

Tristan Tzara, *The Gas Heart*

Translated by Michael Benedikt/Eric v.d. Luft/Christophe Preissing

(parenthesized texts are the author's directions.)

[Bold texts are to be projected.]

[Italicized and/or bracketed texts are my comments or stage directions.]

Tzara's Note, Benedikt

Neck stands downstage, Nose opposite, confronting the audience. All the other characters enter and leave as they please. The gas heart walks slowly around, circulating widely; it is the only and greatest three-act hoax of the century; it will satisfy only industrialized imbeciles who believe in the existence of men of genius. Actors are requested to give this play the attention due a masterpiece such as *Macbeth* or *Chantecler*, but to treat the author—who is not a genius with no respect and to note the levity of the script which brings no technical innovation to the theatre.

Tzara's Note, Luft

NECK is above the stage; NOSE is opposite above the audience. All the other characters enter and exit at random. The gas-heated heart walks slowly, a grand circulation; this is the only and biggest fraud of the century—in three acts. It will bring joy only to industrialized imbeciles who believe in the existence of geniuses. The performers have been begged to give the same attention to this play that a masterpiece as powerful as *Macbeth* or *Chantecler* deserves, but to treat the author, who is not a genius, with little respect, and to take seriously the lack of seriousness in the text, which does not add any novelty at all to theatrical technique.

ACT I

EYE: Statues, jewelry, grilled meats.
[to the audience] "Repeat after me!"
Statues, jewelry, grilled meats.
Statues, jewelry, grilled meats.
Statues, jewelry, grilled meats.
Statues, jewelry, grilled meats.
And the wind open to mathematical allusions.

Cigar, button, nose. *[signals to audience]*
Cigar, button, nose.
Cigar, button, nose.
Cigar, button, nose.
Cigar, button, nose.
Cigar, button, nose.
He was in love with a stenographer.

Eyes replaced by motionless belly buttons.
Mr. My-God is an excellent journalist.
stiff and aquatic, a good-morning corpse floats in the air.
what a sad season.

MOUTH: The conversation is getting boring, isn't it?

[rhythmic]

EYE: Yes, isn't it?

MOUTH: Very boring, isn't it?

EYE: Yes, isn't it?

MOUTH: Naturally, isn't it?

EYE: Evidently, isn't it?

MOUTH: Boring, isn't it?

EYE: Yes, isn't it?

MOUTH: Evidently, isn't it?

EYE: Yes, isn't it?

MOUTH: Very boring, isn't it?

EYE: Yes, isn't it?

MOUTH: Naturally, isn't it?

EYE: Evidently, isn't it?

MOUTH: Boring, isn't it?

EYE: Yes, isn't it?

MOUTH: Evidently, isn't it?

EYE: Yes, isn't it?

NOSE: Hey, down there! Man with starred scars. Where are you running?

EAR: I run to good-morning
I burn in the eyes of days
I swallow the jewelry
I sing in the courtyard
love has neither court nor hunting horn to fish
for hearts in hard-boiled eggs.

EXIT MOUTH

NOSE: Hey, down there! Man with a cry like a fat pearl. What are you eating?

EAR: It has been more than two years, alas, since I began the hunt. But, you see, one gets used to one's own fatigue and how the dead would be tempted to live; the death of the magnificent emperor proves it; the importance of things dies away—each and every day—a little ...

NOSE: Hey, down there! Wounded man with mollusks, wools, chains; man with diverse troubles and full pockets—man like a geography pie—where are you from?

EYE: The bark of deified trees, shelters the worms, but the rain runs the clock of organized poetry. The banks are filled with cotton wool. Man of strings, supported by pimples like you and like the others. At the porcelain flower play us chastity on the violin, o cherry tree, death is short and is cooked in the asphalt at the capital trombone.

NOSE: Hey, down there! Mister

EAR: Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey!
Hey! Hey! Hey! [Hey! Hey! Hey! Aha! Hee hee! Hey! Hey!]

NECK: Tangerine and white of Spain,
I'm killing myself, Madeleine, Madeleine.

EAR: The eye says to the mouth: Open your mouth for the candy of the eye.

NECK: Tangerine and white of Spain,
I'm killing myself, Madeleine, Madeleine.

EYE: On the ear the vaccine of solemn pearl is pounded flat into mimosa.

EAR: Don't you think it's getting rather warm?

ENTER MOUTH

MOUTH: It gets warm in the summer.

EYE: The beauty of your face is a precision chronometer.

NECK: Tangerine and white of Spain
I'm killing myself Madeleine, Madeleine.

EAR: The needle points to the left ear, the right eye, the forehead, the eyebrow,
the forehead, the eyebrow, the left eye, the left ear, the lips, the chin, the neck.

EYE: Clytemnestra, a minister's wife, was looking out the window. The cellists were passing by in a carriage of Chinese tea, biting the air and the caresses of an open heart. You are beautiful, Clytemnestra; the crystal of your skin awakens the curiosity of both sexes. You are as tender and calm as two meters of white silk. Clytemnestra, my teeth tremble. You are married. I'm cold, I'm afraid. I'm green, I'm a flower, I'm a gas meter, I'm afraid. You are married. My teeth tremble, Clytemnestra. When will you have the pleasure of watching the lower jaw of the revolver close in my chalk lung. Without hope and without family.

NECK: Tangerine and white of Spain
I'm killing myself Madeleine, Madeleine.

MOUTH: Too sensitive to the sanctions of your taste, I have decided to turn off the faucet. The hot water and the cold water of my charm no longer know how to entertain the sweet results of your sweat, the love of the heart or love too short.

EXIT MOUTH

ENTER EAR

EAR: His neck is narrow but his foot is wide. He can easily play the drum with his toes on his oval belly, which has already served as a rugby ball in several matches. He is not a being because he is made of pieces. Simple men manifest themselves with a house, important men with a monument.

NOSE: But yes but yes but yes but yes but yes but yes ...

EYEBROW: "Where?" "How much?" "Why?" are monuments. Justice, for example. What a beautiful, regular procedure, practically a nervous tic or a religion.

NOSE: (decrecendo) But yes but yes but yes but yes but yes ...

EYEBROW: We found a lovely morning in the lake soaked twice in the sky—in the bearded sky. It was leaking between the nostrils. Acidic taste of a feeble electric current, this taste, which, at the entrances of salt mines, opens up to zinc, to rubber, to fabric—without weight and wearing make-up. One evening—while looking in the evening—we found at the bottom a very early evening. It was called good evening.

NOSE: But yes but yes but yes but yes but yes but yes ...

EYE: "Watch out!" cried the hero. The two plumes of smoke from the enemy houses were tying a necktie—and it rose overhead to the belly button of the luminous.

NOSE: But yes but yes but yes but yes but yes but yes but yes ...

EAR: Distractedly the thief transformed himself into a valise; the physicist could therefore say that it was the valise that stole the thief. The waltz went on endlessly—endlessly it did not go on—it waltzed—and the lovers would tear pieces off it as it passed—the posters on the old wall are no longer valuable.

NOSE: But yes but yes but yes but yes but yes but yes ...

EYE: One could catch cold for one's tick-tock.
For the tick-tock of his life a little bit of death—which is called continuity.

NOSE: But yes but yes but yes but yes but yes but yes but yes ...

EYE: A fisherman never made any more murdered shadows under the bridges of Paris. But all of a sudden it struck noon, under the cachet of the twinkling eye, tears became entangled in encrypted and obscure telegrams.

EYEBROW: He collapsed like a blot of silvered paper and some drops, some memories, some leaves certified the cruelty of a fervent and real animal life. Wind, curtain of the void, jolts—its belly full of so much foreign money. The void drinks the void: the air has arrived with its blue eyes, and that is why it is always taking cachets of aspirin. Once a day we abort our obscurities.

EYE: We have the time, alas, we no longer lack time. Time wears a mustache, as does the whole world, even women and shaven Americans. Time is tight—the eye is wicked—but it isn't yet in the miser's wrinkled purse.

MOUTH: Isn't it?

EYE: The conversation is getting boring, isn't it?

MOUTH: Yes, isn't it?

EYE: Very boring, isn't it?

MOUTH: Yes, isn't it?

EYE: Naturally, isn't it?

MOUTH: Evidently, isn't it?

EYE: Boring, isn't it?

MOUTH: Yes, isn't it?

EYE: Evidently, isn't it?

MOUTH: Yes, isn't it?

EYE: Very boring, isn't it?

MOUTH: Yes, isn't it?

EYE: Naturally, isn't it?

MOUTH: Boring, isn't it?

EYE: Evidently, My-God.

CURTAIN

ACT II

EYEBROW: We're going to the races today.

MOUTH: Let's not forget the binoculars.

EYE: Well now, good morning.

EAR: The mechanical battalion of clenched handshakes.

EXIT MOUTH

NOSE: (shouting) Clytemnestra is the winner!

EAR: What! How could you not have known that Clytemnestra is a racehorse?

EYE: Amorous scrimmages lead to everything. But the time is right. Take care, dear friends, the season is satisfactory. It chews up words. It stretches silences like accordions. Snakes are silhouetted in their own polished eyeglasses. "And what do you make of the bells of eyes?" asks the intermediary.

EAR: "Seekers and curious people," responds Ear, who finishes the nerves of others in the white porcelain shell. She inflates.

NOSE: Fan in a seizure of wood.
light body with enormous laugh.

EYEBROW: The belts of dream-mills
brush lightly against the woolen lower jaw of our carnivorous plants.

EAR: Yes, I know, the dreams with hair.

EYE: The dreams of angels.

EAR: The dreams of fabric, the paper wristwatches.

EYE: The CAPITAL-DREAMS of inaugural solemnities.

EAR: The angels in helicopters.

NOSE: Yes, I know.

EYE: The angels of conversation.

NOSE: Yes, I know.

EAR: The angels in cushions.

NOSE: Yes, I know.

EYE: The angels in ice.

NOSE: Yes, I know.

EAR: The angels in the atmosphere.

NOSE: Yes, I know.

EAR: The ice is broken, said our fathers to our mothers in the first springtime of their existence, which was honorable and gracious.

EYE: Look how the hour understands the hour, the admiral his fleet of words.
Winter child the palm of my hand.

ENTER MOUTH

MOUTH: I've won a great deal of money.

NOSE: Thank you, not bad.

MOUTH: I'm swimming in the basin. I have necklaces of goldfish.

NECK: Thank you, not bad.

MOUTH: I have an American hairdo.

NOSE: Thank you, not bad.

EYE: I've seen this in New York.

NECK: Thank you, not bad.

MOUTH: I don't understand anything about the rumblings of the next war.

NECK: Thank you, not bad.

MOUTH: And I'm losing more weight every day.

NOSE: Thank you, not bad.

MOUTH: A young man on a bicycle followed me down the street.

NECK: Thank you, not bad.

MOUTH: I'm leaving next Monday.

NOSE: Thank you, not bad.

EYE: Clytemnestra, the wind is blowing. The wind is blowing. On the wharfs of beaded bells. Turn your back, cut the wind. Your eyes are pebbles because they see nothing but the rain and the cold. Clytemnestra, have you felt the horrors of war? Do you know how to slide on the sweetness of my speech? Don't you breathe the same air as I? Don't you speak the same language? In which incalculable metal are your miserable fingers encrusted? Which music, filtered through which mysterious curtain, prevents my words from penetrating the wax of your brain? Indeed, the stone grinds your bones and strikes your muscles, but speech, cut into random slices, will never release in you the course that employs clear methods.

EXIT MOUTH

EAR: Doubtless you know the calendars of birds?

EYE: What?

EAR: Three hundred and sixty-five birds—each day one bird flies away—each hour one feather falls—every two hours someone writes a poem—which someone cuts up with scissors.

NOSE: I've already seen that in New York.

EYE: What a philosopher! What a poet! I don't like poetry.

EAR: But then you must like cold drinks?
Or landscapes that undulate like the wavy hair of ballerinas?
Or surely ancient cities? Or occult sciences?

EYE: I'm aware of all of that.

NOSE: A little more life down there on the stage.

EYEBROW: A gray drum for the flower of your lung.

EAR: My lung is made of lungs and not cardboard, if you really want to know.

EYE: But, Miss.

EAR: I beg you, Sir.

EYE: Bony sacraments in military cages, painting does not interest me much. I like deaf and wide landscapes with considerable galloping.

NOSE: Your play is quite charming, but no one can understand any of it.

EYEBROW: There is nothing in it to understand; everything is easy to do and to take. Bottleneck of thought, from which the whip will emerge. The whip will be a forget-me-not. The forget-me-not a living inkwell. The inkwell will dress the doll.

EAR: Your daughter is quite charming.

EYE: You are very kind.

EAR: Do you care for sports?

EYE: Yes, this method of communication is practical enough.

EAR: You know, of course, that I own a garage.

EYE: Thank you very much.

EAR: It's spring, it's spring ...

NOSE: I tell you it's two meters long.

NECK: I tell you it's three meters long.

NOSE: I tell you it's four meters long.

NECK: I tell you it's five meters long.

NOSE: I tell you it's six meters long.

NECK: I tell you it's seven meters long.

NOSE: I tell you it's eight meters long.

NECK: I tell you it's nine meters long.

NOSE: I tell you it's ten meters long.

NECK: I tell you it's eleven meters long.

NOSE: I tell you it's twelve meters long.

NECK: I tell you it's thirteen meters long.

NOSE: I tell you it's fourteen meters long.

NECK: I tell you it's fifteen meters long.

NOSE: I tell you it's sixteen meters long.

EAR: Thank you thank you very good.

EYE: Love—sport or indictment,
summary of the directories of love—love
accumulated by centuries of weight and numbers
with its breasts of leather and crystal
god is a nervous tic of shifting sand dunes
nervous and agile flies through the countries and the pockets of the spectators
the crown of death thrown to the scourge
new on the outside
friendship wrongly juxtaposed in delicacy.

NOSE: I tell you love's seventeen meters long.

NECK: I tell you it's eighteen meters long.

NOSE: I tell you it's nineteen meters long.

NECK: I tell you it's twenty meters long.

NOSE: I tell you it's twenty-one meters long.

NECK: I tell you it's twenty-two meters long.

NOSE: I tell you it's twenty-three meters long.

NECK: I tell you it's twenty-four meters long.

NOSE: I tell you it's twenty-five meters long.

NECK: I tell you it's twenty-six meters long.

NOSE: I tell you it's twenty-seven meters long.

NECK: I tell you it's twenty-eight meters long.

NOSE: I tell you it's twenty-nine meters long.

EAR: You have a very pretty head
you ought to have it sculpted.
you ought to give a grand feast
to understand and to love nature
and to drive forks into the sculpture.
the grasses of fans flatter the lovely days.

EYEBROW: Fire! Fire!
I think Clytemnestra is burning.

CURTAIN

ACT III

NECK: The sky is clouded
my finger is open
sewing machine the glances
the river is open
the brain is clouded
sewing machine the glances.

MOUTH: Someone has made of it a beautiful fabric for the crystal gown.

NOSE: You want to say: "Despair gives you explanations of its rates of exchange."

MOUTH: No! I don't want to say anything. Long ago I consigned to the hatbox whatever I had to say.

NECK: The whole world is aware of you, installation of conjugal bliss.

NOSE: The whole world is aware of you, tapestry of forgotten ideas, crystallization.

NECK: The whole world is aware of you, song formula, algebra footstool, insomnia number, triple-skinned mechanic.

MOUTH: The whole world is not aware of me. I am alone here in my wardrobe and the mirror is blank when I look at myself. I also love the birds at the ends of lit cigarettes. Cats, all animals, all plants. I love cats, birds, animals, and plants that are the projection of Clytemnestra in the courtyard, bedsheets, vases, and meadows. I love hay. I love the young man who makes such tender declarations to me and whose meninges is torn apart in the sun.

Dance of the gentleman fallen from a funnel in the ceiling onto the table.

MOUTH: Dreams refresh the dusk of taut leather.

EXIT MOUTH

EYE: Imagine, dear friend, that I no longer love someone.

EAR: But of whom do you speak?

EYE: I speak of them whom I once loved too long.

EAR: Me too, I have lost an illusion. My prize horse in the stable has lost his strength.

EYE: Very well then, my dear, someone will renew its life.

EAR: You are just bitter.

EXIT EAR

ENTER MOUTH

EYE: Clytemnestra, you are beautiful. I love you with the clarity of a diver—its algae. My blood shakes. Your eyes are blue. Why do you not hear, Clytemnestra, the tranquil laughter of my cells awaiting you, the violence of my breath, and the sweet infantile possibilities that fate reserves for us? Are you waiting perhaps for other sensational revelations regarding my temperament?

EXIT MOUTH

EYE FALLS TO STAGE

NOSE: Huge.

NECK: Fixed.

NOSE: Cruel.

NECK: Broad.

NOSE: Small.

NECK: Short.

NOSE: Sharp.

NECK: Feeble.

NOSE: Magnificent.

NECK: Long.

NOSE: Narrow.

NECK: Strong.

NOSE: Sensitive.

NECK: Fat.

NOSE: High.

NECK: Thin.

NOSE: Shaking.

NECK: Fine.

NOSE: Clear.

NECK: Courageous.

NOSE: Meager.

NECK: Obscure.

NOSE: Timid.

NECK: Pretty.

NOSE: White.

NECK: Flexible.

NOSE: Deep.

NECK: Treacherous.

NOSE: Ugly.

NECK: Heavy.

NOSE: Low.

NECK: Black.

NOSE: Superficial.

NECK: Odorless.

NOSE: Harmonious.

NECK: Smooth.

NOSE: Stiff.

NECK: Tangerine and white of Spain,
I'm killing myself, Madeleine, Madeleine.

ENTER EAR with MOUTH who walks on all fours

EAR: (shouting)

Clytemnestra, racehorse:

3,000 dollars.

Going once!

Going twice!!

Going three times!!!

Sold!

EYE (~~goes down on all fours next to MOUTH.~~)

EAR: This will end in a lovely marriage.

EYE: This will end in a lovely marriage.

EYEBROW: This will end in a lovely marriage.

MOUTH: This will end in a lovely marriage.

NECK: This will end in a lovely marriage.

NOSE: This will end in a lovely marriage.

EAR: Go to sleep.

EYE: Go to sleep.

EYEBROW: Go to sleep.

MOUTH: Go to sleep.

NECK: Go to sleep.

NOSE: Go to sleep.

[All: Don't go to sleep.]

FINIS