

D E S E R T S

H u g o A l f r e d o H i n o j o s a

I n a t r a n s l a t i o n / a d a p t a t i o n b y C a r i d a d S v i c h

draft revised November 19 2007

This translation/adaptation was commissioned and developed by
The Lark Theatre, NYC through the 2007 US-Mexico Word Exchange,

To those left in the middle of nowhere

*Don't come to me with solutions!
The only solution is death.*

FERNANDO PESSOA

*And did you find
what you were looking for?
I did.
What was it?
To be loved, to feel loved
On this earth.*

RAYMOND CARVER

Figures (in order of speaking)

A Boy (about 10 years old).

A Girl (about 10 years old)

Woman 1 (the Mother)

Sniper

Woman 2 and Woman3 (in mourning/in tombs)

Preacher

Undocumented Man 1 and Undocumented Man 2

Man 1 and Man 2, Child and Dad (in trailer)

Insurance Agent

Stranger

Coyote 1 and Coyote 2

Woman in Hotel Room

Woman in front of the mirror

Older Woman in a bedroom

A soldier in the desert (the Boy as adult)

Setting: Now, then and future time in transient places around the world.

Translator's Note:

This text may be performed with eight actors (4 male, 4 female);

With suggested doubling as follows:

Undocumented 1/Coyote 1/Man 1/Insurance Agent

Boy/Soldier/Undocumented 2/Coyote 2

Sniper/Preacher/Man 2

Dad/Stranger

Girl/Child

Woman 1/Woman in front of mirror

Woman 2/Woman in Hotel Room
Woman 3 /Older Woman in a bedroom

-1

in the heart of the desert

BOY (about 10 years old) -

morning my mother wakes me says it's time for work i pull the blanket over my head stick my hand out grab some clothes get dressed and get up mom has the grocery cart all ready it's filled with sweet bread coffee hot chocolate and beef burritos we sell these things we walk in the cool dawn and after about half an hour of walking we come to a desolate patch of land next to a giant metal fence this is where we work our customers see us they ask us for something to drink and chat about how hard it was to spend the night without cover others talk about sounds they hear in the valley when everything's quiet the morning finally comes and we see between the slats in the fence the bodies of some old men who used to buy things from us their bodies are all torn up thrown on the other side of the fence how were they killed i ask some men who are sitting near us who knows they say only screams were heard bodies fly over the fence *la migra* throws them back nobody says a word the bodies are left on the muddy earth later forensics will pick them up and soon it will be dark and the place will be swarmed with people who want to climb over the fence again we finish selling our bread and coffee at noon we walk back home morning we're back in the same place in the cool dawn and those that were here yesterday where are they i ask an old man he doesn't answer and points to the fence i give him a cup of coffee he thanks me with a smile

A street in the city. A girl is seen talking to her mother.

GIRL—Let's go to the park. It's been forever since you took me to the park, mom. Come on. Why don't you take me? Aren't you going to take me?

A sniper is seen at a window.

SNIPER Esto no es una situacion sin sentido.

*[*simultaneous supertitle: This is not a meaningless state of affairs]¹*

GIRL—Mom, I want some cotton candy. Why do those people shout like that, mom? They scare me. Tell them to stop shouting.... Take me to the park.

SNIPER Cada dia espero que llegue la noche, y vago despacio por las calles como una serpiente fria que busca la redencion.

*[*Every day I wait for the night to appear, and slowly wander like a cold snake through the streets, looking for something to redeem myself.]*

A man is seen on the street; he talks on his mobile phone.

MAN *—(on the mobile) Yes, I'll call you tonight and we'll see what we'll do. Okay? Yes, I think that's a good time, we just need to make sure it's okay for everybody else... yeah, call me then...

SNIPER Le ruego al espiritu santo por las almas de aquellos que he matado. No siento ningun remordimiento. Nosientoningunremordimientoningunremordimiento.

¹ Original text for figure of the Sniper is in English. To approximate similar heightened effect of Othered speech translator has translated text into Spanish to be spoken and suggests simultaneous original English text to be displayed as surtitles, or handled as simultaneous VO.

*[*I pray to the Holy Ghost for the souls of those I've killed. I feel no remorse. IFEELNOREMORSENOREMORSE.]*

MAN²—You could've told them we could have had dinner with them tomorrow. We can't today. You knew that. Why do you always do what you want?

SNIPER Me quedare aqui en el calor, esperando que lleguen los enemigos. Malditos hijos de puta.

*[*I'll stay here in the heat, waiting for the enemies to arrive. Dirty sons of bitches.]*

WOMAN 1 (the Girl's Mother)—You have to ask people what I tell you to ask them, child. Please, it's for our own good. You know that. Go on, ask them. Don't be afraid.

SNIPER Ya se acercan. Los puedo sentir.

*[*They are coming, I can feel them.]*

GIRL—Mom, my head itches; scratch me. I don't want to ask anyone anything anymore. They're all crazy. You ask them. I'm tired.

SNIPER Quien chingados les dijo que vinieran a este lugar?

*[*Who the fuck told them to come here.]*

MAN—Pick me up on 21st and Main. I'll wait for you. No problem.

SNIPER Llegaran pronto. Este es mi puto pais. Mi pais.

*[*This is my fucking land. My country.]*

WOMAN 1—Some other day...another day I'll buy you cotton candy, okay? Now, just ask those people what I told you to ask them.

GIRL—You always say the same thing. I don't want to ask anybody anything.

WOMAN 1—There's nothing to be ashamed of, child.

GIRL—I don't want to, mom. You ask them. Why do people have to touch everything

² This man could be the insurance agent seen later in the play.

they see?

A gunshot is heard: (the Sniper's dream).

1

In houses of mourning, women pray, wail and remember their lost ones

ALL (WOMEN)—Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come...*(underscore prayer...)*

WOMAN 2 If you want to go, go. But don't come back. I don't want you near me. I don't want to see you anymore. You're all grown up now. You don't need me. Go on. Go wherever you want; just make sure to get there in one piece; don't get lost along the way. I'm old now. I can't go round worrying about you anymore. You hear me?

ALL—Forgive us, Oh Lord. Forgive us.

WOMAN 3 Even though your dad didn't come to tell you goodbye, we'll still miss you. You know, I worry you'll go hungry over there. But if you want to be a man, you have to suffer. That's the way it is. Suffering's the only thing that makes you understand what life is truly worth.

WOMAN 2 Last night I heard the owls come up to the window. I knew then that you'd be going away. I don't want to worry about you anymore. Just promise me this: promise me that no more animals will come to send me signs that something bad has happened to you. Promise me.

ALL—Holy Mary, mother of god, pray for us...

WOMAN 3 If you go, who's going to do everything that needs to be done around here? Your father can't do it. And I can't even get out of this chair. And yet, you're going. If we've done something wrong, you should tell me.

ALL—The Son of God was crucified...pray for Him, as we pray for all our children...

WOMAN 3 You decide to go away right before your sister gets married. You know we've no choice. She's the only one who can help us now. You shouldn't get upset.

ALL—Rise, rise, and rest in everlasting peace...

WOMAN 1 Listen, if you get cold along the way, put your jacket on.

WOMAN 3 She's pregnant. That's why you're running away. History repeats itself.

WOMAN 1 Why are you leaving? Tell me.

ALL—Oh Lord, hear your children's prayers and bring to fruition the seed that you planted in this field, in this field, which is our Church...

WOMAN 3 I can't go with you. I'm tired.

WOMAN 1 Lord be with you.

ALL—Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

WOMAN 3 Don't go, son.

ALL—Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

WOMAN 2 Take care of yourself, son... I love you.

WOMAN 3 Don't come back.

WOMAN 1—Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the World.

ALL Have mercy on us.

WOMAN 1 And if you're still cold with your jacket on, then have some tea; that always works.

WOMAN 3 Look, if you're going to kill yourself, do it now; for once and for all. I'd rather you did it now; better to do it now than to go round screwing up your life and everyone else's life wherever it is you end up.

WOMAN 1— In the Holy Spirit (in the Glory of God the Father)

ALL Have mercy.

WOMAN 1 Does anyone have some needle and thread so that I can sew my little girl's hands?

Shift to street. A preacher is seen.

PREACHER (*on the street*) Forgive us, Oh Lord, forgive us, wash away our sins and purify our souls. DO THIS UNTO ME.

Shift to the desert. The open doors of a tractor-trailer are seen in the background. The coyotes order various men to climb into the trailer. A child appears, runs in and loses himself in the darkness of the trailer. [This could be a projected image sequence.]

Shift back to street. The undocumented men (1 and 2) appear.

PREACHER Brothers, seek ye our Lord?

UNDOCUMENTED 2 We have to eat something.

PREACHER I know where you can eat, son. I'll tell you, if you want.... Have faith in me, my brothers.

Shift to the women praying in the houses of mourning.

ALL—Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the World.

WOMAN 1 Have mercy.

Back to street:

UNDOCUMENTED 1 We don't need your help.

They exit. The Preacher follows them.

In the desert, the coyotes close the tractor-trailer doors.

In the houses of mourning:

WOMAN 1 I've some money. I can pay. Just some needle and thread, please. That's all I want.

ALL—Hear us, Oh Lord, hear us.

The street.

GIRL My mom's always lookin for mercy. She thinks the saints will grant it to her. She says the only person who can pardon our sins is God. But when I look up at all the grown-ups all i see are people who've forgotten everything, as if someone had taken an eraser to their heads and erased everything they had inside. I always let her walk in front of me. I don't want people to know I'm with her. I'm ashamed, you see? Cause she's always talking out loud like a crazy person. I don't like listening to her. I'm tired. She's always asking for mercy and forgiveness. I'm not God. I can't forgive her. She makes me laugh. Especially when she asks stuff about stuff nobody cares about. She cries sometimes. I laugh. My granny gave me this big ol doll the other day. I can't even comb her hair. I put her right up against me and say here, little lamb, here. I only want to play with her. The doll looks like she's smiling at me, but dolls smile the same with everybody. Kids that aren't like me can comb their doll's hair. I can't even comb my own hair, let alone my doll's hair. Sometimes I try to lick her, to comb her hair with my mouth cause I don't want her hair to get all messed up, but she always falls down and she looks at me with pity in her eyes. When I get angry, I tell my mom to comb her hair, but she doesn't know how; she doesn't even know how to comb my hair. She just doesn't know. My dad went away; he ran off and got lost in a crowd, lost in the shadows. Mom says dad'll come back. I don't want him to. Because he'll want me to forgive him. I'm not God. I always tell mom, but she says sometimes you have to make exceptions. But I tell her God doesn't make any exceptions; if He's gonna send somebody to hell, He'll send them. Who forgives God? I ask. She says God does. God forgives God. And I say how many Gods are there, mom? The last time I asked her that she

slapped me real hard and said there's only one God in the whole world. I don't believe her, though. Because if there was only one God, how could God know what it means to forgive?

Inside the tractor-trailer (where the men have been left).

MAN 1 (*desperate*) There's a light over there. It's calling to me. Let me pass. I need to go to the other side. Get out of my way.

MAN 2 (*delirious*) I'm not the one they're looking for; it's someone else, i only caress myself when I'm cold, i'm not who you say. My name is Pepe, José, I'm not Roberto or Gumaro, I'm not the one you're looking for. She was already like that when I got here. You have to believe me.

MAN 1 If you don't open the doors, I'm going to kill you. Give me a rock, a knife, a bullet, something that will spare me from this damn heat.

DAD Don't move or all the air will rush out. Quiet now. Don't move or all the air will rush out. Sons of bitches. Don't move.

MAN 1 Where are the matches? Can someone give them to me? I want to get out of this shit place...a match; somebody, give me a damn match.

Child cries.

MAN 2 She was his woman. I took her away from him. I just took her. I wanted her in my arms... between my legs...to finish her off like a succulent piece of meat.

DAD Don't cry, don't cry, son....don't move or the heat will get to you.

MAN 2 I feel as if I'm getting rabies, i'm burning, tinder, like a scrap of coal on an ash heap... Why aren't you with me, mom? Do you remember when i dribbled, when i scratched my gums and you took care of me? Remember? Why aren't you here? i need you. Give me water, give me your breasts. Does anyone know where my mom is?

MAN 1 Nobody's going to die here, cause I'm going to kill you. You hear me, sonsofbitches? Go on now. Hide. I'll break you, anyway. I'll devour you.

CHILD *Mamá...*

MAN 2 Get behind me Satan; go on. Go fuck your mother. The devil got into you before you died; maybe you were in his debt. But you're not going to kill me; i'll kill you first, motherfucker.

DAD Out there, there are people who wait for us with food and cameras in their hands, with water and air conditioning.

MAN 1 All we have to do is look good when they take our picture; all we have to do is be proud of the black bag they'll put us in.

MAN 2 Where's the money they promised me?

Man 1 lights a match.

DAD Blow it out, out, out.

MAN 2 Her hands fell off like they were made of sugar, as if I'd been sucking her and they just...fell. She looked at me. She didn't say anything. She just looked. She didn't understand. It was the wire, you see? The wire I tied her hands with. It ate through her flesh until her hands just...

DAD Fuck off.

MAN 2 Fuck you motherfucker, fuck anyone who comes near me.

CHILD *Papá...*

Man 1 lights a match.

MAN 1 Don't breathe the light will go out.

He blows it out. Lights another.

Don't breathe the light will go out.

He blows it out. Lights another.

Don't breathe the light will go out.

He blows it out. In the darkness we hear the men banging on the trailer doors.

I n s u r a n c e a g e n t ' s o f f i c e

I have life insurance i sell life insurance i bought it when i started my job in this company we're dedicated to providing the best service and securing everyone's well-being i've sold so many policies as many policies as there are sighs nevertheless it's not enough i still have to surpass the level of sales achieved by this EXECUTIVE in this other city who has surpassed us all straight through the roof he's gone the only thing i can do now to stay on par with him is go into the poor communities and sell policies there to make those poor folks feel happy and assured that their lives mean something i call on any number of houses i put in time after all no one should feel bad about being poor we all have the right to be happy look at me i'm the perfect example every day i achieve my personal best i strive for success I SMILESMILESMILE and when i lose my way there's always someone here to pick up my slack and take the credit and that's as it should be it's all about winning staying in the game going for the gold and i'm ready to hit the streets and sell anything to anyone at any moment i remember once i sold coverage to this man who had this coffee stand outside the busiest subway station in the city he said he was 65 years old the exact age required for coverage he came to my office with his wife he asked me about all the clauses in the contract and after reading them the man turned to his wife and asked her whether they should invest in this insurance minutes later the deal was closed and the actors in this drama (the three of us – the man, his wife, and I) shook hands days later the man's body was ripped to bits when a

bomb exploded in the subway station where he had his coffee stand rescue workers found his body most of his limbs were gone they took him to the hospital and put him under close watch in isolation they were afraid he might lose other parts of his body he lost his nose and half of his tongue i remember cause i went to the hospital to make him sign a clause in the contract that stated the insurance company wasn't liable insofar as terrorist attacks were concerned the man's wife asked me why he had to sign these papers i said it was just a formality to make sure they'd get proper coverage they signed i smiled and i left the hospital with all the papers in order they congratulated me at work i'd done so well i'd surpassed my rival in sales and became the head honcho in the office i never went back to the hospital months later i happened to stop by the town where these old clients used to live i ran into the man and his wife they had a new stand they sold coffee and sweets the wife took care of the customers while he sat in a chair saying thank you to everyone who'd buy and speaking a kind of gibberish no one could understand i tried to start up a conversation with them about this new retirement plan that just came out the woman spit at me and started to scream at me with this insane, sinister look on her face i couldn't understand why she was so upset i was silent she kept cursing at me i thought these people these mediocre people they just don't know how to smile i turned around and left that SAVAGE place

The street.

PREACHER (*sermon*) Don't go, don't lose yourselves along the road, along the highway of sin; don't throw your body on the road of evil and impurity. I tell you, brother, you who leave my side, the side of the Lord, come back, come back and work as I do to enrich your spirit. Hear my words, Love me, Wait for me, let patience be your guide and the good Lord will come to your side. Why don't you turn round, son, why don't you turn round and look at me? Is it because you see me like this: poor in clothing and aspect? I tell you, brother, I am not poor but rich in spirit. My soul is ten thousand times richer for being with the Lord. I see you. Yea. Hallelujah! I see your faces of desperation, fear, and thirst...I see your bodies aching for peace. Look at me, brothers. Look at me. I am here. I will bring salvation to you all. For he who dares listen to the word of our Lord will have salvation. You come in search of the truth? I tell you, brothers, seek no more, come with me. Let my people come. Christ, our Lord Jesus, the son of God, said this. Listen, my brothers. Do not be afeared. I am your guide, your savior, your friend. What you need is here. Seek no further. God our Father looks to you, He chooses you to seek comfort in eternal life. HEAR ME OH LORD.

A stranger emerges from the crowd.

STRANGER Do you believe in God? Do you?

PREACHER God is my friend.

STRANGER I'm thirsty.

³ This is scene 11 in original text. This scenic transposition has been made with the author's approval.

PREACHER God takes away all thirst.

STRANGER And hunger?

PREACHER All things, brother. Pray with me, brother, pray. I will show you the way, I will illuminate for you the path between heaven and hell; you needn't look for it anywhere else.

STRANGER There's nothing I don't know. Whatever secrets there may be in this world, I know them. You see the sun shining up there in the sky? It waits for me.

PREACHER And why does the sun wait for you, brother?

STRANGER It doesn't matter.

PREACHER It matters to me, it matters to me. I know your problems, brother. I'm a samaritan; I'm a man who wants to help you. Do not be afearred. The saints don't bite. Want a glass a water?

STRANGER I'm not thirsty

PREACHER But you said you were thirsty. What is your path, eh? Where are you going?

STRANGER Far.

PREACHER Nothing's far. Everything's here, at hand, have faith, all will be known. It'd be best if you waited, so I could show you what you can have when you're at my side and at God's side.... You've heard of eternal riches, of divine grace, of the universal path that belongs to none other than to God? Brother, son; look into the void, I am part of the path God has in store for you. Don't look to another horizon, I am your horizon.

STRANGER I'm going to a place far away.

PREACHER I can help you. I can pray for you.