

The Furies

VERSE PLAYS

William Considine

praise for 'the furies':

"At long last here's Bill Considine's considered, rollicking, breezy, deep, avant-post take on what Poetry is, what Theater is, and what happens when these arts tumble dance through history together only to land simultaneously on page and stage. Equal parts Sophocles and Ashbery, whose lineage from *Electra* right through to 'The Heroes' he invokes, Considine ruffles the classics to fan a new breath of Pure Future. Perform these plays in your mind's eye or take the dare and produce them on stage – they are transportative. IOW, as Agamemnon says in 'Agamemnon, King of Cars', 'Let's prowling the great desert,/Whooping on speed,/In pick-up trucks or tanks./Let's all wear cowboy hats.'"

- Bob Holman

"The Furies is a terrific intervention, a unique contemporary dramatic verse collection with tropes of classic themes and characters. Considine has a poet's lyric ease, wit and calling, and a sensibility that travels through the complicated dynamics of history and war. As Orestes asks Electra, "Shall I talk of our childhood and/ all the times you silently/ stared at the summer leaves/ and tried to imagine, total death,/ nuclear war, all at once, and why?/ Do you remember our civil defense drills..." This is a refreshing "oral" book and generously available here for actors and poet-performers on the stage, as well as readers, in the hand. Bravo!"

- Anne Waldman

"Just when I was wondering whatever happened to poets' theater, along comes William Considine's thrilling collection of four verse plays, *The Furies*. Much poets' theater is heavy on the poetry (making it soporifically undramatic) or ignores language for quirky effects. Considine's work, however, is miraculous both onstage and in the ear. Not only that, he is learned, funny, witty, big-hearted, and timely. Take, for example, Solon's "daring disobedience" in 'Prologue: Prehistory': "You teach people / to say fantasies in public / and enjoy tall tales in meetings, / so faking will succeed / as the political intelligence / of our people." 'Lincoln in Queens' is as human as anything by Woody Guthrie, with a unique take on our most written-about president, who is "back from the dead in Queens," busy urging the narrator to "find the Furies" and speaking "of God like a lost lover: I lived in faith in the old-fashioned fable / of suffering and moral endurance. / We purged the blood-curse on our nation: / slavery! Now you can escape / the iron shackles of war, / the fable of blood atonement, / the faith of Furies." After small productions around New York City over many years, it's great to have these plays in one place to be read and reread, and, one hopes, performed again."

- Elinor Nauen

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The Furies

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The Furies

VERSE PLAYS

William Considine

for Emma

The Furies

PROLOGUE: PREHISTORY
AGAMEMNON, KING OF CARS
ELECTRA
LINCOLN IN QUEENS

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Prologue: Prehistory

Prologue: Prehistory

had its first performance in May 1988,
in the Poets Theater Festival of the Poetry Project
at
St. Marks Church-in-the-Bowery, New York,
with the following cast:

Poet - James Honzik
Solon - Sparrow
Chorus - Mark Robbins, Philip Perkis

Directed by William Considine
Set by Deborah Gans

Poets Theater Festival directed by Bob Holman,
Alternate Direction by Elinor Nauen

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Poet
Solon
Chorus, of at least two persons

CHORUS and POET enter

POET

I too will begin
with signs of a beginning
from long ago, in the Bronze Age
of armored, shining Greeks.

POET withdraws to watch from stage left.

CHORUS

Worn out by war and
preparation for war,
the people of Athens
make all talk of war
taboo taboo.
The punishment for war cries
is death.

CHORUS 2

Swelling blood in the veins
and heat of the young,
a trader of olive oil
and part-time poet named
Solon rushes
into the marketplace of Athens
to act like a fool
in a Persian helmet of straw,
to chant a poem
in the center of the city
as a performance, urging war,
in daring disobedience.

SOLON enters and takes center stage.

CHORUS 1

Urging war as a madman
immune from the laws:

SOLON

War-weary people,
where are our souls?
We're buried alive
with our ancestors
and their forgotten gods,
in graves on Salamis!
Those spooky graves are ours!
We must fight for our graves!

CHORUS 2

His friends laugh and applaud.

CHORUS 1 and 2 clap in unison.

CHORUS 1

Athens attacks the island Salamis.
Solon serves as general.
In a sharp fight, stabbing with spears,
Athens captures the graves of Salamis.

CHORUS 2

Solon rises to be the Law-Giver,
leader of the city,
out of his own wars.
He makes laws on wooden plaques:

SOLON

Law One: We forbid women
to wear large pins in their gowns
or hair, to disarm them
as enemies of war,
before they strike at our eyes.

Remember: in a raid
to the east, most of the men
of the expedition died,
stranded without food on an island
and cut down while hungry.

When the survivors returned in a few ships,
the women of Athens attacked them at the docks
with hair pins, in anger at the loss
of men on a raid.
Our few brave survivors so betrayed!
We must disarm the women.
No hairpins!
Law Two: We forbid women
to cry loudly and wail at funerals
for war dead. Tears are enough.
This wailing is foreign and
a political statement. It's come
with trading ships from Libya,
on the blue Afric shore.
Crying loudly is unpatriotic.

CHORUS 1

Solon's wooden laws
turn and fade in sun and rain.
The city rages in civil war.
Men who build temples prosper.
Then comes an incident with hostages
in the center of the city.

CHORUS 2

Out of the blood-curse of Athens,
the Tyrants take power.
The History of the West begins.

*POET steps in to lead the CHORUS as THESPIS.
CHORUS 1 and 2 move stage right
under the direction of POET.*

CHORUS 1 AND 2

One slow day in his old age,
returned from exile,
Solon walks down the Acropolis
to watch the poet
Thespis teach the sacred chorus
his new concept:

POET

- the tragic
hymn and drama.

CHORUS 1 AND 2

Solon the Law-Giver scolds
at the birth of tragedy:

SOLON

Your performance looks like
law courts and city assemblies.
You teach people
to say fantasies in public
and enjoy tall tales in meetings,
so faking will succeed
as the political intelligence
of our people.

POET

But Solon the Law-Giver,
critic of free sorrow, is a fake
madman, and a maker
of myths to make war.

CHORUS 1 AND 2

- a maker of
myths to make war!

SOLON exits.

POET

Theatre and theory
are from the same source,
meaning: to see
the laws of life enacted.
From that source, please,
allow me to mix discourse,
when words alone are so weak
and surrendered to force.
If a creative rush
like a god allows one more
inspiration and so life
utterly given and fulfilled,
and it can happen in one day
poured into verses,
let this be the evening
late awakening to words.

The End

Agamemnon, King of Cars

AGAMEMNON, KING OF CARS

First presented in a rehearsed reading in the New York Shakespeare Festival's Playwright's Unit at the Public Theater, in the Newman Theater, in November 1980, directed by John Nesci, with Andrew Callahan as Agamemnon, Eric Loeb as Meneleus, Ebbe Roe Smith as Odysseus, Diane Salinger as Iphigenia, and Charles McKenna, Rosemary Moore, Nancy Shinkle, Carol Kane, Terry Ann Bennett, Julie Ariola, Carla Howard, Joanne McEntire and Sherry Steiner in the Chorus.

Subsequently performed in a festival at Theater for the New City on June 5 and 6, 1982, directed by John Nesci, with Bill Sadler as Agamemnon, Matt Locricchio as Meneleus, Mike Moran as Odysseus, Mary Tepper as Iphigenia, and

Shelley Valfer, Len Jenkin, Dan Moran,
Charles McKenna, Rosemary Moore, Saun Ellis, Bridget Leicester,
Joanne McEntire, Betty La Roe and Julie Ariola in the Chorus.

Music by Paul Galasso, set and tank by
John Arnone, costumes by Laura Drawbaugh, choreography by Pam Harling.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Agamemnon
Meneleus
Odysseus
Iphigenia
Chorus of American citizens

SCENE

Bare Stage

*CHORUS of several men in street clothes enter with a case of beer.
They put it down and casually stand around and sip beer.
MENELEUS in a business suit enters and addresses the audience*

MENELEUS

And now - culture!
The Western world, foreseeing
Its own explosive ends, ceaselessly
Now thinks back upon itself,
To the origin of memory,
Back
To the enduring source of Western life,
Back
To the shape that still commands us,
Back
To the mighty king of Western men -
Agamemnon! King of Cars!

*AGAMEMNON enters in modern clothes.
He carries a shield festooned with greasy auto parts and
emblazoned with a picture of a car or traffic jam. He carries a spear.*

MENELEUS turns to the others.

Hey, everyone!
Agamemnon has an idea!

AGAMEMNON

This is great.
I, Agamemnon, have had a vision.
I say, let's cross the sea to the east
In ships and fight!

CHORUS OF MEN look at each other, puzzled, skeptical.

We must fight for the honor
Of Meneleus, my brother,
King of Busyness!

He always loved freedom like a wife
With automatic steering and lots
Of optional features.
But freedom was stolen from Busyness!
Yes! Fight and free the oil!

MENELEUS

Free the oil! While there's still some left!

CHORUS OF MEN sip beer wearily, in unison.

AGAMEMNON

Let's destroy all the great cities of the world!
Blast 'em! Smash 'em down!
Let's embrace the fate of men.
The chain of murder is the fate of men.
Progress is from war to world war to
World system now of Superwar!
The gods have given us nothing.
Let's call down the gods and kill them.
Bring forth the great catastrophe.
Armageddon is up to us.
This damned world must end.
End all that is unhonored.
Apocalypse will be quite a trip.
Boom! Boom! Wow! Bam!

MENELEUS

Agamemnon meant to say that
Always all the armor
Has broken the back of sturdy-limbed men
With the weight of many dead,
And now everywhere armor is piled,
So we must make more missiles and tanks
And ready our hearts for wild war,
Though the effort sickens us.

AGAMEMNON

It's waiting that sickens us.
Set your energy free!
Between the dark sea and the walled city
Waits the fate of heroes, the field of force.
Let your blood flow with the universal
Field of force.

CHORUS OF MEN

All engines groan like the needy. The vast
Train is on schedule and heavy with
Grim projects. Refugees watch the cash
Machines from silver Cadillacs. Startled
Workmen bark out raw product. In air throb
The charged products pleading. Sullen echoes
Cry the possessed. Winter breaks with rain like
Wires and the incessant drums of advent.

AGAMEMNON

Let's prowl the great desert,
Whooping on speed,
In pick-up trucks or tanks.
Let's all wear cowboy hats.

MAN TWO

Why?

AGAMEMNON

Because!

MAN TWO

Why?

AGAMEMNON

Because!

MAN TWO

Why because?

AGAMEMNON

Because! When we win Superwar,
We'll be more famous than huge Roosevelt
Or any of our fathers, fighters all
And the smashers of Nazis and fascists!

MAN ONE

Agamemnon is king!

MAN TWO

No way! Wait a minute!
We don't have a king.

AGAMEMNON

I, Agamemnon, am king
Of oil and the trade routes
And king of cars.

MAN ONE

Agamemnon is king of cars!
Big-bodied, roaring cars that swarm
In the streets nervously.

AGAMEMNON

Give that man some money.

MENELEUS

I think the public trend is toward his way
Of thinking.

MENELEUS gives MAN ONE some money.

AGAMEMNON

And the king of cars must take charge,
In times of crisis and war,
As the king of men.

MAN ONE

Agamemnon is king
Now of all the Americans!

MENELEUS

And you've been drafted, Achilles.

MAN TWO

My name is not Achilles.

MENELEUS

Soon it will be, if you're good.
Ajax. Our enemies will scream your names.

MENELEUS

Sign here. "Achilles."
It's just an image. Sign.
Nothing is real.

MAN THREE

I'd rather sign with the king of records
And tapes.

AGAMEMNON

The future's in cement.

MAN TWO

I don't see the need for Superwar.

MENELEUS

No jobs. The future's in cement.
Let's all mix in and make cement,
For missile silos and parking lots for tanks.
Let's make missiles and tanks and drink hard
And puke and fight and die, like men.

MAN THREE

Hey, what about women?

MENELEUS

You know how women are.

AGAMEMNON

Women can stay home and make cement.

MENELEUS

Okay! Let's get busy! Let's go!

Taxes now, to defend you in Superwar!

We'll make it up to you -

We'll cut all public services.

MENELEUS takes money from the CHORUS OF MEN.

MENELEUS passes weird, complicated weapons to them.

This one's broken.

MAN ONE

How does this work?

MENELEUS

You were educated at taxpayers' expense.

You figure it out.

MAN TWO

Hey, I think it's broken. When do soldiers get paid?

MENELEUS

Sorry. We spent all we had on weapons.

AGAMEMNON

Hurry with the laser-tank.

MENELEUS

It doesn't work.

AGAMEMNON

Then make more!

MENELEUS

Speed it up! Let's go! Let's go!

MAN TWO

You call this defense?

Let's hear what Odysseus thinks.

AGAMEMNON

Bah!

MAN THREE

Odysseus will have a better plan.

MENELEUS

Odysseus is washed-up. He's lost.

He's on some personal trip.

MAN TWO

Odysseus is still laughing

And crafty. What does he think?

MENELEUS

Who cares? The trend is

Totally away from lost Odysseus.

Soon we must cross the sea in ships and fight.

AGAMEMNON

Superwar One is the war

That will be won by winners!

MAN THREE

Draft women! I'm not going abroad without girls.

MENELEUS

Soon you won't need women.
You'll have a laser-tank.

AGAMEMNON

Let's march down to the sea and ships!
Let's go!

*CHORUS OF MEN whirls away from AGAMEMNON.
They walk to the rear, where they drink angrily and mutter.*

AGAMEMNON

The war winds won't rise.

MENELEUS

They're so apathetic.

AGAMEMNON

Okay, we tried.
Let's give up and go home.
Or move to New Zealand.

MENELEUS

Never relent. See your wild dreams happen.
See, their tension and anger builds toward war.

MAN THREE

We've been sold some shoddy goods.
Give us our money back.

MENELEUS

I earned that money.

CHORUS OF MEN

Give us our money back!

MENELEUS

Alright, we'll compromise.

MENELEUS whispers to AGAMEMNON.

AGAMEMNON

Alright, we'll compromise.
We'll draft all the men.
We'll draft Odysseus!
That's the kind of symbol that wins Superwars!

MAN TWO

Let's hear from Odysseus!

MAN THREE

Let's hear from the women!

AGAMEMNON

Let's go draft Odysseus!

CHORUS OF MEN follows AGAMEMNON toward stage right.

MAN ONE

Can you lend me a dollar?

*In from stage right swirl WOMEN and MEN dancing,
including ODYSSEUS. CHORUS OF MEN joins the dancing.
Lights brighten high. Music.
This entire group is the full CHORUS.*

CHORAL INTERLUDE

*The men and women dance, first to the music
and the chant of MENELEUS and then to their song.
They become somewhat puzzled by the lyric to which they dance*

MENELEUS

Okay, everyone!
Let's draft all the men!
Sing along!
Let's draft all the men!

Let's draft all the men!
Come on!
Let's draft all the men!
Let's draft all the men!

CHORUS OF WOMEN *(singing)*

The king of cars has had a dream.
Drink, forget what freedom seemed.
Trash is all the world can be,
And trash, my dear, is never free.

The music and dance continue while WOMAN ONE speaks.

WOMAN ONE

We've been worn out and drugged out and bummed out,
But still these always young Americans
Flow forward, dancing and wild for freedom:
Teeming, registered Democrats, lovers
Of mankind, the people without leaders;
The sturdy few republicans,
Calling on the old republic or
Reveling in the glitter of old ores;
And all are Independents,
Distrusting all parties and politics;
Brave people! Too bad we've no ideas but cars.

The music and dance end.

AGAMEMNON

Look at them! Hey, let's take the women, too.
Draft them.

MENELEUS

We can't draft women.
Because women won't stand for it.

AGAMEMNON

But they'll let the men go?

MENELEUS

Sure. You know how women are.

MENELEUS

Odysseus!

ODYSSEUS

Hey, it's the famous brother act!

The sons of Atreus.

How are you guys doing?

MENELEUS

Pretty good.

Agamemnon is the king of cars now,

And I'm the king of busyness.

ODYSSEUS

That doesn't even keep you off the streets.

AGAMEMNON

And we have to draft you, Odysseus,

As always.

MAN TWO

They want us to cross the sea in ships

And fight for the honor of Meneleus.

ODYSSEUS

You can't draft me.

I'm deranged. Whacko. Totally 4F.

I have too much energy, in my chest and legs,

And I have dreams that keep me awake.

MENELEUS

Great Agamemnon is our leader

And the lord of cars and trade routes,

Oil and men, and he has dreams

That the world must end in terror, fire,
Screaming and glory, and we must obey.

ODYSSEUS

Agamemnon is too late.
His world has already ended.

AGAMEMNON

Look again.

ODYSSEUS

This life ceaselessly changes
And changes now awesomely,
In quiet and ease.
Already the world has ended,
Peacefully, and a new world has begun.
From tensions and shocks,
The long chain of murders has snapped.
The chain of war lies broken in the dust.

AGAMEMNON

Look again, madman.
He is insane.
We'll go without him.

AGAMEMNON turns to go.

ODYSSEUS

Hear me out! I've become an oracle!

MENELEUS

A what?

ODYSSEUS

I've gone into the oracle business.

MENELEUS

Fairly whacko.

ODYSSEUS

And I announce -

AGAMEMNON

So what?

WOMAN TWO

Let's hear Odysseus!

ODYSSEUS

Thank you. I announce -

That centuries of war have smashed the fates

And all their gloomy towers and walls.

The cities stand without walls.

The people stand open to the heavens.

The old fates are exhausted.

Paranoia got so sick it died.

The war-state has died and gone to heaven.

The war machine has run out of gas.

MENELEUS

There's plenty of oil in outer space.

WOMAN TWO

Tell us your plan, if you have one.

ODYSSEUS

We must rewrite the laws of physics.

The universe is not a field of force.

Force is the empty word of Agamemnon.

The cosmos is a field of play.

The world dances, to rock and roll.

Rock and roll is the motion of love.

People dance and play much more than they fight.

These are well-known facts.

WOMAN TWO

What's your plan?

ODYSSEUS

You tell me.

WOMAN TWO

Get serious about disarmament!

CHORUS

Hooray!

MAN TWO

Or else nuclear weapons will kill us!

AGAMEMNON

Here comes the laser-tank! Look!

How big it is!

ALL look to the laser-tank, pushed slowly onstage.

AGAMEMNON stabs ODYSSEUS with his spear and kills him.

Look! Odysseus killed himself.

Unhappy man, insomniac dreamer!

And a really nice person, too.

CHORUS

No!

AGAMEMNON

But unrealistic.

He played with the fates.

The chain of murder is the fate of men.

It coiled and broke Odysseus.

CHORUS

No!

AGAMEMNON

Let the utterance of great Odysseus

Inspire us now in Superwar,

To end this world of war! Men!

CHORUS OF WOMEN

No!

AGAMEMNON

Let the laws forbid women
To scream at the funerals of war,
Shrill and unpleasant.
They can scream at their husbands,
Absent or at home and weep,
If that's their nature.

MENELEUS

We can win without Odysseus.

AGAMEMNON

He slowed us down with wild ideas.
His thoughts are for the future.
Here, help with the laser-tank.
We're losing time.

Several discouraged people push the tank.

WOMAN THREE

This tank is made of cement.

MENELEUS

It grips the road better.

WOMAN FOUR

Is this the MX missile or the XM tank?

MENELEUS

Both. We combined them, to save time
And use more concrete.
X, the unknown, has replaced the cross.
M, as always, is for money and might.

MAN ONE
It's broken.

AGAMEMNON
Let's go, men! We'll fix it.
Me first, remember, and then you, Ajax.
Here's a nuclear weapon.
Just pull the pin and throw it.

AGAMEMNON gives a heavy bomb to MAN TWO.

MAN TWO
It's made of cement!

AGAMEMNON
Let's go, let's win, let's go!

CHORUS stirs sluggishly.

WOMAN THREE
Wait! You can't take all the men.

MENELEUS
Hey, sister, you don't like men anyway, right?

WOMAN THREE
Wrong!

MAN THREE
I think we'd win if we took the women.
No one in his right mind would shoot
A young woman.

AGAMEMNON
For discipline, we must separate the sexes.
They weren't getting along, anyway.

MANY

Says who?

MENELEUS

And we're giving everyone a divorce
Now, to save fuss later.

WOMAN FOUR

We'll settle our own differences, thanks.

MENELEUS

Look, you women libbers wanted jobs.
Now you've got all the jobs.

AGAMEMNON

A woman's place is in the tank shop.

WOMAN ONE

This is not what I wanted.

CHORUS fidgets grimly.

AGAMEMNON

Where is the spirit of Superwar?

MAN TWO

It died with the fascists.

MENELEUS takes AGAMEMNON aside.

AGAMEMNON

They won't do what I tell them.

MENELEUS

Don't worry, don't think, don't plan.
Let money wreak its will.
Trust only to money, and all else will die.
Superwar will come.

WOMAN FIVE

We don't really have a king.
We're still free to do our thing.

WOMAN SIX

We could work the earth in peace,
If we use our elbow-grease.

AGAMEMNON

What do I do?

MENELEUS

Brother!
I've had a vision!
I can't believe it.

AGAMEMNON

What?

MENELEUS

Maybe I read it in a book.

AGAMEMNON

What?

MENELEUS

You, great lord of men,
Must kill your daughter, Iphigenia.
You must slash her bare heart on the altar
With a long knife and stuff her heart
With a handful of dollars.
And then the winds will favor war.

AGAMEMNON

I don't think I have a daughter.

MENELEUS

It's the best I can do.

AGAMEMNON

Iphigenia? Iphigenia?

WOMAN FOUR

There's no one here by that name.

AGAMEMNON (to WOMAN FIVE)

You can be Iphigenia, tragic
And immortal at my altar.

WOMAN FIVE

That's no altar. That's a cement tank.
I'm not going.

AGAMEMNON (to IPHIGENIA)

You! You can be the sacrifice!

*IPHIGENIA - that is, WOMAN SEVEN -
steps forward slowly and gravely.*

IPHIGENIA

Now comes the high pity of tragic
Recognition.

WOMAN SIX

I thought she might.

IPHIGENIA

Someone must know that she is Iphigenia,
And know that she must die on the altar
Of nations, and dying, she must bless
The war-state that ennobles her blood.

*IPHIGENIA walks slowly to the tank.
She pulls out a knife.*

AGAMEMNON

Oh, no. She's gonna do it.

MENELEUS

Do the job.

IPHIGENIA climbs onto the tank as altar.

IPHIGENIA

Anything for drama!

Maybe dead I can get parts

As murdered women in all the new movies.

Is my agent here? Kill me!

WOMAN SIX

I've already seen this movie!

CHORUS

We've already seen this movie!

*IPHIGENIA, on the tank that is her altar,
holds her knife above her.*

IPHIGENIA

Sing, if you will, after the hours of

Prayer and honor the stranger

Gods who march late and pound through

The kitchens. Their daughters too name the

Ancients. They are bathed with flute girls

For the late banquet. They too know sacrifice

And the offerings of words in waves

Before dinner: Almighty the iron sprawl

And the ores washed in tears, gold and

Fragrant oils. Stand the condemned in a field

Of names and grant them a release,

To dance in their homes with abandon.

With product and the right wires pulled,

Their hard new voices use the radio.

IPHIGENIA throws down her knife.

The war winds won't rise! The gods forbid war!

WOMAN THREE

The war winds won't rise!

WOMAN FOUR

The gods forbid war!

WOMAN TWO

The king of cars is not the lord of Americans!

CHORUS

Hooray!

ODYSSEUS leaps up.

He takes the spear and shield from

AGAMEMNON and throws them aside.

MAN ONE

Odysseus!

WOMAN ONE

You were dead.

ODYSSEUS

Like I said - everything is play!

Not quite! It was horrible!

CHORUS

What's it like, when you're dead?

ODYSSEUS

I went to hell and felt too much, awful,
too hard, too fast. All of history was there.

I lived with the ghosts.

Everyone circled, mumbling blood.

I found Achilles, who was sad

and said death is very boring,

Just memories, on and on, the same thing
And now with no hope of redemption.
He said to live simply
And never go off to war. This from Achilles!
I thought hard too, and painfully.
Our time is urgent and maybe too late.
The new words, that overthrow the rule
Of force, will take so long
To understand, but they are
Already among us,
Drawn into life to face the new terrors.
All we can do
Is keep the peace in our generation,
And so give ourselves into the future
And so raise history out of hell
And see this in our lives.

IPHIGENIA gets off the tank and rejoins the others.

WOMAN SIX

What do we do with Agamemnon?

ODYSSEUS

Send him home with unbloodied hands.

AGAMEMNON

If I go home a loser,
Clytemnestra will kill me.

ODYSSEUS

No! You'll find peace.
The chain of murder is broken.

WOMAN FIVE

Odysseus is not the heir of Agamemnon.
We will all decide.

WOMAN ONE

We are all the heirs of the gods
And bless a new world.

MENELEUS

I'll get right to work.

AGAMEMNON

I'm sorry. Smashing the world
Was just a bad dream I had. Forget it.

MAN ONE

We have energy enough for a lifetime,
Each of us, in every limb.

*AGAMEMNON and MENELEUS fade away
by exiting backward, waving good-bye.
ODYSSEUS waves to them.*

ODYSSEUS (singing)

Dead powers cry from their graves!
Too bad for them, tra la!

IPHIGENIA (singing)

The future's ours! We can be saved!
Hooray for life!

CHORUS (singing)

Tra la!

CHORUS dances.

- The End -

Clectra

ELECTRA

An excerpt from *Electra* had a staged reading at The Ritz, an art exhibit by Artists Collaborative (Colab) in Washington D.C. in April 1983,
with Ilona Granet as Electra.

Its first performance was at the Terminal, an art exhibit in the former Brooklyn Army Terminal, New York City in October 1983, with the following cast:

Electra - Sharon Take
Chorus - Marjorie Ohle
Clytemnestra - Susan Riskin
Orestes - David Stocker

Painted set - John Shaw
Stage furniture - Frank Shifreen
Lighting - Michael Curtin
Stage Manager - Marjorie Ohle
Assistant Stage Manager - Dave Lancet

Directed by Kevin O'Brien
Produced by William Considine

A video by Franz Vila of the performance, entitled *Electra: The Furies*, with music by Christian Marclay, was first shown at the Red Bar and on a Manhattan Cable Television public access channel in January 1984.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Electra
Clytemnestra
Orestes
Chorus

SCENE

The tomb of the warlord Agamemnon

The tomb of the warlord Agamemnon. ELECTRA is onstage

ELECTRA

The tragic cycle turns,
turns faster, dizzy to
destroy!
It's down to us, the terrified,
in our generation, now,
in our moral life to
destroy war!
For me, the charge is total.
Agamemnon! Warlord
of the West! Father!
I am Electra!
I'm stuck at your tomb.
I'm here to pray for you,
to you.
They will not let us rest
in peace.
Settle in the earth,
be stone forever.
Let your war-spirit go,
out of this tomb and gone.
Let the new world
blossom with spring, ending
one more winter.
You were the great destroyer
of cities. Help me
destroy war!
I'm powerless now!
It's too much, too late.
Hope is impossible!

CHORUS enters.

CHORUS

Don't cry, Electra!
It breaks my heart.

ELECTRA

These males lusting
war go boom, the big boss
apes strutting air of command
with big bucks for
their iron warheads,
they'll kill us in
Bible-ending glory!

CHORUS

Cool out, right? Stay cool.
Since the storming
of Europe and the bombs
that shook Asia,
everything is cold
on the brink,
but still it's shock-time, right,
to work hard calmly for peace.

ELECTRA

How many wars could you watch
last night on television?
The tanks and bombs, the refugees,
massacres, blasts, the dead, our world!

CHORUS

Use your body's indifference
and appetites,
use the sunshine's indifference,
go on, work for peace!

ELECTRA

Don't we all?

CHORUS

But you ask too much,
you make life impossible!

ELECTRA

So much has to change!

CHORUS

A woman governs the earth now.

ELECTRA

Ah, Clytemnestra!

CHORUS

Maybe
we'll persuade her gently,
in time. You most of all
can help her change.

ELECTRA

Yes, because I'm her
daughter. She hates me!

CHORUS

You scare your mother
with your visions.

ELECTRA

All Clytemnestra
knows is tragedy.
Tragic fate is her noble mask.
Her great beauty is a mask
made of wonderful deaths.
Tragic fate must die!
I have to replace my mother.
I know!
It seems so sick, psychotic.

CHORUS

It's a simple change,
in beauty over the years.

ELECTRA

We don't have years.
You know it's too late.
Don't you?

CHORUS

I know, yes!
All will die
soon of the tensions.

ELECTRA

I can't let that happen.
I have to make time.

CHORUS

I pray there's time.
I pray for you.
You're lost to the tensions.

ELECTRA

Weep at the meaningless tomb.
Politics as usual is doom.
The only way to save mankind
is to change the structure of our mind,
too late, impossible, mad I know,
but so flow
the currents of an electrified soul.
The moral life rides madness to its goal.

CHORUS

Let's surrender our pride
in genius visions God will chide
and punish. Cry to the church
to guide our desperate search.
Only the past holds enough time
to condemn the crime
and evil sin: any order
to war.

ELECTRA

I'll take up anything at hand,
God, love, a rock band,
and tear at it like an ape
sniffing for food in any shape,
but they all break up.
Take love. I didn't make up
that rough emotion. I did take up
its delusions. You wake with a cold eye
and shallow breath,
gasping in a world ordered in death
wish, where love too has to die.

CHORUS

Everything is this and yet
that. Our Western culture
circles the earth like a vulture,
and its returning cycles set
the stage for new life.
Our ancient meanings fall apart.
Their nonsense occupies the heart
with signs of hope. Logic is a lie.
Love takes parting as its wife.
From dreams, we wake up
into nightmares. Industries shake up
our lives. Nothing is at hand. We try!
We try! Our culture feeds on the vultures.

ELECTRA

And so I wrap myself in solitude
that deepens every day alone and silent.
Ever more grim, more quiet, more sure,
I sicken, age, current
with the culture's death convulsions.
I'm from a house of solitude,
a family of madness, and I grow into it,
neglected and poor, my fate,
the daughter of the war-king,

searching my place and culture in outcries.
The fates have changed. All I know is
my choice of a place at the iron tomb,
and I give myself into the darkness
that was given to me.

CHORUS

You've closed into solitude,
lost to us,
and given into dangers,
as you say, into madness.
We have no hopes for you.
Good luck! You make me nervous.
You've always been cold,
self-absorbed and driven.
We like people who like
to go to the movies with us
and chat away the night.
We don't have time to...

CLYTEMNESTRA enters.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Today there are many
fine films at popular prices.

ELECTRA

You killed Agamemnon!

CLYTEMNESTRA

The warlord had to die!

ELECTRA

Home from the war came
the smashers of fascists,
to wrench iron from the
earth into goods.

CLYTEMNESTRA

But the blood stayed inside
inside them and smelled
like whiskey and vomit.

ELECTRA

First you castrated him.
It was always money,
wasn't it, Mother? Money!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Where was the fruit
of the sacrifice?

ELECTRA

On Sunday and at dusk,
there were nice rides in the car.

CLYTEMNESTRA

My washing machines
filled a fallout shelter.
How could I take the end?
So much to be afraid of
drew adrenalin.
My thyroid swelled.
In my neck
I made energy.
It filled even my eyes
with the glare of
suspicion.
And there was a lot
to suspect about the lord
of men, Agamemnon.

CHORUS

I don't ask about mysteries
or which was the murder.

I know the war machines
groan with becoming more.
Where is the peace
that goes with the land?
When's the big occasion?

ELECTRA

The groans of the poor
who have to live without
jobs are the music
she sells to
hide her money supply,
and that's in guns.
Her blood money
gives no ending to
the death of Agamemnon.
If she can think
of more enormous war, I can
think, "Pig for slaughter."
Your neck on the line.
Who will be the next to kill?
Orestes will kill you first.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I think she's hung herself.

ELECTRA

Orestes is savage.
He mates likes a bull.
He hates women, because of
what you did.
You killed our father
in a poisonous net of
home presumptions,
comforts at costs
in the real world.
You hacked off his head
on the tile floor in

the bathroom, to seem
bigger than a poor man
and the heir of Agamemnon.

CHORUS

The warlord had to die.
He died, so forget it.

ELECTRA

Violence fills my head
with grim mouthings.
What will trigger peace?
All is corrupt,
distorting all love,
all cruel, all domination,
all distorted by
tensions of destruction.
All the world is in the
iron tomb of Agamemnon.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Get with it.
You're out of your time
and in personal financial trouble.
With your connections,
you could get a new job for a woman,
in a defense industry.
But no, you're a neurotic,
a disgrace. Not all the world
is in an iron tomb.
What a sadly revealing slogan.
This is just your father's tomb,
and he was a drunk.
We disagree about the way
to peace.
You think in totalities,
like the metaphysics of men.

Transform yourself, take a lover,
find peace in bed and at the table,
in friends and children, like a woman.
All you have to do is work with me.

ELECTRA

I'll wait for Orestes.

CLYTEMNESTRA

That's pretty old-fashioned,
waiting for a man
to topple your mother.

ELECTRA

I wait in the rise of women
the most likely source
of basic change.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Most new women accommodate,
like most old men.

ELECTRA

I can wait.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I'll let Orestes kill me.
If you hate me, I might
as well be dead, except
I won't let you
control me like that.

ELECTRA

I don't want him
to kill you!
Look, I agree!
That angry Agamemnon
killed my sister!

Iphigenia!
To make war!

CLYTEMNESTRA

But Orestes will be
forgiven for killing me.
It's unfair.
I'll change it. It's a myth.
I'll kill the bastard.
Aegisthus was my love
and so the true father,
not Agamemnon, that
god-big pretender.
Stop mourning the man.

ELECTRA

Why mourn?
The earth will shine on, blue
with gray, slow, swirling mist
in other heavens,
the most beautiful planet,
with or without our life.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Life will go
to the place where all
the men have gone, where
death together is more sacred
than a good meal.
That's where Aegisthus is gone,
abandoning me, to save
his own skin.
And I'm to be the state sacrifice,
killed by my son Orestes
to make men the most?
No way! The cub.
I'll snuff him out.

Darling daughter, don't
say no all the way
to the end of my life.

ELECTRA

When you die,
the tragic cycle will end.
Orestes will be forgiven.
I know it's not fair.
But just you go, just you go.

CLYTEMNESTRA

This time the cycle will end
when I kill Orestes.
That will be peace at last.
If you don't love me,
you must kill me.
No more Orestes.
Do what you want or shut up.

CLYTEMNESTRA offers ELECTRA a knife.

ELECTRA

Make me the sacrifice,
so my cries might reach
through concrete cathedrals
to interrupt the civilized
party talk of creation.

CLYTEMNESTRA keeps the knife.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You're stronger than the giants,
who were buried by the gods.
And the gods have fled
my on-coming Furies,
who will haunt even Orestes
if I die.

CHORUS

If the Furies get loose
from deep in the earth,
then will be vengeance
on the gods in one
night of terror.

MESSENGER enters.

MESSENGER

Is this the ancient house of the warlord Atreus?

CHORUS

It is.

MESSENGER

At last! Is the queen here?
Clytemnestra?

CLYTEMNESTRA

I am Clytemnestra.

MESSENGER

I have urgent news.
To the point: Orestes is dead.

SILENCE.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Who sent you?
Who are you working for?

MESSENGER

I promised Orestes
I'd find you.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What did he say?

MESSENGER

Please wish him peace,
as he wanted peace with you.
These are his ashes.
He was killed in Asia
and with him many hopes
burned in napalm.
I've wandered the earth
with his remains
for years searching for the
sky-lit house of Atreus.

MESSENGER places an urn at CLYTEMNESTRA'S feet.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Is this Orestes?

MESSENGER

I saw him die slowly
in awful pain, bitter.
His death was heroic.
He bled a few quarts.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Prove it's Orestes.

MESSENGER

This is his ring, his father's ring,
Agamemnon's ring.

MESSENGER gives ring to Clytemnestra.

ELECTRA

Ashes!

MESSENGER

We passed through here once,
crossed these bridges to the sea

to be stationed abroad,
to hold the shattered center
of the West. Backwards in time,
he bled like men
on the barbed wire,
storming the shores of Europe
to break the fascists.
Backwards he bled like men
in no man's land
charging machine guns.
A war to end war!
He was torn apart like boys
in civil war
to end a form of slavery.
He was scalped, taking the land,
in desperate magic of the natives.
He froze in revolution
to free what? The new world!
He died as the generations of men die,
like flowers in the seasons,
in blood spill into
the earth of our breed.

CHORUS

So many millions died
fighting the fury
of tyrannies applied
in our century.

Hail them, the fighters!
They weren't victims.
Their souls are lighter
than our brooding hymns.

They spring from the earth
as each generation
gives way to birth
in regeneration,

with their return.
Undeclared, they return.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I've lost a son.
His name was an ax at my heart
and bitterly I'd lost my love.
It's easy to despair,
because our despair is close
to the facts and sees the outcome
even of our surges of enthusiasm.
So, let's despair.
As the gods fled, they left us
only their lingering in words
that call out of me now,
words like "pray,"
in confusion.
Pray my power
keeps the peace a while.
Leave us to mourn the fate
of our family, come back bloodless.
Build a tomb for Orestes.
We'll build many iron tombs
to cover the earth, prove our might
and remorseless will. We'll terrify
our enemies. Go! Build tombs!

ELECTRA

We've not given up
on life beyond terror.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Me too! Someday we'll see.
Meanwhile, there are jobs building tombs.
Go, build your tombs, and give
this messenger nothing,
to help him rely on himself.

For bringing such bad news,
he's lucky to live.

CHORUS

We're sorry with you
in more grief unearned by
the royal mother.

CLYTEMENSTRA

Yes, thank you.

CHORUS

The death of the son
can mean the end
of the tragic cycle.
Wasn't that the promise
that was called the Redemption?

CHORUS and MESSENGER exit.

ELECTRA

Do you remember much about Orestes?

CLYTEMNESTRA

That damn nurse
stole him from me!
She didn't trust me
and my faith in the man
Aegisthus. Orestes grew up
somewhere else and died.
And foreigners and the gods
too spoke evil of me to the boy.

ELECTRA

Maybe he'll rise from the dead.
Don't these feel like the days
of the dreadful judgment?

CLYTEMNESTRA opens the door of the tomb.

CLYTEMNESTRA

The myths are dead.
Dead is complete, dead.
Even the word of Jesus
did what, finally?
Change the phrases and forms
of prayer? Even the word of
Jesus couldn't begin
to end war in two thousand years.

ELECTRA

You don't really believe
terror will keep peace.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I believe in my breakfast.
I make warheads for war.
There will be a war,
disease, starvation, bugs,
locusts! Grab what you can
in this life. Eat up.
Won't you come have
dinner with me?

ELECTRA

What are you doing?

CLYTEMNESTRA

From now on,
I'll live in the iron tomb.
Soon we'll all live in iron
tombs. It'll be nice in there.
We can mourn the loss of our love,
in private.

ELECTRA

Mother, I'm afraid.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then take my hand.

ELECTRA

I won't go in there!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then you'll keep your nightmares alone.

ELECTRA

You make those nightmares!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Come to me for comfort.

I want you to.

I'll keep the door open.

ELECTRA

Close it! Let me be!

CLYTEMNESTRA

You can mourn a while for Orestes.

Then there's no more mourning
outside my home, where our enemies
can see, only within, with me.

CLYTEMNESTRA exists, center, into the tomb.

She closes the heavy doors.

ELECTRA is alone onstage with the urn.

ELECTRA

Orestes is dead!

And all my hopes for his return!

I'll fulfill the myth myself, then,
and make the new, the just order,
somehow.

Now my time of tears must die.
Who am I now, if not the woman mourning?
I am the woman mourning!
Electra. Abandon the name now.
Hard to outgrow so much of me.
Electra, modern, the pulse of the force field.
Electra, the synapse snap at the nerves,
the sterile mother of protons, neutrons,
photons, electrons, the strong force, charm,
dark matter, accelerating,
attraction and repulsion, power,
power lines, power plants, current, flow,
boiling water, radioactive core,
fission, fusion, warhead, critical mass,
chain reaction, fire blast, shock war:
Electra is released!

MESSENGER enters.

MESSENGER

Electra?

ELECTRA

No, no more. Electra's gone.

MESSENGER

I want to see her.

ELECTRA

She's vaporized, an ion.

You can't see her.

What she had of herself was old
names, roles. She stripped them away -
just an orbit of feelings
and cloud chamber tracings.

MESSENGER

Is she alive?

ELECTRA

She was out of her time
and disintegrated under great pressures.

MESSENGER

Is she alive?

ELECTRA

She's every living thing.
She's the wave and particle
of everything. Can you feel her tensions?

MESSENGER

Is Electra dead?

ELECTRA

Even the living are nearly dead.

MESSENGER

Who are you? You scorn
questions of life and death.

ELECTRA

Electra's dead.
She called it release.

MESSENGER

Who are you? You hold
the ashes of Orestes.

ELECTRA

I'm the keeper of dead spirits,
and I'm the dead man's sister.

MESSENGER

Iphigenia? Is it you?

ELECTRA

She's in Hollywood.
Please let me alone.
My brother's dead.

MESSENGER

If you're a sister
of Orestes, I must talk with you.
I've carried his ashes
for years, wandering.

ELECTRA

Thank you! Forgive me.
In so much loss, I win at little games.
In so little meaning, I hide in words.

MESSENGER

I have to give the last words
of Orestes to Electra.

ELECTRA

Then Electra's alive. Broken or growing,
what does it matter, I'm Electra.

MESSENGER

You're Electra?

ELECTRA

Yes.

MESSENGER

How can I know?

ELECTRA

Everyone knows I'm Electra.
Ask anyone.

MESSENGER

I can't ask anyone.
I need to talk with you in private.

ELECTRA

I'm anxious to hear
the last words of Orestes.

MESSENGER

Orestes has not yet had the last word.

ELECTRA

And will his ghost walk?
Will it march for peace?

MESSENGER

As I cry out for peace, so will Orestes.

ELECTRA

Don't let mystic talk diminish his death.

MESSENGER

Orestes is alive.

ELECTRA

Where?

MESSENGER

I am Orestes.

ELECTRA

You? Are you Orestes?

MESSENGER (ORESTES)

Can you be Electra? What joy!

ELECTRA and ORESTES embrace.

—
///77///

ELECTRA

Yes, it's perfect! I'm holding you!

ORESTES

I see you, hold you, hear you!

ELECTRA

But are you Orestes?
Why'd you lie? Why'd
you say you were dead?

ORESTES

If Clytemnestra knows
I've come back,
she'll have me murdered.

ELECTRA

She killed our father.

ORESTES

I didn't come for revenge.

ELECTRA

Then why are you here?
Prove you're Orestes.

ORESTES

Shall I talk of our childhood and
all the times you silently
stared at the summer leaves
and tried to imagine, total death,
nuclear war, all at once, and why?
Do you remember our civil defense drills,
down to the school basement in lines?
Do you remember the air raid siren,
tested every Monday at eleven a.m.,
from the roof of the firehouse,
and the strange meaning imagined

all the time in airplanes overhead,
total death, nuclear war, and why?
And the radio: "Beeeee...
Had this been an actual alert..."

ELECTRA

"You would have been instructed..."

ORSTES

"To turn your dial to 740..."

ELECTRA

"Or 1240 kilowatts for further
instructions!" It is you!

ORESTES

And we have to be quiet
and plan. We must act
now, no delay.

ELECTRA

Clytemnestra!

ORESTES

Killing won't end killing.
Laying down arms
will change the truth.
It will break
the spell of blood.

ELECTRA

Did a god speak to you?

ORESTES

In a broken grove
across a river far from here,
in my strange awakening
everything was stone

making steel.
Statues commanded me
in red gleam of unholy
night fires and clangor of the vast
old mills along the river
making danger.
But it was the dawn!
And the sun-god Apollo
said to me calmly,
"You have obeyed the gods
too long for our love.
Now you must be punished
with our last commandment:
Make peace."
And I decided to give up to
Clytemnestra this knife
with which the fates would
have me kill her.

ORESTES shows ELECTRA the knife.

ELECTRA

She's closed in the tomb
and speaks of the Furies.
She swears she'll snuff
you out, kill you!

ORESTES

Then I will be
the sacrifice of change.

ELECTRA

We don't need martyrs.
Listen to me:
there isn't much blood.
Too many must be torn
in the dumb search for
appeasement of blood talk.

ORESTES

I'm the son of Agamemnon.
These have become my days.
I am prepared to die.
We have to act now.
Clytemnestra has to suspect me.

ELECTRA

Agamemnon had just stepped
into a bath from a journey
of a thousand miles home,
when she tapped on the door
and stepped in to kill him.

ORESTES

Call in the people,
to do more than witness
the risk of peace,
to share in it.

ELECTRA

May the future believe
in prevailing over
the murder madness, as it will.
Let's begin the change.

ORESTES

I'll surrender the knife
in front of the people.

ELECTRA

And I'll beg forgiveness
for all my threats.

ELECTRA calls offstage.

Orestes is here, alive!
He calls to the tomb, to
Clytemnestra. Orestes
offers peace!

ORESTES

This reeks of incest taboo
and sleazy theories.
Why do I always talk
of the good and peace?
Those are delusions of the weak,
that disable their lives.
People are brutal, stupid.
Peace is prim talk of losers.
Down into darkest daydreams
of glory and world domination,
no less, sinks my brain,
just a twist of the chains
of pornographic domination
masked with good words to whip
all outcries into meanings,
torture my pain into peace,
my kingdom of release.

CLYTEMNESTRA enters from the tomb.

CHORUS enters.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Stranger, do you have another message,
or do those wild eyes mean treachery?

ORESTES

I'm not a stranger anymore.
I'm your son Orestes.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I see that now.

ORESTES

I haven't come to kill you.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I won't let you kill me.

ORESTES

I don't want to kill you.
Mother, I've returned.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Just don't come closer.

ORESTES

I'm glad to see you.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You lied. You said to
my face you were dead.

ORESTES

I was afraid of the fear
of the old fates of murder.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Be afraid of them still.
I am.

ORESTES

What died was the myth
of Orestes
the princely killer.
All meaning changes.
Look around you.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Dreamers have talked before.

ORESTES

Their talk accelerates
into new meanings.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Only in the depths of dreams.

ORESTES

From Apollo, I got
the vision to see
through the spell
of our house of warlords.

CLYTEMNESTRA

My power is more than a spell.

ORESTES

Your spell has to go into the past.

CLYTEMNESTRA

You did, you came to take
my power, you bastard.

ORESTES

I came to give up the knife of
the on-going revenge.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Did Apollo promise
you victory?

ORESTES

He promised me hardships
in an old-fashioned fable
of pain and moral endurance.
I gave you the ashes
of the old Orestes.

ELECTRA

I won't threaten you
anymore, Mother.
Take this peace offering,
breaking the chain of murders.

CLYTEMNESTRA

And the tomb will be empty
of your screams?

ELECTRA

To make room for
redeeming silence.

ORESTES

I'll relinquish my knife.

CLYTEMNESTRA

This is your only knife?

ORESTES

It was a gift of my father,
loot from the rubble of homes.
Here, in the tomb of Agamemnon,
I renounce the throne of blood,
I denounce the throne of terror.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I see no thrones.
You're an isolated beast,
an assassin of order.
You're mentally ill,
wanting a world
all different. That's ill,
face it. Get away,
before you hurt yourself badly.
Electra, save your brother,
ranting in our house of madness.

ELECTRA

I'll stand beside him.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Did I hurt you so much,
does this life so overwhelm you,
are you so inept, that you flee
to dreams and a quick death
given to dreaming?
Yes, for your protection,
my son, put down the knife.
Put it at my feet, yes,
make the ceremony.

CHORUS

We were always promised
this return. But
the earth does not tremble.
It rolls in a vacuum.
All we can say is
our minds are manipulated.
If this is the day of peace,
I'm here finally to know it.

ORESTES kneels at CLYTEMNESTRA'S feet.

ORESTES

We can rule together.
My destiny is
to make peace
with you, mother.

ORESTES puts the knife at her feet.

CLYTEMNESTRA stabs him in the neck with her knife.

ORESTES falls dead.

CLYTEMNESTRA

It takes more than a gesture
even from Orestes
to break the iron chain.

CHORUS

Quick to die!
A fool in a hurry!
Isolated!

ELECTRA

Useless!
We don't need martyrs!
For one minute
we all had peace.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Only the dead know peace.

ELECTRA

It's madness, stop!

CLYTEMNESTRA

I'll have no more of your
screaming witness.
Won't you join me
in tears? Won't you rejoice?
We're free of that terror.
Won't you ever comfort me?

ELECTRA

What was purged in
this blood ritual
of god-shaming sacrifice?
May the spectacle of
sacrifice satisfy
the guilts and thrills
of barbaric rites
and bring the gods among us
so we can be cleansed of
the blood curses of our
war ancestors.

ELECTRA goes to the body of ORESTES.

CLYTEMNESTRA stabs her.

ELECTRA falls dead.

CLYTEMNESTRA

This is the sacrifice,
appropriate to the gods,
that will call up the Furies.

CHORUS

You killed your children!

CLYTEMNESTRA

It was the enemies and
the fates of the age
doomed to self-destruction
that killed them.

CHORUS

The power and the structure of power
of the war-murder house of the war-king
Atreus is dead. Agamemnon is dead.
You must give up war power.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What is there to find,
that means redemption? Don't we know
already there's no source
that will cleanse,
only the cycle,
never broken, still tragic,
now dooming the race?

— *CHORUS goes to the dead bodies.*

CHORUS

Weight, heavy matter,
called into language,
closed into circles of hell,
the dizzy meaning nothing,
outcries for redemption,
mass of the ancients, sacrifice,
all sacred and strange,
the words enduring,
the gods enduring in words
after their deaths to mean
only pleasure: mysteries
of the resurrection,
the truth of the faith threatened.

CLYTEMNESTRA kills CHORUS.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Dreamers! This is the age of
final solutions. I have my rights,
my power, my visions, my faith,
my anger. I am the stronger.
I have the will. I'll rule
the earth in it eternal image.

CLYTEMNESTRA steps forward to pray.

Lost goddess of grains
and of justice, you, always mourning
for your daughter gone to hell!
Hecate! Hell's damn mother,
goddess of witches!
End my human being, make me
the earth, angry and abused,
spinning the fate of her scornful
children, the restless, indifferent humans!

The earth groans in its spinning.
Dizzy, the seas slosh.
Nations take hold on the grinning
death head turning
in curved space, beginning
the end with sterile machines.

Now fear
the monumental
living rage of the Furies.
The Furies were queens of
the earth before the gods.
Blocked from this world,
their soul is the law: guilt!
They screech like bats at
the three-faced altar.
Their tongue is wrath.
Blood mumbles from their mouths.
They open out of hell
in vengeance, the Furies!

CLYTEMNESTRA exits.

The End

Lincoln in Queens

LINCOLN IN QUEENS

was first presented as a poetry reading with slides by William Considine at Solidaridad Humana on June 12, 1988, in a theater festival curated by Nina Zivancevic and Carlo Stephanos. The reading was later presented at Dixon Place and The Knitting Factory, all in downtown Manhattan.

A video with music by Gerry Hemingway was produced in January 1990 by Leigh Block and William Considine, using public access facilities at Station QPTV, Queens, of Time Warner Cable, and by audio producer Gerry Hemingway, using his studio.

Consulting producer, Jane Polisar. Artwork by Deborah Gans and photographs by William Considine.

The video appeared on cable television in Manhattan and Queens, and in the Videotech series at The Knitting Factory.

It is now available online, and can be found at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvD2qJ9oshE>

The audio track is on the CD, *An Early Spring*, from *Fast Speaking Music*.

LINCOLN IN QUEENS

Lincoln in Queens
is a tale.

This tale has seven
segments, called:

Iron
Unemployed
A Vision
Depression
Journey
The Furies
Offering

IRON

Both my grandfathers worked in the mills.
Steelworkers.
My father was an unemployed
steelworker when I was born.

The clangor and night fires of the vast
old mills along the rivers
swore to me in fearful curses
that the earth is iron and poor.
Steel mills burned the earth in my eyes.
Long trains loaded with coal or slag made my home
on a hill over the mill. Orange smoke from blast
furnaces billowed above Steel Valley.
Polluted rivers ran yellow and sluggish.
Men ate their earnings from a lunchbox.

I am of the race of iron,
still living in the Iron Age.
Do I have to work at a blast furnace,
do I have to make steel
in a big, barn-like foundry
between railroad tracks and the river?

The oldest poems that survive
condemn the race of iron
to work and waste.

"Our hearts are owned forever by war
and the war debts of our fathers,"
chanted the savages.

"The people of iron destroy.
We tear and burn the earth."

So we dreamed our fate into development.
Or so the first poems say.
The author of "The Birth of Gods" says that
in his second song, "The Work Day."
I don't believe it. I think it's primitive.

In World War Two, my father blew up
ships on the huge moon
reflected on the Pacific Ocean.
He was a bombardier, in a black-painted
night raider, a Navy plane with pontoons.
They hid by day in bays of New Guinea.
After the war, he got a job in the mill,
but the work was dirty and hot,
with many lay-offs.

My father left the mill.
He got a job with the Fire Department.
He drove a red fire truck into danger.
He drove the pump truck at Number Four Station.

I inherit fire-fighting too
as my job in Iron City.
It's a strenuous confusion.
The Iron Age rages with furnace fires.

UNEMPLOYED

My job is the most evil ever,
according to Plato. I write poems
about politics, not
from logic but from inspiration.
I excite myself and spurt disruptive
fantasies all over the social fabric,
in danger to the state and order.
But here's the irony,
iron-ee, iron I, the eye run of insight:
I dream of hidden logic.
I speak of ancient things, because
I search them for inspiration.
They are the wild wine I share with you.
I violate another of Plato's rules
for Western Civilization: I should not know
so goddamn much about the rules.
I am of the race of iron. In a republic,
we must be taught with myths to do the work.
We must believe we were born in the earth
to work with dirt. We should only hear
about daylight from people of gold.
I have no gold in my nature, just red dirt.
With a resume like that, I was of course
out of work, like my father at my birth.

I was at the time of this story living
near a river and the ruins of factories,
in Queens.
I was an unemployed lecturer in law.
I lived on unemployment benefits.
Each Thursday I reported to the state
on my efforts to find a new job.

One day in August I walked
to the State Office Building through the bleak,
hot, shadeless sameness of industrial Queens.
I had to watch out for thundering big trucks,
full of demolished debris.

I thought about
money, jobs, women, big trucks, dramatic
poetry, the landscape, the great city,
my unhappy childhood, love, abandonment,
the arms race and the worldwide crisis
of production.

What I resolved was this:
I would keep writing tragic plays, but
I would not get hit by a truck,
get to the unemployment office safely,
get a job, find a woman,
and fall in love even unwisely,
but as soon as possible.

A VISION

I was on my way to sign for my last
unemployment check.
I walked past auto body shops, past car wrecks
dumped on sidewalks outside open garages.
I walked by the ornate old courthouse
and onto a traffic island
named for a corporal killed in a war.
On that island of concrete in the streets
beyond the courthouse stood a man,
dressed all in black old clothes in the sun.
He was tall, lean and stooped. He stared at me.

I thought he was homeless and needed money.
He pointed at me and spoke:

"You have obeyed the gods
too long for our love.
Now you must be punished
with our last commandment:
Make peace!"

I stopped, astounded, for this man
had recited very well
verses from my play, "Electra."
He had played Apollo in a vision!
I turned about; no one else was around,
no one staring at this chanting man.
Still pointing, he went on:

"You must set off at once
into impassable solitude
to find the Furies."

"I am the master of Furies," I snapped
at this insolent stranger. He snapped back:

"The Furies will haunt you"

"Who are you?" I cried,
suddenly scared of the Furies.

He just looked back at me.
He looked like Lincoln, but couldn't be,
not back from the dead in Queens.
Yes, he was Abe Lincoln! The Emancipator.
He spoke softly, with quiet authority.

"I abolished slavery through war.
You must begin to abolish war.
War is no more natural than slavery.
The chain of war was dug from the earth
by slaves, and it is made of iron.
It's time to shut down the iron age
and demolish a lot of useless things,
like war!"

I was astonished by this vision
and his vision of peace.
"How?"

"You must find the Furies!
Alecto, Megaera, Tisiphone!
The female Furies ruled before the gods.
They are forgotten and angry.
They still feed our brain stems.
The law of the Furies is guilt.
The justice of Furies is terror.

"If we can free and appease the Furies,
the super spell on our minds will break.

The war state will crumble.
There will be good
new jobs in a free spirit of work.

"And you must find the Furies."

"But ... the Furies are un-American,"
I cried. "They're archaic female powers.
They're ancient Greek ...
They're no way to communicate today.
No one will understand me when I talk
about Furies. They're like witches.
They're not the faith of Lincoln."

Lincoln spoke of God like a lost lover:

"I lived in faith in the old-fashioned fable
of suffering and moral endurance.
We purged the blood-curse on our nation:
slavery! Now you can escape
the iron shackles of war,
the fable of blood atonement,
the faith of Furies.
Your hope is in creation.
I've given you a job!
Prophecy, abolish war!"

Lincoln turned away and entered
a grimy garage where men looked back at me
with anger at my staring.
I called, "President Lincoln! Wait!
Please, tell me a joke!"

Lincoln came out of the dark garage
where a radio blared. He laughed.
I was glad to see him smile, finally.

"You know how long a person's legs must be,"
he said. "Long enough to reach the ground.
But how long must a person's arms reach?"

"Far enough to touch the stars," I said at once.

"Far enough to touch the people you love."
Lincoln turned and walked into the garage,
and men pulled down the clamoring, blank
metal door that gleamed silver in the harsh sun.

DEPRESSION

I told my girlfriend
Lincoln himself ordered me
to set off at once into impassable
solitude. Right away she left me.
My job was impossible.
Finding Furies could not end war.
Furies were metaphors, myths.
They were obsolete myths,
no contemporary resonance.
I was trapped in poetic language,
struggling to speak in politics.
I was sure to self-destruct on this mission.
But I searched for the Furies in old books, in
troubled sleep and on my walls and ceiling.
My productivity declined.
I stole my own thoughts from others.
I went out to hear poets
in readings in cafes and bars in slums.
I was out of place in public and retreated.
I lay heart-sick in the fetal position.

I was totally laid-off.
My depression deepened in a worldwide
structure of depression. The spirit of
ego had seized the meaning of work, and
the spirit of work had nothing to do.
I was broke, broken, guilty,
obeying the dead in a futile endeavor
to raise the dawn.

I applied for a job as a judge.
I put on a suit and rode the subway,
as if I had a job. I was happy there.
I realized, I was already in love unwisely.
There was no rush to find love.
She wrote me a letter, just to say
good-bye again. I could read it over and over.
Love would be even better after the iron age.

JOURNEY

Out of a desk drawer, I finally pulled
my credit card, my MasterCard!
I'd saved it from better days
as my last resource till I found work.
I stared at the plastic key to
\$1,000 credit!

I leapt in search of the Furies.
I bought a plane ticket to New Mexico
and flew off at once.
I rented a car with my charge card
and drove into the mountains
of the blood of Christ,
up a winding road beside chasms,
from scrub pine and silvery sage shrubs
through pine forest to the hidden summit
of Los Alamos.

I searched
where men created the atom bomb,
to find the Furies and unlock creation.

Los Alamos was bland on a bright,
steam-shovel leveled mountain top,
planted with grass and suburban structures
around huge, guarded hangars and buildings
for nuclear weapons research.
I drove round and round in a rented car,
watched by guards at the many gates,
with nowhere to stop but a small museum
and a duck pond where the ice house had been,
where they built the bomb.
I found no inspiration in the vast enterprise.
The place made me numb. I had to leave.
I'd thrown away a thousand dollars
I didn't have.

Driving down the mountain, at its base,
in scrub pine and silvery sage shrubs,
I followed signs to cliff dwellings
of vanished Indians. The cliffs were white stone.
Alone, I climbed ladders up a cliff
and sat in a hollow looking south
to the white sands desert of Alamogordo.

Alecto

Megaera

Tisiphone

Where are the Furies?

Hags! Witches!

Old crones of the moon,

withered ancients?

Or young girls from the dawn of humanity?

Or my furious mother?

Dead ten years ...

The Furies chase the damned.

Wasn't my mission to end war,

my trip to this cave,

a mad, haunted flight

of the damned?

My furious mother

sat in the cave beside me.

We looked at each other,

unable to reach each other,

and we cried,

caught together in heavy chains of suicide.

THE FURIES

My mother had worked in a five-and-ten
after high school. Then she got married
to a young veteran who worked in the mill.
I learned words at her feet, learned to read
while she did the ironing
in hissing steam clouds.
She liked to get out, to go bowling
or, in her black dress, to a banquet
of the American Legion or the song club.
Her neck swelled, scaring us all.
Her thyroid pumped adrenaline too fast.
She saw too fiercely too much that made her
miserable, fearful, frantic to escape.
My parents had terrible fights for years.

In a confused and shameful divorce,
she gave up custody of her children.
She found work with a dentist,
but she had cancer and brutal surgery.
She stayed alive for years, on welfare,
chattering non-stop when I visited,
home from college or law school.
Her apartment was closed and stifling.
Her refrigerator held laundry and beer.
The closets held piles of pill bottles.
She left a note when she died.
Maybe she killed herself,
to end her solitary suffering.

Now she sat beside me in a hollow
in a white cliff below Los Alamos.
I said,

"I'm sorry
I've disturbed you in death.
I often dream of you:
confused in my somber dream,
baffled by death,
you shiver and sit down.
You stay,
as if you are home
in a new house, full of fear
you show as nervousness.
You keep making jokes,
nervously.
Taking your hand,
I talk you, elaborately, away.
You take my hand
with fake good humor,
to wander slowly out
of the place, as I let go.
I'm still afraid to keep you.
Our loss of family life
was brutal, but blameless,
I hope.
I'm still mourning,
in my on-going
difficulties in love."

She said,
"You know you left me alone
when I was sick,
when I wanted to live with you."

I said,
"I had to make my own way.
You wanted me to stay in school."

She said,

"But then you threw away
your chances to make good.

Now you sit in a cave as a failure.
Now making your way
is not so very important.
I can live with you now, please."

I held out my hand to her.
She took my hand and got up.
We looked at each other
as if for the last time,
like the last time we saw each other.
I said, "Yes, we do live together."
We embraced, and

I stood alone in a cave
looking south to the white sands
of Alamogordo.

OFFERING

I returned to New York
and took work as an office temp,
humiliated by clerical work
in a Wall Street law firm.

I reflected on my search for the Furies:
spinning circles,
the driven and mad,
pursuing ourselves.
Finding my mother as my Furies
seemed so much a cop-out
on politics, more failure.

Then I knew that voice inside,
haunting my every move,
was the Furies.

I'm at home with Furies.
The Furies press home doubts,
sneering like children
repeating the scorn they heard in their parents.

The Furies accuse
and I answer by shaping peace
in fragments
I must make to be complete.

"Will you make offerings to lost spirits?"
the Furies ask with big, skeptical eyes.

So, I offer this work to lost spirits.
May we make peace as we find them.

conceptual framework

The Furies is an attack in dramatic verse on mythic sources of war and the tragic cycle. What starts in jest and hope becomes tragic and then quite personal. The source work for the cycle is Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, radically revised.

Prologue: Prehistory sets the stage in theater and theory, words from the same root. I returned to the foundational story of Solon in the full-length poetic drama, *Women's Mysteries*.

Agamemnon, King of Cars is a comic goat song; Iphigenia refuses to be sacrificed, Odysseus returns from the underworld to plead for peace, and the chorus decline to go to war. It has roots in street theater, with a nod to a performance I saw of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, though this was never a street piece. The jokes are now untimely, but more serious concerns remain constant.

Electra turns the foretold stories on their head, as Electra and Orestes refuse their parts, leading to new tragedy. Sophocles' *Electra*, with its relentless pacing, was a model for my smaller effort.

Lincoln in Queens is a tale in which Lincoln commands a contemporary poet to go in search of the fabled Furies, to free them and abolish war. It's a tale in seven segments - *Iron, Unemployed, A Vision, Depression, Journey, The Furies*, and *Offering* - ranging from the Rustbelt and lingering wounds of a global war through personal and global depression to a final vision at the white sands of Alamogordo. Its offering must serve humbly in place of *The Eumenides*.

These pieces, produced separately in small venues over a period of years, are brought together here for the first time as a unified series.

I wish to express here my gratitude to the many people who gave of their time so generously to participate in these uncompensated theater productions. The actors, directors and other artists are named in the respective credits. Many were good friends and all were dedicated artists. Thank you.

- William Considine, 2017

william considine : a life as poetics and practice

I was born in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, a steel mill city on the Monongahela River near Pittsburgh. My father was a fireman and did plumbing on the side. My mother cared for three boys and later worked as a dental assistant. I first worked as a helper for my father, later as a caddie and soda jerk.

Love of theater may have come first from middle school experiences writing and staging satirical skits. I remember TV quiz show scandals as one of my comic targets. Perhaps the first poem I engaged, also in middle school, was Whitman's "O Captain! My Captain!" I read Aeschylus' *Oresteia* on my own one summer while still working for my father, in a torn-cover paperback I'd bought for a quarter. I read a lot, already dreaming of writing. A great source for reading was the Carnegie Free Library. In high school, I was on the school newspaper and in speech club and on the debate team, further signs of my continuing interest in writing and speaking.

I attended Stanford University on a scholarship and work-study. I majored in political science, with a lot of economics and history. I had put aside creative writing as an unrealistic goal and was consumed by public events and their causes. I worked as a student guide, giving tours of campus and assisting visitors to an observation platform. I graduated "With Great Distinction" in 1970.

At Stanford, Diane Middlebrook first encouraged me to write poetry. I took her Introduction to Poetry course as a senior and loved it. She arranged further study for me in my last term. I first studied writing poetry with Elizabeth Bishop, in her seminar at Harvard in 1972. I was in the law school and could cross-register for one course.

I graduated cum laude from Harvard Law School in 1973. Initially, I worked full-time as an attorney and wrote in the evenings. Then, I served in part-time positions for several years, including teaching law as an adjunct at Pace Law School and conducting hearings as an administrative law judge, while devoting myself largely to writing.

I was a member of the New York Shakespeare Festival's Playwrights Unit at the Public Theater, coordinated by Ed Bullins, from 1977 through 1980. There, I developed scenes and had staged readings of four of my plays

Agamemnon, *King of Cars*, a verse play, was my first production, in a festival at Theater for the New City in June 1982.

I soon was active in the East Village poetry world, with numerous public readings. The No Se No social club was an especially important place in my development, in the summer of 1983, as an open, creative community. My poems appeared over the next

several years in local publications including *Downtown*, *Red Tape*, *Cover*, *New Observations*, *Pan Arts* and *The National Poetry Journal of the Lower East Side*.

My verse play, *Electra*, was performed in an arts exhibition at the Brooklyn Army Terminal in October 1983. A video by Franz Vila of the play in performance appeared in early 1984, my first video.

I made poetry videos during the mid-1980's with Edmond Chibeau and Mitch Corber. In 1990, I co-produced with Leigh Block a video of my poem, *Lincoln in Queens*, with music by jazz artist Gerry Hemingway. It won an award for video produced on public access facilities.

I participated in the annual Poets Theater Festival of the St. Marks Poetry Project, coordinated by Bob Holman, in 1988-90 at the Theater at 2nd and 10th and at LaMama. There, I also developed scenes of what became a full-length poetic drama, *Women's Mysteries*.

I then had a lengthy hiatus as a writer, to focus on full-time responsibilities with work and family. I no longer found it possible to change from work to writing in the course of a day or weeks, or to follow up on any writing that I did. I've had a career of some forty years in the law, primarily in local government and with a non-profit organization for dispute resolution.


While still working, I returned to poetry in 2011. My first concern was to digitize old creative work before the videotapes deteriorated too far. From that impulse came renewed interest in writing again. I took numerous writers workshops, particularly at the St. Marks Poetry Project, to sustain continued focus on writing, educate myself on what I had missed, meet poets and participate again in an active community. I was fortunate in having access to outstanding, often much younger poets as workshop teachers over several years.

In 2013, The Operating System (then known as Exit Strata) published a chapbook of some of my older poems, *Strange Coherence*. That same year, Fast Speaking Music issued a CD of my poems with music, *An Early Spring*. The Medicine Show Theatre presented a staged reading of *Women's Mysteries* in 2015.

I retired from practicing law in May 2016. I live in Brooklyn with Careen Shannon, my wife. My daughter Emma also lives in New York City and my step-daughter Rachel in San Francisco.

I am happy that these related plays (and poem) are being published together now as *The Furies*, and grateful to publisher and guide, Lynne DeSilva-Johnson.

archival photos and documents
from original productions



ELECTRA

a play by
Bill Considine

directed by
Kevin O'Brien

video by
Franz Vila

produced by
Bill Considine

on television:
cable Channel D
9 pm, Mon, Jan. 2, 1984

on videotape:
Red Bar
First Ave. & 7th St.
11 pm, Mon, Jan. 2, 1984

free

Photo by Toya

THE FURIES

ELECTRA

STARRING

Marjorie Ohle
Susan Riskin
David Stocker
and Sharon Take as ELECTRA

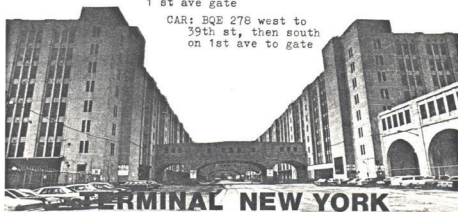
a new play by **BILL CONSIDINE**

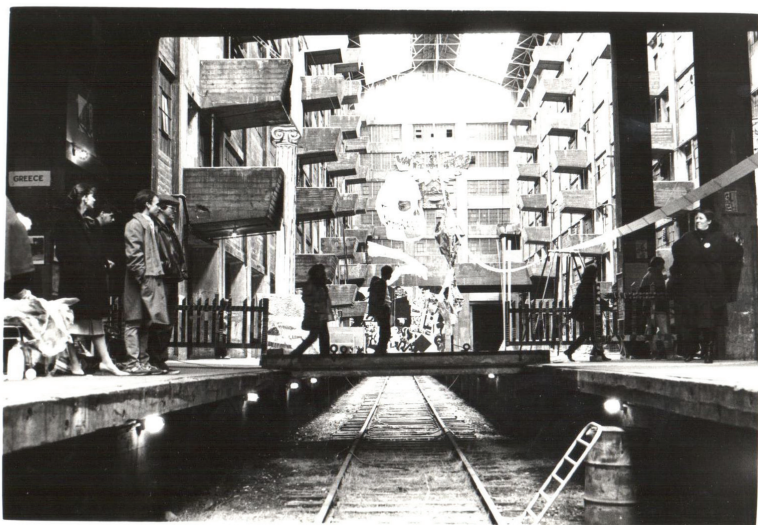
directed by
kevin o'brien

3 pm Sat. & Sun., October 22 and 23

Presented in the Atrium of the Brooklyn Army Terminal
at the TERMINAL NEW YORK art exhibit 58th st & 1st ave
SUBWAY: N or RR to 59th st, bklyn walk down 58th st to
1 st ave gate

CAR: BQE 278 west to
39th st, then south
on 1st ave to gate





ELECTRA @ Brooklyn Army Terminal, 1983

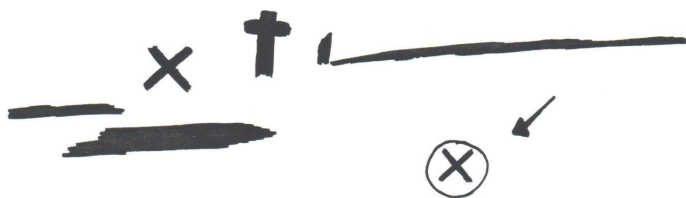


Sharon Take as Electra
(photo: Toyo Tsuchiya)



Sharon Take, L; Susan Riskin as Clytemnestra, R;
painted set designed by John Shaw,
stage furniture by Frank Shifreen
(photo: Toyo Tsuchiya)

THE FURIES: ELECTRA



a play by

Bill Considine

October 22 and 23

TERMINAL



L-R: Sharon Take, Marjorie Ohle, Bill Considine, onsite.



Sharon Take, L; David Stocker as Orestes, R;
(photo: Toyo Tsuchiya)





Electra and Orestes (Take and Stocker), both pages.
(photos: Toyo Tsuchiya)

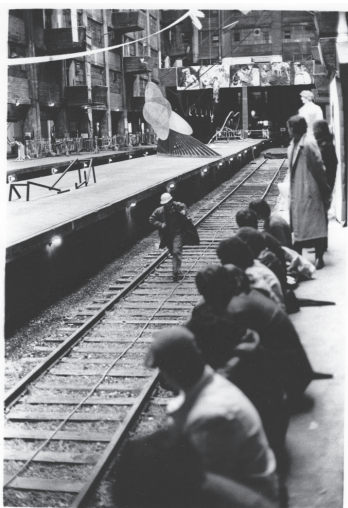


Top: L-R: Marjorie Ohle as Chorus, Sharon Take, Susan Riskin





Top: Cast and crew photo from *ELECTRA*, with (standing L-R) Sharon Take, David Stocker, Michael Curtin, Marjorie Ohle, Susan Riskin, director Kevin O'Brien, Dave Lancet and (in front) playwright Bill Considine. Right: in performance at the Brooklyn Army Terminal, David Stocker enters along the tracks as Messenger. Below (clockwise from left): photographer Toyo Tsuchiya at an exhibit of his photos with Considine, Stocker, and Take.





Photos for LINCOLN IN QUEENS, 1988-90. All photos, Bill Considine unless otherwise noted.

Above: bronze sculpture of Abraham Lincoln, Union Square Park, NY. Henry Kirke Brown, 1870.





Above: Overgrown abandoned freight loading dock, Long Island City, Queens.

Below: New York State Unemployment Office, Queens Plaza, Queens, New York.





Above: Long Island City, Queens

Below: the author, at blast furnaces of U.S. Steel's National Works, McKeesport, PA
(photographed by his father, William Considine)





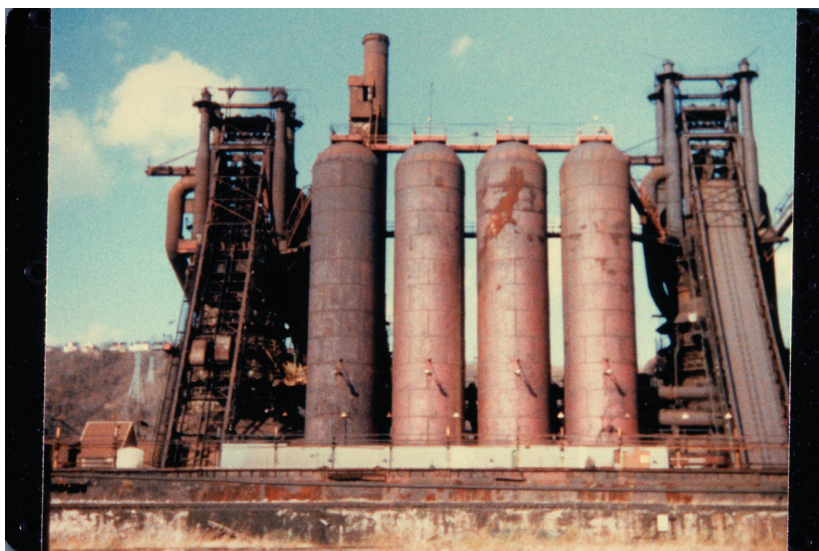
Both Photos: Steel Plant, Duquesne Works, Duquesne, PA





Above: Set Maquette by Deborah Gans, 1986

Below: Blast Furnaces, U.S. Steel's National Works, McKeesport, PA





Above: Steel Plant at McKeesport/Duquesne Works, PA

Below: Empire City Iron Works Signage, Long Island City





Steel Plants at McKeesport/Duquesne Works, PA



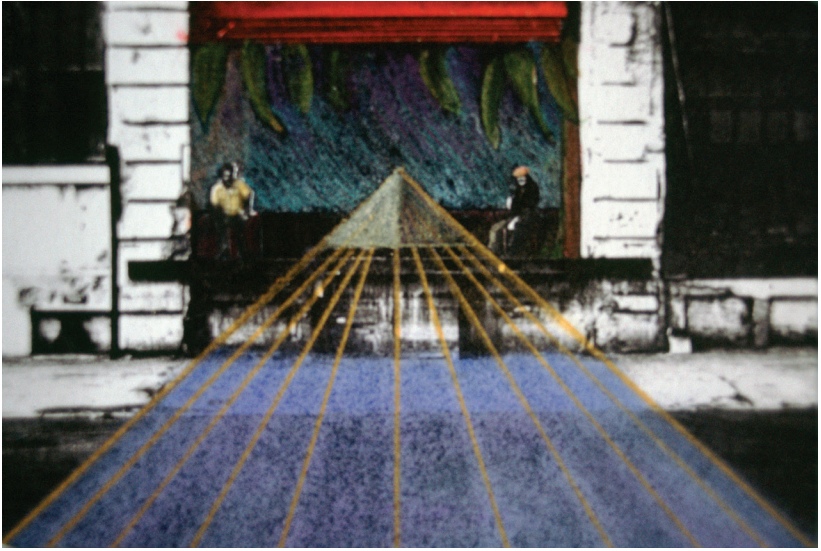
Abandoned industrial loading pier, Long Island City, Queens



Above: Chain / fences, Long Island City,

Below: Composite image by Deborah Gans, 1986, adapted for Lincoln in Queens





Above: Loading Dock composite image by Deborah Gans, 1986, adapted for Lincoln in Queens

Below: Metal door detail, LIC, Queens, NY





Long Island City with Manhattan seen in the background, New York City, 1988

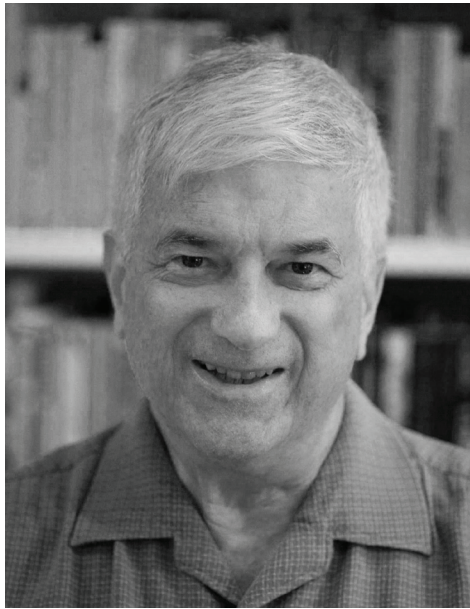


photo: Tom Warren

*poetics, playwrighting and process :
an interview with bill considine and lynne desilva-johnson*

Greetings comrade!

Thank you for talking to us about your process today!

I appreciate the opportunity - and the challenge of addressing some questions I've never had to answer, even to myself!

Can you introduce yourself, in a way that you would choose?

I'm a retired lawyer in my late 60's. I come from a working-class background in a declining Rust Belt mill town, but that was a long time ago. I had the benefit of a terrific education. I chose to live in a vibrant, creative center and participate. I always wanted to write, and over time I've written a lot.

Why are you a poet/writer/artist/playwright?

I wanted to express myself, and to play with language. I enjoy writing. Making a poem is one of life's great joys.

When did you decide you were a poet/writer/artist/playwright (and/or: do you feel comfortable calling yourself a poet/writer/artist/playwright, what other titles or affiliations do you prefer/feel are more accurate)?

I wanted to write since I was quite young. I read voraciously. I was very interested in politics and history, as well as literature. I decided, before college, that it was unrealistic to expect to live as a writer, and I focused in college on social studies. By the time I was a senior, I was taking courses in philosophy and then, in my last terms, in poetry. Law school largely bored me, and I wrote a play. My first wife encouraged me. She was an actress. She earned a masters degree in theater and performed, even on Broadway. I wrote several plays, in the evenings and weekends, while working as a young lawyer in New York over a period of years. Then I felt strongly that I needed to devote myself to my art. Years of discouragement in theater ultimately brought me back to only my own resources. I could not expect anyone to actualize my plays. What I wrote and spoke aloud myself was all I could rely on. With that realization, I was a poet.

What do you see as the relationship between being a "poet" and being a "playwright"? How does that work in your practice?

Well, they're two different communities or worlds. There are relatively few people active in both worlds. That separation of the two arts and communities did not work in my favor.

I've been returning recently to playwriting. In part, this is because I have always been drawn to longer or larger forms, and to multiple voices instead of only the lyric self.

What's a "poet," anyway? What do you see as your cultural and social role (in the literary / artistic / creative community and beyond)?

A poet is a worker in language, making words fresh and honest and exploratory. But that is too laborious: A poet plays with language, because words define our world, and because it's fun.

In the literary community, I am, I hope, attentive to others' work and encouraging. Poets help sustain each other.

Talk about the process or instinct to move these plays as independent entities into a body of work. How and why did this happen? Have you had this intention for a while? What encouraged and/or confounded this (or a book, in general) coming together? Was it a struggle?

These plays developed organically over time from my impulse to write verse plays, to combine poetry and theater, which is a great tradition. I also had the impulse to de-con-

struct, to re-write certain governing myths. *Agamemnon*, *King of Cars* was a comedy, so then I wanted to write a tragedy too, and *Electra* came from that. It took some years to find the third piece, an equivalent to *The Eumenides* in the ancient trilogy. In those years, I made poems and videos. *Lincoln in Queens* finally emerged.

I then wrote another Greek play, a full-length verse drama based on a story in Plutarch, *Women's Mysteries*. It too is about the drive to war in myth and history. I see that play as a second piece in a larger-scale trilogy, with *The Furies* as the first piece. I've drafted some of a third piece, too.

Prologue: Prehistory was an early exploration toward *Women's Mysteries*. It belongs with these plays in *The Furies*, because it is an entry point into the force field of mythic origins, and it helps tie the larger structure together. It is echoed by a prologue in *Women's Mysteries*.

So, in my own mind, I had a relatively large-scale, unified set of plays, but this was utterly unknown. When you asked what I would want to publish now, my first and only thought was to bring these separately produced plays together as the whole that I intended.

When you were writing these plays, (or in general, when you write plays or other work to be performed), did you imagine them also being read? Have you ever written plays or used writing structures from theater to produce work that was intended primarily for the page?

Yes, I also imagine them being read. There are dramatic shapes to some of my poems. *Lincoln in Queens* after all is a poem, but I've included it in a volume of plays, where it belongs.

It's a very interesting phenomena, I think, the publishing and reading of plays -- unique amongst performance media as one that lives quite commonly in our experience both on the stage and the page, in life and in the classroom.

Do you think that the publishing of plays needs to treat the medium differently than it does other poetry, prose, or text? Talk a little more about your relationship to plays on the page versus on the stage, both as reader and producer / maker / writer.

I like to see the continuous flow of verse down the page, so I name the speakers at the left margin, not in the center. It shows the play as a poem more clearly on the page. I have always liked reading plays, because they move so briskly. Poetry's concision and sharpness serve drama well.

I have participated in many poetry readings, and the oral aspect of poetry is key for me,

which is an understanding that lends itself to theater.

What formal structures or other constrictive practices (if any) do you use in the creation of your work, whether poetics or drama? Have certain teachers or instructive environments, or readings/writings/work of other creative people informed the way you work/write?

Using the medium of verse drama and using classical allusion and de-construction are themselves significant constraints. Otherwise, I have not used constraints as a creative practice.

What has most informed me in playwriting has been rehearsals. Seeing that something doesn't work and cutting or replacing it, or seeing that something more is needed, emerges from the rehearsal process.

Numerous poetry workshops over the past several years have informed me as a writer, and I am grateful to instructors and colleagues. That poets persist is among the most important lessons. One device so many recommend, that has not worked well for me yet, is to do free writing daily. I hate what I write down when I don't feel inspired. It is painful to put down just anything. Long ago, I kept a journal for several years. I felt the journal replaced creative writing.

Maybe I will acquire the habit of daily free writing yet! Any day now...

Speaking of monikers, what does your title represent? How was it generated? Talk about the way you titled the book, and how your process of naming (individual pieces, sections, etc) influences you and/or colors your work specifically.

Nearness of unseen Furies figures in both *Electra* and *Lincoln in Queens*. Clytemnestra calls down the Furies at the end of *Electra*. Besides being the book title, "The Furies" is also a segment title in *Lincoln in Queens*, which relates an impelled search for the Furies.

The Furies are problematic, because they're powerful but negative female figures identified with darkness, guilt and fear. I maximized that dark female aspect by portraying Clytemnestra as an onstage killer. When I put on *Electra*, I experimented with called it *The Furies: Electra*, as seen in a flyer for the play and in the name of the video. That title also meant to convey the fury of war, the urgency of war state resistance, and the rapid pace of the play.

In the larger structure, the transition from mythic Furies to the mother in *Lincoln in Queens* and to the women in *Women's Mysteries* is an important progression. The work overall seeks an escape from the tyranny of old myths and misperceptions.

What does this particular work represent to you as indicative of your method/creative practice, history, mission/intentions/hopes/plans?

This book represents a core of my creative work over the years, the attempt to integrate poetry and drama. It also shows a core focus on the power of the war state and aggressive, siege mentality. I looked to the Greeks partly to escape the more pertinent and overwhelming model for verse plays in English, Shakespeare. I thought that I would learn from Greek models and move on to other settings and eras. That didn't happen. Time is shorter now.

I want to complete the larger-scale trilogy that I discussed above. Beyond that, I hope to move in a new direction. That may be another verse drama or an echo of it. I may also get more prosaic. As a lawyer, I wrote a lot of prose. It flows more readily. I have a couple short prose pieces being published in journals this Fall.

What does this book DO (as much as what it says or contains)?

This book is an artifact of ambitions and dreams. I hope it may inspire others.

What would be the best possible outcome for this book? What might it do in the world, and how will its presence as an object facilitate your creative role in your community and beyond? What are your hopes for this book, and for your practice?

The best outcome would be for the book to inspire readings and productions, and for those productions to speak for the necessary but difficult process of finding and making peace.

Let's talk a little bit about the role of poetics and creative community in social activism, in particular in what I call "Civil Rights 2.0," which has remained immediately present all around us in the time leading up to this series' publication. I'd be curious to hear some thoughts on the challenges we face in speaking and publishing across lines of race, age, privilege, social/cultural background, and sexuality within the community, vs. the dangers of remaining and producing in isolated "silos."

These are big challenges, and our nation has suddenly taken a large step backwards. I think the keys are respect for others and openness to recognizing privilege in ourselves and in our assumptions about others.

Is there anything else we should have asked, or that you want to share?

Thank you for this opportunity!

WHY PRINT / DOCUMENT?

The Operating System uses the language "print document" to differentiate from the book-object as part of our mission to distinguish the act of documentation-in-book-FORM from the act of publishing as a backwards facing replication of the book's agentic *role* as it may have appeared the last several centuries of its history. Ultimately, I approach the book as TECHNOLOGY: one of a variety of printed documents (in this case bound) that humans have invented and in turn used to archive and disseminate ideas, beliefs, stories, and other evidence of production.

Ownership and use of printing presses and access to (or restriction of) printed materials has long been a site of struggle, related in many ways to revolutionary activity and the fight for civil rights and free speech all over the world. While (in many countries) the contemporary quotidian landscape has indeed drastically shifted in its access to platforms for sharing information and in the widespread ability to "publish" digitally, even with extremely limited resources, the importance of publication on physical media has not diminished. In fact, this may be the most critical time in recent history for activist groups, artists, and others to insist upon learning, establishing, and encouraging personal and community documentation practices. Hear me out.

With The OS's print endeavors I wanted to open up a conversation about this: the ultimately radical, transgressive act of creating PRINT /DOCUMENTATION in the digital age. It's a question of the archive, and of history: who gets to tell the story, and what evidence of our life, our behaviors, our experiences are we leaving behind? We can know little to nothing about the future into which we're leaving an unprecedentedly digital document trail – but we can be assured that publications, government agencies, museums, schools, and other institutional powers that be will continue to leave BOTH a digital and print version of their production for the official record. Will we?

As a (rogue) anthropologist and long time academic, I can easily pull up many accounts about how lives, behaviors, experiences – how THE STORY of a time or place – was pieced together using the deep study of correspondence, notebooks, and other physical documents which are no longer the norm in many lives and practices. As we move our creative behaviors towards digital note taking, and even audio and video, what can we predict about future technology that is in any way assuring that our stories will be accurately told – or told at all? How will we leave these things for the record?

In these documents we say:
WE WERE HERE, WE EXISTED, WE HAVE A DIFFERENT STORY

- Lynne DeSilva-Johnson, Founder/Managing Editor,
THE OPERATING SYSTEM, Brooklyn NY 2017

TITLES IN THE PRINT: DOCUMENT COLLECTION

An Absence So Great and Spontaneous It Is Evidence of Light - Anne Gorrick [2018]
Chlorosis - Michael Flatt and Derrick Mund [2018]
Sussuros a Mi Padre - Erick Sáenz [2018]
Sharing Plastic - Blake Nemec [2018]
The Book of Sounds - Mehdi Navid (trans. Tina Rahimi) [2018]
Abandoners - Lesley Ann Wheeler [2018]
Jazzercise is a Language - Gabriel Ojeda-Sague [2018]
Death is a Festival - Anis Shivani [2018]
Return Trip / Viaje Al Regreso; Dual Language Edition -
Israel Dominguez, (trans. Margaret Randall) [2018]
Born Again - Ivy Johnson [2018]
Singing for Nothing - Wally Swist [2018]

One More Revolution - Andrea Mazzariello [2017]
Fugue State Beach - Filip Marinovich [2017]
Lost City Hydrothermal Field - Peter Milne Greiner [2017]
The Book of Everyday Instruction - Chloe Bass [2017]
In Corpore Sano : Creative Practice and the Challenged Body
[Anthology, 2017] Lynne DeSilva-Johnson and Jay Besemer, co-editors
Love, Robot - Margaret Rhee [2017]
The Furies - William Considine [2017]
Nothing Is Wasted - Shabnam Piryaee [2017]
Mary of the Seas - Joanna C. Valente [2017]
Secret-Telling Bones - Jessica Tyner Mehta [2017]
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2017 : INCANTATIONS
featuring original cover art by Barbara Byers
sp. - Susan Charkes; Radio Poems - Jeffrey Cyphers Wright; Fixing a Witch/Hexing the
Stitch - Jacklyn Janeksela; cosmos a personal voyage by carl sagan ann druyan steven
sotor and me - Connie Mae Oliver
Flower World Variations, Expanded Edition/Reissue - Jerome
Rothenberg and Harold Cohen [2017]
Island - Tom Haviv [2017]
What the Werewolf Told Them / Lo Que Les Dijo El Licantropo -
Chely Lima (trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]
The Color She Gave Gravity - Stephanie Heit [2017]
The Science of Things Familiar - Johnny Damm [Graphic Hybrid, 2017]
agon - Judith Goldman [2017]
To Have Been There Then / Estar Allí Entonces - Gregory Randall
(trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]

Instructions Within - Ashraf Fayadh [2016]
 Arabic-English dual language edition; Mona Kareem, translator
 Let it Die Hungry - Caitis Meissner [2016]
 A GUN SHOW - Adam Sliwinski and Lynne DeSilva-Johnson;
 So Percussion in Performance with Ain Gordon and Emily Johnson [2016]
 Everybody's Automat [2016] - Mark Gurarie
 How to Survive the Coming Collapse of Civilization [2016] - Sparrow
 CHAPBOOK SERIES 2016: OF SOUND MIND
 *featuring the quilt drawings of Daphne Taylor
 Improper Maps - Alex Crowley; While Listening - Alaina Ferris;
 Chords - Peter Longofono; Any Seam or Needlework - Stanford Cheung

 TEN FOUR - Poems, Translations, Variations [2015] - Jerome Rothenberg, Ariel Res-
 nikoff, Mikhl Likht (w/ Stephen Ross)
 MARILYN [2015] - Amanda Ngoho Reavey
 CHAPBOOK SERIES 2015: OF SYSTEMS OF
 *featuring original cover art by Emma Steinkraus
 Cyclorama - Davy Knittle; The Sensitive Boy Slumber Party Manifesto
 - Joseph Cuillier; Neptune Court - Anton Yakovlev; Schema - Anurak Saelow
 SAY/MIRROR [2015; 2nd edition 2016] - JP HOWARD
 Moons Of Jupiter/Tales From The Schminke Tub [plays, 2014] - Steve Danziger

 CHAPBOOK SERIES 2014: BY HAND
 Pull, A Ballad - Maryam Parhizkar; Can You See that Sound - Jeff Musillo
 Executive Producer Chris Carter - Peter Milne Grenier;
 Spooky Action at a Distance - Gregory Crosby;

 CHAPBOOK SERIES 2013: WOODBLOCK
 *featuring original prints from Kevin William Reed
 Strange Coherence - Bill Considine; The Sword of Things - Tony Hoffman;
 Talk About Man Proof - Lancelot Runge / John Kropa; An Admission as a Warning
 Against the Value of Our Conclusions -Alexis Quinlan

DOC U MENT

/däkyəmənt/

First meant “instruction” or “evidence,” whether written or not.

noun - a piece of written, printed, or electronic matter that provides information or evidence or that serves as an official record
verb - record (something) in written, photographic, or other form
synonyms - paper - deed - record - writing - act - instrument

[Middle English, *precept*, from Old French, from Latin *documentum*, example, proof, from *docere*, to teach; see *dek-* in Indo-European roots.]

Who is responsible for the manufacture of value?

Based on what supercilious ontology have we landed in a space where we vie against other creative people in vain pursuit of the fleeting credibilities of the scarcity economy, rather than freely collaborating and sharing openly with each other in ecstatic celebration of MAKING?

While we understand and acknowledge the economic pressures and fear-mongering that threatens to dominate and crush the creative impulse, we also believe that *now more than ever*
we have the tools to relinquish agency via cooperative means,
fueled by the fires of the Open Source Movement.

Looking out across the invisible vistas of that rhizomatic parallel country
we can begin to see our community beyond constraints,
in the place where intention meets
resilient, proactive, collaborative organization.

Here is a document born of that belief, sown purely of imagination and will.
When we document we assert.

We print to make real, to reify our being there.
When we do so with mindful intention to address our process,
to open our work to others, to create beauty in words in space, to respect
and acknowledge the strength of the page we now hold physical,
a thing in our hand... we remind ourselves that, like Dorothy:
we had the power all along, my dears.

THE PRINT! DOCUMENT SERIES

is a project of
the trouble with bartleby

in collaboration with
the operating system

