

A play celebrating the martyrdom of Saint Perptua. A person of acute and tender feeling amongst all the roaring life of Rome

She Was Ever Vain

A play in sixteen scenes

By Thomas Jackson

CAST

T. Marcellus Gallo: a Senator

P. Tertius Longinus: a Constructor

V. Peto Lucillius: an equestrian knight

C. Petronius Alba: a lawyer

Perpetua: daughter of Marcellus

Blandinus: a wily slave

Julia: a rich lady

Lydia: a not quite so rich lady

A Gaoler

A small choir is also required to sing in scenes 11 and 15. They do not have speaking parts, except one of them should read the prayers at the eucharist and another read the extract from St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. The parts of the Dionysians in scene 4 are taken by the actors wearing masks of the Venetian type not covering the lower part of the face.

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Preface

Except for Perpetua herself and the circumstances of her martyrdom, the characters and events depicted in this play are entirely fictitious. As in the play, Perpetua did quarrel bitterly with her father, was desperately anxious about her young child, did dream vividly, and did have a tutor and mentor who was terrified of the bears he could hear roaring and howling near their prison. Otherwise, even my presentation of Perpetua shows scant regard for historical accuracy. In fact, she was martyred not in Rome but in the provinces, where most of the martyrdoms took place, and not during the reign of Nero, in which, with many anachronisms, I have roughly set my play, but much later in 203 at Carthage. We have good reason to take the account of Perpetua's imprisonment and death given in *The Acts of the Martyrs* as pretty much an accurate account of what happened. Whereas many of the stories in the *Acts* are plainly hagiographical – white horses are seen galloping across the sky or voices speak from the heavens – this one is sober and factual. We also have Perpetua's own account of her time in prison, which she recorded in the journal that she kept right up to the moment of her death. This is one of the most interesting documents that have come down to us from the classical world. It is as if with the advent of Christianity a new phase of individual self-consciousness and personal self-possession came into being, forged, we might surmise, in the sufferings of the martyrs. Augustine's *Confessions* is the first autobiography, and this journal of Perpetua's, as far as I know, the first personal diary. Of particular interest are the dreams that Perpetua records. These dreams are not mythopoetic and stylized as are most accounts of dreams in the ancient world, but nocturnal fantasies recognizably like our own. She dreams that Christ is her father but that he is also the rich man who has paid for the staging of the *munera*, as the games during which she was to be martyred were called. The ambiguities would have fascinated Freud.

One feature of the story, which appears in some accounts but not others, is the episode in which Perpetua holds up her hand and stops the proceedings so that she can arrange her hair. We may reasonably doubt the truth of such a tale. But if it is not true it is one of those fictions that speak more eloquently than fact. For what we have to account for is surely one of the most amazing occurrences in the whole of history. The Roman games were not, as we might perhaps imagine, simply orgies of crude and savage barbarism, but immensely subtle and sophisticated instruments of political control. The targets of tortures of this kind are not the victims who are tortured but the bystanders who are not. Fascinating, and horrifying, insights into these processes are given to us in Anna Freud's theory of identification with the aggressor, Elaine Scarry's book *The Body in Pain* and William Cavanaugh's *Torture and Eucharist*. It is essential to such philosophies of torture that, behind a façade of rationality, the choice of victim is arbitrary and senseless. Anybody, whether guilty or innocent, might be snatched off the streets at any time.

Consequently everybody living in such a society becomes possessed by fear. It is of central importance, too, that such literally unspeakably atrocious assaults on the human body are so appalling and dreadful it is beyond the power of words to express them. At a very deep level linguistic communication, which is perhaps the most identifying mark of what it is to be human, is interrupted. People are locked up in their terror because they cannot express their experiences and establish emotional rapport with each other. Adult personalities disintegrate and become re-possessed by the nightmare fantasies of childhood. In this situation they seek above all things parental re-assurance, weirdly from the torturer himself. This is why torture sessions are often conducted by both a nice guy and a nasty guy, and why in Chile between 1973 and 1988, for example, General Pinochet, who was the authorizer of the atrocities that occurred during that period, deawpresented himself not as the oppressor but as the kindly father of the nation.

The Romans developed these techniques to a far greater degree than anybody else has ever done. It explains why they were able to maintain control for hundreds of years over a huge, wretchedly poor and frequently unemployed proletariat in Rome itself, formed from often penniless migrants flooding in from all over the empire, who were living only a stone's throw away from sumptuous palaces and ostentatious displays of wealth that beggar the imagination. The spectacles in the arenas often acted out Greek myths in physical reality, and were deliberately designed not only to inflict unimagineable extremes of pain on the victims but to shatter the souls of the onlookers with terror. It was a kind of magic. It traded on the fact that terror is addictive and holds its terrorized object spellbound, as if hypnotized by the authority of the terrorizer. The power on display in the arenas was literally awesome. Astonishingly, the fearless defiance of the Christian martyrs turned all this on its head. They defeated Roman power in the very seat of its authority. Crowds who had come to feast on obscenity were moved to tears by such displays of dignity and courage. Even Galen, who was no friend of the Christians and appalled that gentlemen were courting the deaths of slaves and slaves going to their deaths with the self-possession of gentlemen, could not withhold his admiration. The authorities became terrified of the reverse effects that their own terror was having and began to go to extraordinary lengths to execute the Christians anywhere but in the arenas. St Cyprian, who was at first a reluctant martyr, had to be hidden from the adoring crowds who followed him to his death. St Irene was condemned to be an anonymous sex slave in a brothel, but so sweet and dignified was her bearing she began to convert the clients to a pious life and made the brothel so famous that, to the dismay of its owners, it had to be closed. It is an episode Shakespeare uses to good effect in his play *Pericles*. St Agatha, stripped naked in the arena before she was to be tortured to death, proved to be so beautiful that even the magistrate himself wept, and had to order a less disrobed form of execution in private.

Many of the accounts record an extraordinary gallows humour on the part of the martyrs. At the martyrdom of Justin, an eighty year old bishop who was burnt alive in the arena at Smyrna, the crowd chanted 'Away with the atheist'. Shaking his fist at them as he was led to the stake the octogenarian shouted 'Away with the atheists'. Lawrence, roasted on a grid iron, supposedly joked 'Turn me over, I'm done on this side'. These stories are surely apocryphal. But just as surely, since humour is so often the handmaid of resolve,

we might feel that they testify to a strength and resilience of character that must have existed. Ironically, the martyrs were often almost as great an embarrassment to the church authorities as they were to the secular ones. Magistrates became so reluctant to send Christians into the arenas they often postponed punishment in the hope of recantation, and as the magistrates usually only came round to a province once a year, accused Christians could often spend years and years in prison. To the dismay of the clergy a popular belief grew up that martyrs-in –waiting could forgive sins, and as most Christians preferred to sin rather than face martyrdom themselves, they eagerly approached the martyrs for forgiveness, a service for which the martyrs- to-be often charged, as they needed to finance the riotous lifestyles that in many cases they practised even when in prison. Far from the picture we might have of prayerful saints piously and reverently awaiting their union with the Lord, the reality was often very different. Martyrs were a thorn in the side of bishops who sought to discourage them almost as much as the secular authorities did. How the backwards re-arrangements of history iron out the creases.

There is no record of Perpetua's face shining with such extraordinary beauty when she was taken out to be martyred that the crowd demanded she be released. But there is at least one well documented case of such an astonishing translation occurring, at the execution of the Jesuit Robert Southwell, and it is this that justified me in imagining it to have happened during the martyrdom of Perpetua. I don't think that I have caught more than a fraction of this rich and wonderful humanity. But if I have caught even a tiny fraction I shall be more than pleased.

- Scene 1: The Games
- Scene 2: Marcellus upbraids Perpetua
- Scene 3: Blandinus sells Peto a farm
- Scene 4: Initiation into the Dionysian mysteries
- Scene 5: Petronius agonizes
- Scene 6: Blandinus meets Perpetua
- Scene 7. Lydia and Julia
- Scene 8: Petronius meets Perpetua
- Scene 9: Blandinus arranges a feast
- Scene 10: Marcellus abjures Perpetua
- Scene 11: The Eucharist
- Scene 12: Marcellus's lament
- Scene 13: Perpetua and Petronius quarrel
- Scene 14: Perpetua's Dream
- Scene 15: Perpetua in prison
- Scene 16: The Martyrdom

Scene One. The Games

(Petronius, Marcellus, Peto and Tertius are facing the audience in silence. To the rear left a girl wrapped in hood and cloak. The men say nothing but they are concentrating intently. Their faces are working in a frenzy of concentrated brutality, lust and cruelty. Every nerve and muscle in their bodies is tense. Suddenly they give a great shout and start gesticulating wildly)

Tertius: Come on, show some spirit.

Petronius: Give us our money's worth, slave.

Peto: What a feebleton. Get up you weakling.

Marcellus: Run, run.

(They start chanting):

Run run Corinthian run run run
Or the bear he will bite you in the bum bum bum
Eat you up for tea
And then where will you be?
Run run Corinthian run run run

Tertius: He's shaking. He's shivering.

Marcellus: It's getting to him. Ha! Ha! Ha! It's getting to him.

Peto: He's running! Hooray!

All: Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!

(There are claps and shrieks of laughter)

Petronius: You can't climb out that way, slave.

(The girl has turned away horrified. She keeps turning round and peeping through her fingers. But now she slips away. Petronius notices she has gone and follows)

Tertius: Enjoying it, are you?

Peto: Because we are.

Tertius: He's coming, the bear is coming.
(They all start roaring like bears)

Marcellus: Not long to wait now.

(They all start chanting: 'The bear is coming. The bear is coming')

Marcellus: Got your passport to Hades ready, have you?

Tertius: Knees knocking. You don't always see that.

Peto: Good boy, good boy, show a bit of fright. We want our money's worth.

Marcellus (chanting ritually): Where is the bear? Where is the bear?

Peto: Bring on Brunus to finish him.

(They all start chanting):

All: Brun-us Brun-us Brun-us Brun-us Brun-us Brun-us

Tertius: Ille venit! He comes!

All: Hooray Brunus! Brunus! Hooray Brunus! Brunus! Brunus! Brunus !

(An explosion of cheers and yells)

All: Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill!

Tertius: Run run run

Peto: Catch him Get him. (The Run run Corinthian song is repeated)

Marcellus: He's got him! Brunus has got him!

Peto: Brunus has him.

Tertius: Finish him off, boy!

All: Aaaargh! Aaaaargh! (a great cheer as the victim is killed)

Marcellus: That's it then. Here come the demons to clear up the mess.

Tertius: Good, good. That was really excellent.

Marcellus: I always think that Macedonians and Greeks are good value. Maybe Persians too. They're good

Peto: How long till the next act?

Tertius: What is the next act?

Peto: Gladiators.

Marcellus: Oh good. Let's stay. I love gladiators.

Peto: Did you go to the debate at Quintilian's house last week? Which is the greater pleasure? A high class haetaera from the east, or a common harlot taken in the fornaces after the games? It was well done. Proper advocatus on each side and all that.

Marcellus: Who won?

Peto: The harlot waiting under the fornaces. The advocatus who spoke for her was brilliant.

Tertius: That's ridiculous. How could an ordinary tart compare with a top class haetaera?

Marcellus: I don't agree at all. Give me every time the harlot waiting under the arches when you're absolutely bursting for it after the blood-letting.

Peto: I quite agree. Nothing quite like it.

Marcellus: The number of the nobility who can't do it unless they've just seen somebody torn apart by lions or bears is quite something. Or so my maid tells me who serves them in that way. Sex and death I suppose.

Tertius: No no no. Have you ever been with one of these top haetaeras? They're fantastic.

Peto: It's all very well, Tertius. We don't all have your money.

Tertius: I went to a new one just in from Bythinia only the other day. She's called the Lupa. Man! Whooh man! She covers you all over in honey and then starts licking it off howling like a wolf. She really gets you going. And the actual. By Venus! Wow! It was like a velvet mouse trap. Book her. She's not that expensive.

Peto: It's so hot. Why haven't they pulled the awnings across?

Marcellus: I wish Jupiter Pluvius would send some rain.

Tertius: Too little rain, too many Christians. You know the saying.

Marcellus: These hypocrites make me puke. They will be the ruin of Rome. Do you know what they do? They think that if they offer the pinch of incense to the Emperor their God will send them to Hades. They all do of course. So they buy a libellus, a note from a martyr-in-waiting in prison, forgiving them the sin, because martyrs are supposed to be able to forgive sins. The martyrs-in-waiting then spend the money on booze and women because they can forgive their own sins, so they might as well commit some. The Christians then also get the Emperor's libellus stating they've offered the pinch. Except they send the slave round to do the pinch on the grounds that if anybody is going to go to hell it might as well be the slave.

Peto: How long till the next act? I need a piss.

Marcellus: Me too. Why do the games always make you want to piss?

Tertius: And me. Come on, we can just make the cloaculum. The gladiators haven't even been trumpeted yet. (exeunt but for Petronius)

Petronius: She's gone. I wonder who she was. Disappeared into Rome somewhere I suppose. Rome! The civitas! Centre of the civilized world! And what do we find in this fabled fount of civic order? Not the clumsy barbarities of the barbaric tribes we have so graciously civilized. No no, not here. Here we find art, poetry, law, order, civilization, the Pax Romana. And more, more. Here, as if a fine wine had been distilled into a fierce intoxicating spirit, here we find barbarity and bestiality themselves, essential, pure. Malus ipse. Lust, cruelty, greed, avarice, envy walking rampant, the monster itself risen from the deepest darknesses of the soul and cavorting naked at the games. Oh! Romanitas! Oh the greatness! But not just the great buildings, the forum, the roads, the temples, the theatres, no, no it is the men. The men, the guardians of this great civic order, why they must be wise and grave as gods. Prosecuting council, call your witnesses. Your honour, let me first call Peto, so great a fool that in him surely we see true greatness. Senator Peto, are you possessed by superstitions, run from god to god, consult wizards, necromancers, fortune tellers and charlatans of every kind? Oh ! Oh! There will be floods and droughts. Rome will be swallowed by earthquakes and the sky will fall in. Perhaps he's right, for fools sometimes outfool the wise. Next I call P.Tertius Longinus of Vulcan Constructions, a vulgarian so vulgar surely he can't be real. He must be a creation of art. He should be put on a plinth so that we can go and gawp at this eponymous Vulcan and mouth aesthetic platitudes. Oh the raw energy! The vitality! The dynamism! And then Marcellus, poor Marcellus, baffled, lost, yearning for the late republic. A creature from a more primitive era washed up by the sea and left stranded thrashing on the beach. A veteran of many wars, his face hard and red with drink and anger, who laments the soft corruptions of the peace and mourns the long lost comradeship of war. What sad fools we are. Oh Rome! Lying like some huge queen ant, bloated and corpulent in the centre of her nest, ministered to by her scurrying progeny, her only function to propagate yet more. So that all over the empire there are

little Romes, each with its forum, its law court, its bath, its temple and its arena, so that each little scurrying ant can boast 'I am a citizen. I share Romanitas. I have been to the games, I have supped on horrors, I am civilized. I too am a Roman'. And last of all, your honour, I call my star witness, I call myself, C. Petronius Alba, the greatest fool of all. For I loathe and hate the games. For days before, I am consumed with disgust and fear. My mind is possessed with darkness, I cannot eat or sleep, as the day draws near I can think of nothing else. My flesh crawls, my knees knock. This is hell. Yet still I come. And shriek and yell for blood with the best of them. I too am intoxicated. Addicted. Spellbound. I have lost control of myself. And for that reason utterly despise myself. I utterly, utterly despise myself. But I cannot stay away.

(Enter Peto, Marcellus and Tertius. A sound of trumpets)

Peto: Just in time.

Marcellus: Here they come, the gladiators.

(They all stands to attention and sing the equivalent of a national anthem)

All: Rome Rome eternal Rome
Great Rome Great Rome
True home of all mankind
So blessed by every god
We love you and we honour you
Rome Rome eternal Rome

Peto: Twenty sesterces on the reticulus.

Tertius: Done. If Marcus the Philippian cannot see off an inexperienced reticulus from Britannia I'm a Hibernian.

Petronius: I'll put twenty on too.

(They watch absorbed)

Marcellus: Ah, clever, clever.

Peto: It's called the Anatolian feint you know

Petronius: Watch out for your back!

Tertius: Go in now! Now! Now! Thrust! Thrust!

Peto: Use the net you idiot.

Petronius: Come on Marcus. Come on Marcus.

Marcellus: I think it's going to be Marcus.

Tertius: He's down. The reticulus is down.

Marcellus: Is Marcus going to appeal to the Emperor?

(They all turn and look upwards to stage right)

All: Yes!

(Another pause)

Tertius: It's down. It's thumbs down.

All (with downward turned thumbs): Down! Down! Down!

All: Ach! (a shudder goes through them)

Peto: That's it for today.

Marcellus: Let's hope the harlots are not all already taken.

Peto: Where's my money?

Tertius: Hey! Before you go. Come to my villa on dies quinta. I've got a new chef from Anatolia. He specializes in marinated crocodile testicles. Ever had them? This fellow's are wonderful. (To Peto) Come to my feast.

Marcellus: I'll keep places for us in the queue (exit Marcellus)

Peto: Not on dies quinta. It's the Dies Sanguinis. I must go to honour the goddess. My lady Kybele is angry.

Tertius (to Petronius): You sir, come to my feast. Braised sheep's eyes, nightingales' tongues in a Greek sauce, oysters from Britannia. Do come.

Peto: Don't listen to him. Come to the mysteries of Kybele. You will be thrilled. The drumming, the tambourines, the dancing priestesses, the screaming eunuchs. Attis castrated on the pine tree, the impassive goddess. It is a most magnificent drama. You can go to a feast on any day. But dies quinta is the Dies Sanguinis. We should all go to plead for the mercy of the goddess. The times are bad. Do you not agree?

Tertius: Attis castrated on the pine tree! It's all done with red paint. Come to me. I've got a bunch of flute girls from Germania. Real lovelies, all given a personal seeing to by Serenus the Flute Player and guaranteed to give maximum pleasure head and tail.

Petronius: Well I hardly know –

Tertius: But that isn't the best. I've also engaged the Lupa herself.

Petronius (to Peto): I thank you kindly sir for your invitation to the mysteries of Kybele. But I am not a religious man. (to Tertius) You sir, I thank you kindly. I will come to your feast. Farewell. Until dies quinta. Vale, vale.

Tertius: Vale sir. I look forward to seeing you. (He exits making leering licking motions with his tongue toward Petronius as if he is the Lupa. Exit).

Petronius: Farewell sir. This sounds an engagement that no philosopher or student of human nature would wish to miss.

Scene Two. Marcellus Reproves His Daughter

Marcellus: Blandinus! Blandinus! Where is that slave? Off on some business I did not send him on I'll be bound. I could – oh oh – I could - oh she will break my heart. What have I done that the gods should punish me so? I have pleaded with her again and again. Can she not understand? She is my only child. With her the noble lineage of Gallo dies unless she has legitimate offspring. The great line of C. Aeneas Gallo and T. Ullius Gallo and B. Tiberius Gallo will be finished. Why cannot she do her duty and conceive legitimate sons with a suitable gentleman, instead of embarking on these mad escapades? Does she not understand that I am humiliated? I cannot go into the bath house without being greeted with cries of hop hop hop. What they would say if they knew that she had put a woman's wedding veil on the statue of Mars I cannot think. Oh my poor country. I met a man in the forum yesterday, Paul I think he said he was called, who maintained that the souls of slaves are as valuable as those of gentlemen of the equestrian order. They should be respected and treated with humanitas. What a mad idea. They're slaves. I tried to explain. He mumbled something. Then it turned out, bless my soul, that he was a Roman citizen. On his way to appeal to the Emperor against some provincial judgment that had gone against him. Mad as a heifer stung by hornets. A Roman citizen! Who will they ever let in next? O my dear patria -

(enter Blandinus) – oh there you are at last. Where have you been?

Blandinus: Senator, I am sorry. Rome was crowded. It is market day. The mountebanks were doing good business in the forum.

Marcellus: Not unwatched by you for half the day I don't doubt. Go and find Domna Perpetua and bring her to me.

Blandinus: I think I know where she is. I will tell her (exit)

Marcellus: Our beloved fatherland, bleeding to death, rotted in the heart with all this luxury and soft sentimental stuff. I hear that Poppeia goes everywhere with a train of forty she-asses so that she can have a bath in asses' milk whenever she feels like it. Have you ever heard the like? C. Aeneas Gallo and T. Ullius Gallo and B. Tiberius Gallo shut your ears. We are ruled by women and slaves. My Blandinus, for example. What is he doing these long hours when I know not where he is? Some slaves have become so indispensable to anybody wanting to put on an extravagant dinner party or bypass the law, they might as well be given the fasces. Where are the ancient virtues that made Rome great? Manly hardiness. Courage. Fortitude. Stedfast loyalty. Discipline. Modesty. Decorum. Order. The strong farmer returning from his honest labours and honouring the lares and penates before all else. The sober matron sitting serenely with her slaves sewing in the atrium. So it was in the time of C. Aeneas Gallo and then of his son T. Ullius Gallo and then of his son B. Tiberius Gallo. But now no longer. Here she comes.

(enter Perpetua)

Marcellus: Well, what have you got to say?

(Perpetua is tongue-tied)

You have disappointed me. Grievously disappointed me. This latest episode, this hopping through the forum. Hopping like a gypsy! You are a senator's daughter. Do you understand that? A senator's daughter. I hardly dare go into the baths lest people shout 'Hop for us, Marcellus' and the whole bath house starts chanting Hop Hop Hop Hop. Can you understand what that feels like? Have you no feeling for your poor father? The grief, the shame. I thought when your poor mother died, well at least I still have Perpetua. But I have not. I find I have fathered a mad woman, a crazy bitch, a befuddled buzzing fly fallen into the cider jar. Well say something.

(Perpetua is still tongue-tied)

Speak woman. Say something you silly girl, you good-for-nothing. Are you as cold as the statues on the capitol? Have you no feelings? By Jupiter you drive me mad. Hercules! Respect! Respect! I want respect. Do you know what it means? I am your father. I am a patrician of the equestrian order. I am a senator. I deserve respect. I could have you thrashed by the slaves until you are red and bleeding. And I will. Do you not realise that? Say something. Even if it is gibberish as mad as the things you do.

Perpetua (falling on her knees): I am sorry, I am so so sorry.

Marcellus: Pouf! That is what you said last time.

Perpetua: Father, I do respect you and honour you. I love you. More than you can know.

Marcellus: Do you expect me to believe that, after so many broken promises? Your promises are weak as water. Fantasies. Airy fancies. I am at my wits' end. What am I to do?

Perpetua: I cannot....I cannot... it is as if a demon gets inside me and makes me do things that I do not want.

Marcellus: A demon? Pouf! It is you who are the demon. The slaves tell me that you are thinking of entering the mystery of Dionysos. That will hardly help to banish demons.

Perpetua: I feel so melancholy, so sad...as if I am carrying a great weight which is crushing me.

Marcellus: Melancholy? Sad? What are you talking about, girl? How can you be melancholy? You have all the sights and pleasures of Rome at your disposal. Why, at your age there was never a night that I was not at the circus or the races, music, wrestling, the games, dancing. But in between these mad escapades you hang about as mournful as the moon. What is wrong with you?

Perpetua: Father, father, listen, listen. I implore you, listen. I wish I did not feel so melancholy but I do. It is as if I have some great beast slumbering on my heart and smothering me. It is as if I am carrying a great mountain that is getting heavier and heavier and squeezing the air out of me until I can bear it no longer. And then the demon takes hold of me. I throw off the weight. I am almost mad with relief. Do you understand? I am possessed with incredible energy. I feel as if I am dancing madly on hot coals. I find myself doing these mad things. I cannot help it. Then the madness expends itself. The weight returns. The beast crawls back onto my heart. Ecstasy turns into sadness again as night follows day. Do you understand?

(pause)

Marcellus: I see that you are full of grief. Well that makes two of us. Come, Perpetua. Let us try and begin again. Promise me that there will be no more mad escapades.

Perpetua: I cannot promise that. But I promise that I will try.

Marcellus: I see that you mean it this time. Come, let us begin again as if these last years had not been. At least promise me that you will not be seen with Felicity, that slave girl you seem so fond of. The daughter of a senator cannot be seen to be the friend of a slave girl. Surely you appreciate that.

Perpetua: No, father, no. I cannot promise that. Felicity is my greatest consolation in all my sorrows. I would rather die.

Marcellus: By Apollo! You will – no, let us leave that and return to it another time. Let us begin again. I want you as you used to be. My little girl. The joy of my life. Do you not remember how happy you were then?

Perpetua: Yes, I remember. I was a happy child. In those days. Because you were such a dear father.

Marcellus: The lovely picnics that we had by the side of the river at my villa in the Campagna?

Perpetua: You used to wade down the river carrying me on your shoulders. I used to love that.

Marcellus: And we would go round the farm to visit all the animals. You never tired of that. Oh Daddy Daddy, let's go round the farm. Monsignor Pig and Matrona Sheep. Grunt grunt? Bleat bleat?

Perpetua: Yes I remember. I was quite naughty. I used to hide beneath Matrona's robes and then jump out shouting Fire! Fire! Thief! Thief! And you would pretend to be so frightened.

Marcellus: Perpetua, we can have these happy days again. They will come again. It is time you had children of your own. I want to be a grandfather, Perpetua.

Perpetua: Oh father, yes yes, how I understand that. I so want to give you that.

Marcellus: Good. Good. We must put all the bad times behind us and begin again. So perhaps this is a good time to tell you. I have arranged for you to be betrothed to T. Lucius Sereno. He is a nice man. You will like him. There is just one thing. He wants to be re-assured that you are still a virgin. Which you are of course.

Perpetua: I cannot do that.

Marcellus: Perpetua! Remember your promise. In Rome daughters must do what their fathers tell them. This is very important. Nothing could be more serious. The honour and the future of our house is at stake. The house of Gallo.

Perpetua: I cannot.

Marcellus: What do you mean, you cannot? What is stopping you? Are you not a virgin?

Perpetua: Father...father...I...that is...I....father... I was secretly married and am this past month a widow. And...and...am two months pregnant.

Marcellus: What! What! Married? A widow? You are pregnant? Who was the father?

Perpetua: It was ..was... Felicity's brother. It was an accident. It was... it was...after a party.

Marcellus: What! After a party? Felicity's brother? Felicity's brother? Jupiter! Apollo! He's a slave. The blood of our house polluted by a slave! Our house! A slave! This is ruin. This is tragedy. Ruin. Ruin. You slut. You whore...- O my heart - oh oh oh --- you she-demon, you witch... Away. Enough. Get out of my sight. This is ruin. May the gods grind you to dust. A slave! Oh oh oh – may demons tear you apart. Oh oh oh. I will have the villain thrashed until his flesh is hanging in ribbons from his bones. I will have him torn apart. (Perpetua flees)

Marcellus (shouting after her): Let me never set eyes on you again. You have brought shame and ruin on us. Oh... Oh. Oh my heart. Jupiter! Apollo! Never enter this house again. Never. Never. (he leaves the stage weeping bitterly) .

Scene Three Blandinus sells Peto a farm

Enter Blandinus singing:

Heigh ho Heigh ho Heigh ho
The fox and the goose together they went
For a holiday by the sea
Heigh ho Heigh ho Heigh ho

Dear fox, said the goose, it is so kind
Of you to accompany me
Heigh ho Heigh ho Heigh ho

Not at all, dear goose, said the fox
And gave a most courtly bow
Heigh ho Heigh ho Heigh ho

The pleasure's all mine, just relax, he said
All your troubles are over now
Heigh ho Heigh –

Enter Peto

Blandinus: Ille venit! He comes! Salve knight, salve. Well met, sir. You visited the farm? Did you have trouble finding it?

Peto: Salve. Yes, I found it. Eventually

Blandinus: The owner, I believe, has had its name newly and boldly painted over the gate. *Ager Beatitudinis.* The Farm of Blessedness.

Peto: That was indeed the case

Blandinus: A beautiful and blessed farm indeed. But it is not only the beauty of its land, its streams and fields. It is the beauty of the life itself. Its owner is said to be the healthiest man in Italy. As lean as a spear and as fast as a leopard over open ground. What a fellow! It is my belief that it is the fertility of his land that has made this legendary man so strong.

Peto: I have not seen my own farm, *Ager Fructorum*, for many years but from what I remember this one struck me as remarkably similar.

Blandinus: Ah! I see you are a man of perception, sir. I am not surprised. I am not surprised. The land in the Alban hills is so fertile that a special kind of agriculture is practised there. All these farms follow it and so look quite similar to the casual urban eye. But this one is quite singular I assure you. This is the most high-yielding farm of any like it.

Peto: I thought that much of it appeared neglected.

Blandinus: Sadly so, sir, sadly so. Its present owner is old and fat. A situation that would make you weep. He is a veteran of the Gallic wars, sir, as true a son of Rome as Caesar himself. His farm is his treasure, his pearl, the jewel in his fast flowing eye. But his farm is so fertile, so abundant, he has, I fear between you and me, over-indulged himself and is now so old and fat he can hardly waddle about it –

Peto: I thought you said he was the healthiest man in Italy.

Blandinus: Did I? One says so many things. What I mean, I think you misunderstood me, what I was trying to get across was if you get my meaning, he *used* to be the healthiest man in Italy. When he first bought the farm. But he had an accident. Now sir, his tragic situation, too old and fat to tend his beloved acres and weighed down by debt, now he must exchange his dearest treasure for, and I am sure you will not mind my saying this, sir, for geese are not goats and goats not geese when all said and done, for your rather inferior property. And this a veteran of the Gallic wars sir. Even I, hardened as I am, could barely restrain a tear.

Peto: What did you say this farm was called?

Blandinus: Field of Blessings, sir. And indeed it is not hard to see why. Even I, ignorant city-dweller that I am, could see why this farm of farms, this holding in a thousand, is called *Ager Beatitudinis*. Blessed indeed. Imagine the life sir, far away from the broiling heat and the sweating crowds, the brutal daily assault on the senses and the stench of humanity in the stinking alleyways of Rome. Imagine it. The fresh air. The crisp mornings. Up early, the young sun already kissing the hills, the mists rolling from them like sheets from the bed to reveal the beautiful naked young woman they had been so modestly covering. Vergil's *Georgics* in your hand. Bees buzzing, cows lowing contentedly. Your happy slaves harvesting the abundance of grain. The cool pot of cider nestling under the shade of the plane tree, all ready for the siesta break in the noonday heat. The pretty Nubian slave girl come to serve it, the-

Peto: No use to me. I shall continue to live in Rome.

Blandinus: No use? Did you say no use? Beware Rome, sir, monsters swim beneath those glittering surfaces. And what about the profits, sir, from the produce of these fertile acres? The lentils, onions, peas, beans both creeping and tall, sharp refreshing lettuces with such tender hearts, aubergines, peaches, damsons, fat grapes with the bloom still on

them, artichokes, plums, figs, all these can be sold in the markets, figs from the Alban hills fetch top prices, why –

Peto: Figs, figs you say? I believe the reason why figs fetch such high prices that - figs, I believe – how can I put this? - figs -

Blandinus: - assist tired gentlemen to get it up sir? if between us I might be permitted a vulgarism. I understand.

Peto: Quite so, quite so.

Blandinus: The fig, yes the fig. All figs are good. Your fig, sir, is, as they say, the fruit of Venus. And I think as men of the world we know why, sir, do we not? All figs are good. But your Alban fig! Oh your Alban fig! A dish of them makes even gentlemen of – how shall I say? - men of a mature gentility as mad with lust as an ape begging for pomegranates. They do say that the great Caesar himself kept a dish of them by his bedside and the very night before he was killed performed the act ten times.

Peto: Ten times! The great Caesar! By Mars and Hercules what a man!

Blandinus: I believe it to be a story between you and me sir. More likely it was eight.

Peto: And these figs, the figs of Caesar, are growing on this farm you say?

Blandinus: Tended by Venus herself, sir.

Peto: What did you say the terms of sale were?

Blandinus: Ten million sesterces and your present farm thrown in.

Peto: Ten million sesterces?

Blandinus: And your present farm thrown in.

Peto: This is an almighty price.

Blandinus: But this is an almighty property. Food prices are rising. Ten million is the going rate.

Peto: I will buy this farm. But I will only pay eight.

Blandinus: Eight? You want it for eight? I perceive you drive a hard bargain, sir. Eight? Hmmm. No. I do not think that my client will accept eight.

Peto: Alright, eight and a quarter. Eight and a quarter million sesterces is my final offer.

Blandinus: Brrr! Sir, you are too tough. Doing business with you is like wrestling with the champion on the Campus Martius. Nine sir, now what about nine? My client is desperate for his price but I think that he will accept nine.

Peto: Alright, nine.

Blandinus: Done, sir. And may the caduceus of Mercury bless this contract. You have driven so hard a bargain, so hard. But may I say this? It is a greater pleasure to do business with a hard gentleman who is sharp as an eagle and as bold as a lion, rather than these simple, pampered soft-livered fools too easy for the taking, even though one might have got a better price. Farewell, sir. May Jupiter prosper you. I will away to my client who will, I believe, be pleased. Enjoy your farm. Especially the figs. You understand me? Especially the figs. A gentleman of distinction and discretion sent these figs regularly, sir, would be rampant as a gladiator, perhaps not every night, I would not wish in any way to mislead you, perhaps not every night, but six out of seven I guarantee. Soft fig, hard cock as we say in Trastevere. Vale, knight.

Peto: I will arrange for my banker to transfer the money. But I shall need a receipt written on double parchment. Farewell. (*exit Peto*)

Blandinus: So, sold him his own farm. And nine million sesterces to the good. I am, I must say, rather proud of that. (*exit*)

(*re-enter Peto*): Nine million sesterces! This is a huge price. But he seems an honest rogue and if he says this is the going rate I suppose it is. I remember Cato's law. You get what you pay for, and everything will always cost more than you think it's going to. Nine million sesterces! I hope I have done right. (*exit*)

Scene Four. Initiation into Dionysos.

(An empty stage with gongs beating softly offstage. Enter four figures wearing masks of the Venetian type not covering the mouth so that the actors can be easily heard. They pull back a curtain to reveal four huge numinous pagan masks or heads, two to the right and two to the left, and in the centre a pillar with a wooden phallus sticking out from it. At its top are a scarf and a mask, as Dionysos was customarily represented in the classical world. The four masked figures make a deep bow and begin to chant softly 'Iachos Iachos Dionysos Iachos Iachos God of the vine great reveller Dionysos God of frenzy God of life Iachos Iachos Dionysos Beloved of the goddess Iachos Iachos Dionysos Dionysos Iachos Iachos' over and over again, gradually getting louder and more frenzied. During this chanting one of them leads in Perpetua and takes her to the side of the stage where she stands wearing a black dress or smock. She is given a drink. The chant is growing quicker and louder. They begin to dance and draw Perpetua into the dance. The cries grow louder and louder and the dance quicker and quicker and more and more frenzied. They are by now shouting at the tops of their voices and from offstage there is a cacophony of trumpets, drums and cymbals and over loudspeakers deafening animal noises, gruntings, brayings, screechings, squealings. If possible there is strobe lighting and lights flashing on and off. The dance has become as mad and frenzied as possible and at its height Perpetua is led to the pillar. She squats over the phallus and begins to scream and shriek as a woman having an orgasm. She is rocking to and fro as in a trance. Suddenly the noise and movements stop abruptly and only Perpetua is left screaming and rocking to and fro. Suddenly she falls down as if dead (as in some circumstances this part of the initiation might not be thought appropriate, in an alternative version the dance suddenly stops and Perpetua falls down as if dead). The masked figures again begin to softly chant 'Iachos Iachos Dionysos Dionysos'. Two of them bring in a coffin from offstage and Perpetua is put into it. They process round the stage and exeunt carrying the coffin on their shoulders. As they do so they sing:

Go lost wandering peregrine soul
To land of Hades land of darkness
Land of death and dust and shades
There be ravished by Dionysos
And be reborn And be reborn
Let your old life pass and fade
Be enraptured by Dionysos
Oh Dionysos Oh Dionysos
And be reborn And be reborn
In land of Hades land of darkness

(Exeunt except one who repeats the song)

The other masked figures return in procession with Perpetua. She now dressed i wears a wreath of flowers. She is holding a rattle. They enter dancing to a merry tune and lead Perpetua to the centre of the stage where they start feeding her with baby food and

cooing over her as people do with babies ‘Who’s a lovely girl, then?’ ‘Ooh aah ooh.’ ‘Pretty baby Pretty baby’ ‘Whoops! Windy windy are we?’ ‘You are so beautiful. Lovely baby. So so beautiful’ ‘Beautiful Beautiful. Ooh I do love you. ’ and so on. She falls asleep and they raise her onto their shoulders and leave the stage shrieking and whooping and cackling and crying Iachos Iachos Dionysos Dionysos.)

Scene Five Petronius Ruminates

Oh the horror of the games. Others, after the scenes are over, relieve the boiling violence exploding in them with prostitutes. But I cannot bring myself to that. So I return to my lodgings and read Virgil, Catullus and Cicero. How pathetic. Can literature, mere words on a page, bring balm and bless these terrible wounds as does the harlot? Excuse my laughter. Art, alas, fails. How is it that these others, at first uneasy with an initial squeamishness, soon begin to view the horrors with equanimity, and feel no more pity than they would for a hunted rabbit? Whereas I shake and tremble from head to foot for days. They are fully themselves and do what they do with gusto, whereas I cannot. I blame literature. Oh, I sometimes feel, that I had not been educated. Art calls forth an inner man. The fleshly man, the watcher in the eye, watches the games and shrieks and howls and yells for more, more, more of these most delectable dishes and fizzy intoxicating drinks. But I, awakened by literature, stand apart from myself. The inner watcher watches this outer watcher with guilt, dismay and shame, for, not taking part himself he gave permission, and feels himself contaminated. But if this inner watcher stands accused, there must, as in a court of law, be an accuser. There must be a yet more inward watcher, a watcher of the watcher of the watcher, a shy inhabitant dwelling in the very darkness of the heart who whispers 'This is wrong, This is wrong'. Thus, dammit, spoiling the pleasure of the inner man, however struts and boasts the outer, and in its stead inflicting acutest moral pain. He cannot sleep at night for guilt. He lies awake wracked by moral pain. Why? Why? Literature, cursed be literature, deludes us with the fantasy that we are not the animals we really are. So that recollecting in tranquillity the fierce joy with which we animals tear another to pieces, I find my heart whispering 'Poor fellow animal, I feel your pain'. So I seek a sympathizer. A woman perhaps. A beautiful lady but a plain one would do, who with soft word and gentle touch, might ease the wounds of this inmost memyself, this shyest person skulking and shrinking in the darkness of the heart until, thus re-assured, he comes out hesitant and blinking to the light. But is there such a woman? In Rome? The idea is laughable. There is none. So, like an alcoholic seeking to drown his sorrows in the very thing that causes them, I make myself drunk with violence and barbarity. I go to the games, I shout 'So much for you, humanity, art, and literature'. And then return to my lodgings to read Virgil, Catullus and Cicero, as a man might try to stop for a moment the agony of an aching tooth by jabbing it with his finger. And stumble on. And stumble on.

Scene Six. Perpetua meets Blandinus

Enter Perpetua (she is clearly expecting someone)

Enter Blandinus

Perpetua: Oh Blandinus! I am so glad you have come. Was it difficult to get away?

Blandinus: Your father watches me now like a hawk hovering above a mouse. But we mice slip behind the hedges and the corn stooks. We have ways.

Perpetua: How is everything? How is my father?

Blandinus: He is moody, silent, broods, and then suddenly erupts in great storms of rage before subsiding into his gloom again.

Perpetua: Oh my poor father. Does he talk of me?

Blandinus: Never. But his silence chatters loud as a jay.

Perpetua: And Felicity?

Blandinus: She is efficient as ever. Meals are cooked, beds aired, tiles polished. But she does it with heavy heart. She misses you dreadfully. As do we all. It is an empty cage from which the bird has flown, Domna. You are an unhappy lady, Domna, I know. It will be of little comfort to you to know that we are unhappy too

Perpetua: Oh Blandinus. On the contrary. It means so much. The sympathy of slaves is all the sweeter for being freely given. And Zephyr, what about my lovely Zephyr?

Blandinus: Domna, I do not know how to tell you this. He waited in the porch outside the atrium for you to come to take him for his walk, as you always did. But you did not come. And you did not come. We took him back to his kennel but he would not eat. So in the end we took him back to the porch, since that is where he seemed to want to be. Still he would not eat. Barked not. Nor whimpered. Sat still as a statue. Then one morning we found him dead. Dead of a broken heart I think.

Perpetua (through her tears): My poor Zephyr! My poor Zephyr! Oh Blandinus, the nobility of these animals. How they put us to shame. Oh Blandinus. Never to see Zephyr wag his tail as if he were happiness itself. Never to see him run like the wind along the shore again. Do you think that there is in the heavens a great book in which his name will be inscribed in golden letters?

Blandinus: Domna, I think there is. I knew not how to tell you, and in the end thought it best just to tell it how it was. Zephyr. Canis excellentissimus. In letters of gold.

Perpetua: Thank you Blandinus. It is better to know. I prefer to know. But I cannot bear to hear more bad news today. My father will be growing suspicious. Get you home quickly.

Blandinus: No great need to worry. Your father will soon free me for I am now too great an embarrassment to him. An upright senator does not care to be associated with a rascal slave. And what shall I tell them?

Perpetua: Say I am well. I survive. I miss them. I hope to see them soon. Tell my father that you heard from somebody who had heard from somebody that I am well. When you are free you will still come and see me, won't you?

Blandinus: I will. I will. Goodbye, Domna Perpetua. For now.

Perpetua: Dear Blandinus, goodbye.

Scene Seven. Lydia converses with Julia

(enter Lydia and Julia)

Lydia: Bored, bored, bored. I'm so bored these days. I've sorted out the slaves' work by the fourth hour. Then the baths. Then the hairdresser. Shopping perhaps. Or a 'diversion' – though a diversion from what one might ask – a snake charmer from Illyria maybe or a wrestling match between two impossibly handsome Cambrian boys. A spot of flirting round the Vatican, then home to dinner and some frightful senator and his even more frightful wife that Severus has invited to further his career.

Julia: Don't tell me. Fabricius is just the same. He's always bringing back some awesomely important corpse that he's dug up on the Esquiline hill. I want you to make a special effort, Julia. I have invited a most illustrious cadaver to dinner tonight. 'Senator, how kind of you to come. And how delightful to meet your ghastly, ghastly wife.' No, no, please don't let him tell me yet again about his campaign in Gaul. 'Have I told you about my campaign in Gaul?' 'Your campaign in Gaul, Senator? No I don't think so. How fascinating. I'm all agog. Do tell me.' Mercury, god of surprises, do something, anything. Make the slave pour hot soup all over the matrona corpse. Anything. By the way, are you going to go in for this latest retro-Etruscan hair style?

Lydia: You know I can't. That means going to Euphronius the Eunuch and I owe him money already. I do miss the gossip he whispers in your ear as he does the braids though.

Julia: The highest quality ordure in Rome spiced to perfection. Disgusting but indispensable. It was Euphronius who told me about Perpetua dressing up as a man and trying to join a legion on exercise. I suppose she told you about that. According to Euphronius it was only discovered when they all had to strip naked to swim across a river. Gor blimey 'ercules up above, 'ere is a soldia who 'as not been issued wiv a julius caesa. Marcellus tried to keep it quiet but he couldn't keep it from Euphronius of course.

Lydia: I know. She told me. Poor Perpetua. Too tender hearted for this world. If she found a mouse she'd take it home and feed it on warm milk and the finest cheese from Calabria.

Julia: She's always so sad. Why is she so sad? You are her friend. That special kind of sweet melancholy that she has. It worries me. Then suddenly she breaks out and does one of these crazy escapades.

Lydia: She has her reasons.

Julia: She's not just sad, she's mad. Or maybe even more bored than we are.

Lydia: I do miss Eurphronius's. I miss the smell of it. The essences of lilac and peach. The orange and apple blossom. And the atmosphere, the feel. The gorgeous smelly

unguents and smooth oils. The scented powders. The after whiff of power and fear left by the great ladies of Rome.

Julia: You're right. Nobody's safe now. Even the great matronas. Even the expensive glossy heads pampered by Euphronius hang dangling from golden threads. You can feel the fear in the streets. Only last week V. Lucius Tellonius opened his veins in the bath while his wife read Virgil to him until he died. Did you hear about that?

Lydia: Yes I heard. Virgil. Venus, the pity of it.

Julia: Let's get away from it. Come to our villa by the sea. Fabricius is rarely there. It is beautiful. You can go pearl diving under water.

Lydia: Julia, how kind. One day I will. I'll tell Perpetua and perhaps we both can come. Thank you. But not now. What I need to do now is to get some money. How, though? Something that's not too boring. But I'm not so bored I'm going to try and join a legion. If I slept with P. Tertius Longinus do you think he'd give me some money?

Julia: You can't sleep with P. Tertius Longinus. Now he's really disgusting. Even when he casts that devouring lecherous eye that he's got all over you you feel as if you'd been crawled over by a slug or a toad and have to go to the baths afterwards to wash the slime off. Did you hear about Matrona Flavia simulating a sex act with a slave between courses at his last feast? It was art apparently, one of these 'action arts' they talk about nowadays. She called her performance Purple Afternoon. 'Purple Afternoon, ladies and gentlemen'.

Lydia: Of course I heard. It's all over Rome. Posh ladies were crowding into Euphronius's like whores round the back door of a gentlemens' bath house. Apparently the slave was whipped afterwards for not looking as if he was enjoying himself.

Julia: Poor slave. How I sympathize with him. Matrona Flavia is about as alluring as the Tarpeian Rock. Was that the famous feast where they had twenty roast swans wrapped in gold foil?

Lydia: And a hundred nightingales stuffed with spiced wheat, I heard.

Julia: And a snake crawling all over the table with P. Tertius Longinus Vulcan Constructions embossed into its skin in lapis lazuli. The vulgarity. Imagine.

Lydia: I heard there was a Forum modelled in jelly with the Tiber flowing through it filled with wine that was just pouring away into the street.

Julia: But worst of all, worst of all surely, P. Tertius Longinus saying in that disgusting lascivious voice of his - he could stuff a whore with his voice that man - 'Welcome my dears. Come and enjoy my humble little repast'. Lech lech. Lech lech. He always

sounds to me like an overfed wasp stuck in butter. The finest quality butter from Northern Italy of course.

Lydia (in Tertius's voice): Come and watch Matrona Flavia having a purple afternoon. That will make you vomit even if the twenty roast swans wrapped in gold foil don't. Heergh! Heergh! Heergh! (normal voice) Who wouldn't be chaste for life after that? I don't know how anybody can go to such vulgar feasts.

Jujia: Would we have gone if we'd been invited?

(pause)

Lydia: Yes, of course we would (they both laugh). We'd have been like everybody else. People follow the smell of wealth like flies buzzing round a dead dog.

Julia: Anyhow, how do you know that P. Tertius Longinus will sleep with you?

Lydia (in Tertius's voice): One can but try. Heergh! Heergh! Heergh!

Julia: Won't Severus give you any money?

Lydia: Yes he would but then he'd demand sex in return. I know he's my husband. But I just can't stand him near me. Not in that way. These men are so boring. But then when they come back from the games wanting sex, and you know they've already been with prostitutes, they've turned - as if enchanted by Circe - into savage beasts. It disgusts me. I'm repelled.

Julia: Ditto Fabricius. Good morning, Fabricius. What have you done with the monster this morning? 'Asleep' grunt 'Back in 'is cage sleeping it off' belch. What are you doing today, Fabricius? 'Going to talk about my stallion with T. Lucius Martello, of course.' How does it come about that he can love that stallion so much and me so little?

Lydia: Ugh! Sex with Severus is like copulating with a pig. I wanted to make love to an angel and I find myself having sex with a pig. But it's not just that...it's...it's...it's oh oh... (she dissolves into floods of tears)

Julia: Lydia, what's the matter. You can tell me.

Lydia: He...he...I told Perpetua, because she's melancholy and understands, I couldn't tell anyone else but I'll tell you...he ...he... oh oh oh .., he drowned my little daughter. He said she was a girl and no use to him and he drowned her. Oh oh oh oh

Julia: Lydia, Lydia, my darling

Julia: My sweet little piglet. Ambrosia I called her. My child, my little baby, my Ambrosia drowned. And I'm too old now to have another. Killed. Drowned. I can't stand him near me. I hate him.

Julia: Don't weep so Lydia

Lydia: What do you expect me to do? Get P. Tertius Longinus to lay on one of his feasts to celebrate? 'Welcome to my little supper my dears. Sweet little piglet wrapped in gold leaf.' Roasted Ambrosia in Macedonian sauce with pickles. (she rushes offstage followed by Julia)

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Scene Eight. Petronius meets Perpetua

(Perpetua and Petronius each enter from different sides of the stage. They are about to pass when Petronius halts and says -)

Petronius: You were the girl at the games. I followed you but lost you. Why were you there? You were hating it.

Perpetua: Oh it was horrible, horrible.

Petronius: Ah! I see. A fellow self-punisher. A self-loather. I had not thought to meet another in this city. What is your name? I am Petronius.

Perpetua: Perpetua is my name.

Petronius: We do not often see young ladies of delicate moral disposition at the games. Why did you go?

Perpetua: I suffer from melancholy even unto madness. I am invaded by fanciful horrors. I thought that seeing real ones might perhaps cure me of my fancies.

Petronius: And did the games cure you of your melancholy and your madness?

Perpetua: Oh Petronius, it was a disaster. Oh that I had not gone. Oh the horror of it. I had not imagined that there could be such things. I shut my eyes tight but could not insulate myself from the emotions blazing all around me. Peeping out I saw faces intoxicated with bloody joy. They were ecstatic with barbarity. They exulted in the cruelty. They drank in blood as though they were gulping it down like fiends.

Petronius: How I know it. Yes, people need to create real hells for fear that there might not be an imaginary one.

Perpetua: But what I had not bargained for was that the horror would invade me. It entered deep into me as if through my skin. It is overwhelming me. It clings to me like a clammy cloak. It has driven me to desperate acts as if I had the demon himself inside me. And I think I have. It was a disaster, a disaster. Forgive me, you are a stranger. Why am I telling you all this?

Petronius: You must have been the girl who joined a legion. It is the talk of Rome. Forgive me, but your modesty is striking, hardly the braggart exhibitionist your reputation would suggest.

Perpetua: Oh Petronius, I am so ashamed. Why do I do it? I wish I knew. Perhaps, it is as if I need to show the world how wretched and spoilt I am. It is a kind of honesty. The public humiliation brings me a measure of relief. I have a child. I need to feel that I am honest, or try to be, to face my child. Can you understand?

Petronius: I too, as it happens, am a self despiser but without your courage. And not so honest. I am not a doer but, I'm ashamed to say, a ditherer. I am, I suppose, half way between a Cynic and a Stoic. The half-way man. A philosophical chimera. But this is astonishing. I could have searched Rome for such a fellow feeler without finding one, and here the gods in whom I do not believe have delivered her to me. Come, Perpetua, sit down.

Perpetua: I can no longer believe in the gods either. I tried the initiation of Dionysos but it made things worse. To be reborn, a child again, that was what they promised. I'm afraid I was a bad tempered one given to tantrums. Dionysos was no help. I felt the fury of the god alright. But I was possessed already and my possession was only increased by Dionysos. So that was no good. Oh demon, please please leave me. I feel contaminated. Since the games it is as if evil was inside me, had crept though the pores of my skin and invaded my blood and heart.

Petronius: You pay a heavy price for a heart so tender and a skin so delicate.

Perpetua: The Dionysians did not understand what I want, especially since the games. Innocence. That is what I call it. They did not understand about innocence. How can I explain? Once as I passed down a street I heard a woman singing a sad song from within a house, so beautiful I crossed the street to listen. And as I listened I saw an ant trying to drag a leaf across a sunlit patch of whitewashed wall. For a moment I was overwhelmed by the beauty of the world. I felt ravished by goodness, that is the only way I can put it, and now I look everywhere to find again the simplicity and innocence of that moment. The ant. The sunny whitewashed wall. The woman singing. Instead I find only evil and horror. Oh the games!

Petronius: So tender and lacerated a heart. I might have searched the empire to find one.

Perpetua: Why do people go to the games? How can they witness such things to be entertained. To be *entertained!*

Petronius: They do not go to be entertained although they might think they do. They go to be comforted

Perpetua: Comforted? I do not understand.

Petronius: Just like the mysteries of Dionysos, the games are a kind of initiation. They too are about reducing the onlooker to infancy. They shatter his soul, that is why the cruelties have to be so great, and then remake it. They reach into the deepest recesses of

his being. They enchant the imagination. They re-enact Greek myths. Let me tell you of two sights I have lately seen. In one a man is stripped naked. A tarry tunic is put over him like the shirt of Nessus. A torch is put to it and he runs screaming about the arena trying in vain to pull it off (he re-enacts it running about the stage screaming as if totally possessed by pain. He stops abruptly). Another scene. A man is tied between two teams of wild horses like Hippolytus in the Greek fable. The horses are whipped cruelly and in their wild plunging they tear off his arms (he enacts it, his arms stretched wide, his eyes dilated with terror, his face possessed by fear, again screaming as if at the very extremity of pain)

Perpetua: Stop! Stop! No More

Petronius: What do the crowd feel? They feel that this unimaginable horror is happening to them, and then they realise that it is not. It is somebody else. It was somebody else, somebody else not crying as a human does 'I am in pain', but screaming like an animal. They sweat rivers of relief. It is not them. They are still alive. It was somebody else. Do we not feel this now, you and me, not even seeing it? Not me, oh thank the gods not me. Ashamed, they relieve their shame with feeble jokes. I hope he didn't come to any 'arm', they say. They shed tears of gratitude. Oceans. They fall down in thanksgiving before the very Emperor who has commanded these dreadful things because he has not imposed the horrors upon them. Somebody else. But he has done. They walk about Rome with the fiery shirt of Nessus clinging not to their bodies but their souls. Not merely their bodies but their souls have been torn apart. They share secret terrible knowledge with the Emperor. He has aroused the most dreadful and intimate nightmares of childhood and then has said 'No no, I am your father, I love you too much to do this to *you*. Somebody else. I love *you*. So instead I give you bread and circuses'. Thus the natural bond of sympathy between grown up human beings is snapped and broken and replaced with child like devotion to the Emperor, their kindly father. They do not merely obey him. They are devoted. This is so devilishly clever there is no power on earth that could overcome it. I see all this. Yet, to punish myself, to re-assure myself that hell exists, to find a loving father who will save me from it, I still go to the games.

Perpetua: Oh Petronius, how wise you are. How I admire your stoic calm.

Petronius: Stoic calm? You mistake me. I too flee before the fury of the gods in whom I cannot believe. That is why I go to the games. Like you, to escape fantasy demons by seeing real ones.

Perpetua: But unlike me I see you are educated. You know literature. Surely that is a resource and consolation.

Petronius: Ah literature. My refuge and my torment. Literature, so near to life itself and yet so far away. How literature taunts and beguiles, beckoning you towards life and then when you are at its very gates runs giggling away. Come, says literature, you need no longer wallow and squeal and grunt like a pig in the muck of sensation so abundantly on offer in Rome. Come, come, drink this potion and you too can have the wondrous

experiences that the great authors had. But it is not so. Literature is both a deceiving mountebank who capers mockingly before you in cap and bells, and a stern faced matron who perishes with her freezing disapproval the very grunts and wallows which you try to find again in order to escape her. But you are no longer an innocent grunter and wallower. There is no going back. You have been educated! And what does she offer in return? Words, words, words. Scaffolds erected round empty nothings. To see the sights that I have seen when at the games is to totter in terror over an abyss of nothing. To save yourself - Help! Help! I am falling - you grasp at any nearest myth, a myth, a myth, somebody find me a saving myth, ah! here's one, that of 'we decent fellows'. We decent fellows, we read literature. We go to the games of course. But we read literature. Pouf! What sophistry. Compared to the games literature is a flimsy nothing. To be agog with the horror of it, to wail with fear, to howl like an animal, to be enthralled in every nerve and sinew with terror, to feel in trembling union with life itself, to cry out enchanted 'You are the Beast, oh Beast I worship you'. And then to feel 'It was not me'. The blessed relief of it. What thrills does literature offer to compare with this? So I go to the games, and revel in self-disgust. Art fails before the beast. There is nothing else. What power on earth could overcome it? That, I am afraid, is the truth.

Perpetua: Oh Petronius! Is there really nothing else? The gods? Alas no. The gods too have failed. Apollo has departed and left us in darkness. The Stoics have failed you and the Dionysians have failed me. Is there any other religion that we can try?

Petronius: At least I find solace in the thought that I am not deluded by the fantasies of religion.

Perpetua: What about the Christians whom everybody so despises?

Petronius: The Christians! Of all the ridiculous delusions of religion the idea that God is not even a fantasy emperor reigning among the clouds on Mount Olympus, nor the most impossibly beautiful of women nor even the very spirit of song playing on a golden lyre, but a crucified slave, this is surely the most absurd. What will they think of next?

Perpetua: I keep thinking of the ant and the whitewashed wall and the woman singing. Will you come with me to a meeting of the Christians?

Petronius: I had never thought so to compromise myself as even to touch with a sword's end such delusions. But for you Perpetua, dear fellow self-despiser, because, try to hide it as you may, I see that you have so tender a heart in so hard a world, how could I say no? The ant and the sunlit wall and the woman singing. Yes I will. Goodbye. We must meet again.

Perpetua: Oh yes we must. We must. Goodbye Petronius (exit Perpetua)

Petronius: Wonder of wonders, even though it clings to her yelping on her back she has not been enchanted by the beast. She is innocent. Innocence contaminated but, if only for a moment, a woman who was once over whelmed by the beauty of the world and

ravished by goodness. I can hardly think that this innocence will defeat the beast. But nor had I ever thought to meet so tender a heart, here and alive in Rome. The ant and the sunlit wall and the woman singing. A beautiful moment amidst all the roaring life of Rome. (exit)

Scene Nine Blandinus arranges a feast for Tertius

(Enter Tertius)

Tertius: Education? Waste of time. Look at me. I'm a self-made man and all the better for it. I thank the gods that I was never educated but made my own way through my own brawn and brain and wit. P. Tertius Longinus, Vulcan Constructions. That's me. They despise me of course. Well they would wouldn't they? Education! All education does as far as I can see is get between you and yourself. Smothers that gotcha! that gotcha some've got more than others but we all have unless it's been educated away. The priapic thrust, the smack of sensation, that's what it's all about. Carpe diem so the intellectuals are always telling us. Oooh carpe diem, P. Tertius Longinus, carpe diem. As if they could carp a diem if it was slapping them in the face. No, get your arm in deep and live life hard. The oyster slithering down the throat. The clash of the gladiators. But best of all, eh? And then she let slip her tunic. Woooarrgh! Oh that sweet moment. Strange how the act itself always disappoints. Any experienced philanderer would tell you that. You know that. But you never believe it. Every new woman and once again you hope for paradise. But oh that first moment. That first sweet moment. Then - she - let - slip - her - tunic. The very bite of life, eh? Heergh! Heergh! Heergh! Tertius, you randy old toad. But just look at these educated people. Petronius, a miserable withered dried up old prune sitting scoffing in the aisles of life if ever there was one. Peto, only just this side of a religious maniac. Oooh the gods, oooh the gods, the gods are angry, oooh the gods. And the women are worse. Cultuah. Do you think, P. Tertius Longinus, that the latak powems of Ovid have quaithe the muscularitah and sensuous immediecah of the earliah ones? Get your tunic off and I'll give you some sensuous immediacy. This Perpetua for example. I heard about her exploits. At last, I thought. Now there's a woman living in her tits I thought, so I had her over to sunset drinks. Just moped. As melancholy as a ram in April. Damn 'em all. P. Tertius Longinus, Vulcan Constructions. Next stop the consulate and after that - the world! Vulcan Constructions everywhere from Hibernia to Egypt. No, give me your lively quick-witted rascal. Speaking of which Blandinus is late. But first of all the hurdle of the consulate I must o'erleap. I can use this Blandinus.

(enter Blandinus)

Blandinus: Ah! Tertius, hail great constructor, hail.

Tertius: At last. Where have you been?

Blandinus: Oh you know. This and that. You want my help to get you into the consulate?

Tertius: Yes, can you arrange another feast for me? But even bigger. A fantastic feast, one that nobody will ever forget. Festa Mega Magna. The feast of all feasts.

Blandinus: One can but try. How much are you prepared to pay?

Tertius: Never mind the cost. There is no price to be put on fame.

Blandinus: Memorable? Very memorable? Let's see. You'll need exotic foods nobody's ever eaten before. Roast octopus. Sturgeons' eggs marinated in flamingo blood. Oysters cleansed in purest Cambrian water. Faux gorilla steaks perhaps.

Tertius: What are faux gorilla steaks?

Blandinus: There are said to be huge men as black as the abysses of Charon living beyond the southern borders of the African provinces that grunt and howl and when they go to war beat their chests like drums. But the question is, are they human? My suggestion is this. The guests are served the gorilla steaks. Then they are told that they might have been human. They rush to the vomitorium, for none has so delicate a stomach as your gourmet, and then they are told it was just a joke. They were really eating hippopotamus.

Tertius: Won't they be very angry with me?

Blandinus: You've got to break in from the outside, Tertius. 'Tertius the joker! Tertius the risk-taker! He'll be a breath of fresh air. Just what we need in Rome at this moment. Do you remember that famous feast when..? Laugh! Am I glad I was there!' You've got to make a mark, Tertius. You mistake human nature. Listen. You won't even need to serve real hippopotamus. Any tough old cow will do. In their relief to find they are not eating humans any flesh will taste like the finest and richest meat that ever was. 'We might not have been eating gorilla – laugh! - but the hippopotamus on that famous night! Cooked to perfection!. Tender? Wuwh!' Just put plenty of sauce on it. With philosopher to lead a discussion on the ethics of cannibalism thrown in. What about entertainment? First on a magician I would think. The Great Vallo does a slave girl bursting into flames with a live parrot flying out of the blazing ashes. He's good. Music? No question. It's got to be the Tiberians, the best band in Rome. Whores? The mature experienced woman is all the rage these days.

Tertius: Eh eh! Oh no you don't. I don't want to be palmed off with any old rubbish.

Blandinus: Oh sir, I see you are a man of the world, a gentleman of sharpest eye and quickest brain. Well, I have to say, I respect that. Very well, then. Top flight haetaeras from Thessaly, young succulents of the highest quality. It will cost you though. About five hundred sesterces each. Totally nude a hundred sesterces extra. Or you could go for our imperial service. Top flight Thessalian haetaeras fully nude, performing, probably between third and fourth courses, simulated Lesbian sex act.

Tertius: Let's go the whole hog. Totus porcus. Why can't we have real sex?

Blandinus: Sir, these are well brought up young ladies of most delicate moral sensibility, not your sluts from Trastevere.

Tertius: You mean class tarts.

Blandinus: You put it most succinctly. Oh sir, sir, one cannot get round you. Alright then, the full Pompey. Real sex. But it will cost you.

Tertius: On second thoughts perhaps not. We might get the Vestal Virgins complaining, and some of them have brothers who are important business contacts.

Blandinus: Agreed then. Not the full Pompey but the imperial. Top of the range Thessalian whores, erotic dancing with simulated Lesbian sex. Five hundred sesterces each harlot. Say three. Plus nudity it being the imperial. Say two thousand sesterces.

Tertius: That's quite a lot. But if that's what it costs. You get what you pay for I suppose. Now turning from the feast what about publicity? Quickly. I'm in a hurry. Can you arrange for me to save a child from drowning. Something like that.

Blandinus: Too dangerous. Suppose the child really drowned. Scandal is much safer:

Tertius: Hey hey hey! Just a moment. I don't want to be involved in any scandal.

Blandinus: Oh yes you do. You want what we in the trade call essential raw d, the realised admiration of unfulfilled desire. Why do you think that the public go to the theatre to see murders and rapes? Because that is what they secretly want to do themselves and they identify with the anti-hero. I can do you a nice five in a bed sex. Seven hundred sesterces. Information plant to Euphronius the Eunuch five hundred sesterces on top. With I.T.E.R. another hundred

Tertius: What is I.T.E.R.?

Blandinus: What we in the trade call Inverse Trust Exclusivity Ratios. Instead of letting the information out to all and sundry Euphronius tells only one but she's one of the top matronas in Rome. He has to lure her into his salon which is what you are paying for. He whispers it into her ear and implores her not to tell anyone, otherwise he'll lose his contract with the Emperor. But what is the point of being entrusted with a secret if no-one else knows about it? So she tells a friend and now there's an exclusive club of two. But what's the point of being a member of an exclusive club if you can't boast about it to the excluded? So she tells a third and the news flies round Rome like a stone from a catapult, each thinking that he, and even more she, is a cut above because he belongs to an exclusive society of those in the know. It is the common vice of humanity. If two were naked on a desert island one would think himself superior to the other because he had a bigger fig leaf.

Tertius: Well well. I see you have the measure of your fellow beings and prove them with a most cynical eye.

Blandinus: Thank you, sir. It is my vocation. We who are in the business of promoting causes feed on human weaknesses like maggots on rotting meat. Never underestimate the stupidity of the general public. It is the first rule of our profession.

Tertius: So what is all this going to cost me, then?

Blandinus: Let's see. The unforgettable feast. Top haetaeras with full imperial. Magician. Music. Publicity services. Say ten thousand sesterces all in.

Tertius: What? Ten thousand sesterces? I had not thought to pay so much.

Blandinus: What price fame? You said so yourself.

Tertius: Very well. Agreed. Ten thousand sesterces. I must go. Farewell. I will bring the money tomorrow.

Blandinus: Of course. My word is my bond. We operate on trust do we not? Where, after all, would we be without it? Farewell Senator. (exit Tertius)

Blandinus: Blandinus the slave! What a rogue, eh? How easily are fools fooled. I suppose the whole thing might cost five hundred sesterces. Faux gorilla steaks, so absurdly impossible when first heard become customary with hearing, and when shown to be unreal acquire an illusory reality. Clapped out tarts from Trastevere properly presented are seen to be top of the range haetaeras from Thessaly. So long as you are paying enough. All in the prepared mind. What would we do without Blandinus to put flesh on our sad comic fantasies? For how deeply do we need to be re-assured that we are indeed the fools and knaves that we know in our hearts we are. But who is Blandinus? Who is Blandinus?

Scene Ten. Marcellus Disowns Perpetua.

(Marcellus comes to the front of the stage carrying a burning brazier. He addresses the audience as if they were the gods)

Marcellus: You gods hear me. Jupiter, Juno, Apollo, Mars, Mercury, Venus hear me. In your mighty powers grant me this. I solemnly abjure my daughter Perpetua. May she no longer be daughter of mine. Before you and in your presence I cut her out of my seed and my stock. Let it be as if she had never been. She is no longer part of my house, will not share my table and will inherit nothing. Offspring of hers will be to me as strangers and as slaves. May her womb be sterile and her bosom dry up. Let the sun and stars shine on her indifferent to her fortunes and the wind blow her where it will. If she should stumble into the abysses of Tartarus let them receive her. Let her wander unwanted through the world. I annul my fatherhood. I banish her from my being. She is not mine. I know her not. Great powers, you who dwell on Olympus in unfading splendour, everlasting gods, overseers of the fortunes of mankind, grant my petition. Grant me this.

Scene Eleven. The Eucharist.

Enter choir with Perpetua and Petronius. Bread and wine are brought to a table. The choir sings:

‘Though he was in the form of God
 Jesus did not think being equal with God
 A thing to be grasped
 He emptied himself
 He took on the form of a slave
 Being born in the likeness of men
 And being found in human form
 He humbled himself and became obedient
 Unto death, even the death of the cross’

(One of the choir steps forward and says: An extract from a letter that our brother Paul, at present in prison here in Rome, sent to the brethren at Corinth, which has been forwarded to us: and then reads):

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, then I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all that I have and if I deliver my body to be burned but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends; as for prophecies they will pass away; as for tongues they will cease; as for knowledge it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect. But when the perfect comes the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope and love abide, these three. But the greatest of these is love.

Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.

The choir sings:

Therefore therefore therefore
 God has highly exalted him
 And bestowed on him the name that is above every name
 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow
 In heaven and earth and under the earth
 And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord
 Lord Lord Lord Lord

To the glory of God the father' (exeunt omnes)

Scene Twelve. Marcellus laments the loss of his daughter

(Enter Marcellus and Peto. They are in the interval between the hot and cold baths and are wrapped in towelling)

Marcellus: Oh Peto. My heart is breaking. I had thought that through solemn legal and religious process my love for her would cease. But it has not. Instead it has increased. Such a sweet child, Peto. I see her cheerful shining face when she was six or seven, that sort of age, wherever I go. Such pretty ways. Such grace, Peto. Did I do right?

Peto: Of course you did right. She did you great wrong. Think of the dishonour that she has done to your lineage.

Marcellus: Such a sweet child. We would walk hand in hand to visit all the animals on the farm. She would run to me bringing bunches of wild flowers, poppy and marguerites and asphodel, that she had picked from among the corn. She would cross the river on my back. If only I could forget. How she would hide beneath Matrona's cloak and would jump out shouting Fire! Fire! Thief! Thief! and we would rush round the house seeking to locate the fire and apprehend the thief.

Peto: You must not think like this. You have done your duty. Young people nowadays are running riot. You have a duty to your patria and to the state to set an example. Otherwise ruin will be brought on Rome. We must show that we will not tolerate such atheism and such riots.

Marcellus: You are right, you are right. But it is hard, Peto. Her lovely hair. It was her glory. She was ever a show-off and she was vain of it.

Peto: Running riot. Completely out of hand. In our day we knew how to enjoy ourselves and live life to the full, did we not? But always within the bounds of decorum.

Marcellus: You are right, you are right. I keep telling myself that. You are right.

Peto: We knew how to behave but, you will remember, we were no killjoys or milksops. Times, times. What times we had. I can see myself now chasing two virgins with P. Lucius Tellurius – now the gravest of judges, as you know, a very legal pillar of Hercules – chasing two virgins all the way down the Campus Martius before deflowering them. But we knew how to observe decorum. We would never have raped anybody without offering a salutation to Venus first.

Marcellus: My sweet child, my sweet child.

Peto: Pubes Peto they used to call me. V. Peto Lucillius was much sought after by all the young ladies of Rome, I can tell you. Do they still talk about Pubes Peto at fashionable dinner parties, do you know?

Marcellus: I will steel myself to continue on my course. But I cannot help wondering where she is and how she does.

Peto: We must all do our duty, painful as it might be, in these degenerate days. The gods are angry, sir. There are comets, portents, sickenings of beasts and crops. The times are bad. Do you not think so? Could I invite you, sir, to a convening of the followers of Mithras? I think that you will find them most sympathetic to you in your sorrow. Become an initiate. You will soon rise through the orders to become a crow and then a soldier. A safe refuge, sir, in these difficult days.

Marcellus: Mithras? I will stay on my course. But I will not become a follower of Mithras. Come to the frigidarium.

Peto: I really think that you should try Mithras. A most valiant and gentlemanly god.

Scene Thirteen Perpetua and Petronius discuss Christianity

(Enter Perpetua and Petronius)

Petronius: They were very nice and kind. I do have to say that. But I cannot become a Christian. I cannot believe in gods. Still less a god who loves his creation. And still less a god who thinks that he is a crucified slave. How can you believe such nonsense?

Perpetua: How can I believe? Because, I think, well...I suppose, I feel a loving presence in nature that nature itself cannot explain.

Petronius: A loving presence in nature? The lion killing and eating the antelope? The cat playing with the mouse? The frog's terrified gawping eyes as it is sucked down alive into the belly of the snake? What a kindly gentleman your loving god is. What sentimental man-made fantasy is this?

Perpetua: If the world was not created by God how did it come to be?

Petronius: I am a follower of Democritus: All is but drifting atoms. But over eons of time the atoms drifted into each other, and by accident settled into the stable aggregations of the things we see around us.

Perpetua: But it cannot all be accident. The world is so beautiful. Does Democritus have any explanation for that?

Petronius: No, he does not need to. Beauty is only an emotion.

Perpetua: We don't say tables are only an emotion. Don't put your plate on that table. It's only a feeling. Oops, watch out, your dinner's on the floor. If things can be square and wooden why can't they be delicate and beautiful?

Petronius: You have a wit as sharp as my own. But the cat playing cruelly with the mouse isn't beautiful. Nor just an emotion either.

Perpetua: Dogs wagging their tails in undiluted pleasure are beautiful. So are cats. The lovely greyhound muzzle of the cyclamen. Light shining on water. The autumn mists. Aren't you moved to tears by these things? The wild winds and the bright flowers. Everywhere, cruel as the world is, we see beauty peeping out. Oh Petronius, now we've found each other don't let's fall out. God looked at the world and said 'In spite of everything, it is good'. And he was right.

Petronius: Alright, alright I'll give you dogs. Even Democritus is good on dogs. But – please don't be upset - none of this proves the truth of Christianity.

Perpetua: There is no proof for the truth of Christianity. But none for Democritus either and we have to believe in something. Even it is only believing in not believing, as you seem to.

Petronius: I don't not believe for the sake of it. It's just that I can't get round the horror of nature. The cat and the mouse and the frog and the snake.

Perpetua: Oh Petronius, now at last I've found the innocence I searched for, don't rob me of it with your philosophical arguments and Democritus's atoms. I can't explain the horror of nature either. Yes, it is the cat's nature to play with the mouse and the snake's nature to eat the frog. The horror of it all, I know. But nature offers us something else. Ourselves. We are part of nature too, and it is the human's nature to pity the mouse and the frog. To cry out, how can there be such horrors in so beautiful a world. Pity, pity is the nature of the human being. Otherwise why do you not just say, 'That's just cats and snakes for you'. Why do you feel it's horrible, as the cat does not? Only humans feel pity.

Petronius: But not God apparently. Why then did your God if he is so kind and good create a nature whose law is beast eats beast? And we too are beasts. That we should feel pity is an accident of nature that we pay poets to flatter us with.

Perpetua: Oh I don't know, I can't answer you. Christianity may be the nonsense you say it is. But it's our only chance. Otherwise we are overwhelmed by darkness. Apollo has fled and we are overwhelmed by darkness. Can't you see? Don't deprive me of my last chance. Can't you see that if Christ has not defeated the Emperor then the Emperor and his games have won? There is nothing. Only darkness. I feel my melancholy coming back. I must go. Goodbye Petronius.

Petronius: Come back. Can we meet tomorrow?

Perpetua: I don't know. Maybe. I'll see. Goodbye. (exit)

Petronius: Come back! Come back! Oh no! What have I done? Have I lost her?
 Perpetua, Perpetua. Yes yes, the snake swallowing the frog and the cat the mouse, but that nature can also give birth to such delicate creatures so full of feeling. Stupid, stupid, stupid. She searched the world for innocence, and found it, and I searched the world for her and I found her. Oh Perpetua, that you exist. So innocent. So simple. She is beautiful as the flowers are beautiful. She blesses the earth. So lovely and so loving. I was impressed, more than I cared to admit. There is no accounting for such blessing in my philosophy. Logic commands my mind but her innocence haunts my soul. I will become a Christian. But have I driven her away? Oh the stupidity of it. Oh agony. Have I driven her away? To have found so precious a pearl and then to throw it away. Oh misery. (exit)

Scene Fourteen. A prison indicated by a few bars. Perpetua's Dream

(Perpetua is thrust roughly into the prison by the gaoler)

Perpetua (kneeling, she is shaking with fear): O Lord let this cup pass. I want to live, to look after my baby, to love my father. To love the world. Jesus, Jesus, I am terrified of the beasts. I don't want to die. Let this cup pass. Let this cup pass. (a pause) But thy will be done.

(She lies down on the straw pallet and sleeps. As Perpetua falls asleep the stage falls to complete darkness. We hear Lydia's voice calling)

Lydia: Perpetua! Perpetua! Come with me to find my drowned daughter, my little Ambrosia. Come with me through the gates of death to the bottom of the sea.

(There is a long sigh. Then a cacophony of noises, screeches, brayings, crashes, shrieks. In the darkness we see a dance of fluorescent skeletons lit by ultra-violet light. The cacophony dies away and the skeletons leave the stage)

Lydia: Perpetua! Perpetua! I am passing through the first gate of death. I am so frightened. Come with me through the darkness. I must cross the river of forgetfulness and enter the underworld. (By now there is a very dim light. We can just make out Lydia stumbling forward, her hands feeling in front of her as one blindfolded or in pitch darkness)

Lydia: I am passing through the earth towards the river. Perpetua, it is so cold. I am freezing cold. And so terrified. (She is whimpering and screaming) Perpetua, I am assailed by horrible slimey slithery things. Rats, slugs, snakes, horrible white shapeless shapes, spiders. I can't breathe. The earth is pressing in on me. I can't breathe. (She suddenly gives a great scream) What was that? On my face? Uuugh! This is so horrible, so horrible (she stumbles on for a moment in silence. The light begins to

strengthen) A glimmer of light! More light! Air and light! Oh the gods be praised. And the river. I see the river. The river of forgetfulness. The river.

(Peto comes onto the stage moving backwards, as one rowing a boat)

Peto: The times are bad. Don't you agree? The times are bad. Well we must all die. Any more for the Skylark? The death trip in the Skylark?

Lydia: Boatman! Boatman! Peto! Peto! Take me to the underworld.

Peto: Step in, lady. Any more for the death trip in the Skylark?

(they sit on the stage. Peto with legs outstretched and making rowing movements with his arms, Lydia with her legs tucked under her. Peto sings the Hades/Dionysos song)

Go lost wandering peregrine soul
To land of Hades land of darkness
Land of death and dust and shades
There be ravished by Dionysos
And be reborn And be reborn
Let your old life pass and fade
Be enraptured by Dionysos
Oh Dionysos Oh Dionysos
And be reborn And be reborn
In land of Hades land of darkness.

Peto: Here we are. The shore of the underworld and the second gate of death.

Lydia: Thank you, Peto.. Where do I go now?

Peto: Here's a tip, lady. You'll need to pass P. Tertius Longinus, the ferocious dog that guards the gate to Hades. Take my tip. Give him a treat. Distract him with a sop. Give him roast swan wrapped in gold foil, for example. Get any in your bag?

Lydia: Distract him with a sop?

Peto: Beware the dog, lady, and good luck. (he exits backwards as before with rowing movements singing the Dionsysos song which dies away. P. Tertius Longinus comes bounding onto the stage barking like a dog. He makes dog like movements and cries Gotcha! Gotcha! He sees Lydia and menaces her with barks and snarls and growls. She shrinks back, and then reaching into her bag throws him the sop. He bounds after it barking ferociously, and she runs past. As Tertius leaves, she re-appears immediately.

Lydia (raising her arms and praying):

Lady, whose shrine stands on the promontory,
O kindest mother, goddess of the sea

Open the gates of the underworld
And lead me to my little daughter
My sweet beloved Ambrosia.

(enter Julia arrayed as the sea goddess)

Julia: So, Lydia, at last you've come
Welcome to my villa, be transformed
By wonders I will show you under water
In the brilliant palaces of the sea. Come follow me

(We hear faintly tolling bells throughout this passage. Julia moves across the stage making crawling swim strokes with her arms, followed by Lydia who also swims. Sometimes they use the breaststroke, sometimes they move their arms and feet up and down to indicate that they are treading water. But always they swim)

Julia: Lydia, understand. Be transfigured by the transformations
Of the everlasting sea. Here time stops.
Here is everywhere and nowhere.
Before time and after time
Here is a place of transformation.

Lydia: Sweetest goddess of the sea, lady of the waters
Mistress of the winds and tides
Give Perpetua patience
Guide her through the terrible gateways
Past the hideous monsters roaming the deeps
You, kind goddess, who create such fragile beauties
In the gardens of the sea
The diatoms with their glossy mineral skeletons
The shining symmetries of the radiolaria
The sea cucumbers, the venus flower baskets
The exquisite shells and elegant crustaceans
The nimble guppies flashing in and out the coral
And the sponges undulating gently in the swell
You who bring forth such miracles
From the oozy bottom of the ocean
In the pathless tossings of the sea
Bring forth beauty from horror, meaning
From the meaningless, give Perpetua fortitude
Guide her through the terrible gateways
And remember me, remember me
Give me back my little Ambrosia

Julia: Come, follow me, let's swim over
 To the wreck, you see the wreck? Stopped like a clock
 In the hour when the vessel foundered
 So many centuries ago. Run your hands
 Over the barnacle encrusted gunwales
 Here here, come with me,
 Let's swim into the cabins
 And touch the skeletons of the sailors
 Femurs, ribs, collar bones and skulls
 Gleaming jewels in marine darkness
 Translated into emeralds and diamonds
 By the transitions of the sea,
 Caught for eternity in a moment of time,
 Reading a chart, eating a meal
 Petrified in the postures in which they drowned.

Lydia, I cannot give you back your daughter
 For she has passed into the everlasting
 But I can give you another gift, and for that
 We must swim over to Perpetua.

See, she sleeps so peacefully
 Her nostrils barely moving
 Her eyelids fluttering with dreams, for,
 Creations created by her dream, it is we
 She dreams of, her skin as delicate as snow,
 Her bosom gently moving with the motions of her heart
 Her body, released by sleep from anguish and anxieties

Already belongs to eternity
 Blessing with its low sweet breathing
 Even this harsh and grimmest place.
 Lydia, I cannot give you back your daughter
 But I, Goddess of the Sea, ask Perpetua
 To let you have her son instead,
 Ambrosius for Ambrosia, Lydia,
 Will you love and cherish her son
 And so relieve the greatest anguish
 Of this most brave and innocent lady?

Lydia: I will, I will

Julia: Come, swim away.

Scene 15. Perpetua in Prison

(A loud banging on the door. The gaoler opens it. Perpetua is awakened by the banging)

Marcellus (rushing in waving a paper): My daughter! Perpetua! At last. I found you. Lydia told me that you were here.

Perpetua: Father! Father! Father! (getting up, she embraces him weeping copiously)

Marcellus: Perpetua! Oh day of joy! We can soon have you out of here. All you have to do, so Tertius tells me, is sign the Emperor's libellus.

Perpetua: Father, dear father, I cannot do that.

Marcellus: No problem, no problem. There are fake ones Christians are able to sign that Blandinus the slave was selling. Tertius told me, Tertius knew him you see. I have one here. Came prepared you see. All you have to do is to sign it.

Perpetua: Father, I – I – I cannot do that.

Marcellus: You can't do it? Not even the fake one? What madness has got into you? Is it this Christianity you've taken up with? I curse it. I curse such atheism.

Perpetua: Father, don't put this pressure on me. You are tearing me apart. Would you have me do what I think dishonourable?

Marcellus: What is dishonourable about offering worship to the Emperor?

Perpetua: Would C. Aeneas Gallo and T. Ullius Gallo and B. Tiberius Gallo have done what they thought to be dishonourable?

Marcellus: C. Aeneas Gallo and T. Ullius Gallo and B. Tiberius Gallo? They loved Rome. What do they have to do with all this? I am bewildered.

Perpetua: Father, you know that they would not.

Marcellus: Do you mean that now at last I have found you only to have you snatched away once more? What madness has got into you? It is too much. It is too much. (he collapses weeping) What about your child, my grandchild?

Perpetua : No! No! Don't. Father you are piercing me with a sword. Leave me, leave me.

Marcellus: Oh my sweet child. We shall never meet again.

Perpetua: We shall meet again.

Marcellus: Where? Where? If you insist on getting yourself killed – and not just killed – Perpetua, dear child, you were always headstrong and this is your latest madness, can you not see? I implore you, I implore you, it is a madness – oh oh oh – not just executed like a gentlewoman but abused and degraded like a slave – how can we ever meet again?

Perpetua: We will meet again. In the resurrection. I must follow Christ's example. The monster can be overcome by beauty and by innocence.

Marcellus: Resurrection. Perpetua you are mad. When we die we rot. Monsters? Beauty and innocence? There are no beauty and innocence here.

Perpetua: Oh but there are. There are.

Marcellus: Over there are they? Over there? (he goes ironically looking under the bed and through the barred window) Can't see them here. Nor here. These are fantasies Perpetua. Oh Perpetua, how once again you disappoint me. It is the disappointment I cannot bear. The disappointment. My heart is breaking. I cannot express the grief I feel. How can you allow yourself to be torn apart by beasts? My beautiful daughter torn apart by beasts! Oh oh oh! Why do you have to go to the arena?

Perpetua: Father, do you not think that every nerve in my body is screaming to sign the libellus and leave this place? I don't want to die. But I can at least try and face the beasts. What I cannot bear is your pain. Leave me leave me. The monster will never be defeated if we do not follow Christ's example. Christus Victor et Redemptor!

Marcellus: I would to the gods you had never heard of this Christus. Perpetua, I will abandon my authority as a father. I am pleading with you. I make one last plea. Perpetua, come with me

Perpetua (shouting) : Christus Victor et Redemptor! Get out! Get out! Get out!

Marcellus: I am pierced by pity (exit)

(Perpetua kneels in silent prayer for a moment. She is still shaking with fear. Petronius is let into the cell by the gaoler)

Perpetua: Petronius, my old dear friend and mentor. I had not expected to meet again in these circumstances.

Petronius: Oh Perpetua, I am so frightened, so frightened. I could hear the bears howling and roaring as I was brought in. The bears. I cannot face the bears.

Perpetua: Do not be frightened, Petronius. Sign the libellus if you feel you must.

Petronius: I am crushed, I am destroyed.

Perpetua: To some is given the gift of courage and to others not. We must each do the best that we feel we can and leave the rest.

Petronius: How can I sign the libellus? If I do I shall go to hell. Ah – ah – ah –ah! To hell eternally. Everlasting. To everlasting torment. But I cannot face the bears.

Perpetua: Do stop talking about hell. Where is your old cynicism? Your old devastating dry wit? Your old scorn for religion? I think I preferred Petronius the atheist.

Petronius: But Christ himself tells us that those who betray him will be cast out into the everlasting burning where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Perpetua: What a fake cynic you always were. You were ever possessed by demons. Now look here, Petronius. Listen to me. Hell exists. Most definitely. But only for those who are absolutely desperate to go there. Who will turn every stone and climb every mountain and ford every stream in their determination to get into hell. Why? Because that is what makes them happy. You have seen it yourself at the games. People will go anywhere, pay anything, queue for hours to sup on the horrors. They are goggle eyed, fixated, enchanted by hell. You are not like that. You are saved by your precious virtue, ironic self-loathing. Do your best. If you feel you cannot face the bears, then sign the libellus. Christ will understand. Do you really think that God could manage for the whole of eternity without Petronius's cynical wit to keep him entertained? Sign the libellus and be happy.

Petronius: Yes you are right, Christ will understand. I feel better now. I am recovered. But if he will understand me he will understand you too. I'm pleading with you Perpetua, sign the libellus too. Come with me, we could find a little farm in the Alban hills -

Perpetua: Don't don't Petronius –

Petronius: Imagine the cool mornings and the hot days, the siestas under the plane trees in the midday heat. We would be so happy. We could bring up your son together. I could help you –

Perpetua: Get away from me! You demon, you devil. Oh my Ambrosius. Oh my child. You know where to put the knife in where it hurts Petronius, don't you, please please don't attack me where I am weakest.

Petronius: I am not attacking you Perpetua. I just want what is best for you. If Christ isn't going to send us to hell what is the point of being eaten by bears? Can't you see you are playing their game. What good is it going to do?

Perpetua (laying her hands on his shoulders): Petronius, will you please leave me. Please, please? Everybody must follow their conscience and every conscience is

different. I am sure that it is right for you to sign the libellus. But not for me. Unless innocence is brave enough to defeat the monster in his lair he will triumph. I know that in my case I have to do that. I too am terrified of the bears. Leaving you is a deep sorrow. Abandoning my child is tearing me in two. But I know what it is right for me to do.

Petronius: I will not tempt you further. I accept what you say. I am sorry I was so frightened of the monster in the arena and his greater brother, the one in hell. If it is any comfort my own monsters have already been defeated by the bravest lady I ever met. Goodbye, dearest dearest Perpetua. I hope to meet you in the everlasting.

Perpetua: Dearest dearest Petronius who educated me so much. Goodbye for now (they embrace and Petronius departs)

(As before Perpetua kneels in silent prayer. Blandinus is pushed in by the gaoler)

Perpetua : Blandinus! You here. I thought I saw you at the eucharist. I could not believe it and thought that I must have been mistaken. Blandinus? At the eucharist?

Blandinus: Blandinus the slave, what a rogue eh?

Perpetua: Forgive me Blandinus, dear Blandinus, but you did have a – well a – a-reputation.

Blandinus: As the biggest liar and cheat in Rome? But we rogues too have eyes to see with and ears with which we hear and we too feel most delicate airs upon our skin. The Lord came to seek the lost sheep. Is that not so?

Perpetua: Blandinus my brother. I'm sorry. A Christian! Oh I am so glad, so glad. (she embraces him warmly) But how did you come to find Christ?

Blandinus Domna, my story. I only felt alive when I was lying. I was trapped like a spider entangled in its own web. I could no longer distinguish fact from fiction. I had been usurped by a false Blandinus, an actor in a theatre whom I myself had called into existence. Down every byway and alley in Rome I was pursued by this fiery monster of revenge, his foul breath scorching my neck and reeking in my nostrils. I longed to go up to any passing stranger on a fine day and say 'The weather is fine today' but could not. Rather to say 'The weather is fine today, but a soothsayer has told me that it will rain this afternoon' and see his face fall. Oh the joy of it. What god could forgive me? Forgive my vengeance? Not just vengeance but vengeance as art? Not Jupiter, he, laughing in his beard, would only recruit me to further his own dubious enterprises. Not Mercury, he would simply be delighted by my impudence and wit. Not Apollo, he would have been lost in admiration of my art. And then I found Christ. Christ who forgives even those who crucified him, who forgives even vengeance as art. So declaring publicly that Christ

was but a man and it is the Emperor who is a god is one lie that I will not tell. I will go to the arena and the beasts.

Perpetua: Oh Blandinus! We will go together.

Blandinus; Domna, Domna, forgive me Domna, but could I put this to you? Revenge I believe I understand. I have forgiven myself for it but you have not. Ask yourself. Are you not seeking revenge on your mother dying when you were but an infant? For to the infant, dying is desertion. And then your father whom you loved so much also deserted you to go to the Gallic wars? A child does not understand about the Gallic wars. All she knows is that she has been deprived of the love that is her life blood.

Perpetua: Go on, Blandinus.

Blandinus: Ask yourself. Did you not hop through the forum to bring humiliation on your father? Was not your pregnancy an organized accident? Did you not join a legion you knew would have to swim across a river so your deception would be discovered and the Gallos become the laughing stock of Rome?

Perpetua: This is absurd. You get above yourself Blandinus. You may have been freed but you have the soul, and the impudence, of a slave.

Blandinus: Hear me out. Ask yourself. Ask yourself. Did you not deliberately allow yourself to be caught by the imperial guard so you could be sent to the arena? Knowing that in this extremity your father's anger and bluster and pride would all collapse and his love for you pour out, so that you could then say, 'as you refused to love me once, so I refuse to love you now' ? Christ is now my love. Christus Victor et Redemptor. Compete with that, house of Gallo.

Perpetua: I cannot think I am hearing such nonsense. Who in their right mind would be torn apart by beasts simply to rebuff their father's love? How ridiculous.

Blandinus: Because few of us are in our right minds. Below the bright surface of the conscious mind unconscious monsters roam, rampaging uncontrolled and following their own purposes. They control the conscious mind for the very reason that they are unconscious. The art of revenge, I found, is to find the monster that each has and feed it with what most delights it. Peto is no more fool than the next man. He knows that I am selling him his own farm but does not know he knows. He is eaten by the monster fear that the matronas of Rome will laugh at him because he can no longer perform the sex act, so he needs to think his new farm that he really knows is the same old farm, because he is the same old Peto, now grows the figs of Venus. Tertius knows I am overcharging him fivefold for his feast but does not know he knows. He is so terrified of his own monster, shame of his common origins, he needs to feel he can afford to be so grossly cheated. We are not possessed of ourselves. But Christ even on the cross was. Even then he did not take revenge but forgave his enemies. He triumphed over the beast. He was in control. That is why I am a Christian.

Perpetua: Oh Blandinus, the relief! I do not have to face the beasts. I have been so terrified. And the release from guilt at abandoning my child, as I was abandoned. How I see it now. Oh ever my wisest counsellor and friend. How well you know me when I did not know myself. I will sign the libellus. I am not due to face the arena till tomorrow. I will still have time to sign the libellus. Oh Blandinus, the relief.

Gaoler (entering): V. Perpetua Gallo, widow, say your last prayer to the gods. You are next for the arena.

Perpetua: No. There has been a mistake, I am not called till tomorrow. I will sign the libellus and offer the incense.

Gaoler: No mistake. Today's criminal died by accident while waiting so you have been brought forward. The public have paid for their entertainment and must have it.

(He manhandles her out)

Perpetua: No no. There has been a mistake. I appeal to the emperor. No No. My child. I cannot abandon my child. I do not wish to die. (and as she goes still shrieking over her shoulder to Blandinus) Get a message to Lydia to tell her to look after my little Ambrosius.

Blandinus: Her tender heart searches out the beast where he cowers in his deepest lair amidst the mud and slime and turns his monstrosity into love and beauty. Christus Victor et Redemptor. Thy will be done. I will get the message to Lydia.

Scene 16. The Martyrdom

(Enter Peto and Tertius)

Tertius: What's on today then?

Peto: Christians I think

Tertius: Good good. Nice juicy ones I hope. What animals have we got today?

Peto: Bulls. I saw it on the information wall as we came in.

Tertius: Bulls. Excellent. Praised be Dionysus. Nothing gets a bull going more than the sight of a Christian.

Peto: I disagree with you. These Christians don't provide good enough sport. They just stand there and let the bull trample all over them.

Tertius: Come on then. Why are we waiting?

Both (singing): Why are we waiting? Why are we waiting?

Peto: I believe there has been a technical hitch. The criminal that was supposed to be on died while in the cells. But they've fixed it. There's a replacement.

(They sing the Corinthian run run run song)

Teritus: Come on Come on. I've important business to see to.

Both (clapping and chanting rhythmically): Bull bull bull bull bull bull bull bull –

(enter a pantomime horse with a bull's head snorting and pawing. They clap and cheer, and start clapping and rhythmically chanting 'Bring on the Christian. Bring on the Christian'. Enter Perpetua. Loud cheers.)

Tertius; Jupiter above. It's Marcellus's daughter.

Peto: No. It can't be. Marcellus's daughter? Oh poor Marcellus. The shame of it. How fallen is the house of Gallo.

Teritus: It's the girl who joined a legion. Well she asked for it. You get what you ask for. Business has taught me that.

(Perpetua holds up her hand magisterially. During this whole sequence we hear the choir again singing "Although he was in the form of God...etc' ethereally offstage. The bull and Peto and Tertius are struck dumb and remain frozen in attitude during what is in fact a dumb show. Perpetua reaches into her tunic and takes out mirror and lipstick with which she rouges her lips, and then a comb with which she arranges her hair. She holds out her hands to the bull. The bull and Peto and Tertius come to life again)

Tertius: Have you ever seen anything like that?

Peto: Incredible. Amazing. Great Apollo.

(The bull kneels before Perpetua and she kisses its head tenderly)

Tertius: Did you see that? Did you see that? The bull has knelt down in front of her. That's amazing. The bull has knelt down in front of her.

Peto: It's letting her kiss it. O wonder most wondrous. O miracle of miracles. I don't believe it. Oh it is a wonder wrought by the gods.

Tertius: We must be dreaming. Don't kill the girl. Let her go. Let her live.

Peto: Let her live. Let her live.

(they both turn as if towards the emperor)

Tertius: Great Emperor we beseech you. Let her go. Let her live.

Peto: Great ruler of the world we ask for this. Only for this. Don't give her the thumbs down. Let her live.

(There is a pause. Then both give a great wailing cry of sorrow)

Tertius: It's the thumbs down.

(The guard comes on with drawn sword weeping. He cannot look at Perpetua as he plunges it through her heart. She falls. There is a dead silence and then another great wailing cry of despair. They exit and the bull shambles off led by the guard)

(enter Marcellus. He tenderly picks up Perpetua's body and brings her to the front of the stage where he carefully lays her down)

Marcellus: Oh how you can live a lifetime in a day. My heart has been swept by such storms of pride and grief I have been driven like a roaring wave before the winds until it sinks exhausted on a shore washed clean. Even now as on an April day sudden bursts of tenderness alternate with showers of sorrow. Why did I not understand her? Why? Why? What a fool. If I had perhaps she would never have become a Christian and none of this had happened. How bitter is it that now I see so clearly but too late. She would not go to the beast with untidy hair, for in that very moment, I see it so clearly now, she had triumphed over him. She was true to herself. She was ever vain. How often, I was made mad with rage, almost senseless in my fury, at her need to show off, to make an exhibition both of herself and me, and now my heart is bursting with pride. Would not C.Aeneas Gallo and T. Ullius Gallo and B. Tiberius Gallo be proud of her today? Oh how they would. But I would exchange all of it, all the glory of our house, her dazzling triumph that even struck Tertius and Peto dumb, the wonder of her composure, the docility of the beast, her courage that is the talk of Rome, would I not exchange all of it to have her still alive, by my side with working pulse and beating heart. Oh how I would. How I would. But I must dry my tears. She is dead. I cannot believe in the Christians' resurrection that meant so much to her. But who knows what happens after death? I may not believe but I cannot but hope. Oh great powers above, you who sweetly ordain all changing things and from the random falls of accident bring forth design and pattern, receive her into your loving bosom if loving bosom you have. And meanwhile until we meet again, or not as the case may be, I will visit her grave each day and spread on it poppies and marguerites and asphodel. Goodbye dear daughter, dearest dearest Perpetua, goodbye goodbye.

(Lights fade and then in a spot we see Lydia with a baby she is feeding from a spoon)

Lydia: 'Who's a lovely boy, then?' 'Ooh aah ooh.' 'Pretty baby Pretty baby' 'Whoops! Windy windy are we?' 'You are so beautiful. Lovely baby. So so beautiful. Beautiful Beautiful. Ooh I do love you.'

