SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

This sample is an *excerpt* from a Samuel French title.

This sample is for perusal only and may not be used for performance purposes.

You may not download, print, or distribute this excerpt.

We highly recommend purchasing a copy of the title before considering for performance.

For more information about licensing or about purchasing a play or musical, please visit our website.

www.samuelfrench.com
www.samuelfrench.co.uk

SF PERUSALS

Amazons and Their Men

by Jordan Harrison

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830
NEW YORK HOLLYWOOD LONDON TORONTO
SAMUELFRENCH.COM

Copyright © 2008 by Jordan Harrison
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Cover image design by Joshua Dickens
Cover photo by Carl Skutsch
Actress (cover photo): Rebecca Wisocky

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that *AMAZONS AND THEIR MEN* is subject to a licensing fee. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, the British Commonwealth, including Canada, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. In its present form the play is dedicated to the reading public only.

The amateur and professional live stage performance rights to *AMAZONS AND THEIR MEN* are controlled exclusively by Samuel French, Inc., and licensing arrangements and performance licenses must be secured well in advance of presentation. PLEASE NOTE that amateur licensing fees are set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. When applying for a licensing quotation and a performance license please give us the number of performances intended, dates of production, your seating capacity and admission fee. Licensing fees are payable one week before the opening performance of the play to Samuel French, Inc., at 45 W. 25th Street, New York, NY 10010.

Licensing fee of the required amount must be paid whether the play is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged.

Professional/Stock licensing fees quoted upon application to Samuel French, Inc.

For all other rights than those stipulated above, apply to: The William Morris Agency, LLC, 1325 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019, Attn: Don Aslan.

Particular emphasis is laid on the question of amateur or professional readings, permission and terms for which must be secured in writing from Samuel French, Inc.

Copying from this book in whole or in part is strictly forbidden by law, and the right of performance is not transferable.

Whenever the play is produced the following notice must appear on all programs, printing and advertising for the play: "Produced by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc."

Due authorship credit must be given on all programs, printing and advertising for the play.

ISBN 978-0-573-66246-1 Printed in U.S.A. #3751

No one shall commit or authorize any act or omission by which the copyright of, or the right to copyright, this play may be impaired.

No one shall make any changes in this play for the purpose of production.

Publication of this play does not imply availability for performance. Both amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised in their own interests to apply to Samuel French, Inc., for written permission before starting rehearsals, advertising, or booking a theatre.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, now known or yet to be invented, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, videotaping, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

MUSIC USE NOTE

Licensees are solely responsible for obtaining formal written permission from copyright owners to use copyrighted music in the performance of this play and are strongly cautioned to do so. If no such permission is obtained by the licensee, then the licensee must use only original music that the licensee owns and controls. Licensees are solely responsible and liable for all music clearances and shall indemnify the copyright owners of the play and their licensing agent, Samuel French, Inc., against any costs, expenses, losses and liabilities arising from the use of music by licensees.

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of *AMAZONS AND THEIR MEN* *must* give credit to the Author of the Play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play, and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for the purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production. The name of the Author *must* appear on a separate line on which no other name appears, immediately following the title and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent of the size of the title type.

In addition the following credit *must* be given in all programs and publicity information distributed in association with this piece:

Workshopped by Clubbed Thumb as part of Summerworks 2007
and by The Playwrights' Center as part of PlayLabs 2006.
First produced by Clubbed Thumb at the Ohio Theatre in
New York City, January 2008.

AMAZONS AND THEIR MEN premiered on January 5th, 2008 at the Ohio Theatre in New York City. The Production was Directed by Ken Rus Schmoll, with Sets & Projections by Sue Rees, Costumes by Kirche Leigh Zeile, Lights by Garin Marschall, Sound by Leah Gelpe, Props by Alan Edwards, the Composer was Matt Carlson, the Stage Manager was Jeff Meyers, Assistant Stage Manager Courtney James, Costume Assistant Marielle Duke, Wig Stylist Jessica Gaffney, with the following cast:

THE FRAU. . . . . .Rebecca Wisocky

THE MAN . . . . . Brian Sgambati

THE EXTRA. . . . . Heidi Schreck

THE BOY. . . . . .Gio Perez

CHARACTERS

THE FRAU (35-45)
on camera, she plays **PENTHESILEA**, queen of the Amazons.

THE EXTRA (30s)
on camera, she plays several different nameless **AMAZONS**.

THE MAN (35-40)
on camera, he plays **ACHILLES**.
off camera, he plays **THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA** and **MUMMY**.

THE BOY (20)
on camera, he plays **PATROCLUS** and, later, **THE GODDESS OF LOVE**.

HISTORICAL NOTE

This much is true: In 1939, the German film director Leni Riefenstahl started work on a film version of Heinrich von Kleist's *Penthesilea*. Riefenstahl herself was to play the starring role. When Germany invaded Poland, filming was abandoned and Riefenstahl's screenplay was lost. All that survives are production notes in which she delineated the 34 key scenes of the film. While I was inspired by these facts, this is not a historical or biographical play: Riefenstahl isn't named; even the war isn't named. Historical details are meant to sneak through, as if by accident, at the end of a take.

PRODUCTION NOTES

This play takes place *On Camera* and *Off Camera*.

In the *On Camera* scenes, we should feel the narcotic pull of a camera's view, but there must never be an actual camera on stage. An important question, of course, is: How much of the action do we actually see? It seems to me that some kind of physical shorthand is desirable, so that the actors aren't doing exactly what they're describing. (It is probably unnecessary to pantomime drawing an arrow in a bow, but the actors might follow the path of the arrow with their eyes.) Above all, the staging of the On Camera scenes should help us to "film" the scenes in our heads, complete with pans, zooms, and jump cuts. In the Clubbed Thumb production, we used a wheeled platform in many scenes to help create these filmic illusions. When the actors were wheeled closer to the audience, it had the look of zooming in for a close-up; when the actors revolved, it looked as if the "camera" of our eyes was circling around them. Please note that scenes ending with the stage direction "End of fragment" require a more jagged edge – in the Clubbed Thumb production, these scenes ended with the sound of a reverberant editing splice.

On Camera scenes begin with titles, like so:

THE GREEKS DECIDE TO OFFER THE AMAZONS AN ALLIANCE. PENTHESILEA REFUSES.

These titles – some of which are taken from the scene headings of Riefenstahl's treatment – are projected at the beginning of the scene.

Off Camera scenes feel like a return to earth; a return to logic; a return to chairs and inside voices. But, aside from a couple noted exceptions, the characters still wear the classical costumes from the Frau's film.

NOTES ON THE FILM ACTING

When we watch films from the '30s and '40s with contemporary eyes, the performances often seem to flirt with the ridiculous. It's not that film acting was bad – it was just unabashedly emotional and grandly gestural in a way that we seldom see any more. There was a crispness of movement, particularly in period films, as though the actors were moving on rails. This is the kind of acting that is required in the On Camera scenes. I suggest watching Anne Baxter in *The Ten Commandments*, Olivia de Havilland in *Gone with the Wind*, Garbo in *Camille* – and of course Leni Riefenstahl's own performances in *The Blue Light* and *Tiefland*. Although the On Camera scenes in AMAZONS have elements of camp, the actors aren't camping it up – they're giving great performances in a time when the standards of greatness were very different.

EPIGRAPHS

If there is room in your theater's program, it would be good to include the following quotes:

"Nazi cinema exploited the limitations of human imagination, seeking to obliterate first-person consciousness and to replace it with a universal third person."

– Eric Rentschler, *The Ministry of Illusion*

"In Penthesilea I found my own individuality as in no other character."

– Leni Riefenstahl

On Camera.

PROLOGUE

THE FRAU. *(voice only)* Interior. Night.

(Light on **PENTHESILEA***, blonde and beautiful.)*

THE FRAU AS PENTHESILEA. The camera first sees her reflected in a lion's eye.

(Light on **ACHILLES***, in chains.)*

THE MAN AS ACHILLES. What kind of woman keeps lions for pets?

PENTHESILEA. A woman who loves fresh kill.

ACHILLES. What is your will with me, woman?

If you wanted me for meat, we wouldn't be having this conversation.

PENTHESILEA. But instead of answering him, she waves her hand…

(Light on the **EXTRA***, who fans them with a palm frond.)*

THE EXTRA. …And a hundred golden ladies summon a desert breeze.

ACHILLES. An army of women!

PENTHESILEA. In Amazonia, the male is a rare flower indeed.

Now, brave warrior, relax. Cool your brow in the court of Penthesilea.

ACHILLES. Why have you put me in chains?

PENTHESILEA. She doesn't need to answer –

Her close-up says everything.

THE EXTRA. The music plays. The focus softens.

Penthesilea falls in love with Achilles.

PENTHESILEA. *(smoldering)* Let me be food for your ravenous dogs.

Let me be breakfast.

Let me be dust.

THE EXTRA. Achilles falls in love with Penthesilea.

THE MAN AS ACHILLES. *(smoldering)* Let me trail like a corpse behind your flashing-hooved horses.

Let me be baggage.

Let me be ballast.

(The Extra fans them as they kiss.)

THE EXTRA. The camera loves them.

The camera doesn't see anyone else.

(Speaking of herself.)

So she is hired to play Anyone Else.

The Extra. Anyone Else is her specialty.

PENTHESILEA. Your lips are dry. Some grapes, my pet?

ACHILLES. Achilles belongs to no woman.

PENTHESILEA. Some grapes for my new lion!

(The Extra goes and returns instantly, her face obscured by a plate of grapes.)

THE EXTRA. An Extra has to be non-descript. An Extra has a whole arsenal of non-description at her disposal. Sometimes you'd catch her elbow in the corner of the frame, over the star's shoulder. She became a good listener.

THE FRAU. Cut! *(Breaking out of her Penthesilea character.)*

Who said you could talk to the camera?

THE EXTRA. I'm sorry.

THE FRAU. This is *my* story.

(She rips off her blonde wig and looks out toward the audience, where the cameras would be.)

I said CUT!

Scene 1

Off Camera.

(Lights out on all but the Extra.)

THE EXTRA. *(out)* It is my story too. Only she doesn't know it yet.

When the camera goes off, the star becomes smaller. Mortal. Everyone knows this. But few people know that when the Extra puts down her spear and steps off the sound stage and back into her life, she grows larger. She has a story too.

(Beat.)

The first person the Frau cast was herself.

(Light on the Frau.)

THE FRAU. Who else to play the Amazon queen?

THE EXTRA. Right away, a problem.

THE FRAU. Penthesilea was a blonde…

THE EXTRA. But the Frau was not.

THE FRAU. *(holding up the wig, eyeing it like an adversary)* It would be necessary to practice.

THE EXTRA. The next person she cast was Achilles.

But while he too was blonde…

(Light rises on the Man, in a dark coat now.)

THE MAN. She hired a dark-eyed man from the ghetto to play him.

THE EXTRA. …So that no one on screen would be blonder than she.

THE MAN. And also because he came cheap. And because of his strong back. And because of the constellation of moles leading the eye down his strong back.

THE FRAU. *(salacious)* You are *very* talented.

THE MAN. That is what I am told.

THE FRAU. They say you have no formal training, but you have instincts.

THE MAN. *(taking a step back from her)* Everyone has instincts.

THE FRAU. You don't act like you want this job.

THE MAN. How do I act?

THE FRAU. Like I *owe* you the job.

THE MAN. What exactly is the job?

THE FRAU. The man who is my match.
Do you think you're up to it?

THE MAN. How will you pay me?
Everyone in the ghetto says: She has lost favor with the Minister of Propaganda. She is no longer playing with state money.

THE FRAU. I made the state's films with the state's money.
Now I am making my own film. A love story inside a war story.

THE MAN. What will you pay me?

THE FRAU. I will pay you in fame.

(He scoffs.)

THE FRAU. I am offering you a steady job.
(Regarding the Star of David he wears:)
It may be good for you to keep busy.
(Light shifts. Everything accelerating now.)

THE EXTRA. Two months later, in the darkest age of the last century, she started filming her adaptation of *Penthesilea.*
(During the following, the Frau puts on the blonde wig.)

THE EXTRA. On a sound stage outside the great city, the Frau learned how to ride bareback, she learned to land a punch,

THE FRAU AS PENTHESILEA. She learned how to be blonde.

THE EXTRA. All for nothing. Of the 34 scenes in her screenplay, none were completed.
What you will see are mere scraps of image. Here. Watch. See what you can snatch from the cutting room floor.

THE FRAU. *(out)* Roll film!

Scene 2

On Camera.

THE GREEKS DECIDE TO OFFER THE AMAZONS AN ALLIANCE. PENTHESILEA REFUSES.

THE FRAU. The camera swoops over dunes and choked little rivers.

THE EXTRA. Settling on the Amazon army, a row of tiny specks in the desert.

THE FRAU. Tracking closer

THE EXTRA. And the armor

THE FRAU. Closer

THE EXTRA. The jewel on an elephant's brow

THE FRAU. Sound in

THE EXTRA. Tambourines!

THE FRAU. A feminine noise, strange to this war. Close-up

THE MAN AS ACHILLES. Achilles turns his proud head toward the music.

THE FRAU. Closer-up

ACHILLES. Women of Amazonia! I offer you an alliance. Together we can defeat Troy!

THE FRAU. Cut to

THE EXTRA AS AMAZON #1. An Amazon takes aim with her slingshot – there will be no alliance!

THE FRAU. The camera, panning

AMAZON 1. The stone in flight

THE FRAU. Jump cut

ACHILLES. Achilles ducks

AMAZON 1. Too late!

ACHILLES. His helmet falls

THE FRAU, ACHILLES, AMAZON 1. Crash!

AMAZON 1. To the ground.

ACHILLES. His head suddenly naked

THE FRAU. Extreme close-up

ACHILLES. He

is

beautiful.

AMAZON 1. The Amazon queen makes her way through the crowd.

THE FRAU AS PENTHESILEA. *(breathless)* Who knew he'd be beautiful?

AMAZON 1. Her faithful army doesn't see the first symptoms of love on her face.

PENTHESILEA. Only the camera does.

ACHILLES. Achilles picks up his helmet, looking her in the eye the whole time.

PENTHESILEA. *(faux-innocent)* Did you drop something?

ACHILLES. He is proud

PENTHESILEA. Even in his humiliation

ACHILLES. He is *terribly* proud of himself.

THE FRAU. CUT!

(The Frau breaks character.)

Couldn't you make him a bit more beautiful? A bit more *proud*?

THE MAN. I'm trying.

THE FRAU. Like a lion, here, watch. *(She puffs out her chest.)* See my –

End of fragment.

Scene 3.

On Camera.

PENTHESILEA SPARES ACHILLES' LIFE IN BATTLE.

THE FRAU. Exterior. Day.

THE MAN AS ACHILLES. Achilles.

THE FRAU AS PENTHESILEA. And Penthesilea.

ACHILLES & PENTHESILEA. Spear to spear.

ACHILLES. You're new here.

PENTHESILEA. Here is new to me.

ACHILLES. You came to fight?

PENTHESILEA. I came to be queen of you.
We need to replenish our numbers.
Your manparts are useful to us.

THE EXTRA. Penthesilea appraises him like a piece of meat.

PENTHESILEA. In your country, are they all made like you?

THE EXTRA. The camera appraises him like a piece of statuary.

ACHILLES. Are they all made like *you*, in your country?

THE EXTRA. Something passes between them

ACHILLES & PENTHESILEA. In soft focus

THE EXTRA. But the Amazons only see their queen

PENTHESILEA. *(romantic)* Defenseless

ACHILLES. *(self-important)* With her mortal enemy.

(The Extra enters the scene as Amazon #2.)

THE EXTRA AS AMAZON 2. *(drawing her bow)* My queen, your mortal enemy!

PENTHESILEA. *(turning sharply to Amazon 2)* The Amazon who takes aim at Achilles is felled by an arrow.

AMAZON 2. *(hand flying to her throat)* Blood?

PENTHESILEA. Penthesilea rushes to comfort the dying woman.

AMAZON 2. From my own queen's quick quiver?

(A bit of a pietà.)

PENTHESILEA. *Shh*, my dear. My heroic dear. *Shh, shh.*
The pain won't last. The veins will spend their contents.
It's this hole in your throat that's the trouble.
How could you have known he was *my* prize.
You couldn't have known where your loyalties would get you.

(Her focus shifts to the far horizon.)

Your own blood is carrying you to the beds of all the empresses that ever lived. And your left breast is waiting for you there, marvelous, on a rose red cushion. The tip of my arrowhead has made you complete. *Shh, shh, shh.*

AMAZON 2. And the faithful Amazon dies in her arms…
(wheezingly) with a wheeze.

PENTHESILEA. *(dropping the Amazon's head)* Fetch me a shovel.

THE EXTRA. *(still on the ground, dead)* The soundtrack wells up, in place of tears in her eyes.

PENTHESILEA. Has anyone seen Achilles?

THE EXTRA. The camera dolleys in close,
so close that we can see the perspiration on her brow.

PENTHESILEA. Has anyone seen Achilles?

THE EXTRA. …As if we needed further evidence of her wicked little crush.

THE FRAU. And…Cut.

(The Extra rubs her sore head. The Frau is pleased with herself.)

Good.
Very good, everyone. *Very* –

End of fragment.

Scene 4

Off Camera.

THE EXTRA. Between takes, the Frau retreated to her office, where the journalists came to ask: Where had the film come from?

THE FRAU. *(poised, as if in an interview)* Penthesilea, the woman warrior. When I was at university, I looked for her everywhere in the ancient texts. In her first appearance, the epic *Aethiopis,* she is granted just two sentences:

THE EXTRA. 1. "The Amazon queen arrives to aid the Trojans in war."

2. "Achilles kills Penthesilea and the Trojans bury her."

THE FRAU. Her first appearance and already she is forgotten.

Then I discovered the play by Heinrich von Kleist, who revises both statements:

1. Penthesilea enters the war to aid no one but herself.

2. She kills Achilles and dirties her face with his blood.

Now here was a woman to be interested in.

Scene 5

On Camera.

ACHILLES' CHARIOT CRASHES.
THE AMAZONS BLOCK HIS WAY.

(Achilles holds the reins, taut, with nothing attached to them. Or perhaps they lead off into the wings? Stagey.)

THE MAN AS ACHILLES. Fly you my steady steeds, fly! I must escape her before I lose myself. I must escape myself.

THE FRAU. The camera lurching, hoof-high.

ACHILLES. She makes my heart stop. She makes my heart race. She has that effect. She has that affect.

THE FRAU. The camera, breakneck.

ACHILLES. She makes my tongue stop. She makes my tongue race, faster than my mind can think of words. But not faster than my chariot!

THE FRAU. At this speed, the camera can't tell the blue backdrop from the great desert sky.

ACHILLES. My men taken captive, yet I run! But wouldn't it be more cowardly to stay and kneel at her feet and call her Queen?

(The Extra, playing Amazon #3, steps forward and cuts his reins.)

THE EXTRA AS AMAZON 3. You're not going anywhere.

ACHILLES. And why not?

AMAZON 3. Because she has claimed you for her prize.

ACHILLES. I will fly on foot if I have to!

AMAZON 3. *(shouting after him, as he runs)* Your heart will not escape!

THE FRAU. Cut!

(Pause.)

Maybe if you were less corny?

THE EXTRA. I'm sorry.

THE FRAU. *(out)* Again.

ACHILLES' CHARIOT CRASHES.
THE AMAZONS BLOCK HIS WAY.

(Just as before:)

ACHILLES. My men taken captive, yet I run! But wouldn't it be more cowardly to stay and kneel at her feet and call her Queen?

THE EXTRA AS AMAZON 3. You're not going anywhere.

ACHILLES. And why not?

AMAZON 3. Because she has claimed you for her prize.

ACHILLES. I will fly on foot if I have to!

AMAZON 3. *(shouting after him)* Your heart will not esca – !

(Breaking character, as the Extra now.)

I'm sorry.

THE FRAU. Yes.

(Off Camera now:)

THE EXTRA. *(out, as if to the crew)* I'm sorry.

THE MAN. It's not her, it's the line.

THE FRAU. What?

THE EXTRA. He's sorry.

THE FRAU. WHAT?

THE EXTRA. *(cueing the Man)* He's *very* sorry.

THE MAN. I'm sorry.

(The Boy enters.)

THE BOY. Telegram, Ma'am?

(They all spin toward him. In plain clothes, he seems like a visitor from another planet.)

THE FRAU. Ten minutes, everyone.

THE BOY. It is from the Ministry of Culture.

THE FRAU. This should be sobering.

(As she opens the telegram, we see the **MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA** *in a pool of light. He speaks out.)*

THE MAN AS THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. Dear Fraulein –

THE FRAU. The Minister was always a flatterer.

THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. Some are saying: you'd do better to leave ancient history and portray our own country's great story, still being written. *Stop.*

THE FRAU. The Minister was always a Modernist.

THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. Others are saying: you'd do better not to shelter Jews and homosexuals in the embrace of your fiction. *Stop.*

(This knocks the wind out of her. The Minister tips his hat.)

THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. To your health, Fraulein.
(As his light winks out:)
Stop.

THE FRAU. Three sentences. The Minister was always cheap.

THE FRAU. Boy!

(The Boy takes out a pencil, paper.)

THE BOY. Ready ma'am.

THE FRAU. *(dictating; not heated, but quick and sharp)*
My dear sir *Stop.* There is no place for your war on my set *Stop.* My camera interested in a noble war *Stop.* My camera bored with your pomp and your circumstance *Stop.* My actors too busy to fill your work camps *Stop.* My actors too beautiful to fill your work camps *Stop.* No interest whatsoever in your grim telegrams *Stop.* I feed your telegrams to the horses for lunch *Stop.* I feed your telegrams to the ladies who lunch *Stop.* This wire already extravagant *Stop.* Stop sending *Stop.* Stop calling *Stop.* Stop *Stop.*

(To the Boy.)

That is all.

THE EXTRA. She knows the Ministry will not be pleased…

THE BOY. *(lingering)* Good evening then, ma'am.

THE EXTRA. …But this is to be her masterpiece, and she won't have their fingerprints on it.

THE FRAU. What, you expect some kind of tip?

THE BOY. No ma'am.

THE FRAU. *(to the Extra)* Take him to the pantry. Give him a chocolate biscuit.

THE EXTRA. How old are you?

THE BOY. Twenty, ma'am.

THE FRAU. *(brightly)* No one is too old for a chocolate biscuit!

THE BOY. Good night, ma'am.

(He exits.)

THE EXTRA. He wanted *money.*

THE FRAU. There isn't any to spare.

THE EXTRA. *(under her breath)* Maybe if you wrote shorter telegrams…

THE FRAU. We are already over budget for the month. Equipment Rental. Horses. *Actors.*

Tomorrow we shoot the first Patroclus scene and there is no Patroclus!

THE EXTRA. We could sell the crystal, if it comes to that.

THE FRAU. Do you think *you* could play a boy?

THE EXTRA. I played Hamlet in drama school.

THE FRAU. You do have a certain mannish way about you.

THE EXTRA. I played Don Juan, in trousers. The audience stood at the end!

THE FRAU. The stage is one thing, but the camera isn't nearly so forgiving.

Beautiful Patroclus, who Achilles loves like… a brother.

(The Frau looks at the Extra, scrutinizing. The Extra offers her face for observation – she blinks, prettily.)

We'll give it a try.

THE EXTRA. Thank you.

THE FRAU. *(cautionary)* This time, you'll have close-ups.

Scene 6

On Camera.

BACK AT THE CAMP, ACHILLES IS WELCOMED BY PATROCLUS.

THE FRAU. The camera circles the Greek campfire,
shifting from light to desert dark.

THE MAN AS ACHILLES. Achilles cannot disguise the stars in his eyes

THE EXTRA AS PATROCLUS. His companion, Patroclus, wraps him in a blanket. Trying not to lose him to whatever force has possessed him.

THE FRAU. But the camera tells us he has already lost the battle:

PATROCLUS. Out of focus, he barely makes it into the frame.

THE FRAU. Instead, Achilles fills the screen:

ACHILLES. She is Aphrodite clad in Ares! She is a sheep in wolf's clothing!
She is both sexes she is neithersex she is nethersex
She is made of wolves and stars!

PATROCLUS. You want her.

ACHILLES. No.

PATROCLUS. You want to belong to her.

ACHILLES. No. She is a beast, she is a snake!

PATROCLUS. She makes you speak in metaphor.
That can't be good.

ACHILLES. Only because she is less than human –
The human words fall off her like arrows off well-made armor.

PATROCLUS. Then…we still belong to each other?

ACHILLES. Always.

PATROCLUS. But when he looks into Achilles' eyes,
he sees *her* there

THE FRAU AS PENTHESILEA. Stretching like a tigress

ACHILLES. Deep in those two dark mirrors.

THE FRAU. (A very clever double exposure technique, which I invented.)

(Patroclus is stung.)

PATROCLUS. She's in you already.

ACHILLES. Patroclus, no.

PATROCLUS. She wants to blind you to anything else, to anyone else!

THE FRAU. Cut cut CUT!

(Off Camera now:)

THE MAN. *(to the Extra, under his breath)* She scares me.

THE FRAU. This isn't working.

THE EXTRA. *(under her breath)* Shhh. She can help you.

THE FRAU. You're not pretty enough.
We're going to need a real boy.

(The Frau stalks off.)

THE MAN. Why is she so terrible to you?

THE EXTRA. She's my sister.

(Pause)

THE MAN. The Frau is your *sister*?

THE EXTRA. I've been in twenty-seven of her films. I get to die in each one. Sometimes I die more than once in one film. It's my specialty.

THE MAN. Your specialty?

THE EXTRA. I've died by arrow, I've died by leprosy, gangrene, torn to pieces by angry mob, angry dogs, typhoon, starvation, walked the plank, thrown to sharks, mountain lion, mountain goat, mountain climbing accident. Guillotine. (I played a furious head without a body – did you know your head can live for thirty seconds without your body?) And the sword-and-sandal pictures: I died by locust swarm, asp to the breast, wrath of God. Cannonball, catapult, crucifixion.

I'll never have my name above the title but I'm the best there is at dying.

THE MAN. You have a talent for dying.

THE EXTRA. For dying *inconspicuously*, yes.

THE MAN. That isn't a talent I aspire to.

(Short pause)

THE EXTRA. She will keep you safe, I promise. She has already spoken to them on your behalf.

THE MAN. Them…

THE EXTRA. The men who make decisions. The men who have no trouble falling asleep at night.

THE MAN. What if you're wrong?

THE EXTRA. She is very useful to them. She makes their images. She can keep you safe.

THE MAN. Nowhere is safe.

THE EXTRA. Here, in her fantasy, it is safe. *(Beat.)* I know this all must seem…melodramatic at times. She is not a writer. She is not an acting teacher. But when you see it all up on the screen, you won't believe it. You won't *believe* it. It happens to me every time. Her genius is in what she keeps and what she throws to the cutting room floor. Nothing will end up in the frame that she doesn't want there. Not even Them.

But you must be useful to her, in turn.

THE MAN. And how can I be useful?

THE EXTRA. Be beautiful.

THE MAN. Is that all?

THE EXTRA. And act well. But more important, be beautiful.

Scene 7

Off Camera.

THE EXTRA. The Frau sinks into her favorite armchair, smoking one of her rare cigars.

THE FRAU. Thinking
and
thinking
and
thinking.

THE EXTRA. *(entering the scene)* The Extra swallows her pride.

THE FRAU. *(as if she's saying "nemesis")* Sister.

THE EXTRA. Sister, I have an idea.

THE FRAU. Speak.

THE EXTRA. What about the messenger boy?
The one who brings the telegrams?

THE FRAU. You mean

THE EXTRA. He might play your Patroclus.
He will be cheap. And he is not unattractive.

THE FRAU. Perhaps, if I hire him, the telegrams will stop coming?

THE EXTRA. Those big, dark eyes!
When he arrives on the set with your messages, the cameramen whisper:
(Like a secret password:) "Did you bring a little something for me?"

THE FRAU. How imprudent of them.

THE EXTRA. What do you mean?

THE FRAU. There are others, outside the arts, who are not as tolerant as you and me.

THE EXTRA. *(out)* She takes a big puff on her cigar, and those words seem to hang,
like the smoke,
in the air.

THE FRAU. Anything outside of God's design we can choose to abide or…not to abide.

THE EXTRA. What if God's design is not immediately apparent to us?

Is there anything in the world that isn't God's design?

THE FRAU. *("I seem to have touched a nerve")* You are very theological tonight.

THE EXTRA. Sometimes, I think you talk like them. I don't like it.

THE FRAU. You think I talk like –

THE EXTRA. Your former patrons.

THE FRAU. *Employers.*

THE EXTRA. I see you: Using the same camera angles you used to film the rallies. The special lens you built for seeing an entire army assembled. Only it is a different army this time.

THE FRAU. I invented those techniques. Why shouldn't I use them?

THE EXTRA. They are good for filming bodies, not people.

THE FRAU. What are you saying?

THE EXTRA. I am saying: I think you are making something that will please them.

(Pause.)

THE EXTRA. I am not trying to draw blood. I only want / you to –

THE FRAU. Why are you here, if you find my film so distasteful?

THE EXTRA. Because I think you are an artist, and some days even a great one. But –

THE FRAU. But –

THE EXTRA. With that, there comes a responsibility –

THE FRAU. "Responsibility!" Art is not responsible.

THE EXTRA. Why is that?

THE FRAU. Because, in art, beauty comes before justice.

THE EXTRA. I hear they are often the same thing, beauty and justice.

THE FRAU. In art?

(She blows a ring of smoke.)

I'm afraid they are almost never.

(A knock from outside.)

THE FRAU. Enter.

(The Boy comes in.)

THE BOY. Telegram, ma'am.

THE FRAU. *(looking to the Extra)* I see.

THE BOY. It is the Ministry.

(Continuous into:)

Scene 8

Off Camera.

(As the Frau reads the telegram:)

THE EXTRA. She hadn't always dreaded the arrival of the Minister's telegrams.

But no one knew exactly what had passed between them. In interviews, she would say, simply

THE FRAU. Who can live in the past?

THE EXTRA. But if the journalists were patient, and they brought her a box of chocolate biscuits, they were sometimes rewarded.

THE FRAU. Years ago, when I was Fraulein not Frau,

I stood in the doorway of an important party.

The Minister of Propaganda was there.

(Light rises on the Minister of Propaganda, played by the Man. A German accent would be good.)

THE MAN AS THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. …In a smart tuxedo.

THE FRAU. This champagne is repellent, don't you think?

THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. Do not pretend to be a sophisticate.

You are more alive than all these people.

I have seen your films.

THE FRAU. Ah, my little alpine adventures.

THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. Every frame vibrates with energy.

You must direct a film of our upcoming rally.

THE FRAU. Your rallies are not for me.

I'm an actress at heart – I want nice parts to play.

THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. What sort of parts interest you?

THE EXTRA. …He says, ambiguously.

But she does not seem to notice:

THE FRAU. I have always wanted to play Penthesilea.
From Kleist's great drama.

THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. Why Penthesilea?

THE FRAU. She is beautiful but fierce. She is headstrong.
She is a warrior but she puts love above everything else.

(Short pause)

THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. You have just described yourself, Fraulein.

THE FRAU. *(visibly pleased, but trying to hide it)* Perhaps.

THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. With one exception:
I would wager you never put love above anything.

THE FRAU. I do the work that must be done.
I can think of no other way to live my life.

THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. Then we are the same, you and me.

THE FRAU. We are *not* the same.

THE EXTRA. …She says, tossing back the champagne.

THE FRAU. I am an artist.

THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. Look how you pick a fight.

THE EXTRA. He says, sliding his hand down her back.

THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. Look how you pick a fight.
You *are* an Amazon.

THE FRAU. *Sie sind nicht Achilles.*

THE EXTRA. ...She says. *(Translating)* "You are no Achilles."

(The Frau steps out of the scene.)

THE FRAU. *(poised again)* From then on, our relationship was civil at best.

THE EXTRA. …She would say in the interviews, many years later.
After the war, it was necessary that they be adversaries.

THE FRAU. Often, it was much less than civil.

THE EXTRA. But the journalists sensed she was leaving some of the story on the cutting room floor:

(The Frau is pulled back into the scene.)

THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. *(as before)* Then we are the same, you and me.

THE FRAU. *(as before)* We are *not* the same. I am an artist.

THE EXTRA. Perhaps she'd accepted his hand on her back.

THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. Look how you pick a fight. You *are* an Amazon.

THE FRAU. An Amazon with no army to command…

THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. I will ask one more time, Fraulein.

Make a film of the upcoming rally:

You will have a queen's budget. You will have an army of underlings to command. When it is finished, you will have all the fame you need to make *Penthesilea.*

THE EXTRA. Perhaps she took another flute of champagne.

THE FRAU. The preparation, the editing: We are talking about years of my life.

THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. Your Amazon queen will wait.

THE FRAU. You think?

I suspect she is impatient, like me.

THE EXTRA. Perhaps she took his arm and accepted his introductions to important people.

THE MINISTER OF PROPAGANDA. Actress, dancer, mountaineer – and now, the Ministry's chief directrix!

THE EXTRA. Perhaps she said her goodbyes and walked home,

the painful shoes dangling from her right hand.

Although it was late, she lay awake, thinking of the men she'd charmed and the new alliance she'd made.

Outside her window, the boots of soldiers went:

THE FRAU. Left-right, left-right

THE EXTRA. Over the stones of the Preiser Platz.

FINISH READING THIS SCRIPT

Visit our website to purchase the full script or to explore other titles.

www.samuelfrench.com
www.samuelfrench.co.uk

To stay up to date on all that we are doing, follow us on social media:



*Titles for licensing are subject to availability depending on your territory.

SF PERUSALS