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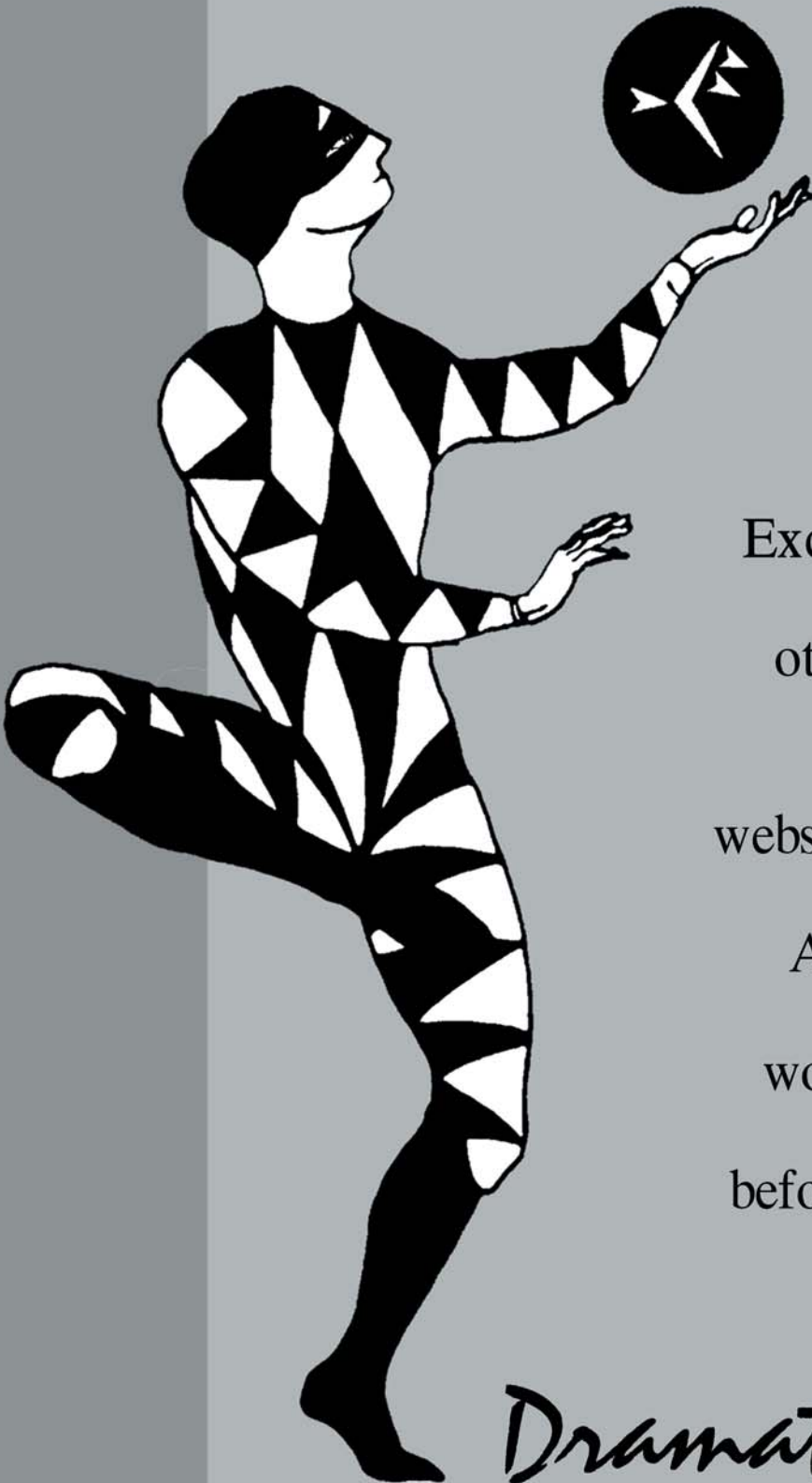
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Dramatic Publishing





FRIEDRICH DÜRRENMATT'S

Hercules and the Augean Stables

Translated by Agnes Hamilton



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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(HERCULES AND THE AUGEAN STABLES)

HERCULES AND THE AUGEAN STABLES

A Full-Length Play

For Nineteen Men and Two Women*

CHARACTERS

HERCULES	. . . . .	<i>the National Hero</i>
DEIANIRA	. . . . .	<i>his mistress</i>
POLYBIUS	. . . . .	<i>his secretary</i>
AUGEAS	. . . . .	<i>president of Elis</i>
PHYLEUS	. . . . .	<i>his son</i>
IOLE	. . . . .	<i>his daughter</i>
LICHAS	. . . . .	<i>a postman</i>
CAMBYSES	. . . . .	<i>a servant</i>
TANTALUS	. . . . .	<i>a circus director</i>
TEN MEMBERS of the ELEAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY		
TWO STAGE HANDS		

Place: Ancient Greece.

Time: The Heroic Age.

*Some of the ten members of the National Assembly may be women, if a more balanced cast is desired.

PROPERTIES

GENERAL

- Scene 1: Dung, which continually increases during the course of the play.
Rostrum (also in Scenes 2, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, and 14).
White curtains on rostrum (also in Scene 2).
Facade of a classical Theban house (also in Scene 5).
Full moon (also in Scenes 8, 11).
- Scene 2: Snow, wild sow.
- Scene 3: None.
- Scene 4: Rope with cow-bell attached. (Also in Scene 12).
- Scene 5: Parcel offstage for Lichas; grave of Phyleus (a mound topped with a battered Greek helmet and a blood-stained garment with torn wedding ribbons on it); pitcher of wine behind facade of house.
- Scene 6: Couch.
- Scene 7: Same as Scene 3.
- Scene 8: Three tents.
- Scene 9: Pitchfork.
- Scene 10: Soup plates, ladles and other utensils.
- Scene 11: Same as Scene 8.
- Scene 12: Same as Scene 4.
- Scene 13: Circus backdrop, theatre-type box with seats.
- Scene 14: Frame only of main tent; heap of rags; fire; bucket, ladle, and several soup-plates; Deianira's bowl of black blood.

PERSONAL

Scene 1:

STAGE HANDS: Wild sow.

HERCULES: Bow and arrows, club.

Scene 2:

Same as Scene 1.

Scene 3:

POLYBIUS: Sling for arm, icicle.

DEIANIRA: Large bowl of black blood.

AUGEAS: Egg.

Scene 4:

None.

Scene 5:

LICHAS: Letter.

STAGE HANDS: Stretcher, body.

POLYBIUS: Bandage, crutch.

Scene 6:

DEIANIRA: Hercules' lion skin, brush.

Scene 7:

HERCULES and POLYBIUS: Sedan chair.

Scene 8:

PHYLEUS: Pair of boots.

Scene 9:

STAGE HANDS: Stretcher, body.

AUGEAS: Milking stool, bucket.

CAMBYSES: Milking stool, bucket, container
of grease.

Scene 10:

HERCULES: Large bowl of beans and meat.

POLYBIUS: Two crutches, bandages.

Scene 11:

None.

Scene 12:

None.

Scene 13:

STAGE HANDS)	
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY	)	huge weight.
CAMBYSES)	

TANTALUS: whip, laurel wreath, brandy
flask, money in wallet.

Scene 14:

PHYLEUS: Greek helmet, sword, wedding
ribbons on tunic.

Some may see this play as being very realistic, others may want to do it completely differently. Therefore stage directions for the play are left to the discretion of the director, as are stage design and the use of properties and costumes.

Scene 1

PROLOGUE

(The stage is empty)

POLYBIUS (addressing the audience). Ladies and gentlemen, that our bare boards should represent the world may well surprise you, and our only excuse is that there is no other way theatrically. We are trying to tell a story which no one has dared put on the stage before, because it deals, if I may put it like this, with man's zeal for cleanliness at war with his quest for art. We only embark upon the precarious task of creating such a tarnished world because we believe that any difficulty can be overcome in the theatre. Well, almost any. It might not have coped with some of the deeds of our national hero; for instance, what about the two serpents which twined 'round his neck whilst he was still in his cradle and which he, a mere infant, without more ado . . . (He makes a strangling gesture.) Or again, the scene when the mighty infant sucked with such force at the breast of the goddess Hera that a spurt of divine milk flew across the sky. A cosmic event to which we owe the Milky Way. Where would we find the snakes? Where the infant? And where indeed the breast? But to come to the point. The pre-historic landscape, which you see here, is littered with cow dung; that legendary compost, to use a more horticultural term, is

none other than the antique dung, which has been accumulating for centuries in Elis, overrunning its frontiers, bursting its confines, overflowing everywhere. However, it may console you to know that if we offer dung, it is at least famous dung. The management have also gone to the trouble to supply a rostrum, complete with curtain, for such scenes as take place in less dirty surroundings. Here it is. (A rostrum with a white curtain rolls onto the stage through the dung.)

The scenery will float down from above. For example, this facade of a house in Thebes, which will soon be required.

(The facade is lowered from "the flies" and then "flown" again.)

Or the full moon--our natural Satellite. (A full moon appears UL and then disappears again.)

There can be no art without romance, no romance without love, and no love without moonlight. We are not going to show you a realistic play; we are not going to present a play with a moral; and we are going to give the theatre of the absurd a miss for once. What we have to offer is a poetic play. Even if the subject is somewhat down to earth, poetry will transcend it. Other props will be brought onto the stage by two stage hands; this worn-out sow, for instance.

Scene 1 Hercules & the Augean Stables Page 7

(Two stage hands, panting heavily, drag a wild sow onto the rostrum. They arrange the curtain to look like an icicle and then go out.)

POLYBIUS. Unfortunately we can't do without this beast. You may have noticed that the stagehands are wearing boots; this is because of the state of the ground. Ladies and gentlemen, we're almost ready to begin. However, I would not like the play to begin without first introducing myself. I am Greek. My name is Polybius and I am a native from Samos. I am private secretary to our national hero. But even the meanest, most downtrodden creature--and I choose the words deliberately--will have his day one day after centuries of waiting, centuries which I am tempted to call barren when viewed in the perspective of history. And so I will speak and disclose what I know. We too yearned for a place in the sun, we too hoped for a dignified human existence. And where did it get us? Just look at the stage. (He indicates the dung.) But enough. My master is coming to hang up his bow on one of those icicles and to take his place on the rostrum.

(HERCULES enters from stage R, dressed in a lion skin, carrying a bow and a club. He sits down on the rostrum next to the wild sow.)

POLYBIUS (continuing). We are going to tell you about Hercules and the Augean stables. The fifth labor of our national hero. We begin, however, with the end of the fourth. Snow; 9,572 feet above sea level. Ladies and

gentlemen, at last we can begin.

Scene 2

THE GLACIAL SUMMIT OF MOUNT OLYMPUS

HERCULES (sitting next to the wild sow, both covered in snow). It's cold.

POLYBIUS. It is.

HERCULES. The air's thin.

POLYBIUS. It's high up. (POLYBIUS blows in his hands, hugs himself, stamps his feet, anything to keep warm.)

HERCULES. Sit down. You get on my nerves, dancing about like that.

POLYBIUS. Sorry. (He climbs onto the rostrum and sits on the left of the wild sow. Silence. They shiver.)

HERCULES. North wind.

POLYBIUS (licking his index finger and holding it up). Northwest.

HERCULES. It's a good thing I've got my lion skin.

POLYBIUS. You're lucky. I'm wearing summer clothes.

HERCULES. The fog is getting worse.

POLYBIUS. There's a storm brewing.

HERCULES. Greeks and glaciers don't go together. (Thunder.)

POLYBIUS. An avalanche.

HERCULES. We're not an Alpine race.

POLYBIUS. All the more reason to congratulate ourselves on being the first to climb Mount Olympus.

HERCULES. The wild boar was first. (Thunder.)

POLYBIUS. Falling rocks.

HERCULES. Half the summit is sliding down.

POLYBIUS. Do you think Olympus is a solid sort of mountain?

HERCULES. No idea. (Silence. Snowstorm.)

Polybius.

POLYBIUS. Yes.

HERCULES. Stop chattering your teeth.

POLYBIUS. Sorry.

HERCULES. I can't help thinking . . .

POLYBIUS. It's the cold.

HERCULES. I wear myself out slaying prehistoric monsters which ruin the crops and running through bandits which terrorize the highways; and yet, ever since I've employed you, my correspondence is in hand but my engagements have fallen off.

POLYBIUS. True. The first three I negotiated didn't bring in much. It's a pity the Nemean lion, where the fee was to equal the animal's weight, turned out to be a Balkan miniature. Then the Lernaean hydra sank in the Lernaean marshes and the Ceryneian hind disappeared altogether. But now we've got the Erymanthian boar. What a chase! Right to the top of the sacred mountain, never seen by mortal eye before.

HERCULES. We're not seeing much of it, either.

POLYBIUS. But we've managed to corner the fearful boar.

HERCULES. It's still snowing.

POLYBIUS. The world can breathe again!

HERCULES. That doesn't help us.

POLYBIUS. It helps us a lot. The Erymanthian boar is stretched out between us in the snow; and where the boar lies, there lies the fee.

HERCULES. That's not the Erymanthian boar!

That's some flaked-out old sow.

POLYBIUS (scrutinizing it). So it is. (Pause.) She must have been following the boar.

HERCULES. Like us.

POLYBIUS. We must keep our heads. (Thunder.)

HERCULES. Another avalanche.

POLYBIUS. If the sow is here, the boar can't be far away.

HERCULES. Over there, in the ravine.

POLYBIUS. What? In the ravine?

HERCULES. The Erymanthian boar fell into the ravine before my eyes.

POLYBIUS. And with it our fee. Fifteen thousand drachmae lie buried down there.

HERCULES. Three thousand more than I got for a common bandit. (Pause.)

POLYBIUS. Couldn't we get the boar out of the ravine?

HERCULES. Too steep. (Pause.)

POLYBIUS. We'll have to think of something.

HERCULES. The old sow's already stiff. (Pause.)

POLYBIUS. I've got it!

HERCULES. Well?

POLYBIUS. I know a taxidermist in Thebes. Now if he could make the odd improvement . . .

HERCULES. What for?

POLYBIUS. To turn the sow into a boar. After all, one wild boar's like another. (Pause.)

HERCULES. It's stopped snowing.

POLYBIUS. The fog is lifting.

HERCULES. Let's stretch ourselves. (They get up, shaking off the snow.) Now for our exercises. (They touch their toes and swing their arms above their heads.) Now I can think clearly again.

POLYBIUS. Thank goodness for that.

HERCULES. So you want to turn me into a charlatan.

POLYBIUS (nervously). But . . .

HERCULES. I'm to pass a sow off as a boar.

POLYBIUS. Just for the fee. Think of it. Fifteen thousand drachmae.

HERCULES. To hell with the money.

POLYBIUS. You can't afford to throw away money like that. Not with your debts. (Pause.

HERCULES looks at POLYBIUS, aghast.)

HERCULES. Enough!

POLYBIUS. Sorry.

HERCULES (raging). We are on the summit of Mount Olympus. (Thunder.)

POLYBIUS. Another avalanche.

HERCULES (shouting). I don't care. (Thunder.)

POLYBIUS. And another. (Pause.) If you go on shouting, the rest of the summit will collapse.

HERCULES (furiously). I feel like throwing you down there. I haven't any debts.

POLYBIUS. And how!

HERCULES (taking hold of him). Liar!

POLYBIUS (terrified). I am not. You've got debts everywhere. With the bank, the Official Receiver, your architect, your tailor, in fact, with everyone in Thebes . . . (Darkness. Rumbling. Silence.)

Scene 3

IN FRONT OF THE ROSTRUM

(POLYBIUS enters limping from behind the rostrum, rubbing his backside, his arm in a sling.)

POLYBIUS (slightly out of breath). His outbursts were world-famous. Indeed, still are. He threw both the sow and me off the glacier into the woods at the foot of Olympus. And then came tumbling after, together with the rest of the summit. (He plucks an icicle from the back of his neck). Look. An icicle. (He throws it into the orchestra pit.) Luckily, the mountainous rocks thundered past me. But Hercules fell right on top of me. Of the three of us he had the most comfortable landing, with nothing to show for it. I was sandwiched between him and the sow. No matter. The only thing that stops me handing in my notice is the difficulty of getting a job without a diploma. I had trouble with the examiners in Athens as well as in Rhodes. Hercules also happens to owe me two months' wages. However, even the worst of his rages are calmed by the voice of . . .

DEIANIRA (offstage, calling). Hercules.

POLYBIUS. Deianira, his mistress. She is so beautiful and intelligent that no praise is too good for her.

(HERCULES peers through the rostrum curtain.)

HERCULES. Did you hear her golden voice, Polybius? Its caressing tone? Isn't she wonderful? What a figure! What a walk! What bliss when she laughs, when she sings, dances or recites and calls my name. (He disappears behind the curtain again.)

POLYBIUS. They are a perfect match. Hercules is strong, brave and uncomplicated. She is delicate and subtle. It is for her he undertakes his labors. And he has dedicated himself to the purification of Greece so that it may be worthy of her. Deianira, on the other hand, is uneasy in her mind. Indeed, she once said to me . . .

(DEIANIRA enters stage R, carrying a large bowl.)

DEIANIRA. I know that Hercules and I are considered to be the ideal couple in Greece. We love each other very much. But ever since I've had the bowl of black blood I dread the thought of marrying him.

POLYBIUS. The bowl of black blood? (DEIANIRA sits on the edge of the rostrum with her bowl of blood.)

DEIANIRA. When we arrived at the river Evenus, the centaur Nessus tried to seduce me. Hercules shot him with a poisoned arrow. The dying centaur told me to preserve his blood in this bowl. It would serve to keep Hercules faithful if I dipped his shirt in the blood. I haven't done so yet. He hates shirts. Normally he goes about naked, unless he is wearing his lion skin. At present we are still free. But one day we shall be married,

and then I shall dread losing him. He will start wearing a shirt because he is older and feels the cold more. Then the day will come when I shall dip his shirt in the black blood of the centaur. (DEIANIRA slowly exits right with her bowl).

POLYBIUS. So much for Deianira. Now for King Augeas, whose invitation was the turning point in the life of this noble pair. Let him speak for himself. (POLYBIUS goes out L.)

(AUGEAS enters UL. He is wearing boots. He glances at the rostrum, then steps forward.)

AUGEAS. First a few remarks about Elis. Situated in Greece, just below the 38th parallel, level with Sicily; to be exact, in the western part of the Peloponnesus, bordered on the north and south by the rivers Peneus and Alpheus; on the west by the Ionic Sea and on the east by Arcadia, an inhospitable strip of land quite unworthy of its reputation. Soil: well manured. Beneath the surface apparently some molasses and below that some gneiss may even be found. The climate, apart from the constant rain, temperate--like our morals. The winters tend, unfortunately, to be somewhat raw, and the warm wind from the hills breeds inertia. Hence the proverb, "as dopey as an Elean." The capital too is called Elis. Our cattle number approximately eight hundred thousand and our pigs some six hundred thousand. We have simply millions of hens. Their eggs--(He searches in his pockets, finds an egg and holds it up.)--are exceptionally large,

nourishing and tasty. Population: some two hundred thousand all told. Religion: moderate Dionysian tempered with orthodox Apollonarian, which was the original sect. Politics: liberal patriarchal, vacillating between Athenian democracy, Spartan autocracy and Persian colonialism. I don't want to waste time on myself. To be honest I am not really king, merely president. Actually, just the richest peasant. And since there are only peasants I have the say and so preside over parliament. Regarding my private life, suffice it that I am a widower with two children. May I present . . .

(Enter PHYLEUS and IOLE from UL and UR respectively. PHYLEUS bows a little gauchely. IOLE curtsies. Both are rather dirty.)

AUGEAS (continuing). . . . Phyleus, my son, an eighteen-year-old lout; and Iole, my little girl, just fourteen. Now you two, hop it. (The children leave.) So much for my private life. Now about the legendary dung. This has become the subject of a heated debate in the national assembly. Let us move the rostrum and we shall find ourselves in the ancient and time-honored town hall of the Elean peasant republic. (The rostrum is pushed back and disappears. AUGEAS is a trifle embarrassed.) Perhaps a little confession would not be inappropriate. Since the town hall has long since been submerged under the by-products of

our rural economy, the national assembly
now meets in my stable.