

Elfriede Jelinek

*Ballad of Three Important
Men and Also of the Circle
of Persons Around Them,
Dramatized for Radio*

Translated by Elisabeth Fertig

Author's Introduction¹

Transcribed and translated by Elisabeth Fertig

The roles are assigned, but we must play them ourselves. Or do the roles play us? Are we the ones being played in this card game? Do we get tossed onto the table, to lie there and wait in a sad pile until someone takes our trick, or perhaps we can take the trick ourselves? Do we have the trump card for once, or are we about to be had? In “Ballad of Three Important Men and Also of the Circle of Persons Around Them”—wherein the “Circle of Persons Around Them,” as the title already indicates, represents a decorative accessory, the cloverleaf placed into the mouth of the slaughtered pig—the gender roles are assigned according to that good old cliché: The men are bold conquerors, brilliant artists, or brutish country boys. Their social circle consists of women, who are either sensual, homely, or otherwise not much. As clichéd as these roles seem, as much as we struggle against them, and as many voices constantly shout above the choir that everything has changed by now, that the roles have long been re-shuffled, that we are moving toward a new androgyny and so on, there is an entire industry working just as eagerly to immortalize and re-inscribe these roles, so that they can endlessly exploit them—that is, exploit us. Bodies do not serve to satisfy one another. No, bodies confronted with the beauty ideal of the advertising industry don’t want to love one another but rather to shop. To shop for things that will enable them to play their role even better, to sell themselves even better. But they themselves are sold the more they try to increase their value through consumption. Regardless of whether it’s a fancy woman buying fancy lingerie or a working housewife buying dish detergent off the supermarket shelf (the one that is allegedly also hand lotion), the goal is not satisfaction of desires but rather frustration, which gets converted back into the aggression of the purchase act. And just as desires are exploitable, so are bodies themselves, and

¹Written and read by Elfriede Jelinek for a 1990 rebroadcast of *Ballad* as part of a retrospective of the author’s Hörspiele (“hearing plays”) on the German radio network SDR (Süddeutscher Rundfunk).

so is sexuality. “My sweater is so scratchy and raw just for you! I have a desire just for you!” says Jane to her Tarzan in the play. Sexual desire, inextricably coupled with gender roles—the man desires, the woman is desired—is reflected on store shelves. Desire materializes as its own stage props; desire itself becomes a prop. The prop is what counts. Without props, we won’t be desired. Bodies must impose things on themselves, or they must hold a fast machine between their thighs, one that takes the form of a woman. (No car can be brought onto the market without the obligatory escort: a woman in lingerie, an evening gown, or a tight suit.) And finally, in an utter fetishization process, we become the decorative accessories ourselves, inanimate, irrelevant. The inanimate—the commodity—replaces the body, since the body, as has been suggested to us, can no longer exist without commodities. And, as the roles are pre-determined, so, too, are the clichés through which they express themselves, from textbooks to sappy TV love stories. What we call assertiveness in a man is called shrill hysteria in a woman. When a woman raises her voice to be heard, she needs to keep dialing it up. We then call it “nagging.” I have investigated what happens when male and female actors swap lines and finally, in the end, when they swap roles—though it’s clear that role and text are not the same, not identical with each other, not co-extensive. How does the same line of text sound when spoken by an actor or actress of the opposite gender? Maybe you’d like to hear for yourself.

Written in 1971; original broadcast March 17, 1974, co-produced by NDR/SDR, directed by Heinz Hostnig

- L charles lindbergh
- W anna, wife of charles lindbergh
- M1 male voice 1
- M2 male voice 2
- C conductor
- B ballet dancer
- T tarzan
- J jane
- K1 lindbergh's son (child's voice, younger)
- K2 tarzan's son (child's voice, somewhat older)

when the notation VOICE SWAP appears in the text, the characters should switch voices, so that the women's roles are spoken by men and vice versa. the notation VOICE SWAP always refers only to the two characters in whose dialogue it appears. the sound effects must contrast sharply with each other: e.g., the clattering of dishes for tarzan/jane, propeller noise for the lindberghs, and swan lake music for the conductor; but these can be modified at will. the tempo: quite brisk.

- L: mein name ist charles lindbergh, i have to get up soon. tomorrow will be a hard day, but it will also make me famous.²
- W: charles, please!
- L: i'm all packed up. tomorrow is the hard but beautiful day that will make me famous, therefore it will be hard, but not too hard.

²The decision to have Lindbergh introduce himself in German was made for two reasons: first, as a playful solution to the problem that this phrase is uttered in English in Jelinek's original and, second, to strengthen the glancing reference to Bertolt Brecht's 1929 Hörspiel *Ozeanflug*, which in its original version begins with the same phrase (that is, in German).

- W: no, charles, please! don't do it! you can still change your mind. once you're in the air, you can't go back. think of our son!
- L: i have to do it. there's an urge within me—to prove myself. i can't even tell you how strong the urge is at this very moment.
- W: charles! no. think of the child! and if you won't think of the child, then please at least think of me.
- L: this is something you can't understand. tomorrow i have to get up. you will never grasp the feeling of being the first to cross the great, wide ocean.
- W: charles, god didn't create the ocean for you to die in and to leave me and the child alone. stay here, charles! there is still time.
- L: you child! toward the end of this radio play, you will learn that nobody can hold back a person as deeply determined as i am.
- W: charles! charles, stay here!
- M1: no, take the darts in further here. and doesn't the color make me look pale?
- M2: the color is just right. if it were even just the slightest bit on the bluer side, though, it might make you look pale.
- M1: but even the green tones in it are making me look pale, right?
- M2: if anything about this color is pale-making, it's not the green.
- M1: actually, it would be good if the color made me a little paler, since i'm naturally blessed with rosy cheeks.
- M2: exactly. and anyway, the red tones are taking things back in a less pale direction.
- M1: do you find me pale?
- M2: of course not. not too pale and not too rosy.
- M1: my complexion is good, but it makes a slightly pale impression, therefore: careful with the clothes!
- M2: but this pattern in particular makes you look less pale than others i could name.

- M1: well, in sunlight i always look less pale than in artificial light.
- M2: but we're in the sun right now!
- M1: exactly. and considering we're in the sun, i look much too pale. just imagine how pale i would look in artificial light.
- M2: but you're not pale at all!
- C: my name is famous conductor. i only conduct in the most famous opera houses and the greatest orchestras on earth. i also travel often and much. one must, in this trying career.
- B: i'm only a small-time ballet dancer. i'm just starting out. there's a steep road ahead of me, a thorny one. my parents were a russian grand duke and duchess, they gave me the russian first name natasha. this increases my value somewhat.
- C: when i am not conducting, i am resting from the acutely strenuous work of conducting. i am drained, spent to the last drop. sometimes i think about what the right word could be for what i am.
- B: lonely is the word for what you are. i'm just starting out.
- C: i am at home everywhere, i am always living out of my suitcase, which is strenuous and trying. fame costs me a lot, maybe too much. but when i'm standing before the berlin philharmonic, for example, i think to myself that fame in fact does not cost too much.
- B: my career through the eyes of a woman: it is important, but not life itself, which is a completely different thing.
- C: i have just now composed something to completion. i will continue composing right away: a ballet made of very modern music, which not many will understand, but that nevertheless will receive enthusiastic applause.
- B: there's a tough road ahead of me. will i master it, or remain mediocre like so many others?
- C: my music is so modern that not many can follow it. it can in no way be called mediocre.
- B: i think i will remain mediocre like millions of others.
- C: mediocrity is a big achievement for a woman but rather little for a man.

M1: light eye shadow makes my face look pale, more or less.
M2: no. anything but pale! for god's sake. then you should use dark ones.
M1: but even dark is sometimes pale-making.
M2: well, you're not pale, but it can't hurt to take precautions.
M1: but are you being honest when you say that you don't find me pale? today i am feeling truly pale.
W: charles! if you take off tomorrow, i'll leave you. i mean it.
L: but child! oh, you child. you know how much i love you, but you also know that a man has to prove himself wherever he goes and whatever he does.
W: charles, you have a child. don't forget that!
L: how could i forget something that makes up such a big part of my life, dear little wife, i will not forget you two. i will always have your image before my eyes as i cross the ocean. but i simply must cross, must ever be crossing.
W: (weeping) charles! do you know how a mother feels when her child will soon grow up without a father?
L: please don't cry. you ought to be brave and to believe in me. you ought to be proud of what i will achieve tomorrow. don't make this so hard for me, dear little wife.
W: charles, no!
K1: dad! dad! don't leave us, father, stay with us! don't you see how mom is crying?
L: my son. you can't understand it yet, but one day you will understand. then your father will be a hero. a famous flyer.
W: charles!
K1: father, stay with us.
L: my son, you're now the man of the house. take good care of your mother and return her to me just like i left her, in good condition!
K1: yes, father. i will look after mother. i promise.
W: charles! (sobs)
M1: then i'll look for a lipstick to match this dress, one that won't make me look pale.
M2: don't you think that this one will rather heighten than diminish the delicate tones of your face?

- M1: i think that it will make me look pale.
- M2: not at all! besides, you aren't pale in the least.
- C: i have just finished conducting the composer stravinsky's famous firebird suite. i am completely drained and depleted and sapped. but the applause is roaring.
- B: i have just finished dancing my solo in the composer stravinsky's famous firebird suite. the great conductor was an artistic phenomenon. i felt as though he were supporting each of my steps, with this world-renowned music.
- C: that little dancer has a so-called radiance that reached all the way to my conductor's podium, the loneliest place in the world.
- B: i feel small next to him, insignificant, lost, and tiny. my parents left me a small apartment decorated with period furniture from the tsar's old palace. it would be the right setting for this extraordinary person and artist.
- C: i am standing in front of the great entrance of the world-famous opera house. i am all alone. the music has left me all alone. i am standing in the rain, which is pattering down steadily and evenly, and gazing into the distance at my sports car, which i brought over from the united states.
- B: my delicate dancer's body looks lost in this wide expanse. my hair is blonde and damp. i'm dead tired from the strain of the strenuous dance.
- C: where are you going, you little, insignificant, lost, and tiny one?
- B: to the left bank of the seine. that's where my small garçonnière is, decorated with period furniture.
- C: hello, sweet switchboard girl!³

³German: "Hallo, du süße Klingelfee!" This is the first instance of a trope central to this text's intertextual strategy: all characters (men, women, and children) will spontaneously utter seemingly nonsensical one-liners that turn out to be the titles of kitschy, sentimental German and Austrian pop ballads (or *Schlager*) from the 1930s through the 1970s. I've made the decision to translate each title into English, more or less literally, while offering the original title in a footnote in the first instance of each. In the audio production of this Hörspiel that I worked with while creating this translation, these lines were always offset from the rest of the dialogue: for example, spoken more swiftly, more slowly, in a sing-song voice, or—in a notable use of stereophony—suddenly coming from the opposite channel

- B: yes.
- C: i've already picked up your small, delicate body so that your little shoes don't get wet. i've already taken this body in my conductor's arms and carried it over the puddles to my sports car, where i set it down with care.
- B: how gentle a conductor's hands can be when they aren't tensely swinging a baton.
- M1: of the many things that can make one look pale, bright light is the worst.
- M2: but you aren't pale! of course, if the light is too bright . . .
- M1: do you find the light here too bright?
- M2: no, but i don't find you pale either.
- M1: are you trying to say that i'm imagining things?
- M2: of course not. in less bright light, i'm sure you're less pale.
- T: my name is tarzan. between my jane and me, the athletically built man, there has been a noticeable amount of sexual tension.
- J: the goats are milked, tarzan.
- T: jane, take a rest! you manage your duties as a mother just as well as you manage your duties as a housewife.
- J: i don't just want to be a good housewife and mother, i also want to be a good spouse. and yet, there is something unsatisfied within me—it festers.
- T: what is this thing within you, jane, dear little train conductress?⁴
- J: i'm afraid to tell you. the spouse within me says: be silent! but the housewife and mother within me say: speak!
- T: say it, jane!
- J: tarzan, don't you love me even one little bit?
- T: i love the wife and mother within you, jane, but i also love the jane who is my wife and spouse.
- K2: on the farm. dad is driving the heavy combine. mom is in the kitchen, planning lunch with the farmgirl.
- J: (sighs) i have a great big unsatisfied wish right now.

than the rest of the character's lines. Visit <https://journals.publishing.umich.edu/absinthe/> to access a playlist of every song mentioned in this play.

⁴German: "Liebe kleine Schaffnerin."

- T: tell me what it is. maybe i, the athletically built man, can help with my mixture of courage, strength, energy, vigilance, and experience.
- J: tarzan, oh tarzan, that would be marvelous! you know how often i have to reach into the hot, greasy dishwater with my once-delicate hands, right?
- T: tell me: how often, how often, jane? HOW OFTEN?
- J: so i thought, tarzan, i thought it would be marvelous if we . . .
- T: if we what? do tell me, jane!
- J: if we (giggles)—i'm afraid to say it, my love. don't be so hard on your little wife!
- T: jane, jane. you know that i, the athletically built man, believe it's better to be gentle than tough. come on, what is it?
- J: you know that new lemon dish soap, honey, with the scent of ripe lemons?
- T: the one that's supposed to make you wild and fresh? are you wild and fresh, jane?
- J: no, i'm not, tarzan; that's just it. i haven't used it yet, but i have a desire for it. oh please, tarzan, please buy it! right now!
- T: ok. i, the athletically built man, will buy it. and then there will be no more tension between us, jane? none?
- J: no, tarzan, no! the mood is relaxed again now. in every marriage, there will be periods where tensions come up, but the clever and vigilant wife can always sway her lord and master with a bit of diplomacy.
- K2: on the farm. father rides out with the farmhand. mother goes into the dairy to carry out housework.
- W: you're not a mother, charles, you don't know what it means to lose the man you love. why are you always chasing adventure?
- L: in any case, tomorrow is the difficult but big day that will bring me fame as the first ocean-crosser.
- W: charles, you have so much to lose: both of us, myself and your child.

- K1: don't cry, mother. i'm a man now. i'll protect you.
- W: oh, my boy.
- L: it must be so. i have to prove myself. tomorrow i will begin to prove myself. no one can stop me.
- W: can you even look your child in the eyes anymore?
- L: yes. i can look my child in the eyes precisely because tomorrow i am going to do my duty. you can't understand it. i have to get out there. i am a man. i must go onwards and upwards. soon i must go onwards and upwards. that is: tomorrow i must take off and prove myself, my little wife.
- M1: hair, eye shadow, lipstick, nail polish, blush, makeup—everything, everything makes me pale!
- M2: not at all! pale? no.
- M1: perhaps this hat makes me less pale?
- M2: much, much, much less.
- M1: but still too pale, right?
- M2: absolutely not, hardly a little bit pale.
- M1: then only slightly pale, and yet still pale after all.
- M2: hardly pale at all.
- M1: then just a little bit pale, but still—pale.
- B: no sooner am i carried to the car than i'm already in my apartment, surrounded by expensive textiles, furniture, and accessories. it's the right setting for this important person and artist who has come with me.
- C: you seem almost a little lost here, while for me this is exactly the right setting. both for me as a person and for me as an artist. i'd like a drink now. i need something hard.
- B: can i offer you a whiskey, neat—that means without water or ice, a real man's drink—out of this precious crystal bottle?
- C: i'm drained from the strenuous work of conducting.
- B: what a feeling it must be, to make the world submit to your will through music?
- C: i call it the feeling of having passed a test. i am constantly composing, even when i am alone.
- B: is it true that this work of conducting and composing must often be paid for with loneliness?

- C: it is true, but one pays the price gladly. and yet the price is high. i kiss your hand, madame.⁵
- B: exactly how high is the price that you must pay?
- C: the high price that i must pay is called—my personal life. while others twiddle their thumbs, i compose modern compositions.
- B: that is very high. but i think it's been worth it.
- C: sometimes, when i'm standing dead tired in the limelight, with applause raining down on me, i think: a high price, but it's been worth it.
- B: when i imagine never having children, never having a home . . . i would fall apart.
- C: you supple willow: willows bend but don't break. but you're a woman after all—you and a home and children belong together. i kiss your hand, madame.
- B: truly, i would fall apart. dear mediocrity!
- C: perhaps you really would fall apart. i kiss your hand, madame.
- B: within me, the woman is still battling the dancer within me.
- C: within me, the artist within me has retained the upper hand, though not without a fight.
- B: within me, the woman within me will retain the upper hand. no, wait! perhaps the dancer within me will gain the upper hand, after all!
- C: if the dancer within you gained the upper hand, you'd no longer be a real woman. you would still be beautiful, but you would no longer be a woman—not a real, true one.
- B: i think, i feel that i am still beautiful, though i am no longer a woman—not a real, true one.

VOICE SWAP

- C: you are beautiful and have value as a person. and yet, your working life will soon leave its traces on your face, making

⁵German: "Ich küsse Ihre hand, Madame."

- it tough and bitter. everything feminine and soft about it will disappear.
- B: is there nothing left of the femininity and softness i once had?
- C: the femininity as well as the softness is no longer what they once was. nevertheless, i myself am much harder and less valuable as a person, which is acceptable for a man and an artist. i, too, i think, feel torn.
- B: let someone smooth out your worry lines. who can do that better than a woman?
- C: your hands are no longer as soft as they once were. they've become tough and cracked by the struggles of life. hello, sweet switchboard girl!
- B: you have luck with the ladies, bel ami.⁶
- C: come to me! together we're less alone than one is when standing alone in the thundering applause under the limelight. i also happen to be looking for a title for my new, modern ballet. a new, modern title. i kiss your hand, madame!
- L: mein name ist charles lindbergh. when i think of the ocean, then i instantly remember that i must prove myself tomorrow, as a man and as a flyer. tomorrow, i will take off with my brave little airplane.
- W: charles, no! please! if you had ever been a mother, you wouldn't talk that way. a child needs his mother to dry his tears and his father to show him how to climb trees.
- L: a man needs to know where he belongs.
- W: you belong to your family, charles.
- L: tomorrow i must take off, must prove myself. every man must.
- Kl: you don't understand it, mom! i'm the man now. i'll take good care of you, mom. i promised father i would.
- L: anna, tomorrow i will take off. when the sun is up high, i'll be up high too.
- W: charles, if you leave tomorrow, i'll leave you.

⁶German: "Du hast Glück bei den Frau'n, Bel Ami."

- L: i have to! don't you understand that? when a man says he must, he must.
- T: jane, there's a cheeky curl peeking out of your scarf. only a woman's curl could peek out of her scarf like that. dear little train conductress.
- J: oh tarzan! it's hardly cheeky.
- T: and how your body is outlined under that thin sheath! only a woman's body could be outlined under a thin sheath like that.
- J: oh tarzan, hardly! it's not outlined at all. my sweater is scratchy and raw.
- T: i, the athletically built man, see no scratchy sweater, i only see your fit body underneath it. with brand new eyes.
- J: oh, tarzan, my sweater is so scratchy and raw just for you!
- T: be quiet! let me, the athletically built man, gaze at you quietly!
- J: my love, i have a brand new desire. i have this beautiful brand new desire just for you. but my sweater is still scratching me, ow, it's scratchy just like the towels.
- T: what kind of desire is that, jane? haven't you always gotten everything you wanted? what kinds of new desires are these? dear little train conductress.
- J: i think it's more of a physical desire. do you think we could today, tarzan? please! i'll cook your favorite food. you have luck with the ladies, bel ami.
- T: no, jane, no! you're a woman, you should only want to give, never take. you know: giving is more blessed than taking. do you want to get old and used up before your time? to no longer be attractive to me, the athletically built man? to lose your femininity?

VOICE SWAP

- J: tarzan, i think my femininity just went missing. i have a desire, tarzan. you have luck with the ladies, bel ami.
- K2: on the farm. father is balancing the books. mother is sitting in a corner and mending stockings, socks, and various

other things that her wild boys have ripped up. monika, her youngest, is helping diligently. outside, her older brothers hans and erwin are running and climbing around. they're racing to the top of the highest cherry tree.

J: tarzan, my sweater is so raw just for you, ow. it leaves me with an unsatisfied feeling—a similar feeling to the one you leave me with, tarzan. lonely boy . . . ⁷

T: the one thing that i, the athletically built man, loved most about you, jane, was your femininity. jane, you're not as feminine as you once were, and far, far less feminine than you could be if you tried. think about it! did you do everything you could to make your sweater both white and soft? dear little train conductress.

J: no! what a harsh, dissonant screech. for god's sake, no!

T: just add a capful of fabric softener to the last wash cycle.⁸ poor little ingeborg.⁹

K2: on the farm. father is still balancing the books. mother is still sitting in the corner, but now she's praying the rosary. moni, her youngest, is doing her best to follow along. outside, the wild brothers hans and erwin are running around.

C: you are beautiful. you radiate a certain something that only a woman can radiate.

⁷German: "Einsamer Boy."

⁸This line comes from [a series of 1970s TV commercials for Lenor fabric softener](#). In one, a beautiful housewife is admonished by her "conscience" (who appears in the ad as her double) for not getting the laundry soft or white enough. But when she adds a capful of Lenor to the last cycle, as her conscience instructs her, everything is set right. The last line in the ad is the woman's conscience telling her, as she happily arranges flowers, "Everyone loves you so much." Austrian listeners in the 1970s (especially women) would likely have caught this right away, as my mother did when she listened to the radio production of this text.

⁹Like the other intertextual scraps, this line jumps out because it appears to have no context at all. Who is Ingeborg? Austrian readers and listeners would likely think of Ingeborg Bachmann, perhaps the best-known woman author in Austrian literary history. The link is strengthened by details of Bachmann's biography and reception, notably the public fascination with her relationships with famous male artists, including Paul Celan and Max Frisch. For all her achievements, Bachmann still tends to be read through her love life. Jelinek is also a prominent interpreter of Bachmann's work and wrote the screenplay for the 1991 film of Bachmann's only complete novel, *Malina*.

- B: ha, i'm hardly beautiful.
- C: i would liken you to an old renaissance painting, if i weren't so busy with my bold, modern composition. what title can i give it? i can't think of a single one that would be new and bold enough.
- B: let me think about it, please! maybe i can . . .
- C: no, don't think about it. you've already lost enough of that femininity that i used to love so much about you. where has it gone? as for me, i'm pure male toughness, while you're still more feminine and softer than i am, despite greater toughness than you used to have.
- B: i think "abandoned" would be a pretty title.
- C: ha! that title is much too feminine. i kiss your hand, madame. i'm thinking "passion" would be a good title, or even "passion in the pond."
- B: i will grow as an artist, although it will count against me as a woman. as for that title: it's cheap. what about "swan lake"?
- C: you have a lot of work to do on yourself, whereas i'm already complete. but the title is good. may it always remind me of you, my little one. a tough, masculine line has just etched itself into the corner of your mouth, which counts against your femininity.
- B: yes, i feel it now, this tough, masculine line.
- C: i will compose my famous ballet, swan lake, and you will dance the female lead. this will be part of my sponsorship of your talents. any moment, the melodies will start flowing out of me.
- (music: swan lake)
- B: could it be true, really true, that the melodies are already flowing? isn't swan lake too great for you? won't you fail?
- C: a woman must believe in her man, or he'll lose his grip. regardless, my modern music will be even more modern than the title swan lake could ever suggest.
- B: OUR swan lake.
- C: my swan lake. this work will become even bolder and more modern through your interpretative talents.

- B: sometimes i think it will never be written, this ballet. will it come between us?
- C: often career stress is what comes between a man and a woman. everyday life does the rest. i kiss your hand, madame.
- B: even i often doubt myself. the tough, masculine line at the corner of my mouth is proof.
- C: well, i do not doubt myself at all.
- B: you're a man. swan lake is calling you. never look back, always ahead.
- C: i kiss your hand, madame. there's an urge within me to compose this modern ballet, i can't help it. it urges and urges.
- B: you have luck with the ladies, bel ami!
- W: i'll fight for you, charles. weak as i am, i removed a screw from the motor of your plane. you can't take off tomorrow. i hereby rebel for the last time.
- L: give it here, you little dumb-dumb, that's not for you to mess with. hello, sweet switchboard girl!

VOICE SWAP

- W: my will is rebelling, which you can see because my face is twisted into a white mask of determination. i threw the screw in the trash, charles, out of hatred for that plane.
- L: (stuttering) it will take a day, uh, one whole day, anna, for me to find a replacement. the takeoff can't be saved. masculine toughness and determination are written across your face. where is the softness that i always loved so much about you? dear little train conductress?
- W: at the moment, i'm nothing but toughness. i want you to stay, charles, with me and with our son.
- K1: mother, i'm a man now, i'll take care of you.
- L: actually, a harmonious family life is the greatest joy in the world. i've come late to this realization, but not too late, anna. i'll stay with you two, my love. many adventurers, cowboys, explorers, artists, and scholars have realized this before me.

- W: charles, you're making too little of yourself. you could achieve far more, charles, if you would just make a serious effort!
- L: i did like to kiss the ladies. dear little train conductress!
- W: i love my family, too, charles, maybe even more than you do. but there's no way a man can seek and find his greatest joy at home with his family. whereas i, as a wife and a mother, can certainly find my greatest joy, my inner happiness as a wife and a mother, with my family. you must take off tomorrow, charles! your brave airplane can be a wife and child to you. lonely boy . . .
- L: i think the word for what you are is ruthless. i did like to kiss the ladies. is my son supposed to grow up without a father? he'll be grown soon. is he supposed to come of age without me? you're a mother. you've borne a child. can't you understand me? dear little train conductress.
- W: tomorrow is your big day, my love! aren't you looking forward to it? tomorrow, your battle with the elements begins, which will make you into a famous man. charles, the screw . . . it was never removed. i just wanted to test you, charles. you have luck with the ladies, bel ami!
- L: what? (stuttering) anna, yes it was. the screw—it was removed! it was! i watched you do it myself!
- W: no, charles, my love, i didn't remove it. i lied. i lied for you. forgive me.
- K1: i'm a man now, mother. don't be afraid, i'll protect you!
- L: let me stay with you, anna! my love!
- W: you must! that word might as well have been made for men. tomorrow, you must take off.
- L: but my child is calling out to me. i think i must hear that call.
- K1: father, let mother go. take off with integrity!
- L: no, let me stay with you! adventure no longer calls to me when i look into your clear eyes.
- B: and so another night fades, and i'm fading too.
- C: it was a lovely night.
- B: and now off to your desk, to swan lake!

- C: it was a lovely night. if it was lovely for you, then it was lovely for me too. do you think my ballet, swan lake, is already calling to me?
- B: it is calling loudly, my love. on my many tours i've experienced considerably lovelier nights than this, yet you could still call it a pretty nice one.
- C: if only my desk weren't calling! i want to stay with you always.
- B: for example, under the southern cross i once experienced a night that was considerably lovelier than this one.
- C: i want to stay with you always and never go back to my cold, hard desk.
- B: did you know that i'm married?
- C: no, no! not married!
- B: my husband lives in the states, in a sanatorium, incurable.
- C: no, not incurable! at the moment i think it's too much for me, though presently i will notice that it's not too much. i must abstain—as a man, a conductor, and a composer.
- B: abstinence is good for your artistic maturity. you are writing this modern ballet for me, and while you write, you will abstain from me (singing: aaaah) our swan lake! (music)
- C: i am already abstaining. it has become second nature to me.
- B: you have luck with the ladies, bel ami! this swan lake is sounding familiar to me.
- C: you're getting that impression because it will become a famous ballet. my beloved little ballerina. i kiss your hand, madame.
- B: i've just sewn a loose button back onto your tuxedo jacket. the button came loose from the strenuous work of conducting. sometimes the woman within me demands her rights, despite being hidden away.
- C: i kiss your hand, madame. despite your substantial toughness, sometimes the woman in you blooms like a flower in the wilderness.
- B: compose, compose away! we can never see each other again.

- C: inwardly i've already abstained, but the task is now proving difficult, almost as difficult as swan lake. thank you for fixing that small and inconspicuous seam!
- B: you're very welcome. sometimes i think swan lake is neither bold nor modern.
- C: oh yes it is, my love. please, say swan lake is bold and modern! please! don't crush my last shred of enthusiasm for my work!
- M1: the darkness always makes me so pale, don't you think?
- M2: yes, i think so too. i can hardly see you.
- M1: that's a lie! i'm not the least bit pale today. you'd be glad to have my face.
- J: oh, tarzan, how clumsy! coffee stains on the nice white tablecloth.
- T: jane, i'm sorry. just now i, the athletically built man, have soiled the nice white tablecloth. now there's a nasty little dirt goblin all over the lily-white tablecloth. us men are sometimes big and clumsy like that—but that's why you love us, right, janie?
- J: tarzan, i don't love you at all and your clumsiness is getting on my nerves. what are we going to do now?
- T: jane, you don't love me anymore! (sobs) you don't love me, the herculean man, anymore! here is the laundry detergent, jane. will you love me again if i wash the tablecloth?
- J: no, and i still wouldn't love you even if you had brought me the pre-wash detergent instead of this hot wash detergent. because i'm about to say this: it's clean, but it wasn't properly pre-soaked.
- T: jane! will you still not love me ever again (sobs) even if i, the athletically built man, use the pre-wash detergent? even then?
- K2: on the farm. father is negotiating with the hog trader. mother has a big laundry day today. the farmgirl is helping her. how those little rascals get everything dirty! smiling, mother shakes her head kindly. then she gets back to work.
- T: truly lily-white! look, jane! consoled, i sniffle through my nose. now you surely love me, the herculean man, again,

jane. (crash, shards) oh, jane, what have you done! (sobs) coffee stains on the lily-white tablecloth again! now i, the athletically built man, have to go do the laundry again. but i do it gladly and with pleasure. for you, jane.

- J: well, at least it WAS lily-white, tarzan. haha.
- K2: on the farm. father is driving the wagon into town. he has some business to take care of. mother is sitting in god's corner and sewing herself a new blouse. wait, no! the blouse isn't for her, it's for her little daughter, monika. mother never works for herself: when she moves her diligent hands, it's always for others. monika is sitting next to mother on a stool and sewing a doll's dress. our kind mother helps her often, because moni is still little. soon, susi the doll will have a pretty, new, red dress. hopefully those wild boys won't ruin it again.
- C: now the melodies are flowing through me again. with such intensity and abundance—like never before. i kiss your hand, madame.
- B: it must be an unusual feeling, to have melodies flowing through you. this swan lake is seeming more and more familiar to me.
- C: impossible. it's bold, modern, and yet universally accessible. i'll conduct it myself too. i kiss your hand, madame.
- B: when i dance, something flows from my body. something indefinable, a mixture of spirit and body.
- C: a great deal flows from your body: artistic talent.
- B: even you are talented somehow, much as i doubt it whenever i hear swan lake. but it's no reason to despair!
- C: no, no reason. i'm summoning new courage as we speak. how do you like this? (sings swan lake theme)
- B: it's just not new, not unique. i'm beginning to understand your doubts about your talents more and more.
- C: i did like to kiss the ladies. only the legs of dolores do that.¹⁰
- B: we have a shared goal: our world-renowned ballet.
- C: i'll flee from you like a deer from a hunter.

¹⁰German: "Das machen nur die Beine von Dolores."

- B: i'll pursue you and overtake you. i am a woman, you are a man. could there be a more fortuitous coming-together?
- C: i have to abstain from you. for the first time since i lost my dear parents, i'm abstaining from something. swan lake, i'm coming! a song goes 'round the world.¹¹
- B: this song thing—if i were you, i'd think long and hard about it.
- C: do you mean that i could be no more than a minor, interpretative talent? no, you can't mean that! not in light of swan lake, the bold and modern work.
- B: sure, you're a little talented. but too little for swan lake.
- C: may i just sit still here for a little while longer and gaze at you?
- B: yes, but you must be very still. no humming, singing, or whistling swan lake!
- L: anna! we'll see if you don't regret this one day. our child may also regret it. don't you think?
- W: you don't understand, charles. take off! this is your duty.
- L: but just look into our child's eyes. how he begs and pleads. it's my child too, anna!
- W: when i look into the eyes of our son and heir i waver for the blink of an eye, but i hold fast. tomorrow, you must take off!
- L: don't deprive our child of a father, anna!
- W: would you be proud of a man who broke a promise he had made to himself, charles?
- L: a woman can only be proud of a man who wouldn't break a promise he had made to himself.
- W: good boy, keep thinking that way. and now: onwards and upwards!
- L: there's more to life than pride, anna.
- W: you have luck with the ladies, bel ami. lonely boy . . . tomorrow you'll push through the clouds with your flying body.
- K1: father, come on, don't cry. i'll protect mother!

¹¹German: "Ein Lied geht um die Welt."

J: tarzan, you said we could do it after dinner.

T: i don't feel like it, jane! (giggling) we men have our little weaknesses. and for me, the athletically built man, it's alcohol.

J: tarzan, i'm a woman. i have desires.

T: do you still love me, jane?

J: i'm about to just reach out and grab you! you have luck with the ladies, bel ami.

T: first tell me if you still love me even a little, jane!

J: unfortunately, i don't love you at all, tarzan. (tarzan sobs) oh, christ!

T: my jane doesn't love me, the athletically built man, anymore. (weeps)

K2: on the farm. father is scolding the farmhand. mother is smiling as she watches her wild boys climb the cherry tree. monika sits on the ground below, talking to her doll.

J: it's up to us women to awaken the good in a man or make him into a murderous beast.

W: tomorrow you'll take off, charles, so that you can keep being yourself, and so i can be proud of you. you will only be yourself if you take off tomorrow, charles.

L: i'm so afraid! hello, sweet switchboard girl.

W: you would be unfaithful to yourself if you stayed tomorrow.

L: maybe not so unfaithful, anna. please say that i wouldn't be unfaithful to myself if i stayed on the ground tomorrow, anna!

W: i can't lie like that, charles.

L: anna, i have to confess something to you: i removed a screw from the motor of my plane. i can't even take off tomorrow. i hereby rebel for the last time.

W: give it here, you little dumb-dumb!

L: i threw the screw in the trash, anna. i'll never find it again. hello, sweet switchboard girl!

W: it will take a day to find a replacement, charles.

L: anna! just let me stay with you. pretty please.

W: you could have endangered yourself and your plane with your recklessness, charles.

- L: i'm so ashamed, anna, so very ashamed. can you forgive me?
- W: well, the day after tomorrow you really must take off. stupid, senseless charles!
- Kl: mother, i'm a man now. i'll take care of you.
- L: please, let me stay here, anna! you're my wife! please!
- B: swan lake didn't amount to anything this time around either. nothing bold, nothing modern.
- C: i'm going to go now, to make swan lake even greater and more modern than it already is.
- B: you're better off practicing your conducting!
- C: the critics will not understand my revolutionary ideas— but you, you will understand me. the only one in europe or abroad who will understand. i kiss your hand, madame.
- B: well, at this point i still don't understand it at all. but work hard, as hard as you can.
- C: i will mature in my art. mature for you. i kiss your hand, madame.
- B: will swan lake mature too?
- C: it, too, will mature over the years. i can become much more mature as a person too, if i try. then swan lake will automatically mature along with me. i kiss your hand, madame, and mistake it for your mouth. you're so charming, madame! (pause)
- L: anna, about the screw . . .
- W: yes, charles?
- L: it's not true, anna, i lied again, anna, forgive me, please. i didn't want to lose you, so i tried a miserable trick. dear little train conductress. i did like to kiss the ladies.
- W: ok, so tomorrow, then. tomorrow you really must take off, charles.
- L: forgive me, anna, if you still can. i'm so ashamed. i did like to kiss the ladies. dear little train conductress.
- W: yes, charles, you're right. shame on you! be ashamed! it's good for you.
- L: forgive me, anna!
- Kl: mother, i'm the man now, i will take care of you. dear little

train conductress. hello, sweet switchboard girl, i did like to kiss the ladies, only the legs of dolores do that . . . etc., etc.

VOICE SWAP again (from this point, all characters swap voices once more—so that the male roles are again voiced by men and female roles by women—until the end)

T: oh, jane, you aren't having secret desires again, are you? with my arts and crafts corner calling to me and my jigsaw collecting dust?

J: yes, tarzan, i have a great, unsatisfied desire. come with me!

T: oh, jane, dear little train conductress, you yourself gave these lovely art supplies to me, the herculean man! so that i could craft all kinds of pretty things, like this proverb i wrote with a wood-burning pen.

J: you're coming with me, tarzan! you're going to satisfy my sexual demands this instant!

T: oh, jane. i, the athletically built man, have such a headache! only the physical exertion of using my new hammer drill helps. please, jane, dear little train conductress!

J: tarzan!! you will come right now!

T: no, jane, please! let me solve this difficult crafting problem. please, please, jane. i enjoy it so much. i'm sure that this original craftwork will please you, too, when it's finished. but there's still a lot of work left to be done. i did like to kiss the ladies.

J: tarzan!!! will you come here! (fade out)

C: (humming swan lake) and this theme still needs to be cleaned up, and this little spot. this wrinkle in the cantilena still needs to be ironed out. only the legs of dolores do that.

B: i get the sense i've heard this dumb swan lake not just once but many times before.

C: no way! too bold, too modern. i made it that way. i did like to kiss the ladies.

B: did you know that swan lake possibly already exists, you idiot?

C: impossible! too bold. too modern. before me: no swan lake. with me: swan lake. after me: nothing but swan lake. i kiss your hand, madame.

B: to hell with your swan lake!

C: swan lake no hell but hope for many. this is goal of art. also my goal. (sings swan lake)

B: dear god, what nonsense!

W: what are you holding so tightly behind your back, charles?

L: i can't tell you, dear little train conductress.

W: what is it, charles?

L: it's nothing (stuttering) nothing . . . nothing, anna!

W: give it here right now! this is . . . this is . . .

L: a little screw, anna, dear little train conductress.

W: this just can't be true, charles.

L: it is true. i removed it from my airplane myself.

W: will you put it right back where you found it, charles?

L: no (sniffs), please no, anna! please! think of our child, anna!

W: do you want to make me angry, charles?

L: no, anna, please don't be angry with charles! (weeps) i didn't mean it that way, anna. watch, i'm screwing it back into its rightful place. are you still angry, anna?

W: i'm still very annoyed, charles. what will you do early tomorrow morning?

L: (crying) i'll take off, anna.

W: what was that, charles?

L: (crying) tomorrow i must take off. (sobbing uncontrollably) i did like to kiss the ladies, dear little . . . don't be angry, please, please, anna! i'll never do it again. i promise.

W: i'm still very annoyed, charles. but you can make up for your mistake today by being extra diligent tomorrow.

L: (sobbing uncontrollably) dear little train conductress, hello, sweet switchboard girl . . . (fade out)! (long pause)

M1 & M2: have you finally noticed any changes to your physical person? if yes, then these have always been present in you. they

are of completely natural origin and will influence your organism only insofar as they are decisive for the victory or defeat of your character. they are thus no cause for concern. have you finally . . . (repeat and gradually fade out)