

THE GAS HEART

BY TRISTAN TZARA

Translated by Michael Benedikt

CHARACTERS

EYE

MOUTH

NOSE

EAR

NECK

EYEBROW

ACT I

(Neck stands downstage, Nose opposite, confronting the audience. All the other characters enter and leave as they please. The gas heart walks slowly around, circulating widely; it is the only and greatest three-act hoax of the century; it will satisfy only industrialized imbeciles who believe in the existence of men of genius. Actors are requested to give this play the attention due a masterpiece such as Macbeth or Chantecler, but to treat the author—who is not a genius with no respect and to note the levity of the script which brings no technical innovation to the theatre.)

EYE: Statues jewels

roasts statues jewels roasts

statues jewels roasts statues jewels roasts

statues jewels roasts

and the wind open to mathematical allusions

cigar pimple nose

cigar pimple nose

cigar pimple nose

cigar pimple nose

cigar pimple nose

cigar pimple nose

he was in love with a stenographer

eyes replaced by motionless navels

mister mygod is an excellent journalist

inflexible yet acquatic a good-morning was drifting in the air

what a sad season

MOUTH: The conversation is lagging isn't it?

EYE: Yes, isn't it.

MOUTH: Very lagging, isn't it?

EYE: Yes, isn't it?

MOUTH: Naturally, isn't it?

EYE: Obviously, isn't it?

MOUTH: Lagging, isn't it?

EYE: Yes, isn't it?

MOUTH: Obviously, isn't it?

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MOUTH: Naturally, isn't it?

EYE: Obviously, isn't it?

MOUTH: Lagging, isn't it?

EYE: Yes, isn't it?

MOUTH: Obviously, isn't it?

EYE: Yes, isn't it?

NOSE: You over there, man with starred scars, where are you running?

EAR: I'm running toward happiness

I'm burning in the eyes of passing days

I swallow jewels

I sing in courtyards

love has not court nor hunting horn to fish up

hard-boiled-egg hearts with.

(Mouth exits.)

NOSE: You over there, man with a scream like a fat pearl, what are you eating?

EAR: Over two years have passed, alas, since I set out on this hunt. But do you see how one can get used to fatigue and how death would be tempted to live, the magnificent emperor's death proves it, the importance of everything diminishes-every day-a little . . .

NOSE: You over there, man with wounds of chained wool molluscs, man with various pains and pockets full, pieman of all maps and places, where do you come from?

EYE: The bark of apotheosized trees shadows wormy verse but the rain makes organized poetry's clock tick. The banks filled with medicated cotton-wool. String man supported by blisters like you and like all others. To the porcelain flower play us chastity on your violin, O cherry tree, death is so quick and cooks over the bituminous coal of the trombone capital.

NOSE: Hey you over there, sir

EAR: Hey hey hey hey hey hey hey hey hey hey hey

NECK: Tangerine and white from Spain

I'm killing myself Madeleine Madeleine.

EAR: The eye tells the mouth: open your mouth for the candy of the eye.

NECK: Tangerine and white from Spain

I'm killing myself Madeleine Madeleine.

EYE: Upon the ear the vaccine of serious pearl flattened to mimosa.

EAR: Don't you think it's getting rather warm?

MOUTH (who has just come in again): It gets warm in the summer.

EYE: The beauty of your face is a precision chronometer.

NECK: Tangerine and white from Spain

I'm killing myself Madeleine Madeleine.

EAR: The watch hand indicates the left ear the right eye the fore-head the eyebrow the forehead the eyebrow the left eye the left ear the lips the chin the neck.

EYE: Clytemnestra, the diplomat's wife, was looking out of the window. The cellists go by in a carriage of Chinese tea, biting the air and openhearted caresses. You are beautiful, Clytemnestra, the crystal of your skin awakens our sexual curiosity. You are as tender and as calm as two yards of white silk. Clytemnestra, my teeth tremble. I'm cold, I'm afraid. I'm green I'm flower I'm gasometer I'm afraid. You are married. My teeth tremble. When will you have the pleasure of looking at the lower jaw of the revolver closing in my chalk lung. Hopeless, and without any family.

NECK: Tangerine and white from Spain

I'm killing myself Madeleine Madeleine.

MOUTH: Too sensitive to approval by your good taste I have decided to shut off the faucet. The hot and cold water of my charm will no longer be able to divert the sweet results of your sweat, true love or new love. (Exits.)

EAR (entering): His neck is narrow but his foot is quite large. He can easily drum with his fingers or toes on his oval belly which has already served as a ball several times during rugby. He is not a being because he consists of pieces. Simple men manifest their existences by houses, important men by monuments.

NOSE: How true how true how true how true how true

EYEBROW: "Where," "how much," "why," are monuments. As, for example, Justice. What beautifully regular functioning, practically a nervous tic or a religion.

NOSE (decrescendo): How true how true how true how true how true . .

EYEBROW: In the lake dipped twice in the sky-the bearded sky-a pretty morning was found. The object fleeting between the nostrils. Acidulous taste of weak electric current, this taste which at the entrances to salt mines switches to zinc, to rubber, to cloth-weightless and grimy. One evening-while out walking in the evening-someone found, deep down, a tiny little evening. And its name was good evening.

NOSE: How true how true how true how true how true . . .

EYE: Look out! cried the hero, the two paths of smoke from those enemy houses were knotting a necktie--and it rose overhead to the navel of the light.

NOSE: How true how true how true how true how true

EAR: Carelessly the robber changed himself into a valise, the physicist might therefore state that the valise stole the robber. The waltz went on continuously--it is continuously which was not going on--it was waltzing--and the lovers were tearing off pieces of it as it passed--on old walls posters are worth-less.

NOSE: How true how true how true how true how true . . .

EYE: They kept catching colds with great regularity. For the regularity of his life a little death, too. Its name was continuity.

NOSE: How true how true how true how true how true . . .

EYE: Never had a fisherman made more assassinating shadows under the bridges of the city. But suddenly midnight sounded beneath the stamp of a blink and tears mingled in telegrams undecoded and obscure.

EYEBROW: He flattened out like a bit of tin foil and several drops several memories several leaves testified to the cruelty of an impassioned and actual fauna. Wind the Curtain of nothingness shakes--his stomach is full of foreign money. Nothingness drinks nothingness: the air has arrived with its blue eyes, and that is why he goes on taking aspirin all the time. Once a day we give abortive birth to our obscurities.

EYE: We have the time, alas, time is lacking no longer. Time wears mustaches now like everyone, even women and shaven Americans. Time is compressed-the eye is weak-but it isn't yet in the miser's wrinkled purse.

MOUTH: Isn't it?

EYE: The conversation is lagging, isn't it?

MOUTH: Yes, isn't it?

EYE: Very lagging, isn't it?

MOUTH: Yes, isn't it?

EYE: Naturally, isn't it?

MOUTH: Obviously, isn't it?

EYE: Lagging, isn't it?

MOUTH: Yes, isn't it?

EYE: Very lagging, isn't it?

MOUTH: Yes, isn't it?

EYE: Naturally, isn't it?

MOUTH: Lagging, isn't it?

EYE: Obviously mygod.

CURTAIN

The Gas Heart: ACT II

EYEBROW: We're going to the races today.

MOUTH: Let's not forget the camera.

EYE: Well hello.

EAR: The mechanical battalion of the wrists of shriveled hand-shakes.

Mouth exits.

NOSE (shouts): Clytemnestra is winning!

EAR: What do you mean you didn't know that Clytemnestra was a race horse?

EYE: Amorous jostlings lead everywhere. But the season is propitious. Take care, dear friends, the season is satisfactory. It chews up words. It distends silences in accordions. Snakes line up everywhere in their polished eyeglasses. And what do you do with the bells of eyes, asked the entrepreneur.

EAR: "Seekers and curious people," answered Ear. She finishes the nerves of others in the white porcelain shell. She inflates.

NOSE: Fan having a seizure of wood,
light body with enormous laugh.

EYEBROW: The driving-belts of the mills of dreams brush against the woolen lower jaws of our carnivorous plants.

EAR: Yes, I know, the dreams with hair.

EYE: Dreams of angels.

EAR: Dreams of cloth, paper watches.

EYE: The enormous and solemn dreams of inaugurations.

EAR: Of angels in helicopters.

NOSE: Yes I know.

EYE: The angels of conversation.

NECK: Yes I know.

EAR: Angels in cushions.

NOSE: Yes I know.

EYE: Angels in ice.

NOSE: Yes I know.

EAR: Angels in local neighborhoods.

NOSE: Yes, I know.

EAR: The ice is broken, said our fathers to our mothers, in the first springtime of their life which was both honorable and gracious.

EYE: This is how the hour understands the hour, the admiral his fleet of words. Winter child the palm of my hand.

Mouth enters.

MOUTH: I've made a great deal of money.

NOSE: Thank you not bad.

MOUTH: I swim in the fountain. I have necklaces of goldfish.

NECK: Thank you not bad.

MOUTH: I'm wearing the latest French coiffure.

NOSE: Thank you not bad.

EYE: I've already seen it in Paris.

NECK: Thank you not bad.

MOUTH: I don't understand anything about the rumblings of the next war.

NECK: Thank you not bad.

MOUTH: And I'm getting thinner every day.

NOSE: Thank you not bad.

MOUTH: A young man followed me in the street on his bicycle.

NECK: Thank you not bad.

MOUTH: I'll be on my ship next Monday.

NOSE: Thank you not bad.

EYE: Clytemnestra the wind is blowing. The wind is blowing. On the quays of decorated bells. Turn your back cut off the wind. Your eyes are stones because they only see the wind and rain. Clytemnestra. Have you felt the horrors of the war? Do you know how to slide on the sweetness of my speech? Don't you breathe the same air as I do? Don't you speak the same lan-guage? In what limitless metal are your fingers of misery in-laid? What music filtered by what mysterious curtain prevents my words from penetrating the wax of your brain? Certainly, stone grinds you and bones strike against your muscles, but language chopped into chance slices will never release in you the stream which employs white methods.

Mouth exits.

EAR: Doubtless you know the calendars of birds?

EYE: What?

EAR: Three hundred and sixty-five birds--every day a bird flies away--every hour a feather falls--every two hours somebody writes a poem-somebody cuts it apart with scissors.

NOSE: I've already seen it in Paris.

EYE: What a philosophy. What a poet. I don't like poetry.

EAR: Then you must love cold drinks? Or a countryside that rolls like a dancer's permanent waves? Or ancient cities? Or the black arts?

EYE: I know all about that.

NOSE: A little more life on the stage.

EYEBROW: Gray drum for the flower of your lung.

EAR: My lung is made out of lung and is not a mere cardboard front if you really want to know.

EYE: But, Miss.

EAR: Please, Sir.

EYE: Bony sacraments in military prisons painting doesn't much interest me. I like a quiet countryside with considerable gal-loping.

NOSE: Your piece is quite charming but you really don't come away enriched.

EYEBROW: There's nothing to be enriched by in it everything is easy to follow and even come away with. An outlet of thought from which a whip will emerge. The whip will be a forget-me-not. The forget-me-not a living inkwell. The inkwell will dress a doll.

EAR: Your daughter is quite charming.

EYE: You're very considerate.

EAR: Do you care for sports?

EYE: Yes, this method of communication is very practical.

EAR: You know of course that I own a garage.

EYE: Thank you very much.

EAR: It's spring it's spring.

NOSE: I tell you it's two yards.

NECK: I tell you it's three yards.

NOSE: I tell you it's four yards.

NECK: I tell you it's five yards.

NOSE: I tell you it's six yards.

NECK: I tell you it's seven yards.

NOSE: I tell you it's eight yards.

NECK: I tell you it's nine yards.

NOSE: I tell you it's ten yards.

NECK: I tell you it's eleven yards.

NOSE: I tell you it's twelve yards.

NECK: I tell you it's thirteen yards.

NOSE: I tell you it's fourteen yards.

NECK: I tell you it's fifteen yards.

NOSE: I tell you it's sixteen yards.

EAR: Thank you thank you very good.

EYE: Love-sport or indictment

summary of the directories of love--love

accumulated by centuries of weights and numbers

with its breasts of copper and crystal

god is a nervous tic of shifting sand dunes

nervous and agile leafs through countrysides and the pockets of onlookers

the hair-do of death thrown on the flail outwardly new

friendship with error delicately juxtaposed.

NOSE: I tell you love's seventeen yards.

NECK: I tell you it's eighteen yards.

NOSE: I tell you it's nineteen yards.

NECK: I tell you it's twenty yards.

NOSE: I tell you it's twenty-one yards.

NECK: I tell you it's twenty-two yards.

NOSE: I tell you it's twenty-three yards.

NECK: I tell you it's twenty-four yards.

NOSE: I tell you it's twenty-five yards.

NECK: I tell you it's twenty-six yards.

NOSE: I tell you it's twenty-seven yards.

NECK: I tell you it's twenty-eight yards.

NOSE: I tell you it's twenty-nine yards.

EAR: You have a very pretty head
you ought to have it sculpted
you ought to give the grandest of parties
to know nature better and to love nature
and sink forks into your sculpture
the grasses of the ventilators flatter the lovely days.

EYEBROW: Fire! Fire!

I think Clytemnestra's ablaze.

CURTAIN

The Gas Heart: ACT III

NECK: The sky is clouded
my finger is opened
sewing-machine these staring examinations
the river is opened the brain clouded
sewing-machine these staring examinations.

MOUTH: We will make fine material for the crystal dress with it.

NOSE: You mean to say: "despair gives you its explanations regarding its rates of exchange."

MOUTH: I don't mean to say anything. A long time ago I put everything I had to say into a hatbox.

NECK: Everybody knows you, installation of conjugal bliss.

NOSE: Everybody knows you, tapestry of forgotten ideas, crystallization.

NECK: Everybody knows you, formula for a song, running board of algebra, insomnia number, triple-skinned machine.

MOUTH: Everybody does not know me. I am alone here in my wardrobe and the mirror is blank when I look at myself. Also I love the birds at the ends of lit cigarettes. Cats, all animals and all vegetables. I love cats, birds, animals and vegetables which are the projection of Clytemnestra in the courtyard, bedding, vases and meadows. I love hay. I love the young man who makes such tender declarations to me and whose spine is ripped asunder in the sun.

Dance of the gentleman fallen from a funnel in the ceiling onto the table.

MOUTH: Dreams dampen the evening of stretched hide. (Exits.)

EYE: Imagine that my dear friend I no longer love him.

EAR: Which one do you mean?

EYE: I mean the one I've loved too long.

EAR: Me too I've lost an illusion. The prize horse in my stable has lost his energy.

EYE: Well then, my dear, his life must be renewed.

EAR: You're just bitter. (Exits.)

Enter Mouth.

EYE: Clytemnestra you are beautiful. I love you with the intensity of a diver . . . his seaweeds. My blood trembles. Your eyes are blue. Why can't you hear, Clytemnestra, the quiet laughter of my cells awaiting you, the violence of my breath and the sweet childish possibilities fate has in store for us? Are you perhaps awaiting further sensational revelations regarding my temperament?

Exit Mouth.

Eye falls to the stage.

NOSE: Huge.

NECK: Fixed.

NOSE: Cruel.

NECK: Broad.

NOSE: Small.

NECK: Short.

NOSE: Shriill.

NECK: Feeble.

NOSE: Magnificent.

NECK: Long.

NOSE: Narrow.

NECK: Strong.

NOSE: Sensitive.

NECK: Fat.

NOSE: High.

NECK: Slim.

NOSE: Trembling.

NECK: Fine.

NOSE: Clear.

NECK: Courageous.

NOSE: Thin.

NECK: Obscure.

NOSE: Timid.

NECK: Pretty.

NOSE: White.

NECK: Flexible.

NOSE: Deep.

NECK: Nasty.

NOSE: Ugly.

NECK: Heavy.

NOSE: Low.

NECK: Black.

NOSE: Superficial.

NECK: Scentless.

NOSE: Harmonious.

NECK: Smooth.

NOSE: Rigid.

NECK: Tangerine and white from Spain

I'm killing myself Madeleine Madeleine.

EAR: (entering with Mouth, who crawls on all fours, and shouting):

Clytemnestra, race horse:

3,000 francs

Going once!

Going twice!!

Going thrice!!!

Gone!

Eye goes up to Mouth, on all fours.

EAR: This will end with a lovely marriage.

EYE: This will end with a lovely marriage.

EYEBROW: This will end with a lovely marriage.

MOUTH: This will end with a lovely marriage.

NECK: This will end with a lovely marriage.

NOSE: This will end with a lovely marriage.

EAR: Go lie down.

EYE: Go lie down.

EYEBROW: Go lie down.

MOUTH: Go lie down.

NECK: Go lie down.

NOSE: Go lie down.

FINIS