtle
squirmed

(Soldiers’ laughter explodes, but Patroklos breaks down. Stunned silence, except his weeping)

ACHILLES

What is it
Has your father died?

Or mine?
You look like a child
who's run after his mother
begging to be held
pulling on her dress

PATROKLOS: People are dying!

ACHILLES: It's a war

PATROKLOS

They're our friends!
Gods save me
from anger like yours

ACHILLES

What's wrong with dying?
Life is only a moment
we all will lose

PATROKLOS

You feel nothing!
You're not human
Don't tell me
your father was Peleus
It was the grey sea
smashed
on towering rocks
that bore you
in the image of a man
Where is your loyalty?

ACHILLES: I am alone.

PATROKLOS

Not when you've pledged
to fight with the armies!
Where is your honor?

ACHILLES

Ask Agamemnon!
It is he
who took it from me

PATROKLOS

The Trojans
have reached our ships
and you sit
pouting like a child!
Will you fight?

(No response)

Then let me!

(Startled, Achilles looks sharply at Patroklos. Briseis and Thetis apart, alarmed)

BRISEIS: No...

THETIS: *(Amplified whisper)* No...

ACHILLES: You?

PATROKLOS

Let me go fight!
With your men

ACHILLES *(Roars)*

With men
who whine and grumble
behind my back?!

(Patroklos scared, freezes. But Achilles suddenly laughs, magically playful)

ACHILLES

You call me
a pouting child?
Then let's play—
Pretend you're me!

Stand here, my friend
and prepare
to wear a gift
from the gods
Bring me Peleus' wedding gifts!

(The Soldiers at first surprised, then run to bring Achilles' gleaming armor. Briseis and Thetis, as though in Achilles mind, try to intervene—)

BRISEIS: This is wrong, Achilles.

THETIS: The god Apollo loves Hector

BRISEIS and THETIS: Do not let him go to the fight!

(Achilles seems not to hear them, as Patroklos is ritually dressed in his armor)

ACHILLES

Patroklos—

it was you at my side
when I held my first sword
you as the guide
when I took my first run
through the edging tide

Now

you will wear
my armor

(Achilles handles the armor with affection)

This came to Peleus
my father

with great gratitude
on the day he married
the goddess of the sea
All the gods rejoiced
now she was bedded safe
that Thetis' progeny would be
no more dangerous
than me

Wear it in health
beloved friend

THETIS: Don't let him go!

ACHILLES

When you stride out alone
the sight of you

upon the hill
will chill the Trojans' bones
They'll think you're me

Fear will take hold of them
while your spirit will fly
Unleashed by
my armor
you'll do amazing deeds
You'll push them back
from off the ships!
Then come back here

Do not chase them cross the plain
Do not venture to the walls
Do not engage great Hector
He is meat for me
The sun god fights for him
So let him be

*(In spot, in Achilles' armor, Patroklos strikes a battle pose; light brightens, isolating him;
soldiers gather eagerly and sweep away the tent)*

CHORUS *(Whispering on the fly)*
Achilles?
Achilles?
Is it Achilles!

PATROKLOS: Now this is life!

*(As Achilles backs away, watching, battle begins. Patroklos and soldiers give battle cry, turn to
attack a swarm of Trojan soldiers who run in to fight them. Briseis, isolated in light, narrates—)*

BRISEIS
As out of clear air
shrieking
the hurricane comes on
so loud was the scream of battle

CHORUS *(As fight begins)*
Is it Achilles?
Is it Achilles?

BRISEIS

Brave Patroklos
touched by the spirit of Achilles
Achilles whom he worships
Achilles whom he longs to be

(All fight. Patroklos' energy phenomenal; Trojans begin to be beaten back. Briseis speaks at regrouping times, between actions)

BRISEIS

Patroklos wheels
All Trojans turn about
seeking only to escape
screaming death

(Trojans are pushed back. Briseis cries out to Patroklos—)

BRISEIS

They're on the run
They've left the ships!
Return now
Go back and tell Achilles
Do not chase them cross the plain
Do not venture to the walls
Do not engage...

(But Patroklos' fury only grows, he leads soldiers chasing the Trojans)

BRISEIS

Brave Patroklos
touched by the spirit of Achilles
Achilles whom he worships
Achilles whom he longs to be
Plain Patroklos
beloved of the boy god
older, wiser than Achilles
now feels life-purpose
surging to its peak

(Trojans, fighting for their lives, escape through their city wall – and create the closed barrier by lining their tight wall of shields against Patroklos)

BRISEIS: Do not venture to the wall!

(But Patroklos storms the shield-wall)

BRISEIS

But oh the sparkle
of excellence sublime
of clear soaring spirit
like Achilles
Oh...to be pure hero
however alone
like Achilles

(As he climbs the wall, Patroklos' head is suddenly thrown back, frozen in dazzling light, and he topples down.)

BRISEIS

Three times Patroklos climbed
Three times he fell to earth
but as he rose to try a fourth
high atop the wall
the sun-god Apollo stood blazing
and hurled him down.

GOD VOICE *(Apollo amplified)*

Proud fool
Troy will not crumble
for you

(As Patroklos falls again, Achilles' helmet topples to the ground. Patroklos stands bewildered, panting, but undaunted. The shield-wall parts slightly and through it comes Hector. The wall, in chorus, keeps repeating Achilles' order—)

CHORUS

Do not engage great Hector...
Just let him be!

(As Patroklos tries to gather his strength, a Trojan darts out, stabbing him in the back. Though Patroklos still fights ferociously, Hector bears down on him, throws him to the ground, stabs him in the belly, still gripping his sword)

HECTOR

Achilles sent you to kill me
and your fool's heart
agreed?

PATROKLOS *(Gasping)*

No need
Patroklos is no one
but you do name
your angel of death:
Achilles

HECTOR: Unless I am his

(Hector jerks his sword out of Patroklos.)

PATROKLOS: *(Dying cry)* Achilles!!

*(The instant of Patroklos death, Achilles stands, hearing his cry...
...and Hector lifts Achilles' helmet over his own head...
...the action freezes in a MIE pose...
...an unearthly cry of fury and anguish echoes far away)*

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Briseis, alone. *Soldiers behind. Dark. Lights play on the scrim and mimed shadows of the actions described may appear.*

BRISEIS

It was a long time
before I knew
the kindest of men
was gone
Sweet Patroklos
If he gave his life
to war—
War must be a great god

SOLDIERS

Patroklos no longer knew
either sun or rain
as Trojans swarmed
like locusts
upon him
tearing off the armor of Achilles

BRISEIS

Bold Hector longed
to slice Patroklos' gentle head
from its soft neck
to thrust it up
atop a stake
to fling his mutilate body
to ravenous dogs

SOLDIERS: But Greeks came screaming down

BRISEIS

So like two screeching vultures
clash
above a single prey

SOLDIERS

The armies met and clawed
above Patroklos
One hitched his foot
to a shield
whipping its sling
fast round his tendons
to drag him away

But that one was hit
through the cheek of his helmet
and so
with soft brain bleeding
down the spear
through his eyehole
he fell as well
upon Patroklos

BRISEIS

Only the horses
given by gods
to Peleus
stood aside
refused to move
leaned their heads along the ground

SOLDIERS: ...and wept warm tears

BRISEIS: ...for Patroklos

SOLDIERS

Ranged in a circle
the armies pulled
pulled in all directions
pulled Patroklos
as at the stretching of an oxhide
stretching till it's flat
till the moisture squeezes out
and the fat soaks in
so the armies leaned and pulled
and there was slaughter
on both sides
until the earth ran with blood
beneath Patroklos

BRISEIS and SOLDIERS

Until a sound
struck the air above
that made them all stop still
a sound so strange
unearthly
piercing not the ear
but down beneath
the root of life
a wail
that wedged new terror
even in the boldest throat
of all who heard

(Battle sounds build until air is split with a SCREAM heard as high as Olympus and down to the depths of the sea. Briseis and soldiers fade back. Achilles stumbles on screaming, and throws himself down flailing and groaning)

(Thetis entering, draws Achilles into a violent dance to match his raging heart)

THETIS *(Urging in rhythm)*

Speak...you must speak
Let it go
or the heart will break

(Achilles will not speak, only dances more wildly)

THETIS

I would Peleus had wed
a mortal
instead of me
For you, my son
are much too great
Too great in grief
Too great in love
Too great in arrogance
in bravery
in anger

ACHILLES: *(Scream)* Aaaaahh!

THETIS: Too great in anger.

(Tortured Achilles finally collapses. Thetis catches and cradles him)

THETIS: Speak, speak...

ACHILLES

Sweet sweet anger
As dripping honey
slows the wind
it swarms like smoke
until it chokes
my heart

I sat
a barren burden
on the land
and let my friend
be butchered!

Was this why
you feared
the monster Hector?

THETIS: No

ACHILLES: He wears my armor now

THETIS: You said you would leave this land

ACHILLES

Soon

Mother

you must get me

what I need:

a new armor

(Thetis alarmed, backs away)

THETIS: You must not meet Hector

ACHILLES: Why? If I am the stronger

THETIS

Your destiny is clear my son

Two ways

lie there for you

You may choose life

or glory

ACHILLES

What life?!

The gods have life

not I

No man can choose

Life is only a thing he will lose

And my second choice is glory?

But what will glory mean

Perhaps a sweet release—

Until I kill

the demon Hector

I will have no peace

THETIS

If you kill him

you will die

Let Hector be

·
ACHILLES

Unless I kill him
I cannot live
So get the armor
for me

·
(Achilles raises his hand; Thetis bows, dance of armor begins. The chorus mimes assembling the armor made by the Fire God for Achilles)

·
THETIS

Peleus
in wedding me
could not make me
mortal
But you
in childbed
have done it
even so

·
The mortal mother
coils a line of woe
no goddess knows
It grapples her
with his first cry
and binds her
evermore
A pull
from him to her
command inexorable
to abandon earth and sky
upon that cry
saying

·
I am the cause
of his life
and I
must keep him in it
Try as he will
to die

·
Let the armor woo you
away from war

It celebrates sweet life
fashioned by the God of Fire
to hold no limbs but yours

(Achilles moves, eager to wear his new armor, but the Chorus wants to sing of it)

CHORUS

The fire-god etched
the earth upon it
and the sky
the great sea's water
and the tireless sun
the moon waxed full
and all the constellations

And in great beauty spread
two glorious cities
with marriages and festivals
a council and a court
herds of cattle
sheep and shepherds
soft fields tilled
and teams with plows
A great ox slaughtered
grape-bearers dancing
girls and boys
and all
upon an Ocean River
binding strong the outward rim

(As Achilles receives his glittering armor, drumming signals a procession coming)

SOLDIERS *(Off)*

Nine long years of seige
but Troy's wall still stands
Agamemnon!

THETIS

The god did these carvings
of this earth before
there was war

SOLDIERS *(Off)*

Massed armies of Greece
are beaten down by this land
Agamemnon!

THETIS (*Disappearing*)

Choose life, my son
choose life

(A partition screens Achilles from delegation moving toward him; he, donning his new armor, occupies one side; wounded soldiers, led by Agamemnon, also limping, on the other. Soldiers catching sight of Achilles are dazzled, shield their eyes from his brilliance. They may be cloaked to under-dress Trojan uniforms.)

ACHILLES (*Amazed, to himself*)

I feel the armor work
Life spilling
its feast of joy
filling my veins until
all my fury is distilled
to gentle wisdom
and now I see it all
like a god

AGAMEMNON

A long time away
great Achilles!

(Agamemnon waits on his side, but Achilles does not respond)

Too long, may I say?
Petty quarrels
shouldn't keep us from...
Perhaps you'd like news
of the war?

(Silence)

Often I've thought
our angry words were...

ACHILLES (*Interrupts*)

Enough!
Your news: the war?

AGAMEMNON

Well, we...
Difficulties come upon us
Hector rages irresistibly, and...

ACHILLES: I have some word of that

AGAMEMNON

And so many of us gone
and of those still alive
the bravest
lie down among the ships
all hit by arrow or by spear

ACHILLES: Yet you are here

AGAMEMNON

Because I want...
we want...
We need you back, Achilles
And there are gifts
I wish to offer you
in restitution
for your injury

ACHILLES: Agamemnon...

AGAMEMNON (*Loud, insisting—*)

Seven unfired tripods
Ten talents' worth of gold

ACHILLES

You dishonored me
What does it matter now?

AGAMEMNON: And twenty shining cauldrons...

ACHILLES

You took
the bride of my heart...
Now what did we come here for
Helen, was it not?

AGAMEMNON: Twelve horses – racers all!

ACHILLES

Yes, it was Helen
Each man
loves his own
as I loved mine

AGAMEMNON: And seven women of Lemnos...

ACHILLES

If you gave me
twenty times what you possess
as many gifts
as there are grains of sand

AGAMEMNON

Their handwork is superb
and their beauty...

ACHILLES

I would still go home

My father Peleus
will give me a bride
My one desire
is to enjoy with her
the pleasures
of my own sweet land

(Agamemnon, astonished and dismayed, plays his last card)

AGAMEMNON

I've brought one
who misses you more
Achilles

ACHILLES

All the fabled majesties of Troy
cannot be worth my life
Cattle and sheep can be had
for the lifting
and tripods can be won

and tawny heads of horses
but a man's life cannot be lifted
or won again
once it has crossed the line

AGAMEMNON

I return her to you now
and before all gods
I swear that she
never has been touched
by me

(Agamemnon pulls Briseis forward, beautifully adorned, and pushes her across toward Achilles. Briseis lifts a hand to him. Seeing her, Achilles is moved, reaches to her, then stops himself–)

ACHILLES

She should have died
before I took her
for all the pleasure
she can give me now

(Briseis stung, twists away, looking for the kind man she misses)

BRISEIS

Where's my friend?
Where is Patroklos?

(Achilles – struck by her words as if they were a dagger – roars, all his pain and rage rekindled. He strikes down the screen, and Agamemnon sees him bright in his armor. The soldiers cheer, and Achilles' roar winds him straight into battle. Briseis, stepping away from the tumult, narrates. The tent is swirled away)

BRISEIS

Like a lion
when spear-hit
spins
foam breaking on his teeth
Then deep in his chest
his mighty heart groans
and lashing his ribs with his tail
he rears–
so Achilles' eyes raged
full glazed
for the fight

(Drums. Fighting. A crush of Trojans Achilles whips like a whirlwind, killing one after another)

BRISEIS

In fury
Achilles swept – like fire
raised by whirling wind
blazing
through a dry wood mountain –
while the black earth ran blood

(Soldiers fall in heaps and begin to fill the River – which may be presented by a long blue cloth stretched across the stage; shaken, to ripple and flow by Koken)

BRISEIS

The noble River
full with corpses
heaved in anguish
unable at last
to cast his waters
into the sparkling sea
so congested was he
with the Trojan dead
Achilles killed
so brutally

(Achilles grabs an unarmed boy-soldier stumbling past him; the boy slips to the ground, clutching Achilles' knees in supplication)

LYCAON: Achilles!

(Achilles pulls the boy's head by his hair and recognizes Priam's son, Lycaon)

ACHILLES

How is this?
The Trojans I killed
long ago
rise up to face me

LYCAON: My life must be charmed

ACHILLES

You silly child of Priam

could the grey sea not hold you?
I scraped you from a hedge before
and sold you off in Lemnos

LYCAON

Great Achilles, I escaped
and I'm weary of the fight
What is it worth?
You see I've stripped my helmet off
and thrown down my sword

ACHILLES: Then feed the earth

(Achilles casts his spear, but the boy squirms away, then scrambles back, clinging again to Achilles' knees)

LYCAON

You got a hundred oxen for me!
Spare me now
You've cut the throats
of both my brothers
My mother
was not Hector's!
Spare me
Only spare me

ACHILLES

You cry?
Why?
Patroklos is dead
who was better than you
And even I
splendid, invincible
with a mother immortal
will die

(Lycaon lets go of Achilles, lifting his hands to screen himself. Achilles kills him and flings him into the river, which bellows up angrily)

ACHILLES

Lie where fishes
caring not for anyone
can feed

on the shining fat
of Priam's son

(The River lurches, the armor of the floating dead clang together)

BRISEIS

The rushing water
spewed
masses of armor
cresting bodies
sputtering foam and blood
until the River itself
enraged
rose on its precious flood
to curse Achilles

RIVER GOD *(Chorus amplified)*

Brutal man
do not kill more!
My living flow is choked
with your glut of death

(As though rising, the dead challenge Achilles from within the swirling river. Angry at the challenge, Achilles jumps in to fight the River)

ACHILLES

All Trojans die!
Or give Hector to me
No howling river
can save you

BRISEIS

Achilles leapt to the middle
Deep-swirl
of boiling surge heaved—
beating down his shield
with its swallowing waves

(Achilles is overwhelmed by the river, and disappears within it)

BRISEIS

Achilles swept off his feet
catching at branches

of an uprooted elm
dragged the whole cliff away
The waters ran above him
and fiercely beneath
rolling the soil
from under his feet

(Achilles struggles to get free as water wraps round him. He tries to run, but the River runs after with soldiers making a huge roar, and River falling on his shoulders. He falls and twists to fight back, surfaces gasping, screams—)

ACHILLES: Gods save me!

(Red (fire) now streams from the sky, to overwhelm the River)

BRISEIS

When Achilles cried out
all the gods heard
so down swept the Fire-god
hurling gales of flame
to fight
the heaving River

(Flowing streamers – red for fire, blue for water – whipped by Chorus/Koken into undulating curliques that fight for dominance amid loud fire and water sounds)

(Gasping Achilles, still fighting, is finally freed, exhausted, when the blue of the River retreats, followed by the red of the fire, and he turns to look across the plain, where a Wall of Shields has formed)

ACHILLES

Great Wall of Troy
will even you
do battle?

(The Wall – chorus members behind each shield – is screaming like a crowd in terror, then through the Wall steps Hector in Achilles' old armor)

(The Wall screams, tries to pull Hector back inside. Above the Wall, the head of an old man appears, pleading—)

PRIAM

Hector, my son
stay inside our wall

Have mercy on me
We all will die
if you fall

A young man
can lie butchered
still in beauty
But an old king
his white hair smeared
with dung
and eaten by dogs
is pitiful

(Hector salutes his father, but stays rooted, in armor he stripped from Patroklos, to fight Achilles alone. Achilles sees Hector, rears roaring, begins a slow advance. Wall emits a low tone that builds as Achilles moves closer)

ACHILLES

You died
the moment
you drew the blood
of my beloved
Patroklos

Still there you stand
brazen
in armor stripped
from my dearest friend

Now it will sear your skin
till flesh and metal blend
for in stealing it
you stole my honor

My spirit sears you now
It can't release
and fly to me
until it sees you
to your end

(Just as Achilles comes within striking distance, and both brace for the impact, Hector spins and evades Achilles by running away)

(Startled at first, Achilles sharply laughs, and runs after Hector. They may run in place with the

wall moving opposite, behind them)

BRISEIS

As in a dream
a man is not able
to catch one who runs
nor the one who runs
to get away

As when a hawk
swoops for a dove
but she slips loose
and flies
while he
shrill screaming
close after
plunges again and again
furious
to take her...

so Hector would make for the gate
and Achilles race ahead
to prevent him
and on and on
one, two, three times
round all the great walls
Until at last Hector froze

(Suddenly Hector's head is flung back, frozen in dazzling light. Achilles stops)

BRISEIS

For down swept
golden Athena
who loved Achilles well
but to Hector she said

GOD VOICE *(Athena tricking Hector)*

Run no more!
Stand
and we'll take him
together

HECTOR *(Amazed, to the air)*

You'll fight with me?
Then Achilles
die!

(Hector signals Achilles with an upraised arm. Achilles faces him, waiting)

HECTOR

Let us swear an oath:
If I kill you
I will strip your sword and armor
but give your body
to your friends
Will you swear the same?

ACHILLES

What oath
can there be
'tween a lion
and a man?

Did you swear
such kind words
for Patroklos?!

(Achilles attacks viciously. They fight. Hector, loosing, looks frantically about)

HECTOR

Athena, help me!
Where are you?

(Hector is bewildered. Achilles strikes)

ACHILLES

The goddess tricked you
She fights for me!

(At Hector's vulnerable moment, dazzling light strikes them both. But Achilles, his head thrown back, realizing the choice he's making, shouts as he strikes Hector's neck at his collarbone)

ACHILLES

Take my life, then!
I choose glory!

(Hector chokes, falls, lies dying with Achilles over him)

HECTOR

As you love
your parents
do not fling my corpse away

ACHILLES

Hah!
Dogs strip your flesh
until their fangs tire
then birds rip what's left
off your bones
To see you eaten raw
is my greatest desire

(Achilles pulls his spear roughly out of Hector, roaring—)

ACHILLES

If this is glory
it's not enough!

(A moan rises when Hector dies, but Greek soldiers swarm to celebrate, picking Hector's corpse, tearing off the armor. They cheer and shout, but, as armor disappears in pieces, they quiet awestruck, because Achilles still roars, still stabbing and kicking the corpse of Hector.)

BRISEIS *(Apart, in darkness)*

As soldiers swarmed
to stab the corpse
again, again and again
Achilles ripped his bloody armor
off of Hector
pierced his ankles
lashing rawhide through the tendons
and whipping horses to a run...

(Uneasy, soldiers back away. The actor Hector has been replaced by a dummy corpse, which Achilles begins, laboriously, to drag, screaming as he does so)

...began to drag great Hector heavily across
the dry and rocky ground
Round and round the walls
his bare head thumped on stones

(Now horrified, the soldiers run off. As Achilles drags the corpse, red ribbons stream from its mouth, trailing longer and longer as they go round and round a large circle)

Achilles, in his grief and rage
Every day for twelve long days
dragged dead Hector
'mid billowing dust
face down

(Full darkness now, except for Briseis isolated in light)

BRISEIS

So Achilles embraced
his purpose in life
Did he grow
into a man
or beast?

I know only
the night of killing
is long
before the soft dawn
offers peace

(Dim light on Achilles, alone, perched over the corpse of Hector like a beast of prey, guarding it. Frightened Trojan soldier sneaks to edge and bows low)

SOLDIER

Do not strike, great Achilles
In deep secret
honored Priam
King of Troy
begs to approach

(From distance, Priam, disguised and filthy, shuffles hesitantly. Achilles snarls. Priam stops, still far off. His attendant, terrified, runs away. Priam begins a story—)

PRIAM

I sing a song
of the king of sorrows
Do you know any such king?

(Priam takes a step to approach, but Achilles stirs, ominous, and Priam stops)

PRIAM

This king once stood proud
atop his golden city
of the shining towers
brimming with riches of earth

And best among his riches
he counted
his fifty fine sons
And the greatest, the kindest
among all the fifty
was Hector

(Priam, watching Achilles, creeps closer, but Achilles snarls, rearing)

PRIAM

King of sorrows
he loses them one by one
his riches, his sons
and knows
when Hector
the best, is lost
he'll have none

(Priam stops his song, goes on humming. Pause. Achilles sharp—)

ACHILLES

That king was a fool
to look for more
from the gods
than pain
A mortal's life
is spun with sorrows
though it's true
he untwines
evil and good
by turns

PRIAM

Such a mortal I heard of
named Peleus...

(Achilles startled, glares at Priam, who goes on humming)

PRIAM

...with only one
brave son
who cares not for him
in his age
but stays
far from home

(Achilles painfully reacts to his own story)

ACHILLES

...robbing other old men
of their sons

(Gives a harsh laugh, nearly weeping)

So Peleus' boy has grown

(Priam dares a move to Achilles, close enough to stretch his beseeching hand)

PRIAM

Let me only
touch
my son

(Achilles screeches like a hawk, shoots up threatening to strike, but Priam dives to catch Achilles' trailing hand)

PRIAM

This is the hand
that killed
the best
of my sons
Is it the hand
of a lion
or only
a man?

(Then slowly, watching Achilles, Priam draws this hand to his lips and kisses it. Achilles crumbles, sobbing. Priam cradles Achilles. They weep together)

PRIAM: Why have we war?

(Achilles looks up at Priam. Long pause)

ACHILLES

We'll eat
and then sleep
I've gone many days without.
You as well?

(Priam looks at him, and nods "yes," then—)

PRIAM

First let me
see
my son

(Achilles springs up, sharply—)

ACHILLES

Do not dare
to anger me!

(Achilles strides away. Now begins a procession of dead and living witnesses— Hector, Lycaon, Patroklos, Agamemnon, soldiers. They gather round Achilles)

(Priam is separate, waiting, does not see Achilles lift high the corpse of Hector, then ritually cleanse, gently prepare the son for the father. The others slowly sway)

ACHILLES

A man
may gash and tear
the animal flesh
of another
letting spill
the precious nectar
of his breathing fluids
out over the earth

And this is called
glory

SOLDIERS: And this is called glory

(An animal is raised; Achilles cuts its throat. Priam's fallen asleep where he sits)

ACHILLES

I give it back
Though I cannot choose
life
I return
to the gods
their glory

(Lights, sound and company move, as though in a dark whirlwind. Thetis appears; all characters gather to witness the story's end)

BRISEIS

So deep into the night
the father and the son
honored each other
with feasting
and at last
fell into sleep
which both had refused
for many terrible
nights and days

CHORUS

Thetis
deep in the sea
do not weep
that he
is only a man
and not a god of the sky

(Thetis raises her arms in a blessing)

ACHILLES

Though weak of body and brain
I claim
the courage
of lions
to die
without knowing why

(Achilles lifts his helmet to arm himself, all others watch; Briseis questions them. They answer,

singly and together as a whole society trying to understand)

BRISEIS: So he must die?

AGAMEMNON: When the war started

ALL: or why

AGAMEMNON: no one knows

BRISEIS: Forgive me

ALL: (*Murmuring*) no one knows

BRISEIS

I must try
to understand

PATROKLOS

Man
is no more
than man

LYCAON

War is a game
the gods play!

HECTOR

We men
are its pitiful pieces

AGAMEMNON

They flick us
from off their board

ALL: with a laugh

PATROKLOS: caring not

ALL: that our lives drip away

THETIS (*Amplified, as a god*)

War is a game

the gods play

Child of man
can grow
only high as a man
has no choice
but to die

BRISEIS

Still I know
man's glory can fill
the whole sky...

(A loud god-laugh that echoes from the whole sky. Priam wakes, hearing the god-laugh, stands, confused, looks at the others, then answers the laugh)

PRIAM

Man's glory can fill
the whole sky...

(The others join him, and their combined answer gets louder)

PRIAM and **ALL** *(Softly under Priam)*

...when he stands
gazing
full in the eyes
of another
saying—

ACHILLES: You are as I

PRIAM: You are as I

ALL: You are as I

END OF PLAY

APPENDIX

SHOZO SATO - BIO

Shozo Sato, a master of Zen arts, was officially adopted into the Kabuki family of Nakamura and is a master of the highest order of the Japanese Tea Ceremony, ikebana (flower arrangement), and sumi-e (black ink painting), and has published many books on these subjects.

Sato is the founding director of Japan House at the University of Illinois, where he is a professor emeritus. In 2004, Sato was awarded the Order of the Sacred Treasure from the emperor of Japan, and in 1992, the minister of foreign affairs of Japan awarded him a Certificate of Commendation for his promotion of Japanese culture throughout the world. In 2003, he received the first Cultural Achievement Award from the Japan America Society of Chicago.

Sato has received national and international recognition for creating a new form of kabuki through adaptations of the plots of well-known Western classics. He has conceived, designed, and directed award-winning productions that have been seen in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Japan, and the United States. He resides in northern California, where he established a center for Japanese Arts, and freelances as a director and visiting professor in theatre and Japanese arts

AUTHOR NOTES

THE PLAYWRIGHT TO HERSELF (on writing Kabuki Macbeth)

Recreate Macbeth? Sure. Very Funny. I know it backwards. Played the Lady in three separate productions. But to redo it? Impossible.

No matter what I say, the original will haunt me. And it's a very bad luck piece, Macbeth. The Brits won't even say the name aloud.

Ok, but Kabuki needs something different: straight to the point, simple, short, more like lyrics – they jazz around with their voices, you know. It's sex and violence with an ethereal wash of Zen.

So I've done it. And luckily, words are not the main thing in Kabuki. I mean, it's a sensual feast. Of course "hearing" is a sense, but to feed the hearing you also have music, sound, rhythm, voices. And where we must have words, yes, I've tried to find some.

TO THE VIRGIN VIEWER (who's seeing the Sato/Sunde Macbeth)

In Kabuki Macbeth, you'll see a story that comes from Scottish history. We know it because Shakespeare wrote a play called Macbeth.

In Kabuki Macbeth the story is retold, and in a form that is to the Japanese as "westerns" or musicals are to us: cultural wellsprings, sheer entertainments that celebrate who we are, how we live, and what we like to believe. In it you'll find purity, evil, beauty, violence, mystery, heroism, passion.

It is a world completely strange. Don't be thrown. Just...take a breath, deep as your belly, and let yourself sink – into the brilliant pool of colors. Then, as with your first glimpse of a geisha girl, a samurai film, a plate of sushi – then, slipping into that pool, you'll begin to experience Kabuki.

ACHILLES – playwright to audience

THE ILIAD, with its hero Achilles, is the first, and many would say, still, the greatest work of Western literature. A story of warriors and honor, this epic song echoes the heroic traditions of both East and West.

THE ILIAD celebrates violence – contains passages so graphic even media-soaked hearers squirm. Yet, while it entertains us with gore, it also questions. Of the many nations comprising the Greek armies, and the many nations on the Trojans' side, none is the favorite, none shown finally right or wrong. And this epic does not end in victory, but pitifully, quietly, with an enemy's embrace.

THE ILIAD speaks to our time of worldwide violence balanced crazily against worldwide longing to be done with war. So why not make Kabuki theatre? Why not make a cultural crossing place from this warrior's song? KS

Karen Sunde, a playwright and screenwriter, lives in New York

ASTERISKS in Play List below indicate published plays available for purchase at:

<http://www.broadwayplaypubl.com/alphlist.htm> * <http://www.dramaticpublishing.com> **

For descriptions of all works, see <http://www.karensunde.com>. Some screenplays are at <http://www.howardshulman.com>

PLAYS BY KAREN SUNDE

LIBERTY

BALLOON *

DARK LADY **

TO MOSCOW **

SWEET LAND OF FIRE

HAITI: A DREAM (in *Facing Forward*) *

NATIVE LAND

OH WILD WEST WIND (in *Rowing to America*) **

ANTON, HIMSELF

MASHA, TOO

PLEASE GOD, NO WEDDING OR SHOOTING AT THE END

IN A KINGDOM BY THE SEA (in *Plays by Karen Sunde*) *

HOW HIS BRIDE CAME TO ABRAHAM *

TRUTH TAKES A HOLIDAY (in *Plays by Karen Sunde*) *

GENTLEMAN JOHNNY

ME & JOAN (of Arc)

WHEN REAL LIFE BEGINS

TRACKING BLOOD WHITE

DEBORAH: THE ADVENTURES OF A SOLDIER

2020 SEXCARE
*THE FASTEST WOMAN ALIVE ***
*KABUKI OTHELLO ***
KABUKI MACBETH
KABUKI KING RICHARD
ACHILLES
*KABUKI LADY MACBETH ***
QUASIMODO (a musical)
SPA (an opera)
THE SOUND OF SAND

SCREENPLAYS BY KAREN SUNDE

UNDERCOVER PATRIOT
COUNTDOWN
OVER THE RAINBOW
BOULE DE SUIF
SECRET SHIP
HOW HIS BRIDE CAME TO ABRAHAM
IN A KINGDOM BY THE SEA
THE LINE
PARALLEL LOVES
DREAM HOUSE
FINAL QUEST: THE MOUNTAIN OF THE GODS
TRIPPING TAMMY
THE FASTEST WOMAN ALIVE
LOVE HITS EARTH (& Other Disasters)
NEXT!