

BEASTS OF BURDEN
A Modern Day Fable of an Ass and a Woman
RAQUEL TOMÀS

translation John Ingle & Marina Albaladejo

CHARACTERS

ASS, man.

WOMAN, woman.

CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT SPACE AND TIME

A small, claustrophobic space resembling the living room of a house yet containing objects and people inappropriate to a living room. The space will be constantly cluttered throughout the play and will reach a state of complete disarray towards the end of the piece when a light mist will obscure the dirt and disorder. A sense of harmony can be intuited, at the beginning, from the still life concept that will be broken creating new “still lifes” as the piece progresses and the improbability of the story increases. We switch from harmonic still life scenes in certain points of the space to unharmonious still life scenes in states of decomposition.

The text is organized by means of scenic pictures that do not follow a real, chronological order. However, all the elements that appear and that are used within each scene must be intensely hyperrealistic.

The light enhances the volume and the prominence of the elements and deepens the shadows giving everything a hint of unreality and the feeling of being closed in. The light often zooms in bringing out tiny details or objects belonging to the characters but not the characters themselves. The light should never drop into complete darkness between the scenes.

The seating will be arranged in three sides or in the Proscenium way confining the acting space to a corner.

Beasts of Burden, A Modern Day Fable of an Ass and a Woman is a textual project of scenic inquiry by Raquel Tomàs which has been carried out through a residency and the support of AREAtangent, an Iberescena 09 grant for dramatist creation, a creation residency in the Magalia Meetings 09 and a place of work-in-progress in the July cycle at the Biblioteques in the Grec 09 Festival of Barcelona

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"Man's weakness makes him sociable (...) Every affection is a sign of insufficiency; if each of us had no need of others, we should hardly think of associating with them (...) he who begins to regard himself as a stranger will soon forget himself altogether. " J.J. Rosseau (Émile IV, 503-535).

PICTURE 1
the transformation I

Complete darkness. A light bulb goes on and off sporadically. These brief moments of soft light –not flashes– afford us a momentary glimpse of the characters' faces and parts of their bodies, and the far corners of the space, but never their entirety. Sounds of Ass moving around in the darkness.

WOMAN Are you awake?

ASS *Pause.* Yes.

WOMAN You ok?

ASS *Pause.* Yes.

Pause.

WOMAN What's the matter?

ASS Nothing.

WOMAN Sure?

ASS I can't sleep.

WOMAN I can see that.

ASS Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you.

WOMAN It doesn't matter. I'll turn the light on /

ASS No, no, it's ok, don't bother. I'll try to sleep.

WOMAN Ok.

Pause.

WOMAN Are you alright, my love?

ASS Yes, yes, it's just my stomach. Can you hear that noise?

WOMAN *Pause.* No.

ASS No? Are you sure? I can hear noises.

Silence.

WOMAN No I can't hear a thing.

ASS Ok.

Pause.

WOMAN Shall I get you a yoghurt? It'll do you good.

ASS No, no. Not just now.

WOMAN What about some tonic water?

ASS No, it's ok.

WOMAN Ok.

Pause.

ASS It's hot in here, isn't it?

WOMAN Not really, a bit, maybe. Maybe you've got a temperature. Let me see...

Silence.

WOMAN No, you're ok.

Pause.

ASS Are you sure you can't hear any noises?

WOMAN No, what kind of noises?

ASS Noises *Pause.* I don't know, just noises.

WOMAN *Pause.*No. I can't hear anything, my love. *Pause.* It's completely silent.

ASS There's no need to shout.

WOMAN I'm not shouting.

ASS I've got a headache.

WOMAN I'm not shouting.

ASS Ok, ok.

WOMAN I thought it was stomach ache you had.

Pause.

WOMAN It'll probably be indigestion.

ASS Maybe.

WOMAN You ate a lot yesterday.

ASS Mm.

WOMAN And you wolfed it down.

Silence.

WOMAN Are you sure that's all it is, my love?

ASS Yes –I don't know. I feel funny, but i'm ok. Come on, let's go to sleep.

Silence.

WOMAN I can't now.

ASS I'm sorry, I woke you.

WOMAN It's alright, I wasn't completely asleep.

ASS No? Have you got a bad stomach as well? Maybe it was something we ate /

WOMAN No, everything we ate was of the highest quality –it goes without saying.

ASS Well, don't be like that. It was only a possibility.

WOMAN Everything we had for dinner was delicious and perfectly cooked /

ASS Ok, sorry –I was only making sure /

WOMAN Well, I can assure you /

ASS I was only making sure that I'm the only one who's not feeling well /

WOMAN I feel perfectly fine /

ASS Well, I'm glad.

Silence.

WOMAN I've been a bit on edge, lately.

ASS Yes, I've noticed.

WOMAN Have you?

ASS I feel terrible.

Silence, steps moving away. A window being opened. Footsteps moving closer again.

WOMAN I've opened the window. Is that ok, my dear?

ASS Yes, that's better, come on now. Let's get some sleep.

Silence.

WOMAN It's just that it seems a bit odd to me.

ASS What?

WOMAN This.

ASS This, what?

WOMAN You moving around so much and that... for days...

ASS What?

WOMAN That you've been different for days.

ASS Can't we go to sleep?

WOMAN Well, it doesn't appear so.

ASS It's only indigestion.

WOMAN And the sweating and the noises that you say you hear?

ASS I do hear them.

WOMAN I don't know what to make of it.

Silence.

WOMAN You seem more...

Silence.

WOMAN I don't know how to explain it...

Silence.

WOMAN Kind of more... intense.

Silence.

WOMAN Don't get me wrong –I like it – but...

Silence.

WOMAN But it's different...

Silence.

WOMAN Do you think everything's ok?

Silence.

ASS Everything's ok.

WOMAN Are you sure?

ASS It's only indigestion.

Silence, Ass turns over.

WOMAN You hardly speak.

ASS I've never spoken much, don't romantizise. I feel sick.

Silence.

WOMAN You've been eating too much for days now and you sweat all the time.

ASS I sweat all the time because we shag all the time, end of story.

Silence.

WOMAN Are you awake?

ASS Of course I am.

WOMAN And you smell different.

ASS That's how I smell.

WOMAN That's not how you smell.

Pause.

WOMAN You seem stronger, somehow.

Pause.

WOMAN And...

Silence.

WOMAN And I think it's got bigger.

Silence.

WOMAN Quite a lot.

Ass gets up and sounds of vomiting can be heard.

WOMAN Shall I come?

Ass continues vomiting and breathing noisily, stops and comes back.

WOMAN Are you ok?

ASS *Having trouble speaking, stutters between breaths and speaks in a flat voice.* Yes, I don't think the dinner agreed with me though.

For the first time, a bulb stays on long enough to see the silhouette of Ass, a man with a huge cardboard head of an ass.

WOMAN I don't think so either, my love.

Ass takes off the cardboard head.

PICTURE 2

everyday scene with stamps and tapes

Ass is sitting down looking at and working on his stamp collection. There are letters soaking in a bucket waiting for the stamps to be removed. He takes a letter which has been left to soak, takes off the stamp and dries it with a hairdryer. If it is nice enough, he places it in the album and in a box, if it is ordinary. He has an enormous magnifying-glass which allows the audience to see the stamps without Ass showing them to them directly. Woman is putting into order some recorded cassettes (there may be one or two video tapes as well).

A dialogue of sounds between the drone of the hairdryer, the rewinding of the tapes and brief excerpts from the tapes. Woman checks the tapes and makes a note of dates and times on the covers accordingly. She keeps a record.

EXCERPT 1 / RECORDED VOICE OF ASS AND WOMAN *Ass and Woman's laughter.*

EXCERPT 2 / RECORDED VOICE OF ASS *Where are you? Don't hide. Close the door. Come here /*

EXCERPT 3 / RECORDED VOICE OF WOMAN *Good morning, my love. Don't move –be still– let me do...*

EXCERPT 4 / RECORDED VOICE OF ASS *I'll wait for you at the end of the route, in the same place as always. I'll arrive silently, as always. I'll touch you silently, in the same place as always.*

EXCERPT 5 / RECORDED VOICE OF WOMAN *Come closer... closer... closer. No. Not yet /*

WOMAN *Do you want to make a new one?*

ASS *Not just now, when I finish we can do what you want.*

Silence, only the sound of the hairdryer can be heard.

WOMAN *Getting ready to record. And suddenly, I can see myself pinned against the wall of a service station toilet, with your hand covering my mouth. Pause. In a toilet or in a car or in a room. The place is not important but certainly nowhere fancy. Pause. And I imagine it every single day because of the way you say...*

ASS *Good morning.*

WOMAN *Stopping the recording. Good morning.*

ASS *Good morning.*

WOMAN *Good morning.*

ASS *Good morning.*

WOMAN *Good morning.*

ASS *Good morning.*

WOMAN *She continues recording. And even before punching my ticket in the machine, I've already started to imagine it. And the way you've just wished me a good morning has touched me deep inside. Pause. Then I see you sitting down, watching me out of the corner of your eye in the rearview mirror, discrete, silent, and I know that with you I can really open up and be myself. In body and soul. Pause. And before getting to the empty back seat I am not in the toilet any more, nor in the car, we are in...*

Woman stops recording, takes one of the tapes and puts it into the stereo. The voices of a man and a woman are heard, rising steadily. They are making love. Sighing, moaning. No names are heard.

WOMAN *To the microphone.* A public park, the one that the bus passes on its last three stops. The one that looks completely abandoned and has been left to go to the dogs.

ASS The Centenary Park.

WOMAN *To the microphone.* The park I imagine as the perfect place for our rendezvous. In my mind, you'd stop the bus /

ASS And I did stop.

WOMAN *To the microphone.* I'd get off.

ASS I got off.

WOMAN *To the microphone.* And it wouldn't be necessary to say anything else.

Silence.

ASS I didn't say anything.

WOMAN Only the sex would break the silence. You'd cover my mouth, you'd be gentle but hurried, trembling yet strong. And I would position myself for you and you for me.

Woman stops recording.

WOMAN Good morning, my love.

ASS I bet the customers at the fruit stall all say good morning to you as well, don't they?

WOMAN Yes, but they don't all drop their trousers though, do they? I could've caught the 63 instead, you know? Or even the 42.

ASS Yes, but then none of this would've happened and besides you'd have been late for work if you'd taken the 42.

WOMAN Don't be stupid.

ASS Come here.

WOMAN What for? To look at stamps?

ASS What's wrong with my stamps? You know you like them...

WOMAN Oh, yes, of course! I'm a huge fan of your stamps.

ASS Come on, come here...

WOMAN Stamps are trivial diversions.

ASS Maybe I like trivial diversions.

WOMAN I hope you're not referring to me?

ASS No, of course not! Come on, come here and I'll record something for you...

WOMAN What, and then leave it for me on the answering machine?

ASS Sometimes I come home and put a tape on while I have a shower. As a matter of routine, like somebody putting on music or the radio.

WOMAN It's a distraction like any other –I don't see anything odd in that.

ASS It makes me feel closer to you, more like you, it's strange.

WOMAN Some couples take up ballroom dancing to bring themselves closer together...

ASS No, no, don't even suggest it...

WOMAN Why not? Come on cha, cha, cha.

ASS No, no, not again!

WOMAN Come on, love, let it take you...

ASS I've let it take me enough already.

WOMAN Come ooon...

ASS No!

Woman dances in front of Ass, only a few steps, trying to arouse him. He remains in his seat.

WOMAN Come on, let's try it one day...

ASS No. They'll look at me and think I'm useless...

WOMAN It's not what other people think, it's what I think that counts. And what you think. Everybody I see at the market has a certain idea of what I'm like and the same happens with you on the bus. The neighbours have another idea of us and that man you see every morning as well. But when we get home, we are here together, just the two of us, free from outside conjectures. We close the door and enter into our little cave, my love.

ASS So I could kill children in my own home and it wouldn't matter.

WOMAN You could kill children and dance with me.

ASS *Taking the recorder and getting ready to record.* And I arrive home. I never thought that there could be anybody there when I arrived home. And I say hello, are you here or not, but I go through the door and say hello, anyway. And I never thought I would have my own cave. And I head for the shower to take off the smell of the bus, but first I put the tape on, I hear your voice, my voice. And in the bathroom, now, I undress. *Following his own indications, he starts to take off his clothes.* First my shoes, then socks, trousers, t-shirt and finally underpants.

WOMAN Wait a minute.

Ass does not finish undressing, still in his underpants. Woman stops the recorder, takes the stamps, wets them with her tongue and starts sticking them onto his body, one by one. This is what I like to do with stamps.

ASS *Whispering in Woman's ear.* You like them now because you see them in a different light. Because where once I was silent, now I speak; where once I was still, now I act. Because where once I was predictable, now I do things you never imagined; while you've always done what you thought, what you felt, always; you never put things off for later, you always do them, and I like this about you. Always.

WOMAN *Whispering in Ass's ear while continuing to stick stamps on his body.* Honey, you do unpredictable things because you like doing them, don't you? Because you didn't dare to do them before; you carried the burden of other people's opinions, and that's why you'd never stopped the bus at a stretch of open ground and why nobody had ever waited for you in such a place.

ASS *Whispering in Woman's ear.* The day people do whatever enter their heads, they'll have to keep the children off the streets.

WOMAN *Whispering in Ass's ear.* That day I'll have an excuse to stay locked up here with you.

Woman finishes sticking all the stamps on his body.

ASS I'm not a wild man like you think I am.

WOMAN No, more like a stamp man!

They laugh.

PICTURE 3
everyday scene with vegetables

Woman is washing vegetables. Ass is still engrossed in his stamp collection.

WOMAN Cauliflower.

ASS Yes.

WOMAN Chards.

ASS Yes.

WOMAN Cucumber.

ASS Yes.

WOMAN Artichokes.

ASS Yes.

WOMAN Onion.

ASS Definitely!

WOMAN Celery.

ASS Hang on. *He looks through his stamps.* Yes, yes, it's here.

WOMAN Lettuce.

ASS Of course.

WOMAN Mache.

ASS Mache? Don't think so. *Looking through his stamps.* No, no.

WOMAN Pumpkin.

ASS Ah, that's an easy one, yes!

WOMAN Peas.

ASS Let me have a look. *He looks through his stamps.* Yes.

WOMAN Radishes.

ASS Ah, yes!

WOMAN Your favourite?

ASS Recently acquired.

WOMAN Did you find the rocket one?

ASS Yes, look.

WOMAN Who would think of making a stamp with a picture of some rocket on it?

ASS I would, but I can't draw.

Silence.

WOMAN Couldn't you sleep last night?

ASS Why?

WOMAN I woke up this morning and you weren't there.

ASS I'm on the early shift all month.

Pause.

WOMAN There was lettuce in the bed.

ASS I was hungry.

WOMAN Every time you see the leftovers that I bring home from the market your eyes nearly pop out of your head.

ASS It's healthy to eat vegetables, besides, they remind me of you, your lips, your eyes, your elbows, your ears...

WOMAN I turned over, half asleep, to give you a cuddle and in your place I could smell onions and chards, I almost threw up.

ASS I got hungry and I couldn't stop myself, I didn't want to stop myself.

WOMAN I'm surrounded by vegetables all day and when I get home to you, you smell of vegetables –it's the last straw! I'm flattered by it, don't get me wrong, but it's the last thing I need! Vegetables mean the outside world to me, cabbages are people, cucumbers are streets, peas are obligations, beetroots are conjectures... The people that come to the market stall, they disgust me –repressed vegetable eaters they are– the lot of them! They are not human – they hide their desires under chard leaves, it's horrible; sickening –they scare me! Tomorrow I'll eat a big, juicy steak in bed! And even though it repulses me I'll enjoy seeing the blood ooze out when I cut into it! Hah!

ASS I feel sick.

WOMAN From all that lettuce.

ASS No, from the blood... I think I'm going to be sick... *Acting as if he is going to vomit and starts taking deep breaths.*

WOMAN Right now, I could eat a nice, little rabbit. I'd like to examine its tiny legs and gnaw the meat right down to its little bones. I'd like to see its tendons, its veins –bring the meat close to my ear and hear its little voice speaking to me –touch it to my face and feel its softness... *Ass still feeling sick and eating lettuce compulsively.*

ASS Stop it! Please...

WOMAN I'll bring a big piece of meat home, the biggest I can find. I'll slap it on the table and I'll cut it up, piece by piece. First, a leg, then a wing, then I'll cut its neck and take off the skin, and droplets of blood will spill onto the plate – no, not onto the plate, onto the bed – that way there'll be salad for us as well and the blood will stain the sheets.

Ass continues feeling sick and eating lettuce compulsively, he covers his ears with the lettuce leaves. Silence. Ass moves his head and makes a humming noise to drown out the sound of her voice. She looks at him, laughs, embraces him.

WOMAN I was only making a comment, my dear, it's alright. I know you're not like that.

Silence. Embracing.

WOMAN You'll turn into a snail, you know, if you eat so many greens.

ASS If I turn into a snail I'll attach myself to your body and come out when it rains.

WOMAN Well, ok, a rabbit then.

ASS If I turn into a rabbit, we'll end up shagging all day and having little baby rabbits running all over the house and jumping in and out of the furniture.

WOMAN *She gives him one of the vegetables she has washed.* After cleaning the bed this morning, I made a tape for you.

Silence. Woman puts a tape in the tape deck. Ass eats.

WOMAN'S RECORDED VOICE *Whispering*. Come my guide. It's dark, come closer. You're almost there. Reach out your arm, touch my hand, have you got it? Come to me, my guide –that's it, give me your hand and don't go groping your way in the dark. Touch my neck, can you feel it? The journey starts here, from my neck to my feet. I won't move a muscle, I won't breath. Wait, when I tell you...

WOMAN *Over the recording*. When I was little, I used to fall almost every day, I became accustomed to blood. Later, I got used to fighting with my brothers, it didn't bother me either. As I got older, I grew accustomed to myself without fear. But I don't intend to get used to anything else ever again. That way everything will be a surprise, I am my own guide –my stomach, my sight, my sex are all guides; your smell, your face, your sex are all guides too. Are you listening to me?

ASS Eh?

WOMAN Are you alright?

ASS *Without stopping eating*. Yes. I'm hungry.

WOMAN I can see that.

ASS *Without stopping eating, looking content*. If I'm hungry, I eat /

WOMAN I can see that.

ASS If I'm tired, I sleep /

WOMAN Ok.

ASS If I'm cold, I wrap up /

WOMAN My love, are you ok?

Silence.

ASS I'm fine, never been better, my love. *Pause*. Good morning.

WOMAN Close your eyes.

ASS What?

WOMAN Close your eyes. *Ass closes his eyes.*

WOMAN *Taking some of the vegetables that she's washed, she gets undressed slowly, sits in a chair, naked, picks up the vegetables and places them strategically over her body and remains still as if in a picture*. Your world is a world of green, my love, the only things you care about are eating, having sex and stamps, in that order. I see you wake in the night with vacant eyes, wandering through a green landscape, enormous fields where you can saunter freely...

Ass starts to outline very subtly the imaginary body of a woman, with his eyes closed, from the neck to the waist.

WOMAN I imagine you running and jumping through the fields of the still and perfect landscapes of your stamps; lying in the grass, inside your green and natural world. One unique colour –green. Lying and eating in the grass, without fear. And in bed, my breasts are small hillocks close to the meadow, my mouth a cave at the end of my neck, my shoulders a distant mountain range and my eyes two moons. And you must be happy in your green landscape. *Pause*. Open your eyes.

Ass looks wonderously at Woman, who remains motionless, like a statue.

ASS Wait. *Taking some rocket and throwing it over her as if it were confetti. They laugh and kiss.*

WOMAN I'm a woman of the wild even though I roam the streets.

ASS My lettuce woman.

PICTURE 4
everyday scene with buses

Space resounds with the intermitent sounds of flies and noises from the neighbours and from the street (arguments, music, TVs, babies crying...) Ass in his chair, the place is a mess. Leftover vegetables litter the floor. Ass is eating vegetables, he keeps fiddling with his stamps. At times he stops and stares into space, he puts on music, Wagner's symphony No.1 Ila Kraftig bewegh, doch nicht zu schuell / Die Meistersinger von Nürberg. Woman is in a corner, in the dark. She enters the space. He sees her and pulls her up to dance with him slowly, clumsily. He nuzzles her, smells her. She smiles. The piece of music finishes. He carries on holding her. She breaks away.

WOMAN You smell awful, my dear.

Ass smells her up and down and then goes to his chair. He flops into it. Silence.

WOMAN My love, I've just told you that you smell really bad.

ASS There's no need to shout.

WOMAN I'm not shouting.

ASS Please, don't shout.

WOMAN I'm not shouting!

Ass covers his ears. Noises from the neighbours can be heard.

WOMAN What's the matter?

ASS Can't you hear it? It's doing my head in!

WOMAN I can't hear anything, love.

ASS Well, I can.

WOMAN I can't.

ASS I hear everything.

WOMAN What things?

ASS Don't shout!

WOMAN I'm not shouting, ok?

ASS Hush, quiet!

WOMAN This is crazy.

Complete silence.

WOMAN What's the matter with you?

Ass continues in silence.

WOMAN What are you doing? And what did you do yesterday –and the day before?

Ass continues in silence.

And what about the 57?

Ass continues in silence.

What about your beloved 57? This isn't like you.

ASS Hah! That's where you're wrong. What you see is what you get, in the flesh, au naturel, as you would say.

WOMAN My love, it's one thing to make compromises and another thing to change altogether.

Ass covers his ears. Noises from the neighbours can be heard.

ASS Those fucking noises again!

WOMAN What about the bus?

The noises stop. Ass keeps his ears covered, in silence. When he's sure that the noises have stopped, he picks up lettuce leaves from the floor and places them in his albums as if they were stamps. He picks them up, smooths them down, cuts them and puts them in.

WOMAN Come on, Stamp Man...

Ass continues in silence.

WOMAN Good morning.

ASS Good morning.

WOMAN Good morning.

ASS With his voice cracking. I've been sacked. My beloved 57 has gone for a Burton. They'll have given it to someone else by now.

WOMAN What did they sack you for, the vegetables?

ASS No – it was over a minor incident.

Both stay silent.

ASS Somebody saw me urinating against the bus door... at the start of a shift.

Woman remains silent.

ASS It wasn't the first time, but it was the first time anyone had seen me.

WOMAN Are you ill? Is that the reason? *Pause.* Are you incontinent?

ASS No, I just felt like pissing on MY bus, that's all.

WOMAN You what?

ASS I only do what I feel inside.

WOMAN Well, do what you feel inside somewhere else, not on the bus! By the way, you must also feel the urge to piss all over yourself because you smell shocking. Honey, there are limits.

ASS Not here, there aren't, not in our cave. *Sticks a stamp on his forehead, gets up from his chair and starts throwing vegetables.* Stamp Man has no limits! And neither does Lettuce Woman. Together, fuelled by the heady brew of sex and desire, they fight against everything and everybody. Them, alone, against evil Dr. Rule!

WOMAN That's enough!

ASS Didn't you want to dance?

WOMAN Baby, the neighbours have been complaining about the noise at night for days.

ASS That's because you tend to make a lot of noise.

WOMAN Not that noise. The noise you make when you get up to eat. The noise you make when you put on music at full volume whenever you feel like it. And the smell in the stairway; that horrible smell! Love, the market's barred you from entering again and it looks like that dog from the park is going to need an operation. They'll report you, for sure.

ASS My beloved 57...

WOMAN That's what I say.

ASS It doesn't matter.

WOMAN It does matter.

ASS I like how you are. On the outside and the inside.

WOMAN I know.

ASS I like eating lettuce in bed. I like making love to you amongst green leaves. I like fighting with dogs if they piss me off. I like putting on loud music to drown everything out. I like pissing on the bus before I get on. I like looking at things five centimetres away and laughing. I like liking you. I like all these things and I don't intend to give them up.

Silence.

WOMAN I'm going to stop bringing you vegetables. You are not going to eat any more vegetables, dear.

Ass covers his ears. Noises and sounds from the neighbours can be heard.

WOMAN Do you hear me? No more vegetables. No more vegetables!

ASS *Frantically.* Stop! Get out! Be quiet!

Woman goes and gets a bag of meat, takes it out, cuts it into pieces whilst the noises and Ass's shouting continue. She smears her arms with the meat, shoves them under Ass's nose and rubs them in his face.

WOMAN He who begins to regard himself as a stranger will soon forget himself altogether. Greens cause amnesia, things should be sold when they're dead but vegetables are sold when they are born. Only flesh is sold when it's dead, my love, why can't you see that? It bleeds the same if you cut it with a scalpel or with a knife, my love, don't you see? I'm me and you are you. No more vegetables. You hear me? No more...

ASS Stop! Get out! Be quiet!

WOMAN No more veg! Meat, meat! Meat, meat! *Whispering.* Meat, meat, meat, meat, meat, meat...

ASS *Shouting.* Quiet!

WOMAN Meat, meat!

Woman covers her ears from Ass's shouting.

PICTURE 5
everyday scene with allotment

The space resounds with the buzzing of flies and the recorded tape of a man and a woman making love. Their breathing is faster than before. Semi-darkness. Ass appears with some sacks of earth, carries four very heavy bags as if they were as light as a feather, moves aside the objects that are in his way, tears open a bag and tips earth over the floor until it covers one part of the floor. He is breathing quickly and making little noises with his mouth. He's excited. He tears open another sack and repeats the action. He kneels down and arranges the earth into different strips, like an allotment. He looks for a standing lamp, takes it and drags it to where the earth is and sets it up so that it shines on the earth. He produces an envelope of seeds from his pocket, plants them and then sticks a cane in the earth. He then goes to get the bucket with the stamps soaking inside, brings it back and waters the seeds. He sits on the earth. Woman enters and Ass breaks off his actions. Woman stops the tape and approaches Ass.

WOMAN Good morning, my love.

ASS *Silence.* Good morning.

WOMAN I'm absolutely shattered.

ASS I'm hungry.

WOMAN And you're thinking of eating earth?

ASS It'll grow.

WOMAN I've brought you some food – red.

Silence.

WOMAN Are you hungry?

ASS Yes.

WOMAN Now, you and I are going to sit down and eat quietly together, and tomorrow as well, and little by little everything will go back to the way it was before. We can't go on like this.

ASS It'll grow.

WOMAN Yes, yes...

Ass takes her hand and she sits beside him and the two of them gaze at the earth on the floor. Ass smells her, licks her very slowly.

ASS Good morning /

Silence.

WOMAN Good morning /

Silence.

ASS Good morning /

WOMAN *Pause.* Good morning.

They continue repeating good morning as they kiss and embrace on the earth. Ass makes little noises and breathes heavily. A light bulb comes on at the same time as the standing lamp goes out.

PICTURE 6
the transformation II

Complete darkness. A light bulb goes on and off sporadically. These brief moments of soft light – not flashes – afford us a momentary glimpse of the characters' faces and parts of their bodies, and the far corners of the space, but never their entirety. At the same time as a certain corner of the space is illuminated, a faint sound of buzzing flies may be heard.

ASS Are you awake?

Silence.

ASS Are you awake? My love...

Silence.

ASS Are you awake?

WOMAN *Pause.* I am now.

ASS Are you ok?

WOMAN What's the matter?

ASS Are you feeling alright?

WOMAN Yes. Why?

ASS My stomach feels as if it's about to burst.

WOMAN Does it hurt?

ASS Yes, it's killing me. Doesn't yours?

WOMAN No.

ASS Not even a little bit?

WOMAN No. How does it hurt? Like stabbing pains?

ASS Yes.

WOMAN Breath deeply.

Ass takes a few deep breaths and remains silent.

WOMAN Better?

We hear Ass get up to be sick, vomits and returns to the same place.

WOMAN Better?

ASS Yes.

WOMAN You'll have to get used to it, meat is very heavy on the stomach. Come on, let's go to sleep.

Silence.

ASS I can't.

WOMAN Try.

Silence.

ASS Are you still awake?

Pause.

WOMAN Yes.

ASS I've got a crick in my neck.

WOMAN Keep taking deep breaths and try to relax.

ASS I can't.

WOMAN My love, I need to sleep. If it's not the smell of lettuce, it's indigestion and if it's not...

ASS And also other things...

WOMAN *Smiling*. Yes, but at least we do those other things together...

ASS It's the only meat that I like.

WOMAN I'll take that as a compliment.

Ass makes noises of pain and puts his hand on his stomach.

ASS I feel dizzy.

WOMAN Open the window if you want.

ASS My whole body hurts.

WOMAN Pull the covers up and try to sleep. Or I'll make you a cup of tea if you want.

ASS I feel really strange.

WOMAN Well, you are strange.

ASS Really? Have I got a temperature?

Silence.

WOMAN No. *Pause*. Try to sleep.

Silence.

ASS I'm cold.

WOMAN It's indigestion, don't worry. Now sleep!

ASS I'd like to tell you something /

WOMAN Not now, it's late and I have to get up very early.

Silence.

ASS But I can't...

WOMAN Can't what?

Silence.

ASS I can't find the words.

WOMAN Wasn't it your stomach?

ASS I think of them but they don't do as they are told.

WOMAN Have a yoghurt, it'll make you feel better.

Ass makes a noise as if saying no. Silence.

ASS *Stammering*. I c_n't th_nk

Silence.

ASS *Stammering*. I d_n't_are ab_ut _nyth_ng.

Silence.

ASS *Stammering*. My own smell makes me pass out.

Silence.

ASS *Stammering*. I'v_ g_t th_ swea_s.

WOMAN Love. it's late, don't worry. Everything will be alright. You are a bit strange, yes, but who isn't? At the moment, everything's new, but you just have to adapt. You'll get used to it soon.

ASS *Stammering.* C_n't_ou he_r a n_ise?

WOMAN Again?

ASS *Stammering.* C_n't y_he_it?

WOMAN There are some earplugs in the second drawer.

Silence.

ASS *Stammering.* H_v_n't y_not_ced?

WOMAN What?

ASS *Stammering.* It's grown ag_n.

Silence.

ASS *Stammering.* Q_te a bit

Silence.

WOMAN You're telling me.

ASS And?

We hear Ass rush out to be sick leaving Woman without answering. The vomiting becomes more violent and is accompanied by coughing and spasms. The flickering light becomes more intense. Ass returns to Woman's side wearing a big cardboard head of an ass. Woman looks at him, the light intensifies in the area around their heads. Ass has got his hands in closed fists and walks with a certain gait of an ass. Silence.

WOMAN My love, I really do think the dinner didn't agree with you.

PICTURE 7

everyday scene with sounds of braying

The space is even dirtier than before. Woman moves aside the earth that Ass left to make the vegetable patch. She pushes it to one side, slowly, almost idly. She stops what she is doing and goes to get a tape and puts it on. The voices of a man and woman making love can be heard. Ass is sitting down, still, motionless. They remain in silence a good while. Woman observes Ass and utters a few phrases sotto voce which we cannot make out. Ass is wearing (and continues to wear until the curtain) the big cardboard ass's head. Once she has finished moving all the earth to one side, Woman approaches Ass.

WOMAN That's me. Pause. And you. Pause. At the market. Remember?

Ass does not react. He remains sitting down, still, motionless.

WOMAN You were like a dog with two tails.

Ass does not react. He remains sitting down, still, motionless. Ass and Woman look at each other for a few seconds, until the panting on the tape finishes, complete silence except for the faint, sporadic sound of flies.

WOMAN Is this how an animal looks at things?

Ass turns his cardboard head away from Woman, who takes a lettuce leaf out of her pocket and moves closer so that he turns back to her.

WOMAN I asked you a question.

Ass grabs the lettuce leaf.

WOMAN I, too, can be disinclined to do things.

Ass eats the lettuce leaf without paying any attention to her. He scratches himself. He is restless.

WOMAN My love, make an effort. I am. It's always me, me, me, me. *She whispers in his ear.*

Ass does not react. He eats.

WOMAN Ok, we'll go back to the vegetables. Whatever. Each to his own. Giving in can be quite relaxing, actually. More than your massages, in fact.

She smiles, Ass looks at her.

WOMAN Are you ok?

Ass moves his head up and down, signifying yes.

WOMAN Don't worry. If this is what you're like when all's said and done, you're not so different from a man as you may seem.

Ass shrugs his shoulders and gives her a piece of lettuce.

WOMAN No, thanks. It's nice, really nice, that you want to bring me to your territory, love, but all this is doing my head in! Right now I feel like going out onto the streets and looking for a lion! I'm at the end of my tether! I'm used to taking charge of things, but /

Ass caresses her with his cardboard muzzle.

WOMAN It's true that not everything is worth doing alone.

Ass caresses her again.

WOMAN And I encouraged you, yes, encouraged you... please, how ridiculous!

Ass caresses her again.

WOMAN I haven't caught the bus in days, the mere thought of it depresses me, I don't recognise myself any more. Weary, yes, furious, yes, cheerful, yes but depressed?

Woman caresses Ass and makes little noises. She caresses him with her whole head, softly, scratches his arms, and punches him lightly. Ass relaxes, clearly enjoying it. She notices and continues. They do this for a good while, relaxing together and caressing each other, mainly, Woman to Ass. As a game, she makes animal gestures (noises with her mouth, pulling her leg back...) which he responds to.

WOMAN Can you hear that now? What are they doing up there? Are they shouting? Crying? Making love? *Pause.* I've never been one for listening at walls before. Is that somebody screaming?

Ass nods his head.

WOMAN Are they making love?

Ass shrugs.

WOMAN Are they laughing?

Ass shakes his head, stops suddenly, makes a listening gesture and then changes the movement to a nod.

WOMAN I don't want them to hear us, to make things up about us.

A timer alarm goes off. Woman gets up to turn it off, goes back to Ass's side, and sits down with a hot wax hair-remover. She waxes her legs as she talks.

WOMAN We should have made an agreement, my love, set a few ground rules. People have always done so and there must be some reason for it. Each one doing their bit. Look at this place, it's a pig-sty! No more eating in bed. Since the bus episode I haven't heard a peep out of you. No more Stamp Man and Wild Woman, nonsense. There's nothing wild about having a life-sized pet, because that's all animals are when they are kept at home –pets! Would you like me to call you Rover, my pet?

Ass shakes his head repeatedly.

WOMAN No, ok, I know. How about Benjy?

Ass shakes his head repeatedly.

WOMAN I've got it, Bouncer!

Ass shakes his head repeatedly.

Woman approaches Ass, and grabs his arm. Ass looks at her wondering what she's going to do. She starts to put wax onto his arm.

ASS *Braying.* Hee-haaaaaaaaw!

WOMAN It's necessary.

ASS Hee-haaaw. *Trying to pull away but she holds him firmly, they struggle.*

WOMAN *Blowing on the wax.* It's for your own good.

ASS Hee-haaaw...

Woman tears off the wax, Ass lets out a terrible, braying scream.

WOMAN Ssssh! They'll hear us! What will they think?

Ass makes a concerted effort to tear his arm away and does so with so much force that he almost knocks Woman off balance.

PICTURE 8

everyday scene with hamster

Woman is holding a cage with a white hamster inside and relates to it the following:

WOMAN When I was a little girl I spent much of the time alone; not for any particular reason –it wasn't through neglect or anybody's fault or anything like that– that's just how it was. I've never wanted to have children and plants always die on me. I don't feel the need to be responsible for anything in order to fill the hours nor to while them away; but as a child I had a tortoise –well, not really “had” one, it was just there. I spent hours upon hours with that tortoise. Not that it did anything or anything like that– it didn't give me its foot; half of the time it didn't even bother to stick its head out of its shell for me. It didn't run or fetch a ball or speak or make a noise or anything –it was just there. My brothers used to take it and they would throw it to one another, launching it through the air like a rugby ball. And maybe it liked it, I don't know. Each time they took it I would do the same as I always did but without the tortoise– and I never expected it to return. Everything that I was supposed to do and think was contrary to what passed through my mind. I imagined living with the tortoise in a jungle by a lake. Without any more ado. I had the impression that when I looked at her I could understand her, in fact, we were alike in many ways. And then I gave her a name and became her master, as my parents were mine. And on that day I couldn't look at her. Now that she belonged to me, I wanted her to give me her foot or to be there waiting for me when I got home or wag her tail, but she didn't do any of these things and finally I grew tired of her. *Pause.* And then one day she died. She fell on her back and was left out in the sun all weekend. And I looked at her and I felt pity for her and this time I did do what I was supposed to do and think –I cried. I was sad and I missed her. We were no longer alike. And I didn't understand at all. Was it love?

Woman gives the cage with the hamster to Ass.

ASS Hee-haw...

WOMAN It's your new pet.

ASS Hee-haw...

WOMAN What are you going to call it?

ASS Eeyore.

WOMAN That's nice.

Ass nods his head in agreement.

WOMAN I look at you and you remind me of someone.

Ass shrugs.

WOMAN If I were to fall on my back one day and was unable to get up would you give me your hoof?

Ass nods his head.

WOMAN Have you practiced today?

Ass shakes his head.

WOMAN Looooove...

ASS Hee-haw...

WOMAN That's no way to talk.

ASS Hee-haw...

WOMAN I miss your stories of the 57.

ASS Hee-haw...

WOMAN I walk the streets and I feel a part of the flagstones. But it's ok.

Ass nods his head.

WOMAN I'm here. With you. Here and now.

ASS Hee-haw...

WOMAN I think Eeyore might be hungry. How about you?

Ass nods his head.

WOMAN I brought loads of trays today, we can freeze them. And we'll buy a hand vacuum-cleaner and a microwave and lots of things with plugs and batteries. The world is out there, my love, and I'm one of its flagstones and so are you. In the fruit shop we should also have everything on trays. Polystyrene is the most hygienic thing ever. My love, we are coming on in leaps and bounds

Woman goes over to the stereo and puts on classical music, Wagner's symphony No.1 Ila Kraftig bewegh, doch nicht zu schuell / Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg at a high volume, which will blend randomly at certain moments with the sound of flies. She puts on a short dressing-gown, a pair of slippers, and examines a pile of books. She sits down and starts to read Robinson Crusoe. Ass stares at his new pet Eeyore. He gives him a piece of lettuce, moves the cage, speaks to him (hee-haw, hee-haw...) and gets ready to show him his stamp collection. With the aid of an enormous magnifying glass he shows the hamster his stamps at the same time as the audience see them enlarged. There will follow a series of stamps with images representing the history of life on Earth, starting with the Big Bang, the dinosaur age, prehistory, Homo Sapiens, the Egyptians, the Roman Empire, the Greeks, the Middle Ages... and so on, up to the present day.

WOMAN Reading an extract from Robinson Crusoe to Ass, the music still blares out. "In this government of my temper I remained near a year, lived a very sedate, retired life, as you may well suppose; (...) I thought I lived really very happily in all things except that of society. *Pause.* The poor savage who fled, (...) was so frightened with the fire and noises of my piece, that he stood stock still, and neither came forward or went backward (...) at length he came close to me (...), and laid his head upon the ground, and taking me by the foot, set my foot upon his head: this, it seems, was in token of swearing to be my slave forever. (...) In a little time I began to speak to him and teach him to speak to me; and first, I let him know his name should be Friday, which was the day I saved his life; (...) I likewise taught him to say "Master", and then let him know that was to be my name: I likewise taught him to say "yes" and "no" and to know the meaning of them."

ASS Hee-haw...

Ass approaches Woman and clings to her. They sway to and fro as if they were dancing drunkenly. Woman smiles.

PICTURE 9
everyday scene with ass and woman

The space resounds with one of the recorded tapes. We recognize the voices of a man and a woman making love mixed with the braying of an ass, as if a woman is making love to an ass. Ass has a small blackboard hanging from his neck. Woman is preparing sushi.

WOMAN Do you want to let Eeyore out for a walk?

Ass writes a "yes" on the board.

WOMAN Ok, love, we'll let him out later. Do you want me to go out for a short walk?

Ass writes a "no" on the board.

WOMAN Have you taught Eeyore to wipe his feet on the tray?

Ass writes a "yes" on the board.

WOMAN Get Eeyore ready and lend me your ears. Today's class will be poetry.

Ass makes a gesture of applause or happiness, picks up Eeyore's cage, puts it on his lap and turns to listen to Woman.

WOMAN

Green, how I want you green.
Green wind. Green branches.
The ship out on the sea
and the horse on the mountain.
With the shade around her waist
she dreams on her balcony,
green flesh, her hair green,
with eyes of cold silver.
Green, how I want you green.
Under the gypsy moon,
all things are watching her
and she cannot see them.

Green, how I want you green.
Big hoarfrost stars
come with the fish of shadow
that opens the road of dawn.
The fig tree rubs its wind
with the sandpaper of its branches,
and the forest, cunning cat,
bristles its brittle fibers.
But who will come? And from where?
She is still on her balcony
green flesh, her hair green,
dreaming in the bitter sea.

Ass applauds. Silence.

WOMAN *Reading the box.* Love, do you like...wasabi?

Ass writes "what?" on the board.

WOMAN Wa-sa-bi. *Pause.* It doesn't matter. Let's try it, it looks very clean.

Ass writes "no" on the board.

WOMAN When in doubt, it's good manners not to do what you feel like doing. So wasabi it is, all round.

ASS Hee-haw.

WOMAN Ssssh. I don't want any tantrums.

ASS Hee-haw.

WOMAN Today, I passed by the number 57. They've given it to a complete moron. Man is, in essence, good –but men are terrible and the one on your beloved 57 is even worse. Of course, a man will always be a man, however, and an ass will never be a lion, don't you agree?

Ass shrugs his shoulders.

WOMAN We're alright here, you and me. What an idiot!

Ass brays differently. It is a sound halfway between a bray and a "yes".

WOMAN Very good, my love, very good!

Ass makes another sound, halfway between a bray and a word, saying something unintelligible.

WOMAN Well done, my love! I've signed up for a cookery course, a D.I.Y. one and a gardening one. And in each one there are lots more people. Don't you think it's funny that a group of different people all decide to put their names down for a D.I.Y. course at the same time. I mean, that they all have the same idea –it's weird, isn't it?

Ass makes a sound halfway between a bray and a "yes".

WOMAN I know. People do some strange things, don't they?

Silence.

Do you want me to make you a new tape? And when I go to work tomorrow I'll leave it on for you so that you wake up to my voice.

Ass writes a "yes" on the board. Woman goes to get the tape-recorder and gets ready to record.

WOMAN *Recording in a corner trying not to let Ass listen.* Sex is the most real thing that I have – all the rest is just nostalgia. I come out of the market and ride round and round on the first bus that comes along. Everyday I get on a different number, let it take me to a certain point of the city and there I catch another bus and so on and so forth until I finally get home; feeling lost and dejected. After everything we've been through, the last thing I want is to make do with second best. We learn to make do with so little that before long masturbating will count as having sex. And you, my good savage, my man, you wait for me silently at home. One can't live from nostalgia alone. And I like to find you calmly waiting for me when I get home. And you like the way I come home and move things around. We will be so immensely happy, you and I – so happy that we'll make ourselves sick! Good morning, my love.

ASS Hee-haw.

WOMAN I'm coming, I'm coming.

ASS Hee-haw.

Silence.

WOMAN I had a row, yesterday, with a customer at the market.

Ass looks at her attentively.

WOMAN She was pawing all the chards with her sweaty, bloated fingers. It was so disgusting!

Ass looks at her attentively.

WOMAN And to top it all, she didn't even buy a single one! She left them all contaminated with God-knows-what and then bought some potatoes!

Ass writes "bad" on the board.

WOMAN I had to stop myself from whacking her round the head with a polystyrene tray.

Ass writes "and then?" on the board.

WOMAN Then I thought of you – the old you – the you before me. And the memory was misty, like something strangely far away, like a dream.

Ass writes "and then?" on the board.

WOMAN I took a few very deep breaths, so deep that I almost fainted and then I flashed her a smile. She paid and then left.

Ass claps or makes a gesture of happiness.

WOMAN It's exhausting!

Ass writes "no" on the board.

WOMAN I've got so much to learn.

Ass writes "yes" on the board.

WOMAN Ok, ok, I get the message.

Ass writes "more" on the board.

WOMAN Time will tell.

Ass writes "good morning" on the board.

WOMAN Good morning, my love. I love you, too.

PICTURE 10
the transformation III

Darkness with the twinkling of light bulbs. The ceiling full of bulbs attached to one another, at varying heights. One bulb or several go on and off randomly, only one at a time and for a brief moment. These brief moments of light afford us a momentary glimpse of specific elements of the space; the hamster, books and so on, but never its entirety.

WOMAN Are you awake?

Silence.

WOMAN I'm not feeling well.

ASS *Stammering.* A-a-aren't you?

WOMAN I've got a splitting headache.

ASS *Stammering.* W-w-w-why?

WOMAN I d_n't know.

ASS *Stammering.* I_ll g_off. Go t_sleep.

Silence.

WOMAN I'm scared.

Ass tries to speak but does not manage it this time. She understands him, however.

WOMAN I don't think so. Maybe – I feel strange.

ASS *Stammering.* It's b_n days.

WOMAN I know. I can't be bothered to move. I feel lazy. I act rashly.

ASS *Stammering.* T_ke_t e_sy.

WOMAN Love, have you been eating in bed?

ASS *Stammering.* N-n-no.

WOMAN I can smell meat.

ASS *Stammering.* Y-you.

WOMAN Ow, it hurts!

Ass tries to speak but this time he does not manage it. She understands, however.

WOMAN I can't, it hurts too much. And I think I've shrunk.

ASS *Stammering.* N_.

Ass tries to speak but this time he does not manage it. She understands, however.

WOMAN No, thanks, love. I'd prefer not to take anything.

ASS *Stammering.* Yo_h_rt.

WOMAN A yoghurt won't get rid of my headache.

ASS *Stammering.* W_ter?

WOMAN Ok, a little.

We hear Ass go to get a glass of water.

WOMAN Thanks.

ASS *Stammering*. Sl_p.

Silence.

WOMAN I can't, my head's killing me. What if I have to go to the doctor's?

ASS *Stammering*. H_ve you g_t a t_mp_rture?

WOMAN I don't think so. What if I have to take some pills or medicine? I've never been to the doctor's.

ASS *Stammering*. Sl_p.

WOMAN What if I've got a tumour or had a brain haemorrhage?

ASS *Stammering*. Bad_tomach.

WOMAN No, my stomach's fine, it's just my head. Are you ok?

ASS *Stammering*. Yes.

WOMAN Well, I don't know what it can be then. I'm scared. What if I have to have an x-ray? What if they can't find what I've got? I prefer not to know.

ASS *Stammering*. P_in.

WOMAN Of course it's the pain I'm afraid of, you idiot!

ASS *Stammering*. N_rves.

WOMAN Maybe yes, prolonged stress. I don't know, it hurts a lot. Is it normal?

ASS *Stammering*. M_graine.

WOMAN What's that? Is it dangerous? I think I'm dying.

ASS *Stammering*. No.

Silence.

WOMAN I feel so strange.

ASS *Stammering*. No_s_x.

WOMAN I haven't felt like it for days.

ASS *Stammering*. Spe_k.

WOMAN Yes, maybe a bit more than usual, but there's nothing wrong with that.

ASS *Stammering*. Re_d.

WOMAN Do you think it's because I read so much?

ASS *Stammering*. M_ybe.

WOMAN It's killing me!

ASS *Stammering*. Sle_p.

WOMAN I'm trying! I'm trying!

ASS *Stammering*. Lia_.

WOMAN No. I am!

Silence.

WOMAN Love, I feel dizzy.

ASS *Stammering*. It's_k.

WOMAN My head's spinning, love, my vision's blurred.

Woman faints and falls to the floor.

ASS Lo_e, l_ve, l_ve...

Ass is making noises. He's scared. He manages to raise her. He gets up. The flickering lights get more intense. Woman gets up. She's wearing a big, cardboard head of a woman, which she will wear until the curtain. Ass looks at her, the light intensifies in the area around their heads. Woman touches her cardboard head.

WOMAN My love, what if I'm allergic to wasabi?

PICTURE 11

epilogue

Ass will have a microphone if necessary so that his voice can be heard from inside the cardboard head. His right hand trembles continuously during the text. Woman hangs a rabbit and some chards very slowly on the ceiling. She stands beside Ass and remains still.

ASS I don't know what to do about everything that she says to me. I've always liked placid things. Placid and specific. The bus was a specific thing, rocket is specific, stamps are placid stories. I am fond of them; they are my passion – a quiet passion, albeit, but no less of a passion for being so. But desire is not placid; from the moment I cast my eye at her in the rearview mirror, it ceased to be so. To this day, I've never had more than a dozen erotic dreams or masturbated in a public place. I've never shirked my duty whilst supervising children and I've never contradicted authority (except in the case of my father during my adolescence). Never. *Pause*. I like things to be in order; I'm a placid man. *Pause*. – I always have been. Well – was. People don't say what they think before thinking about what they want to say and dogs don't shit on the pavement. It's not so difficult and if everybody does what they are supposed to do then nobody will get hurt. *Pause*. Until now. And she waited right until the very last stop. There was nothing to say. Everything stirred up in me; I was blind, consumed by passion like never before. We made love on a stretch of open ground – I was so nervous I thought I was going to pass out. I got up the following day and it was as if someone had moved everything out of its place. I felt fragile, disorientated, confused – in love, possibly.

I got up and tried to do only the things that I knew that didn't involve danger. But the mere thought of the coins that I would have to handle on the first shift turned my stomach – coins coming from other hands, all kinds of hands, some sweaty, some dirty, with skin diseases. I threw up my coffee. I called the bus depot and told them that regretfully I wouldn't be able to go to work that morning and that someone would have to cover my beloved 57, and that I was very sorry; it was true.

It was the first time in my life that I hadn't made it in to work. It wouldn't be the last. I soaked my hands, like the stamps, all morning. I wanted to cleanse them of the coins, the skin diseases, the glue from the stamps – of everything, except her. The same hands that had, the night before, without knowing how, ended up on her breasts, in her mouth, in her sex. How could I ever dirty them again? I used to be a placid man and now I am no man at all.

Woman stands next to Ass. They remain still, expectant.

OFFSTAGE VOICE OF ASS The Buridan paradox consists of the following: not making a move. The story goes that two buckets are placed in front of an ass, one full of food and the other of water. Both buckets contain exactly the same quantity. The poor beast has no means of deciding which one to go for and remains immobile. Indecisive, battling against impatience, it stays where it is, continuing to ruminate on its dilemma, with no criteria with which to go on. I, too, found myself at this point and I went for the food decidedly, obtusely, with conviction.

Maybe the crux of the paradox in this case lies in an error of judgement. I simply didn't take into account the collateral damage. Everything has its place and every place its thing, and I already had my place. But desire moves bigger mountains than faith. Words alone will take me away from the buckets; words alone will

take me to the final scene. And I messed up; I was happy for a short time –I still am– domesticated, placid. I wait for her to come home, I live within the world of my stamps. I don't need to go anywhere, I don't need anything. But animals are not superior to us in any way and we are all ephemeral. So the Buridan ass died because it didn't know whether to go for the food or the drink. *Pause.* It died a safe distance from life.

They remain still for a few seconds, under the lights, and then gradually the lights fade to total darkness.