

SWR
SYMPHONIE
ORCHESTER

SWR»CLASSIC

Hans Werner Henze
**Das Floß
der Medusa**

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(The Raft of the Medusa)

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PART I: EMBARKATION FOR DISASTER

1 CHARON'S PROLOGUE

(Charon enters and speaks from the front of the stage.)

You are about to hear an account of the frigate Medusa, which was shipwrecked on a voyage to Africa, and a true report of the fate of those aboard her. Our story is based on information published by M. Alexandre Corréard, Ship's Surgeon, and the Surveyor M. Henri Savigny, both members of the expedition and witnesses of its end, and on Théodore Géricault's portrayal of the event in his painting *Le Radeau de la Méduse*. This story of betrayal and steadfastness and of nature's blind enforcement of Fate's verdict did not change the world, but it lent support to the questions that must be asked; it aroused mistrust of a régime which later collapsed, and of its favourites, and increased sensibility for that moment when the scales tremble between loyalty and disloyalty towards the unknown.

(With an introductory gesture)

This is the side of the Living – this of the Dead, for our report speaks with two voices.

This gentleman has taken over the role of Jean-Charles, the mulatto from Djefara in French service, whom you will remember from Géricault's painting. With his gaze directed towards a ship on the horizon, he waves a red rag, a signal seen and acted upon by Madame La Mort, on your right. We speak with two voices.

I myself guide you through our story, in that I play the part of Charon, the ferryman between the 'Raft of the Living' and the refuge of those who, like the cicadas, are nothing but voice.

2 MOTTO (PASCAL'S 'PENSÉES' FROM FRAGMENT 383)

Soloists and choirs

From the quayside judgement is passed
On those who sail aboard a ship.
Those sailing in a ship
Believe the people who stay behind on land
Are escaping.
Both sides speak the same language.

3 ORDER OF THE DAY AND ROLL-CALL

Charon

On 17 June 1816, before seven in the morning, a squadron consisting of four ships of His Majesty Louis XVIII of France put out to sea from the ports of Rochefort and La Rochelle to recapture the territories along the Senegal which had been lost to Great Britain under Bonaparte and thus restore the authority of the French crown.

Boys' Choir

Vive le roi!

Charon

Under the command of Monsieur de Chaumarey, a protégé of His Majesty, and future Governor of St Jean, St Louis and Gorea, and Commander of the flagship Medusa, the following embarked: the African Battalion, consisting of four companies of Bretons, Corsicans, Mamelukes, Malambus, Sardinians, Moors, plus the officers, the escorts and the baggage train.

Choir

That's not counting the sai-hai-lors!

Charon

Three hundred and twenty-two fusiliers, three dozen women, children: nine.

Choir

That's not counting the sai-hai-lors!

Boys

Vive le roi!

4 JOURNAL OF THE PASSAGE

Choir

The sea was calm,

The wind from the north blew pleasantly.

Boys

The anchors are up!

Choir

Four ships,
A hundred sails
Soared into June.

Boys

To Africa!

Choir

Four ships glided from the bay
To recapture the sapphire of Senegal
For King and Country.

Boys

Vive le roi!

Choir

Vive le roi!

Charon

And the squadron of the King of France is at sea. On the first day it draws level with the Gironde, on the second with Santander, on the fourth with Finisterre. On the twelfth evening look-out men sight Tenerife.

Jean-Charles

The mountain floats,
Suspended in the sky,
Quite weightless:
Swimming in distance,
Or so it seemed,
And was the highest,
The most unhopèd-for of all mountains,
A phantom of safety and joy!

Choir

Oh, what longing!
To Africa!

Boys

It's
Se-
ne-
gal
we're
head-
ing
for

Choir

To Africa!

Boys

And the
first
to
see
it,
that
is
YOU!

Charon

Twelve times we have seen the day aflame, twelve times a-slumber, since this ship sailed the open sea.

The North Star sank, and ev'ry time that darkness fell new stars rose in the South where the other pole is;
they stared down brightly, new and alien glances burning with desire.

Choir

Oh, what promise!

Jean-Charles

Then we heard it ...

Brothers, it called ...

Brothers!

Do you hear it ...

It is still a watch away
For the other ships.

If you don't waver ...

If you dare,

If you dare
To hazard your hopes
And do not fail
To wake up
To the world
You live in

And to the misery
And the glory
Of mankind
Then you will understand,

It called
The new world
And become its masters!

La Mort

heard it ...

brothers ...

it called ...

it called brothers?
Vengeance, it called,
reefs!

. . . shudder, shudder,

it called, despair!

despair
despair

despair
despair –

it called: misery.

Horror!
it called

it called
oh perish!

That's what we heard ...

and called

The virtue of knowledge
shall be yours, yours!

No, no, no, no!

Choir

Fresh winds, dolphins,
New voices,
Oh, what longing!
The ships pressed along,
And we were carried
As on pure white wings
To Africa!

Charon

Ah! How we flew! The ships all drew apart, and the Medusa - the fastest ship in the squadron, frigate, flagship of His Excellency, the Governor de Chaumarey ...

Jean-Charles

... salutes and cheers ...
Medusa!

Choir

Medusa!

Charon

On the second of July, in the early hours of the morning, Medusa, more than twelve hours ahead of all the other ships, crosses the Tropic of Cancer, passes Cap Blanc and Port Etienne, and runs aground, scarcely thirty hours away from its destination ...

Boys

And the
first
to
see
it,
that
is
YOU!

Charon

... on a reef, the sand-banks of Arguin.

5 AN ANSWER

La Mort (*imitating the children*)

The
sand-
banks
of Arguin ...

Come, pride, come, you many too many,
Come to where the ships go:
Come to the stars, calling from the other pole:
The stars of longing!
You only need to look upwards for a moment,
Look and ask,
Then you'll see how they do grow,
And shine more brightly,
Fast approaching, just like birds
They soar above the radiant sea.
Struck by their beams of promise,
You flee, flee,
And come.

6 ATTEMPTS TO SAVE SHIP AND MEN

Charon

For three days a battle is fought to save the ship, but all attempts to free her from the sand fail. Sea, current, and quicksand hold her fast, and on the third night she threatens to capsize. In the course of this night friends and intimates of the Governor begin to board the boats. But the others and the many-too-many ...

Jean-Charles

We others and many-too-many, we were not taken in the longboat,
Neither was there any room in the Governor's sloop,
And the cutters took only officers,
We watched it all, and witnessed many things:
We learned salvation is for pursers only,
And only captains can expect a place in heaven.
The overseers gave up their overseeing, and vanished,
And the bosun quickly hid his cat, then himself.
The priests first blessed the quartermasters,
Then with their help they scrambled on the boats.
The cooks and apothecaries packed,
The staff musicians gathered all their music up.
For all at once they were so slim and light,
That the boats scarcely noticed their weight,
But from the gold and silver on their uniforms
Great splendour rose -
Right up to us.
That's what we learned in that one night of anguish,
We learned so much that we'd not known before.
Then all of us got down to work together,
We ...

Choir

... who were not taken in the longboat,
We, the redundant and far-too-many,
Gathered from all over the ship
Masts and spars and planks
For a raft -
We hoped would bring us safely ashore,

We wanted to live!

Jean-Charles

The morning came.

La Mort

Come! Come!

Jean-Charles

It was the day

On which we were to leave our ship, Medusa.

La Mort

... and you came.

7 DISEMBARKATION

Charon

Monsieur la Chaumarey has the situation well in hand. At dawn he leaves the Captain's cabin, his hand raised to his feathered hat: salutes the flagship! - and leaves her for the sloop.

Choir

We all stood at the ship's rails
And watched.

Jean-Charles

In a bosun's chair he was lowered.

Choir

We all stood at the ship's rails
And watched.

Jean-Charles

A corporal who had been left on board ship ...

Choir

We stood right next to him
And watched him.

Jean-Charles

... drew his pistol, aimed at Chaumarey ...

Choir

We stood right next to him
And watched him.

Jean-Charles

... a black soldier knocked the pistol out of his hand.

Choir

We all stood at the ship's rails
And watched.

Jean-Charles

Then came the order to abandon the Medusa.
We jumped onto the raft.

Charon

Seventeen men refuse to obey the order; they remain on the wreck. Nevertheless, when the lines are cast off, there are one hundred and fifty-four men aboard the raft, standing up to their chests in water, holding on to one another so as not to be swept off by the waves. With the raft in tow, the boats move off fast, driven by the waves and currents. They have put out their oars, and set their course; seven spiders stretching out a hundred arms to lug an immense carcass, which, rolling, adrift, and pounded by the waves, drags after them. Three hours later, courage has sunk, the current is too strong. The boats are under full sail, the oars groan, but the convoy tacks about with-out making headway. The boats ship their oars.

8 BALLAD OF BETRAYAL**Jean-Charles**

We watched the boats,
Not letting them out of our sight.
We clutched one another
To keep balance in the high seas,
And as we stared ahead
We saw someone stand up in the nearest boat,
And climb on the gunwale alone.
There, outlined black against the blood-red heavens, He raised his hands high in the air above his shoulder, Like an executioner!
We saw the flash as he swung an axe up.
And then he struck.

Choir

Hey, the tow-rope!

Jean-Charles

The tow-rope was cut through!

Choir

You dog! Murderer!
Accursed dog,
That had the thought,
Oh, you murd'ers!
Dog, that did the deed!
Accursed murd'rer that did the deed!

Boys

Vive le roi!

Jean-Charles and Choir

Now there is mercy only for the gentry,
The pursers, the provost and the priests.

Choir

In this world

Luck wears a feathered hat.

Jean-Charles and Choir

We've been abandoned.

La Mort

Come now!

Choir

Where to?

Oh please tell us:

Where to?

La Mort

Come now, come!

Choir

Although we hear your voice

We see you not!

La Mort

No need to see me. Come!

Choir

As the sun sinks low

It makes us blind!

Jean-Charles

The sun sank.

La Mort

... it sank and rose again!

Jean-Charles

Then came the night.

La Mort

... it came?

Yes, but it soon passed by.

Jean-Charles

The crescent moon, sinking fast,

Shrouded us in darkness;

The stars shone

Without shedding any light.

Each grasped the next

In order not to fall alone.

La Mort

... and then fell,

So as not to sink into the night alone.

Jean-Charles

Then the moon was gone ...

9 SONG WITH NEW VOICES

Two Children

Per correr migliori acque alza
le vele
Omai la navicella del mio
ingegno,
Che lascia dietro a se mar sì
crudele ...

*The little ship of my fancy
hoists sail for a better
Journey,
turning her back on a cruel
sea.*

Jean-Charles

The first to go were children,
Drowned before midnight.

The Two Children

Or discendiam qua giù nel
cieco mondo,
Io sarò primo, e tu sarai
secondo ...

*Let us descend now into a
blind world;
I shall go first, you shall follow.*

Jean-Charles

Two ship's boys –
We called them ...

Choir

Chico' Pierre'

The Two Children

E canterò di quel second
regno,
e canterò ...

*And I shall sing of that
other realm,
and I shall sing ...*

Jean-Charles

Nothing. We got no answer.
The echo disavowed them.
And when the moon had set again,
Azak let go,
And then Rigault;
After him Condin,
Cherson ...

Chorus of the Living

Azak! Azak!

Chorus of the Dead

Come verro, se tu paventi
Che suoli al mio dubbiar esser

*How can I go on if you
hesitate,
you who alone supports the*

Confroto?
Io sarò primo, e tu sarai
secondo ...

waverer?
I shall go first, you shall follow.

Jean-Charles

That was at midnight;
By then our tears were spent.
We held on,
Our fingers tightly clamped in the next man's.
But silence rumoured,
Till they all knew the worst.

Choir

Azak!

Jean-Charles

Then we saw Venus rise.
And twilight followed her,
A green and baneful twilight.
Pale faces swam towards us from the darkness:
They were living faces.
That helped us in the counting,
And we stared around.

Choir

Where are the Corsicans?
The Savoyards have gone, too!
We've lost the Sardinians.
Where are the Sardinians?

(A number of singers change over to the Side of the Dead.)

Jean-Charles

The gunner Lacoste was no longer next to me,
And my hand was empty;
But I still felt the shape of his shoulder there.
I stretched and flexed my fingers,
Then let them sink.
Now it was day.

Choir

Azak! Azak!

The Dead (basses)

Non lasciavam l'andar, per
ch'ei dicessi,
Ma passavam la selva
tuttavia,
La selva, dico, di spiriti
spessi ...

*We did not stop at his words
but made our way through
the thicket,
as I call it, the throng of
souls ...*

The Dead (tenors)

Dolce color d'oriental zaffiro,
Che s'accoglieva nel sereno

*Sweet shade of orient sapphire
gathered up from the serene*

petto ...

breast ...

The Dead (*contraltos*)

... del mezzo puro insino al
giorno ...

*... from the pure fulcrum of
the day ...*

The Dead (*sopranos*)

... agli occhi miei ricominci6
diletto,
Tosto ch'io uscì fuor dell'aura
morta ...

... revived my eyes

*as soon as I was free from the
deathly air ...*

All the Dead

... che m'avea contristati gli
occhi e'l petto.

*... which took from me gaze
and breath.*

La Mort

The star that comforts love
Triumphs in the east, and leaves the fishes
Far behind to struggle after longingly.

All the Dead

I'mi volsi a man destra, e posi
mente
All'altro polo, e vidi quattro
stelle
Non viste mai fuor ch'a la
prima gente ...

I turned to the right,

*facing the other pole, and
beheld four stars
which no-one had seen since
the first mortals ...*

10 INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE SECOND DAY

Jean-Charles

Then came the second day;
That day was one long crime,
And if days had a conscience
It would suffer.

Chorus of the Living

He says we can expect no mercy
From this second day.

Jean-Charles

The white sky's
Split asunder
By the black sun.
Look away!

Chorus of the Living

He says the sun
Is surely going to blind us all!

Jean-Charles

Two casks of water, seven casks of wine,

And one of biscuit.

Chorus of the Living

He says the hands still left
Will now be counted.

Jean-Charles

Today there is no clock,
And so the seconds run blank.
One cask of minutes now counts as an hour,
A cask of hours adds up to roughly half a day.

Chorus of the Living

We'll die of thirst!

Jean-Charles

Drink time!
Drink the blank minutes with the searing heavens, And drink the hours with the black and scorching sun!

Chorus of the Living

Ah, the black sun will burn us alive¹

Jean-Charles

Then drink the empty, dead horizon
That offers no hope,
Drink the sunken coastline.
Drink! Drink! Drink!
Till night's come.

Chorus of the Living

When will night come?

Jean-Charles

When the last drop's drained from you.

Chorus of the Living

And who will save us?
Where's the ship to save us?

Chorus of the Dead

A-e-i-o-u

Chorus of the Living

Listen!
Was that a voice?
Are they coming?

Jean-Charles

The black sun is speaking
And the searing heavens,
The horizon too, and thirst.
They are all speaking.
They all have voices.
The empty sea

Screams!

Chorus of the Living

The sea screams!

Wait! Listen!

Chorus of the Dead

Lobel pianeta che ad'amar
conforta,

Faceva tutto rider l'oriente,
Velando i pesci, ch'erano in
sua scorta ...

The star which trusts in love

*smiles already in the east,
veiling the fish who could follow it ...*

Chorus of the Living

They're coming,

Oh, they're calling,

Can't you hear?

La Mort

E canterò, e canterò,
e canterò...

*And I shall sing, and I shall
sing, and I shall sing ...*

Chorus of the Living

... the searing heavens,
And the blank seconds, the day,
The scorching black sun
And this thirst.
How many sails are coming?
They're calling,
Many voices,
Where are they?

Chorus of the Dead

E canterò, e canterò,
e canterò...

*And I shall sing, and I shall
sing, and I shall sing ...*

Chorus of the Living

Who'll be the first to see them?

Chorus of the Dead

E canterò, e canterò,
e canterò...

*And I shall sing, and I shall
sing, and I shall sing ...*

La Mort

E canterò, e canterò,
e canterò...

*And I shall sing, and I shall
sing, and I shall sing ...*

Chorus of the Living (Boys)

The
first
to
see
them

that
is
YOU!

La Mort and Chorus of the Dead

E canterò, e canterò,
e canterò...

*And I shall sing, and I shall
sing, and I shall sing ...*

PART II: THE NINTH NIGHT AND THE MORNING

11 REPORT ON THE SITUATION

Charon

For eight nights the moon has waxed and the numbers of survivors diminished on the raft of the Medusa. Our story finds them adrift on the open sea with the ninth night falling, silent, windless. The forlorn survivors float along the trembling path of light shed by the moon, which has lost all semblance of solidity, as if on a flight between Heaven and the bed of the sea, and those who can still see it suffer from giddiness and the expectation of falling. They lie on planks washed by the waves, huddled round the mast they have set up to hold a drooping sail, the living and the dying - the last of the one hundred and fifty-four who hoped to save themselves with this raft; and each new hour makes the counting quicker: fourteen have died of exhaustion, nineteen have been killed by the sun, eleven by the sea. Eighteen died in a scuffle for a sip of water, forty-nine in a fight one night over the wine casks, which were dashed to pieces next morning by a heavy sea.

Others - hiding their faces - threw themselves overboard: eight constrained by their dreams, seven on waking from dream to reality.

A handful have survived exhaustion and fever, the knives of their friends, the scream of the sun, and the overpowering moonlight. They live in misery, facing an end which both courage and cowardice only tend to delay. Tortured by visions, out of reach of the laws of the land, they feel themselves falling, are frightened of the impact, listen to the silence as it counts their names out, and stare at the moon, the glistening calfskin on which Nothing drums ...

The Dead

Achmed!

A Voice

I hear you ...

The Dead

Ezra!

Second Voice

Here ...

The Dead

Correard!

Fourth Voice

I hear you ...

The Dead

Salvador!

Fifth Voice

I'm still here!

12 MOTTO (PASCAL'S PENSEES, FROM FRAGMENTS 205 TO 207 and 347)

Choruses of the Living and the Dying

How many kingdoms are there
That know nothing of us?

Jean-Charles

If I think of the speck that I am:
As nothing in the infinity -
If I think of how short mortal life is: A now in the eternity -
I shudder!

The Living and the Dying

Oh, why are we here -
And not there?
Oh, why are we now -
And not then?

La Mort

Ah, the universe knows nothing of that!

13 ROLL-CALL UNDER THE MOON

A Child

La luna, quasi a mezza notte
tarda ...

*The moon, late, towards
midnight ...*

Jean-Charles

The moon!

Several Children

... faceva le stelle a noi parer
più rade ...

*... hides the stars from us with
its light ...*

Jean-Charles

The moon!

All the Children

... e correa contra 'l ciel per
quelle strade ...

*... and mounts its course in
the face of night ...*

Jean-Charles

The moon, hung high in the sky
Of monster night ...

The Dead

La luna!

The moon!

Jean-Charles

... and the stars all paled in her Strident light ...

The Dead

La luna!

The moon!

Jean-Charles

... shattered the sea and sailed
Towards the wind ...

The Dead

La luna!

The moon!

Jean-Charles

... and as the hours passed,
Slow and grim and bitter,
Night grew old.

The Dead

Per entro se l'eterna
margarita ne ricevette,
Com' acqua recepe raggio di luce,
Permanendo unita ...

The pearl of eternity received us

*as water drinks light,
without division ...*

The Living and the Dying

We felt like grains of salt
Dropped in the restless ocean:
The sea drank us ...

Jean-Charles

Was I not there?

The Living and the Dying

... and at the same time
we drank all the sea ...

Jean-Charles

I felt that I was there,
Where the visions are.
Yet when I did my best
To grasp and hold them
I woke up here,
Plunged to the depths of night.

La Mort

Faith is what you need.

Jean-Charles

I'm blinded by belief!

La Mort

Blind belief is the best!

Jean-Charles

We have been wasted.

The Dead

O voi che siete in picciolletta barca,
Desiderosi d'ascoltar, seguiti
Dietro al mio legno che
cantando varca,
Tornate a riveder li vostri liti:
Perdendo me, rimarreste smarriti!

*Oh you who are in such a tiny boat,
trying to listen, follow behind
my bark, which sails, singing,

turn around towards your coast;
if you lose me, you are lost!*

La Mort

Come, many-too-many,
For your time is up!

The Living

A call! Who's calling?

Jean-Charles

Who is that? Who is calling?

La Mort

The white harbour of cicada voices!

Jean-Charles

Tell me once more!

La Mort

The island of cicada voices!

Jean-Charles

Tell me, where can I find you?

The Living

What has happened to Gunner Lacoste?
Where is Lacoste?

The Dead

Eccolo!

Here he is!

The Living

And where are Chico? Pierre?

The Dead

Eccoli!

Here they are!

The Living

And where are Azak and Rigault? Cherson?

The Dead

Eccoli!

Here they are!

Jean-Charles

Who are you, you who know?

Where are you?

La Mort

With me!

The Dead

Ecco!

Here!

Jean-Charles

Tell me how I can find you!

Tell me your name! Speak!

The Dead Children

La luna, quasi a mezza notte tarda
Facea le stelle a noi parer piu rade
E correa contra 'l ciel per
quelle strade ...

*The moon, late, towards midnight,
hides the stars from us with its light
and mounts its course in the
face of the night ...*

La Mort

I am the changeless peaceful haven of your longing;
Out of first love was I conceived,
And born of conscience out of righteous will –
They formed me out of nothing.
Come, many-too-many!
I am the ultimate night.
Come, now.

The Dead Children

E canterò di quel second
regno ...

*And I shall sing of that other
realm ...*

The Dead

Moreau! Destouches!

The Dying

Who's calling?
Are you friends?
Brothers?

The Dead

Maudet! Toubade!

The Dying

Is that wings we hear?
Can we hear sails?

The Dead

Sambadurand! Beurthonne!

The Dying

It is the ships, they've come at last
To save us!

The Dead

Samer! Julio! Zenon!

The Dying

They're surely coming
Before this watch is over!

The Dead

Monbrun! Timo! Garcia!

The Dying

They're taking us
To their lovely town!

The Dead

Galam! Vaquerito! Silvestro! Muhamed!

The Dying

Land! Land!

La Mort

Come, far-too-many!

The Dying

Land! Oh, land!

La Mort

It is the shore
Of ultimate night!

14 THE FATAL RECKONING**Charon**

Midnight. Clouds form in the skies above them - sails, which they stare at in longing and hope. When a cloud climbs to the zenith that the moon has now attained, then darkness falls upon the raft, and it rains - too little for the salt to be washed from the faces of the men dying of thirst.

It is the first night in which they have had nothing to drink, and thirteen are nearing their end at last - but ... they do not die. They drown in their fever - but the water cask is empty ... except for a handful for each.

Jean-Charles

Then some men said:
Two mugs for each if ev'ry second man drinks.

The Living

No man did dare to say that!

Jean-Charles

No, but the sum they did was right!

Charon

A hundred and twenty-six men have perished - fighting, screaming- or biting back their screams, and those that stayed alive, fell upon the bodies of their comrades. The thirteen men who cannot die begin to have visions.

Jean-Charles

'We are with'ring',
That's what some said.

Charon

They're close to madness. They feel they have entered paradise, but stretch out their hands when the water ration is doled out ...

The Living

They're close to madness.

Jean-Charles

Far too many hands, still,
And those yet able to think
In terms of death
Asked one another:
Why can't they be content
With the paradise they've got?

Charon

They lie there, eyes wide open but quite unseeing ...

The Living

... the hands they stretch out
seem to have a life of their own ...

Jean-Charles

Then others said:
Look at those greedy hands!

The Living

Look at those greedy hands,
They steal our nights,
They're robbers!
They'll steal from us the day
On which we hope for rescue.
Chop them off!
No-one chopped off their hands!

Jean-Charles

It was the reckoning ...

Charon

And that was ... as it rained on the faces of those that were dying of thirst, and darkness lay over the raft
... and a cloud concealed the moon ... and some men said: now it is midnight!

15 THE BALLAD OF THE MAN ON THE RAFT

Jean-Charles

I saw a man cross the raft,
And then darkness fell.

The Living

We did not see him cross!

Jean-Charles

I saw a man cross the raft
And those that watched him
All said that they had seen nothing.

The Living

We did not tell you you should do it.

Jean-Charles

I saw a man cross the raft,
And those that spoke to him
Now say they said
Nothing at all.

The Dead

Non sapei tu che qui e l'uom
felice?

*Did you not know that the
Happy man is here?*

The Dying

Tiemmi!

The Dead

Non sapei tu che qui e l'uom
felice?

*Did you not know that the
happy man is here?*

The Dying

.. felice?

... happy?

The Dead

Leva la testa, e fa'che
t'assicuri!

Look up, and make sure!

The Dying

... assicurì?

... sure?

The Dead

Piglia quel ch'io ti dicero se
vuo' saziarti!

*Believe me, you will be
Satisfied!*

The Dying

... saziarti?

... satisfied?

The Dead

Tiemmi!

Hold me!

The Dying (*shouting for joy*)

Tiemmi! Tiemmi!

Hold me! Hold me!

Jean-Charles

I – saw – a man – cross the raft.
He saw – delirious faces.
You're raving, aren't you?
He asked.

The Dying

Tiemmi! Tiemmi!
Felice!
Assicuri!
Saziarti!
Tiemmi! Tiemmi!

Hold me! Hold me!
Happy!
Sure!
Satisfied!
Hold me! Hold me!

Jean-Charles

You are raving!

The Dying

We're drinking wine!
We're eating bread!

Jean-Charles

You're moonsick!

The Dying

No!
We're resting.
Tiemmi! Tiemmi! Tiemmi!

Hold me! Hold me! Hold me!

Jean-Charles

There stood the man on the raft,
And thirteen pairs of hands
Stretched out in hope that he would hold them.
Life was still there,
But the strength and the grip,
And the future that was written there
Had all faded.

La Mort

Come, many-too-many!
Your time is up!

The Dying

Tiemmi! Tiemmi! Tiemmi!

Hold me! Hold me! Hold me!

Jean-Charles

Why are you breaking them?
They were human –
Now they're almost dust.

La Mort

Come, far-too-many!

I am the ultimate night.

The Dying

Tiemmi! Tiemmi! Tiemmi!

Hold me! Hold me! Hold me!

Jean-Charles

There – stood – the man – on the raft,
read the – palms – of –
the thirteen who still survived,
saw them – grope – for –
some kind of hold – in the darkness,
then took each hand,
grasped it firmly.

The Dying

Are you our rescuer?

La Mort

I am.

The Dying

Tiemmi! Tiemmi!

Hold me! Hold me!

Jean-Charles

And the man grasped all their hands,
And - let them go.

(Six of the Dying leave the Side of the Living.)

The Last of the Dying

You'll hold us fast?

Jean-Charles

I'll hold you fast.

(Six more of the Dying leave the Side of the Living.)

The Last of the Dying

Why is your hand trembling as it holds me?

Jean-Charles

And then the man let the last hand go.

(The Last of the Dying leaves the Side of the Living.)

The Children

Non sapei tu che qui e l'uom
felice?

*Did you not know that the
happy man is here?*

The Living

You dared to do it!
You were the one!

Jean-Charles

You thought it, too!

The Living

You are to blame!

Jean-Charles

But you all said it.

I was alone.

The Living

The guilt is yours.

Jean-Charles

You judge me?

Then where is the law?

The Living

We have no law.

Jean-Charles

You have but one law -

One that lets you die:

For salvation is for pursers only,

And only epaulettes can find a place in heaven.

The padres bless the quartermasters

Knowing that food enough will then be theirs for the asking.

The overseers, so hard to please,

Are now contented, and the provost

Has long since thrown his whip out.

The world's luck wears a feathered hat!

How many kingdoms are there

That know nothing of us!

How many kingdoms are there

That know nothing of us!

16 THE FUGUE OF THE SURVIVORS AND THE PROSPECT OF RESCUE

The Living

There is no law for us

And we're dying

Because kingdoms have no conscience

Jean-Charles

Then make a law that will let us live!

The Living

We'll make ourselves a law,

And disinherit

All those who left us to die alone,

That showed no mercy.

Jean-Charles

And call it out,
So that the kingdoms cannot ignore it'

The Living

We ourselves are the law,
And we shall no longer be silent.

Jean-Charles

Now give us water!

The Living

There is no more than a handful left for each.

Jean-Charles

No! We're thirteen fewer!

The Living

Count the hands then!

Jean-Charles (*increasingly trance-like*)

Count what you like!
The setting moon,
The coming day.
Count the blank minutes
With the searing heavens,
And count the long hours
With the black sun.
Count the sunken coastline
And the dead horizon
That offers us
No hope.

The Living

Will there be no ship?

Jean-Charles (*struggling to overcome his weakness*)

There will be, and I'll wave till it sees us.

La Mort

What will you wave with?

Jean-Charles

With this red rag here!

La Mort

Come, last – of the far-too-many!

Jean-Charles

No!

The Living

He's speaking ... to whom?
You're speaking!

Who are you talking to?

Jean Charles

I am alone.

The Dead

Non sapei tu che qui e l'uom
felice?

*Did you not know that the
happy man is here?*

Charon

And that was when the rain stopped and the darkness passed. The cloud had uncovered the moon, the shadow the raft, and some said day had come.

17 FINALE

La Mort

Look up!
Look in my eyes and see -
Reflected heaven.

Jean-Charles

Go! Turn away!
Before your eyes
We lose all our substance
And ev'ry image fades.

The Living

He says we will have water,
He says he sees a ship!

The Dead

Or discendiam qua giù nel
cieco mondo,
Io sarò primo, e tu sarai
secondo ...

*Let us descend now into
blind world,
I shall go first, you shall
follow ...*

La Mort

I sing—
Of another country ...

Jean-Charles

The star that comforts love
Rises out of the dreary, baneful night.

The Dead

Come verro se tu paventi
Che suoli al mio dubbiar esser
conforto?

*How can I go on if you hesitate,
you who alone support the
waverer?*

The Living

He'll wave with that red rag there.
He'll wave, and they will come and call us!

The Dead

O voi che siete in picciotta barca,
Desiderosi d'ascoltar;
Tornate a riveder li vostri liti!

*Oh you who are in such a tiny boat,
trying to listen;
Turn round towards your coast!*

La Mort

Look up! Above the other pole
You'll see four stars arise right to the zenith,
They're stars no man has seen since paradise.
You must look up!

The Living

They're coming, calling,
And we are all saved now!

La Mort

Then be lost, lost!

The Dead

A quella luce cotal si diventa,
Che volgersi da lei per altro aspetto
È impossibile che mai si consenta!

*Before that light, one becomes such
that to turn willingly away to another prospect
is impossible.*

Jean-Charles

Tell me! Where you are –
Do the ships ever sink?

La Mort

No. Here ships do fly.

Jean-Charles

Do stones fall where you are?

La Mort

They rise!

Jean-Charles

And does time count there?
Tell me!

La Mort

No, for here effects
Are followed by their causes.

Charon

On the seventeenth of July eighteen hundred and sixteen, at seven in the morning, a passing brig called Argus sighted the Raft of the Medusa. The mulatto Jean-Charles, who – keeping his eyes on the Argus – had waved the red rag to attract it, lay in the throes of death when he was found, and did not recover.

But those who did survive, having learned a lesson from reality, returned to the world again eager to overthrow it.

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