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CONCORD
THEATRICALS

THIS RESTLESS HOUSE

AGAMEMNON'S RETURN
Based on Aeschylus' *Oresteia*

by Zinnie Harris

SAMUEL FRENCH

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United Kingdom and World
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The three plays that comprise *This Restless House* can be performed on their own or as part of a continuous evening. Together they run at 4.5 hours, and if performed in rep with each other, I suggest part one (*Agamemnon's Return*) plays on its own, then parts two and three (*The Bough Breaks* and *Electra And Her Shadow*) play as different parts of the same evening.

When we first performed this trilogy at the Citizens/National Theatre of Scotland we used ten actors in total plus four children. This meant that the chorus was made up of three actors. It would also work comfortably for larger casts, and then the chorus could be much more substantial. You can divide the chorus lines up however you wish, but they shouldn't speak as a whole group – rather as a bickering and discordant group of old and dishevelled men.

The style and staging is open to future directors; for the first production our references were the Balkan wars and the Eastern European revolutions of the late eighties; but whatever the setting, it should be messy and glamorous in a down-at-heel way and very bloody. There are various songs that should be sung by the chorus and /or the whole company. I have given lyrics, and these can be sung either to an original or existing tune – anything that feels folky and like it comes from the anarchic energy of the chorus.

All of the plays are about love in some way, and they work best if the love is there alongside all the darkness and hatred. Clytemnestra loves Agamemnon, and hence is so torn. Their scene on the hill, in the first play, is where they re-encounter that, and the question we had in rehearsal for that scene was whether or not these two people were ever going to be able to becomes lovers again. Equally in the second play, the starting point should be that Electra loves her mother, and the last thing she would ever do is to hurt her. Her journey is one of separation from her mother and seeing her as she is, rather than as she wants her to be. Also of course having to appease

her father's ghost. (In Dominic Hill's production the ghost of Agamemnon was always visible, bloody and itchy in the background, sometimes coming and sitting among the action; this was very effective, but however you stage it, Agamemnon's influence should never feel far away.) In the third play, love is there too – finally – and at the last moments the little girl comes back on to stage with her suitcase; it should feel as if all the characters remember that love and gentleness have been the things they lost.

Zinnie Harris

THIS RESTLESS HOUSE

This Restless House first performed at the Citizens Theatre in May 2016.

CAST

AGAMEMNON	George Anton
DOCTOR/JORDAN	Adam Best
CHORUS/ IAN	Cliff Burnett
BUTCHER/CHORUS/MICHAEL	George Costigan
AEGISTHUS/CHORUS	Keith Fleming
CLYTEMNESTRA	Pauline Knowles
ORESTES	Lorn Macdonald
ELECTRA	Olivia Morgan
CELIA/MEGAN	Itxaso Moreno
AUDREY	Anita Vettesse
YOUNG ELECTRA	Chloe Chambers
YOUNG ELECTRA	Orla Hay
IPHIGENIA	Rose Hughes
IPHIGENIA	Freya Kane
OWEN	Jonas Lennie
OWEN	Callum McGhie

with Rich McPherson, Mike Moran, Loretta Scott, Annette Stewart and Stevie Thomson-Fitch

CREATIVE TEAM

Writer – Zinnie Harris
Director – Dominic Hill
Designer – Colin Richmond
Composer – Nikola Kodjabashia
Lighting Designer – Ben Ormerod
Movement Director – EJ Boyle
Fight Director – Emma Claire Brightlyn
Assistant Director – Jack Nurse

CHARACTERS

BUTCHER
A SERVING WOMAN CALLED CELIA
CLYTEMNESTRA
ELECTRA
AEGISTHUS
A DOCTOR
ORESTES
AGAMEMNON
AUDREY
JORDAN
MICHAEL
MEGAN
IAN
OWEN
IPHIGENIA
CHORUS

PART ONE:
AGAMEMNON'S RETURN

ACT ONE

A **CHORUS** *of old and dishevelled men come on to stage. They stagger, they limp. Some may even crawl. If they had names they would be things like "the ancient one", "the one who can't see", "hollow face", or "lost in his own thoughts".*

Once on, they look straight at the audience. They stare at the audience without flinching, brazen. One of them has a slight tick, another occasionally moans.

CHORUS go on then avert your gaze

look away

don't stare at us for too long

turn your heads gentle women

men hide behind your hands

you walk past us on the street after all

you close your curtains

shut your door

we've seen you do it

you bolt the gate and bolt it again

who can blame you?

we are the abandoned

left out in the rain

yes the given up on by the gods

and who wants that to cross their land?

They look around.

don't worry we are impotent
we can hardly stand
we won't chase you
the most we will do is kind of half a wave
don't get too near though you might catch something
the shake my hand and my arm falls off
the don't mind my leg, it's just a stump
why have the Gods left us to this? you ask
did we deserve our witless state?
our pain?
did we offend them?
good question
curse them perhaps?
we sit here as a reminder
say your prayers
do what they tell you
for the Gods have no mercy
and life can be long.

They look out at the audience.

oh, no one's leaving?
there's the door
let me tell you this tale is not for everyone.
and it's not going to be funny either
comedy this is not
if you want to laugh try elsewhere I suggest

Pause.

alright, we'll start then
the tale starts ten years ago.

right here in Greece
a woman called Helen
a married woman
a queen
smiled too sweetly at another man
it's not the smile that mattered
would the gods have minded a smile?
it's a euphemism
screw the euphemism
you don't run off to Troy to "smile" at someone
she was snatched, Paris took her
no, she was a harlot
a slut, she opened her legs
she defied the rules of marriage, let us say that
offended the gods
and her husband King Menelaus
furious and fearful of the repercussions from above
he had to act
so he and his brother, our King Agamemnon got together
they raised an army to bring her back
well – there followed a war
a holy war –
you might have heard of it
a war so terrible
you remember the horse?
I actually think, it starts years before that
it starts with a meal that was served to Thyestes, that's
where it starts
yes the meal of his roasted children, he's right

before then though the house of Argos was cursed
you have to go right back to the beginning to understand
the blight on this place
the Gods have never been happy
I think it started with a girl
Iphigenia
bless her holy name
you can't start with the Iphigenia
why not?
it starts with the eagle
the eagle yes, the day of the sailing
even you agree now?
two armies line up, ready to set sail to get Helen
the two Kings at their helm
Menelaus and Agamemnon,
temples visited, prayers said
anxious to set off and bring the beauty home
when overhead, two eagles
soaring
one black one white
fly across, make a great arc in the sky
and everyone remarking
look at that they said
at first they thought it was a blessing from above
oh what luck, two eagles flying over two armies
a sign of the gods' delight
one black one white
and on the right hand side too
the side of fortune

what a great day everyone said
victory is written, given from the heavens
this is a holy war indeed blessed from the start
the army were delighted
the wives saying goodbye to their husbands, reassured
businessmen knowing their workforce would return
smiles all around
but then those birds,
on closer look, those eagles
turned – a bit ugly
not so nice after all
savage in fact
they swooped down and seeing a hare
large with babies
right there with the army and crowd watching
they ripped it without a second's thought
ate it
tossing its body
it makes me scratch to remember
it was a bit revolting truth be told
graphic, you know how these things can be
the babies still quivering
what does it mean, King Agamemnon? the soldiers cried
what does it signify, King Menelaus? asked the army wives
if this came from the Gods then what is the message?
but King Agamemnon couldn't answer
he was as stumped as they were
and, not liking to be silent in front of his people
he called for the holiest in the city

the high priest and his entourage
the holy man came to the port, looked at the shredded hare
chewed his beard
stroked his face
it means victory of some sort, that is certain
a blessing he said
the crowd go crazy
but that's not all, he adds
the gods have given you a coda
a little postscript
you aren't making sense your holiest
King Agamemnon then irritated
the holy man raised his voice
yes, you will take Troy
restore honour to marriage
yes you will slaughter the men
yes you will walk over the corpses of those you have killed
in the name of our Gods take the city of Troy and crush it
just as they wish but
after
afterwards perhaps
here is the uncomfortable coda
the Gods see all the death ahead and are not happy
what do you mean holy man?
Agamemnon again
restless
irritated
the Gods can't be against us?
no but there's a cost for this war,

and they want you to feel it
what? they cried, you aren't being clear
the Gods aren't being clear he replied
but I think they need appeasing.

Beat.

and that is how he left a worried king
a father
the army ready to depart
let's just go
his first thought
stupid holy man, what does he know of Gods and wars?
let's just –
be off
let's just –
get out of here, do the damn thing
we are assured that the Gods are on our side
but the weather was not with them
a hurricane, a storm
every time they left the port, they were blown back
it's too dangerous the king was told to leave in this weather
the ships were being wrecked on their own rocks
it's the Gods cried the naval officers
I told you said the holy man
they need appeasing.
and so the lonely king
– this is the part you might not like –
the faint hearted still have a chance to leave
it's a bit, you know, the next bit
you have to understand how it is for men like Agamemnon

himself a holy leader
anointed by the heavens themselves
the men already sick from being on the boat, and not having even left the shore
his brother, miserable and worried for his city
the crowd, blood thirsty for victory
he took to prayer
he went down on his knees and offered himself
listened
harder
and harder
until
he knew he had to offer something so dear that the tears fell
as he heard the answer
something so precious –
NO, not that, he shouted out.
then be damned, howled the Gods right back
I am damned if I do, and damned if I don't he answered in a sweat
do what? said his wife
his queen
Clytemnestra – his only true love
busy with their newborn
do what, precisely?
but he couldn't tell her
how could he even utter the words?
do what? she repeated
but he shook his head and left her alone
do what? She shouted after him. Do what? Do what?
this is where the daughter comes in

this is where, well
well what is there more precious to a father than a daughter?
any daughter, but Iphigenia?
bless her holy name
what is there more precious to lose?
Iphigenia was their firstborn
others came later but Iphigenia –
even the people who weren't her father had to agree
she was pretty special
a much loved child, adored by her parents
not spoiled but –
tell them about the suitcase
the suitcase kind of breaks my heart, do we have to talk about the case?
tell them about the yellow dress then
do we have to fill in the details?
they have imaginations, they can colour it in for themselves
but without the stain, without the detail
what is a story without the pigmentation?
Iphigenia
bless her holy name
just eleven
her body just starting to show the first signs of womanhood
Iphigenia
dressed in yellow
cadmium yellow
with a red lace
and carrying a little case
close to cornflower blue

into which she had put everything she could think of for her father's trip
what does a man need, when he is to become a soldier?
she thought
what is required?
will he know how to be brave out there?
will he be courageous?
he has never fought much before, will he know how to fight?
and so she had looked it up
burdock
came the answer
burdock for brutality
a little well pressed and made into a poultice.
burdock for brutality
and bilberry for bludgery
and so she put them into the case
foxgloves for fearlessness;
garlic for endurance. Crushed up, and eaten raw.
mistletoe, to lose all gentle spirit
Willow to feel unabashed, brazen,
compfrey to feel no pain.
dandelion as blood thickener.
cleanse the spirit with Guelder Rose,
camphor stored in oil increases strength
liquorice for courage.
thyme to clean wounds, lavender to sleep when you need to.
only don't sleep for long. She told him

wake up fresh and start again. You've got might on your

side but you can't be complacent.

caraway for cruelty. Hibiscus, hawthorn to bring you luck.

sweet Liden to forget.

A **GIRL** *of about eleven and dressed in yellow comes on to stage and watches them, unnoticed. She is carrying a little blue suitcase.*

only there'll be no forgetting she told him. Only of the city when it's done. We'll get the news then we'll celebrate me and Mummy, and the baby we'll be laughing.

you did it, you went and did it. That's what we will say. even the infant will talk. You fucking nailed it.

The heavens open and it starts to rain.

and the father

in answer

and now convinced

took his girl and embraced her

this girl he had cradled so many times through so many nights

this child he had so often sung to sleep

he put his big soldier hands around her back

and tight

tighter than he had ever held her before

and get off Dad and what are you doing?

and holding out his knife

tears already in his eyes

but Daddy said the girl

is this a game? You're hurting me

your grip is so hard

no game

he said and
I'm sorry my love
the rain now heavy and running
the Gods have made me
what then? She asked seeing the knife
a look of terror in her eye
a scream
panic setting in
realising she was caught
the trap made from her father's hands
let me go
let me go let me go
the blood
already forming on the yellow dress
Daddy she screamed out
with a sound that no child should make
let me go
no child should even hear
the cry of the torture chamber
of the horror unbelieving
the pleading, the clutching
still surely a game
Daddy
but the knife was in her back and not watching how she flailed
he put it in and in and in
and again
a frenzy now
a thin line of sweat on his upper lip from all his work

and in and in and in

until she –

Pause.

then lifeless and limp

and covered in blood, he put her on the sand

and he raised his hands to the skies above, and said see.

I did it,

I did what you asked

and now can I sail to victory?

The **GIRL** *is sitting on the ground with her little blue suitcase in front of her.*

IPHIGENIA a compass – I know you don't need it. A plastic plate to eat your dinner off, a woollen hat for the cold and a pair of gloves. Don't laugh at me.

a knife to slice out the eyes of the enemy. Don't you want that?

some hemlock and belladonna for Helen the whore? You have to think like a savage if you're going to win.

She pushes the case in front of her. As if she expects the other person to take it.

She feels in her pockets.

Beat.

I haven't got anything else.

I put it altogether. I put it in a case. Won't you take it?

I sewed a little row of hearts on a cloth, you could keep it at your breast? And I know stitches are just cotton and commonplace, but maybe by some charm they'll bring you back safe –

Beat.

Daddy?

The heavens open. It starts to rain.

Daddy?

Her dress runs red.

DADDY?

CHORUS can we save her?

she's a ghost

bless her holy name

you can't even touch her

IPHIGENIA DADDY?

CHORUS must we watch it?

put up your umbrellas, shield yourselves.

I can't see it again

we've watched it every night for ten years

no more

Her last scream curdles the blood.

IPHIGENIA DADDY

They put up the umbrellas and the rain comes down hard.

A moment passes.

Then the rain eases off, and they take the umbrellas down.

The ghost has gone.

CHORUS the mother should have buried her

I agree

properly, she's a martyr

she did bury her
she came down to the sand when she heard what he had done
she had her carried from the shore
yes but
not a proper grave
a grave in the garden – tut –
the girl needed a proper grave
oh the mother should have buried but the father was alright
to slaughter her? It's the mother's fault that she can't rest?!
the Gods asked it, of course he was right.
we saw him anguish, didn't we?
kneel down in prayer
it was a holy act
not holy enough
don't even think that, do you want them to curse us more?
who's that?
where?
another ghost?
this is the night for them
he has a lantern
stand back, let him on his way

A **WATCHMAN** *enters. Dressed for the cold.*

WATCHMAN who are those voices? I can hear you

CHORUS just the old sir
the lame
the weird.

WATCHMAN I can't see your faces, come out of the shadows

CHORUS we mean you no harm

The **CHORUS** *step forward, the rain has stopped.*

WATCHMAN praise the gods then

CHORUS in all things and all ways

Greeting over, the **WATCHMAN** *looks at them.*

WATCHMAN well help me up
my legs are as bad as yours

CHORUS we can't lift you sir
we are the useless the forgotten

WATCHMAN give me a hand I said

CHORUS you see the grass that grows around us

WATCHMAN what you can do nothing?

CHORUS we can sit
sometimes we can chew on very softened food
sometimes we lift a very heavy finger to shoo a very tired insect

The **WATCHMAN** *manages to get up on to the stage.*

WATCHMAN you need to get your ideas about you then
there's news tonight
look over there

CHORUS where?

WATCHMAN a light
this isn't the night to sit about complaining about one's
crippled legs, how your old teeth ache
this is the night to be leaping, running, shouting with joy
tell the gossips, the messengers,
scamper to your neighbours, your friends

there's news, tell them.

CHORUS what news?

WATCHMAN the best news of all.

you see – there? A flare

They all look.

CHORUS I'm not sure where we are looking

WATCHMAN behind, there further over

CHORUS I see it

I don't

lend him your eye-thing

WATCHMAN are you the blind as well as the infirm? Goodness sake there.

CHORUS I still can't see it

you are looking the wrong way, over there

WATCHMAN ten years I've been watching. Ten years up that hill, and looking at nothing. Absolutely nothing. They'll be a light, you say to yourself. One night. Surely there will be a light one night? You plead with yourself, you make up these games

CHORUS we get the idea

WATCHMAN but tonight

tonight my useless friends –

CHORUS and it means?

WATCHMAN and it means? And it means? Only the best it could mean

Troy has fallen

that's what it means

it means we did it.

they did it.

merciful are the gods
ten years it might have taken sure but
they fucking nailed it
move out of the way, I need to get to the bell

CHORUS you are waking the household?

WATCHMAN yes

CHORUS are you sure?
the royal household?

WATCHMAN the queen will want to want to wake up
give me a better reason to wake a queen.

CHORUS just wait a minute

WATCHMAN was there ever a better reason to wake a wife?
your husband is a hero, a winner
for ever they'll be remembered for this fight
and the tip of the top
he is coming home
Agamemnon is coming home
imagine when she hears that?

CHORUS wait a minute, can you just wait a minute
ok there's a light but before you say anything just for a moment,
I am sure we are all thinking the same thing aren't we?
it's just, the Queen, she needs notice sometimes
you can't just barge in
and, well, not so very long ago
you remember the past?
things have always been bleak around here, let's be honest
and now this
good news, blessings

it just doesn't sit well
I agree
we all pretty much think
well, a flare?
anyone could light a flare, I know in that exact spot

WATCHMAN I just want to wake the queen
can you move out of the way?

CHORUS would you mind checking again?
could there be an uncomfortable surprise
– a little coda –
lurking behind this good news?
or a mistake?
a flare is easy to light after all
it's not as if there are letters in the sky
victory

WATCHMAN there's a flame, you can't deny

CHORUS that could be lit in earnest sure or by accident
perhaps some children and a bonfire
could you just check?
that's all we are saying
check would you?
call us anxious
neurotic
the worried well
but perhaps you could check?

WATCHMAN wake up, misfits
shake off whatever place or dream you were in
you aren't listening
open your ears your bloodshot eyes

see – a fire – like the sun
that is no omen
it's a fire lit by a watchman like me.
a final flame in a great chain of flames lit right the way
across Greece.
look
the Greeks have won
that's what it says
Agamemnon has done it
he fucking did it
they fucking did it
they fucking nailed it
wake up.

The **WATCHMAN** *rings the bell.*

wake up
wake up

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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