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Dramatic Publishing

Timberlake Wertenbaker's

*The Love of the
Nightingale*

THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



The Love of the Nightingale

*Drama by
Timberlake Wertenbaker*

Produced by the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, the London critics described this play as follows: "With wit economy and powerful theatricality she (Timberlake Wertenbaker) offers us a rich retelling of the Philomele story. Her play passionately demonstrates the violence that stems from enforced silence:" "A cycle of retribution begins which only ends when the gods transform Philomele into a nightingale ... classical austerity and great verbal elegance." "... that rare thing, a compelling piece of theatre which may indeed rivet you to your seat making for a violated age."

*"Myth is the oblique image
of an unwanted truth
reverberating through time."*

T.W.

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THE LOVE OF THE NIGHTINGALE

by
Timberlake Wertenbaker



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(THE LOVE OF THE NIGHTINGALE)

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For Kate

Listen. This is the noise of myth. It makes the same
sound as shadow. Can you hear it?

Eavan Boland, *The Journey*

Now, by myself, I am nothing; yea, full oft
I have regarded woman's fortunes thus,
That we are nothing; who in our fathers' house
Live, I suppose, the happiest, while young,
Of all mankind; for ever pleasantly
Does Folly nurture all. Then, when we come
To full discretion and maturity,
We are thrust out and marketed abroad,
Far from our parents and ancestral gods,
Some to strange husbands, some to barbarous,
One to a rude, one to a wrangling home;
And these, after the yoking of a night,
We are bound to like, and deem it well with us.

Much

I envy thee thy life: and most of all,
That thou hast never had experience
Of a strange land.

Two fragments from Sophocles's lost play, *Tereus*
Translated by Sir George Young

THE LOVE OF THE NIGHTINGALE was first performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company at The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon, on 28 October 1988. The cast was as follows:

MALE CHORUS David Acton, Stephen Gordon,
Richard Haddon Haines, Patrick Miller,
Edward Rawle-Hicks
FIRST SOLDIER Patrick Miller
SECOND SOLDIER David Acton
PROCNE Marie Mullen
PHILOMELE Katy Behean
KING PANDION Richard Haddon Haines
THE QUEEN Joan Blackham
TEREUS Peter Lennon

Female Chorus

HERO Cate Hamer
IRIS Claudette Williams
JUNE Joan Blackham
ECHO Joanna Roth
HELEN Jill Spurrier

Actors in the Hippolytus play

APHRODITE Claudette Williams
PHAEDRA Cate Hamer
THE NURSE Jill Spurrier
FEMALE CHORUS Joanna Roth
HIPPLYTUS Edward Rawle-Hicks
THESEUS David Acton
MALE CHORUS Stephen Gordon

THE CAPTAIN Tony Armatrading
NIOBE Jenni George
SERVANT Joanna Roth
ITYS Nicholas Besley/Alexander Knott

<i>Director</i>	Garry Hynes
<i>Lighting</i>	Geraint Pughe
<i>Music</i>	Iona Sekacz

THE LOVE OF THE NIGHTINGALE

A Full Length Play
For Seven Men and Seven Women, and Two Chorus*

CHARACTERS

MALE CHORUS

FIRST SOLDIER

SECOND SOLDIER

PROCNE

PHILOMELE

KING PANDION

THE QUEEN

TEREUS

HERO

IRIS

JUNE

ECHO

HELEN

APHRODITE

PHAEDRA

THE NURSE

FEMALE CHORUS

HIPPOLYTUS

THESEUS

MALE CHORUS

THE CAPTAIN

NIOBE

SERVANT

ITYS



Female Chorus



Actors in the Hippolytus play

*The Chorus never speak together, except the one time it is specifically indicated in the text.

THE LOVE OF THE NIGHTINGALE

SCENE ONE

Athens. The MALE CHORUS.

MALE CHORUS. War.

(Two SOLDIERS come on, with swords and shields.)

FIRST SOLDIER. You cur!

SECOND SOLDIER. You cat's whisker.

FIRST SOLDIER. You flea's foot.

SECOND SOLDIER. You particle.

(Pause.)

You son of a bitch.

FIRST SOLDIER. You son of a lame hyena.

SECOND SOLDIER. You son of a bleeding whore.

FIRST SOLDIER. You son of a woman!

(Pause.)

I'll slice your drooping genitalia.

SECOND SOLDIER. I'll pierce your windy asshole.

FIRST SOLDIER. I'll drink from your skull.

(Pause.)

Coward!

SECOND SOLDIER. Braggard.

FIRST SOLDIER. You worm.

SECOND SOLDIER. You—man.

(They fight.)

MALE CHORUS. And now, death.

(The FIRST SOLDIER kills the SECOND SOLDIER.)

SECOND SOLDIER. Murderer!

FIRST SOLDIER. Corpse!

MALE CHORUS. We begin here because no life ever has been untouched by war.

MALE CHORUS. Everyone loves to discuss war.

MALE CHORUS. And yet its outcome, death, is shrouded in silence.

MALE CHORUS. Wars make death acceptable. The gods are less cruel if it is man's fault.

MALE CHORUS. Perhaps, but this is not our story. War is the inevitable background, the ruins of the distance establishing place and perspective.

MALE CHORUS. Athens is at war, but in the palace of the Athenian king Pandion, two sisters discuss life's charms and the attractions of men.

SCENE TWO

PROCNE, PHILOMELE.

PROCNE. Don't say that, Philomele.

PHILOMELE. It's the truth: he's so handsome I want to wrap my legs around him.

PROCNE. That's not how it's done.

PHILOMELE. How can I know if no one will tell me? Look at the sweat shining down his body. My feet will curl around the muscles of his back. How is it done, Procne, tell me, please? If you don't tell me, I'll ask Niobe and she'll tell me all wrong.

PROCNE. I'll tell you if you tell me something.

PHILOMELE. I'll tell you everything I know, sweet sister. (*Pause.*) I don't know anything.

PROCNE. You know yourself.

PHILOMELE. Oh, yes, I feel such things, Procne, such things. Tigers, rivers, serpents, here, in my stomach, a little below. I'll tell you how the serpent uncurls inside me if you tell me how it's done.

PROCNE. That's not what I meant, Philomele, I'm going to marry soon.

PHILOMELE. I envy you, sister, you'll know everything then. What are they like? Men?

PROCNE. Look: they fight.

PHILOMELE. What are they like: naked?

PROCNE. Spongy.

PHILOMELE. What?

PROCNE. I haven't seen one yet, but that's what they told me to prepare me. They have sponges.

PHILOMELE. Where?

PROCNE. Here. Getting bigger and smaller and moving up and down. I didn't listen very carefully, I'll know soon enough. Philomele, when I am married, will you want to come and visit me?

PHILOMELE. Yes, sister, yes. I'll visit you every day and you'll let me watch.

PROCNE. Philomele! Can't you think of anything else?

PHILOMELE. Not today. Tomorrow I'll think about wisdom. It must be so beautiful. Warm ripples of light.

PROCNE. I think most of it you can do on your own. The sponge. I think it detaches.

PHILOMELE. I wouldn't want to do it on my own. I want to run my hands down bronzed skin. Ah, I can feel the tiger again.

PROCNE. If I went far away, would you still want to come and visit me?

PHILOMELE. I will cross any sea to visit you and your handsome husband, sister. *(Pause.)* When I'm old enough, I won't stop doing it, whatever it is. Life must be so beautiful when you're older. It's beautiful now. Sometimes I'm so happy.

PROCNE. Quiet, Philomele! Never say you're happy. It wakes up the gods and then they look at you and that is never a good thing. Take it back, now.

PHILOMELE. You taught me not to lie, sister.

PROCNE. I wish I didn't have to leave home. I worry about you.

PHILOMELE. Life is sweet, my sister, and I love everything in it. The feelings. Athens. You. And that brave young warrior fighting to protect us. Oh!

PROCNE. Philomele? Ah.
He's dead.

PHILOMELE. Crumpled. Procne, was it my fault? Should I have held my tongue?

PROCNE. Athens is at war, men must die.

PHILOMELE. I'm frightened. I don't want to leave this room ever.

PROCNE. You must try to become more moderate. Measure in all things, remember, it's what the philosophers recommend.

PHILOMELE. Will the philosophers start speaking again after the war? Procne, can we go and listen to them?

PROCNE. I won't be here.

PHILOMELE. Procne, don't go.

PROCNE. It's our parents' will. They know best.

(Pause.)

You will come to me if I ask for you, you will?

PHILOMELE. Yes.

PROCNE. I want you to promise. Remember you must never break a promise.

PHILOMELE. I promise. I will want to. I promise again.

PROCNE. That makes me happy. Ah.

SCENE THREE

The palace of King Pandion. KING PANDION, the QUEEN, TEREUS, PROCNE, PHILOMELE, the MALE CHORUS.

MALE CHORUS. Athens won the war with the help of an ally from the north.

MALE CHORUS. The leader of the liberators was called Tereus.

KING PANDION. No liberated country is ungrateful. That is a rule. You will take what you want from our country. It will be given with gratitude. We are ready.

TEREUS. I came not out of greed but in the cause of justice, King Pandion. But I have come to love this country and its inhabitants.

QUEEN (*to KING PANDION*). He wants to stay! I knew it! (*Pause.*)

KING PANDION. Of course if you wish to stay in Athens that is your right. We can only remind you this is a small city. But you must stay if you wish.

TEREUS. No. I must go back north. There has been trouble while I've conducted this war. What I want—is to bring some of your country to mine, its manners, its ease, its civilized discourse.

QUEEN (*to KING PANDION*). I knew it: he wants Procne.

KING PANDION. I can send you some of our tutors. The philosophers, I'm afraid, are rather independent.

TEREUS. I have always believed that culture was kept by the women.

KING PANDION. Ours are not encouraged to go abroad.

TEREUS. But they have a reputation for wisdom. Is that false?

QUEEN. Be careful, he's crafty.

KING PANDION. It is true. Our women are the best.

TEREUS. So.

QUEEN. I knew it.

(*Pause.*)

KING PANDION. She's yours, Tereus. Procne—

PROCNE. But, Father—

KING PANDION. Your husband.

PROCNE. Mother—

QUEEN. What can I say?

KING PANDION. I am only sad you will live so far away.

PHILOMELE. Can I go with her?

QUEEN. Quiet, child.

TEREUS (*to PROCNE*). I will love and respect you.

MALE CHORUS. It didn't happen that quickly. It took months and much indirect discourse. But that is the gist of it. The end was known from the beginning.

MALE CHORUS. After an elaborate wedding in which King Pandion solemnly gave his daughter to the hero, Tereus, the two left for Thrace. There was relief in Athens. His army had become expensive, rude, rowdy.

MALE CHORUS. Had always been, but we see things differently in peace. That is why peace is so painful.

MALE CHORUS. Nothing to blur the waters. We look down to the bottom.

MALE CHORUS. And on a clear day, we see our own reflections.

(Pause.)

MALE CHORUS. In due course, Procne had a child, a boy called Itys. Five years passed.

SCENE FOUR

*PROCNE and her companions, the FEMALE CHORUS:
HERO, ECHO, IRIS, JUNE, HELEN.*

PROCNE. Where have all the words gone?

HERO. She sits alone, hour after hour, turns her head away and laments.

IRIS. We don't know how to act, we don't know what to say.

HERO. She turns from us in grief.

JUNE. Boredom.

ECHO. Homesick.

HERO. It is difficult to come to a strange land.

HELEN. You will always be a guest there, never call it your own, never rest in the kindness of history.

ECHO. Your story intermingled with events, no. You will be outside.

IRIS. And if it is the land of your husband can you even say you have chosen it?

JUNE. She is not one of us.

HERO. A shared childhood makes friends between women.

ECHO. The places we walked together, our first smells.

HELEN. But an unhappy woman can do much harm. She has already dampened our play.

JUNE. Mocked the occupation of our hours, scorned.

IRIS. What shall we do?

HELEN. I fear the future.

PROCNE. Where have the words gone?

ECHO. Gone, Procne, the words?

PROCNE. There were so many. Everything that was, had a word and every word was something. None of these meanings half in the shade, unclear.

IRIS. We speak the same language, Procne.

PROCNE. The words are the same, but point to different things. We aspire to clarity in sound, you like the silences in between.

HERO. We offered to initiate you.

PROCNE. Barbarian practices. I am an Athenian: I know the truth is found by logic and happiness lies in the truth.

HERO. Truth is full of darkness.

PROCNE. No, truth is good and beautiful. See...*(Pause.)* I must have someone to talk to.

JUNE. We've tried. See...

HERO. She turns away.

PROCNE. How we talked. Our words played, caressed each other, our words were tossed lightly, a challenge to catch. Where is she now? Who shares those games with her? Or is she silent too?

ECHO. Silent, Procne, who?

PROCNE. My sister. *(Pause.)* My friend. I want to talk to her. I want her here.

HERO. You have a family, Procne, a husband, a child.

PROCNE. I cannot talk to my husband. I have nothing to say to my son. I want her here. She must come here.

HELEN. It's a long way and a dangerous one for a young girl. Let her be, Procne.

PROCNE. I want my sister here.

HELEN. She could come to harm.

PROCNE. Tereus could bring her, she'll be safe with him.

ECHO. Tereus.

HELEN. Dangers on the sea, he won't want you to risk them.

PROCNE. He can go alone. I'll wait here and look after the country.

ECHO. Tereus.

HERO. Will your sister want to come to a strange land?

PROCNE. She will want what I want.

HELEN. Don't ask her to come, Procne.

PROCNE. Why not?

HERO. This is no country for a strange young girl.

PROCNE. She will be with me.

HERO. She won't listen.

HELEN. I am worried. It is not something I can say. There are no words for forebodings.

HERO. We are only brushed by possibilities.

ECHO. A beating of wings.

JUNE. Best to say nothing. Procne? May we go now?

PROCNE. To your rituals?

JUNE. Yes, it's time.

PROCNE. Very well, go.

(They go.)

This silence...this silence...

SCENE FIVE

The theatre in Athens. KING PANDION, TEREUS, HIP-POLYTUS, THESEUS.

KING PANDION. Procne has always been so sensible.

Why, suddenly, does she ask for her sister?

TEREUS. She didn't explain. She insisted I come to you and I did what she asked.

KING PANDION. I understand, Tereus, but such a long journey...Procne's not ill?

TEREUS. She was well when I left. She has her child, companions.

KING PANDION. Philomele is still very young. And yet, I allowed Procne to go so far away...What do you think, Tereus?

TEREUS. You're her father.

KING PANDION. And you, her husband.

TEREUS. I only meant Procne would accept any decision you made. It is a long journey.

(APHRODITE enters.)

APHRODITE. I am Aphrodite, goddess of love, resplendent and mighty, revered on earth, courted in heaven, all pay tribute to my fearful power.

KING PANDION. Do you know this play, Tereus?

TEREUS. No.

KING PANDION. I find plays help me think. You catch a phrase, recognize a character. Perhaps this play will help us come to a decision.

APHRODITE. I honour those who kneel before me, but that proud heart which dares defy me, that haughty heart I bring low.

TEREUS. That's sound.

KING PANDION. Do you have good theatre in Thrace?

TEREUS. We prefer sport.

KING PANDION. Then you are like Hippolytus.

TEREUS. Who?

KING PANDION. Listen.

APHRODITE. Hippolytus turns his head away. Hippolytus prefers the hard chase to the soft bed, wild game to foreplay, but chaste Hippolytus shall be crushed this very day.

(APHRODITE exits. The QUEEN and PHILOMELE enter.)

PHILOMELE. We're late! I've missed Aphrodite.

KING PANDION. She only told us it was going to end badly, but we already know that. It's a tragedy.

(Enter PHAEDRA.)

QUEEN. There's Phaedra. *(To TEREUS.)* Phaedra is married to Theseus, The King of Athens. Hippolytus is Theseus' son by his previous mistress, the Amazon Queen, who's now dead, and so Phaedra's stepson. Phaedra has three children of her own.

PHAEDRA. Hold me, hold me, hold up my head. The strength of my limbs is melting away.

PHILOMELE. How beautiful to love like that! "The strength of my limbs is melting away." Is that what you feel for Procne, Tereus?

QUEEN. Philomele! *(To TEREUS.)* Phaedra's fallen in love with Hippolytus.

TEREUS. Her own stepson! That's wrong.

KING PANDION. That's what makes it a tragedy. When you love the right person it's a comedy.