

Enter Pylades

A play
by Ben Hauck

Ben Hauck
25-85 36th St. Apt. A5
Long Island City, NY 11103
Service: (212) 252-4706
benhauck@webtv.net

Enter Pylades

A play
by Ben Hauck

[A & B, of similar ages, simultaneously approach their seats for a production of Aeschylus' epic tragedy, the *Oresteia*. A, coming to support his friend cast as Pylades, focuses on the program as he walks, and sits, still focused. B, dressed uncomfortably in the garb of a literary scholar, follows A, scouts the theater space, and takes the aisle seat next to A. A looks eager for the play to start, while B looks nervous about his surroundings. A still fixes on the program. B only glances at his and sets it under his chair so he can people-watch.]

A

[Looking at his program, Open for response:] Ah, man! I *hate* that!

B

What?

A

Ah, I hate that. This is America--Get it right!

B

What??

A

Look at that.

[A hands B the program.]

B

[Reading:] "The oRESteeA by Aysk--

A

No, Look how they spelled "theater."

B

What about it?

A

T-R-E. It ends in T-R-E.

B

So?

A

So?! It's British! That's the British spelling!

B

So?

A

So, this is NOT Britain, this is America. We spell "theater" T-H-E-A-T-*E*-R, not T-H-E-A-T-*R*-E. [Somewhat loudly:] GET IT RIGHT, PEOPLE!

B

So?, what's it matter?

A

What's it matter? Well, for one thing it makes the Theater look like a bunch of idiots who can't spell.

[B chuckles snidely.]

You don't think anyone notices? Okay well then, take *me* for one. But if I don't count, then how bout try counting those who do care a little bit about spelling, those who care about the English language . . .

B

[Trying to sound expert:] *I* care about the English language. I care, I teach it, I teach English. At the College. But this Greek-play shit . . .

A

What?! What're you talking about?, This play?

B

Yeah. It's Greek.

A

[Shocked at an English teacher's distaste for Greek lit:] What?!

B

It's Greek. I don't understand Greek.

A

Greek? This is not Greek, it's a translation, at least I think it is? Lemme see, *Yep*, it is, see here, it says "translated by Tony Harrison"--O, that should be good . . .

B

[Clueless:] Who's Tony Harrison?

A

Who's Tony Harrison?! Only one of the best living poets around!

B

Oh. Well yeah, I know, I know Tony Harrison. We read him last semester, in class, it's just, ya know, he's poetic, All he writes, he's too *poetic*.

A

You really think so?

B

Uh, Yeah. I mean, all he writes is *poetry*. I mean, can't he write anything *else*? I mean, poetry gets so old, can't he write a movie or something, something like Arnold Schwarzenegger or Steven Seagal?

A

Um, he wrote this *play*.

B

[Delayed:] Uh, OH YEAH I KNOW, I mean, wait, wait, *You* know what I mean, he didn't write this, he translated it. This Ayskloose guy wrote it first. Real English is in movie scripts nowadays.

A

You said you were an English teacher?

B

Yeah, uh, First year teaching.

[Pause. A has his suspicions.]

B

It's Greek then.

A

NO, it's NOT GREEK, it's a TRANSLATION.

B

That's what I mean, it's a translation.

A

. . . It's a TRANSLATION . . .

B

That's good, ya see, cuz I don't know Greek, I mean, I didn't learn any Greek when I was goin for my, uh, my doctor's, doctorate, no, *Degree* in English, ya know, *Degree* in English.

A

[Slightly “Yeah Right”:] Uh-huh.

B

Never mind.

[A sits, confused by this nervous theater-goer. B feels a need to make the situation more comfortable. Once the desire to break the silence arises:]

B

Sooo. Where do ya live?

A

[Hesitantly:] Um. I live, In the area.

B

Yeah? Really? Where?

A

[Trying to fool him:] Uh... You know where the big Cheese Statue is?

B

No.

A

[Not surprised:] Oh. Well that’s where I live.

[Pause.]

B

Aren’t you gonna ask me where I live?

A

[Disinterested:] Where do you live.

B

I don’t, Not in the area, I, I just flew in, Another college, Just flew from--

A

The play’s starting, hush.

[B glares slightly at A, as if shoved aside by that comment. They look in front of them at the SPEAKER, unseen: A voice.]

SPEAKER

[Somewhat effeminately, Sounding memorized:] Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the Fairview Theatre's production of the ancient Greek tragedy, Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, UNCUT, translated by Tony Harrison. We hope you'll join us in June for our exciting summer Theatre season, starting out with Marsha Norman's tribute to suicide, *'Night Mother*, followed by another Tony Harrison adaptation, *The Medieval Mystery Plays*, UNCUT, featuring local Elvis impersonator William G. Masterson as Jesus--

B

Oh Jesus.

SPEAKER

--and rounding off the list, a post-modern revision and special-effects extravaganza in the Rodgers & Hammerstein musical, *Oklahoma!* [Sounding less memorized:] We're already in pre-production for *Oklahoma!*, and we're scheduled to build a humongous exploding replica of the building destroyed in the Oklahoma City bombing. Should be exciting!

[B looks somewhat intrigued.]

[Back to memorized:] In the unlikely event of an emergency, let me direct you to the exit signs, located at the sides of the theatre and at the rear,--

[B looks where the speaker directs him to look, in the *likely* event of an emergency.]

--and, I want to remind you that the use of flash bulbs and recording devices is not permitted during the performance. We'll have a ten-minute intermission at the conclusion of the second act, the two acts together run Four hours, Fifteen minutes. And Yes, by popular demand, we now sell Advil and Tums. Thank you and enjoy the show.

[A goes back to his program. B still looks around, then notices A's reading his program. B tries to see the item that A reads.]

B

You know someone in the play?

A

Yeah.

B

Oh yeah?

A

Yeah.

[Pause. That question went nowhere.]

B

Is it a guy or a girl?

A

It's a guy, it's the guy who plays Pylades, Chuck Ductman.

[The house lights dim.]

B

[Excited:] Chuck Ductman??! Chuck Ductman??! Noooo! That's precisely why I'm here! To see Chuck Ductman!! He's Pylades?, When's he come on?

A

In about four hours.

[B sits, constipatedly. Then the light of the rising curtain falls on them, and they watch the opening moments of a WATCHMAN in a football uniform. Putting his program underneath his seat, A considers how this stranger might know Chuck Ductman.]

WATCHMAN

[With a hillbilly accent:]

No end to it all, though all year I've muttered
my pleas to the gods for a long [Accentuate:] groped for end.

B

Why's he dressed as a football player?

A

It's a style piece. It's modernized. The director probably wants to make a comment on football.

[A looks disgusted. The WATCHMAN, who has taken a "dramatic pause," continues. A and B turn back to the stage.]

WATCHMAN

Wish it were over, this waiting, this watching,
twelve weary months, night in and night out,
crouching and peering, head down like a bloodhound,
paws propping muzzle, up here on the palace,
the palace belonging the bloodclan of Atreus--
Agamemnon, Menelaus, bloodkin, our clanchiefs.

[The Harrison dialogue may continue softly or silently underneath A and B's dialogue. When the Harrison dialogue appears in the script, assume the onstage action distracts them from their discussion, or takes importance.]

B

What's going on?

A

[Snapping:] You're not an English teacher, are you, How do you know Chuck Ductman???

B

[Plainly:] No, I'm not an English teacher. What's going on, is he talking about *sex*, What's this about a [Mocking accent:] "groped for end"?

A

What are you then? You some, How do you know *Chuck Ductman*?

WATCHMAN

I've had a whole year's worth so I ought to know.

A whole year of it! Still not sign of the signal

I'm supposed to catch sight of, the beacons,
the torch-blaze that means Troy's finally taken . . .

A

[Pressing:] HOW do you KNOW *Chuck Ductman*?

B

[Shushing him with a library finger:] Shhhh! I'm trying to figure out this play.

A

You don't know Chuck Ductman, you don't know Chuck Ductman. If you know Chuck Ductman, what's his telephone number?

B

Unlisted.

A

Alright, where's he live?

B

[Rapidly:] In Burt's Bluff. 323 Hill Road. Red house. Small. Dog chained up in the front of the yard, won't shut up even if you throw it a steak. Gravel driveway, plastic mailbox, aluminum siding by Sears, Concealed by a wall of evergreen trees, pines and others, One-car garage with no windows, shingles falling off the roof, has a guy-friend who comes and goes, comes in a green Geo Storm with personalized tags, says "REAREND," Barbed-wire fence, high, like at prison, Lives with an old man who resembles him in the body and is about the same height, I'd say it's his old man.

[Pause.]

A

Who are you?

B

[Seriously:] I'm his parole officer.

A

Parole officer?! Yeah, well Chuck's never done anything!

B

Do you *know* Chuck Ductman?

[A does not respond.]

That's what I thought. I have to make an occasional surprise parole visit to our parolees, every once'n awhile, to make sure they're in line. Chuck's doin pretty good, but you never know the potential of someone of his type.

A

[Believing:] Why?, What'd he do?

B

[Delayed:] Let's just say he's always had an interest in "drama."

WATCHMAN

It's there! An oasis like daylight in deserts of dark!

It's there! No mistaking!

A

So, what?, you carry a badge?

B

No, don't need to, he knows who I am.

A

You carry a gun?

B

Uh, on occasion.

A

Is this an occasion?

WATCHMAN

Troy's taken! Troy's down and Troy's flattened!

A

Is this *an occasion*?

WATCHMAN

There'll be dancing in Argos and I'll lead the dance.

B

No, you kidding?, I wouldn't take a gun to a play, who's gonna pull anything at a play. As if someone would actually stop a show and pull some crime off during a play.

A

I guess you're right.

WATCHMAN

Those who know what I know, know what I'm saying.
Those who don't know, won't know. Not from me.

[Lights fade with Harrison dialogue.]

First interlude.

EARLIER.

[Dark on A & B, frozen still. Lights rise, illuminating a path from the *Oresteia* stage to the row just in front of A & B's seats. A MAN enters from the *Oresteia* stage along the path. He carefully measures the footsteps from the stage to the row, planting each foot and counting aloud.]

MAN

[Beginning offstage:] [...] 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. [...]

[Once he reaches the row in front of A & B's seats he stands, pausing to take in the seat where B will sit. He then turns in place and returns to his origin, counting backwards.]

MAN

[...] 10. 9. 8. 7. 6. 5. 4. [...]

[Path lights fade out as lights on A & B rise slowly.]

LATER.

[As the lights fade up with the Harrison dialogue, B has lost track of the onstage action and has fallen into a fit of boredom. He looks around in the audience, perhaps for something interesting, but he finds nothing. B reaches below his chair for his program and contorts so he can get stage-light on it and read it. As he starts to read it, he glances at his watch then lets out a deep sigh of exhaustion, but this Harrison dialogue catches his attention:]

HERALD

[A cavernously-voiced male:]
Suffering. Suffering only the gods escape it entirely.

[B rolls his eyes, but the HERALD catches his attention again.]

If you'd known firsthand our louse-ridden billets,
cramped berths on board, claustrophobic, foul bedding,
what didn't we have to complain of you tell me.
Ashore was no better. Worse. We bivouaced
under the walls with the enemy firing.
Drenched either by drizzle or dew from the ground.
Clothes moldy with mildew. Locks crawling with lice.

B

[Whispering:] What happened to that redneck linebacker way in the beginning?

A

[Rudely, Without eye-contact:] Shh!

[B stares at him for a moment, taking in A's shushing, and goes back to the program. He reads it silently, mouthing the words as he reads. He entertains Chuck Ductman's bio. When he finishes,]

B

Looks as if Chuck's a pretty busy guy.

A

[Seeking finality:] Yeah.

[Pause. B keeps up the conversation.]

B

Looks as if he's, ya know, doin a lot, he's actin a lot, doin a lot of plays.

A

[Peeved:] Yeah, he is.

[Pause. B persists.]

B

What's he got here, WHOA HO HO!, he's DONE *Charley's Aunt*, he's done *Major Barbara*,
he's done *Fefu* AND *HER FRIENDS*, Hm!, he's done *Juno and her PayCOCK*--

A

[Wryly:] Uh-huh.

B

He's even bagged *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*.

[Pause.]

Mm, *Top Girls* musta been REAL GOOD . . .

A

[Whispering tersely:] Would you please SHUT UP with your asinine comments I'm trying to WATCH A PLAY THANK YOU.

HERALD

That's all. That's all there is for the telling.

[Pause.]

CHORUS

Your news shows me that I was mistaken.
But you're never too old to learn a new lesson.
Clytemnestra, she should be first to hear the whole story.
The leftovers and scraps of it satisfy me.

B

What kind of name is "Clytemnestra"? Sounds like a vaginal disease. "You got gonorrhea? Well, I got clytemnestra."

CLYTEMNESTRA

[Sounding like a dead cow:]
Mutterings like that made me feel stupid.
I went on with the sacrifice in spite of their moaning.

B

She sounds like a dead cow. Someone get her an Advil.

A

[Whispering snippedly:] AlRight, that's the last straw. SIR, you can kindly SHUT UP or we can cause a commotion right here and I can *make you* SHUT UP. This may not be your regular VENUE, but you can at least show some *common courtesy* and SHUT UP while I'm watching this play. Wait, I have an idea! Why don't you *sleep* until Chuck Ductman comes on and I'll WAKE YOU UP when he comes on? Huh?, What about that?, What do ya think about that??

B

No-can-do, nope, but thanks for the suggestion, Hmmm, sleeping sounds good, but No, Sorry. Gotta keep alert to the activities around, ya know, all the little movements people do, yeah, cuz if I ever learned anything, TRUST NO ONE, don't trust *anyone*, anyone could be conspiring against you, part of a plot to hit you off, uh, or, uh, kill your parolee, cuz you get that sometimes, ya know, Yeah.

[A stares harshly at B, communicating that his time to talk has well ended.]

A

[Still whispering, With emphasis:] I want to watch this in peace. I want to watch this with no more interruptions I don't care if you're not following it, I don't care if you don't know what they're saying or what they're doing, I want to watch this because I want to watch my *friend* and I came for entertainment. If you have a problem with that, If you can't handle that I don't want to discuss the life and times of a parole officer, you've chosen a BAD TIME to make a parole visit.

[B just looks back at him.]

Now, if you have nothing further? [Looks for something further,] I will return to my play. Nothingfurther?-Nothingfurther.

[B still looks at A as A re-adjusts to view the play.]

HERALD

No-one knows anything, at least not us men,
only the sun that looks down from the sky.

CHORUS

How did the storm start? Why did it? When?
Was it godgrudge, and if a grudge, why?

[B reaches into his sportcoat and casually pulls out a gun. He holds it low and admires it for his entertainment. He does not flash it around. B removes from his outside jacket pocket his white handkerchief and polishes off the barrel with it. He runs the gun-barrel between his two fingers, respectfully. A has not noticed. B looks up to the stage and watches the action.]

HERALD

[...] a mountainous death-toll,
with anguish for all in the rolls of the fallen,
the best lads in their tonlads tangled and landed
and gashed by the flesh-hook, the fish-gaff of Ares,
gaff-flukes and grapnel barbs gory with fleshbits--
if he comes so overbalanced with trouble
then that's the time to start hymning the Furies.

B

Cool!

A

[Hypersensitive:] Shh!--hhH!!!

[A just sees the gun and inhales his Shh!, sounding rewind. He quickly darts his eyes back and forth from the gun in B's lap to B's face; B simply has an expression of smiling--relaxed control. A has frozen. B jerks the gun suddenly up to chest-level, to tease A. A gasps with a start. B chuckles at the situation.]

B

[Like Mr. Rodgers:] Go ahead, Mister "I want to watch the play," Go ahead and cause that commotion you were all so *eager* to start. I don't mind.

[A still shares looks between the gun and B's face. B turns his head slightly, listening to the dialogue.]

HERALD

You know when a collie not used to its charges
scatters the daft sheep every direction,
colliding, collapsing, that kind of [Accentuate:] chaos ...

B

[Back to A:] What's the matter?

A

I hate guns.

B

Oh, that's too bad. They're much more entertaining than a play. They can really make an *impact* on a person. About, I'd say, TEN TIMES more of an impact than any play.

A

[Nearly stuttering:] Could you please put that away? I'm terrified of guns. I mean, nothing's going on, no one's doing anything, Why do you need it out?

B

[With a chuckle:] You're just a wee bit *nervous*, aren't you?

A

I thought you said you didn't have a gun.

B

What I say earlier? TRUST NO ONE. Anyone could tell you anything and it could be a lie.

[Pause. Ominous.]

A

You're not Chuck's parole officer, are you.

B

No.

[Pause.]

I'm his dentist.

[Lights fade quickly.]

Second interlude.

EARLIER. After the first interlude.

[Dark on A & B, frozen still. Lights rise, illuminating the earlier path from the *Oresteia* stage. The same MAN as before enters along the path, this time a bandanna blindfolding him. He again carefully measures his footsteps, exploring with his arms extended. He looks only slightly clumsy. He still counts.]

MAN

[Beginning offstage:] [...] 4... 5... 6... 7... 8... 9... 10... [...]

[Once he thinks he has reached his landing point, he peaks from underneath his bandanna, excited that he has hit his mark. He covers his eyes again, turns. Extending his arms, he takes measured steps toward the exit and counts backward until he hits his offstage origin.]

MAN

[...] 10... 9... 8... 7... 6... 5... 4... 3... 2... 1!

[Path lights fade out quickly on "1!" as lights on A & B rise slowly.]

EVEN LATER. Around the fourth hour.

[B sleeps, his one hand gripping the gun but concealed by his sportcoat. His head rests heavily on A's shoulder. A looks as if his initial intolerance an hour ago of this head positioning has faded, and does not pay attention to it anymore. A sits erectly in his chair, engaged by the onstage action.]

CHORUS

Both bloodblades are now drawn out
for the final killing bout.

Either Clytemnestra's cleaver

finishes the clan for ever

or Agamemnon's son can light
the beacon, freedom, in black night.

In the blood-bout two to one,
back up Agamemnon's son.

[Sound effect of a football play. A tackle. Then,]

AEGISTHUS

Aaaaggghhh!

[B awakens with a start, ripping out his weapon.]

B

[Disoriented:] Wha?Wha?Wha?!

[A, startled, suddenly looks at B and notes the gun. Fear comes over A again. Then, a spontaneous fearlessness.]

A

[Taking charge:] Alright, Move over. You're sitting where I am, I'm not gonna put up with this trapped feeling anymore. Move over, I get the aisle seat.

B

[Groggily:] Wha?Huh?

A

Get up.

[As A rises to a crouched stand, B mindlessly moves to where A has sat all along. A now sits where B had sat.]

CHORUS

Listen! Whose was that cry? The clan's in the balance.
But better we women withdraw till it's settled.
Whatever the outcome we must seem to be blameless.
One way or another the battle's decided.

[B looks at his watch and sees four hours have passed.]

B

Has Chuck Ductman come out yet?, Did I miss him?

A

No, he's just about to come out.

B

Will you point him out to me when he comes out?

A

He's Pylades. His name'll be on his jersey.

SERVANT

[Overly emotional:]

Help! Help! Everyone's deaf there's no point in shouting.

Deaf or asleep. But where's Clytemnestra?

Her head's the next one due for the hackblock.

The axeshaft's poised in the clenched fist of bloodright.

[B looks well awake, poised for Clytemnestra's entrance.]

CLYTEMNESTRA

Who's that shouting for help in the palace?

SERVANT

The dead, the dead are hacking the living down.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ah, your riddle's by no means baffling to me.

We're to be killed by the same guile we killed by.

Get me my man-axe, my king-cleaver. Quick!

B

[Adrenalized, To himself:] Pylades Pylades Pylades Pylades Pylades Pylades Pylades [...]

CLYTEMNESTRA

We'll put to the test who's victor, who's vanquished.

A

Enter Pylades.

[The power goes out. Pitch black. A moment, then the *Oresteia* actors continue with their lines, with some confusion.]

B

What the *fuck*???

ORESTES

It's you I'm after. He's had enough the one inside.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ah, dead, dead! My shield--

ORESTES

Pylades! What shall I do? Shame, pity, awe,--

[The sound of direct, measured footsteps marching from the *Oresteia* stage to the row in front of A and B. The darkness does not affect their directness. The approaching figure speaks:]

THE FIGURE

[With a bellowing vengeance:]

Remember Apollo and all that you swore

Give grudge to mankind but not to the godclan!

[Gunshot from the figure. Immediate female scream. A half-second: another Gunshot, from B. The figure falls with a solid thud. Pause. Sounds of scurrying out of a seat, tripping, then desperate running toward the exit sign. Another female scream. Brief silence. Power comes on, including the house lights.]

[A sits slumped low in his chair, clutching his chest with his hand, hand and shirt covered in blood. *In shock*. In a football uniform, the figure lies on his stomach on the floor, a wound through the back of his jersey. His jersey bears the name "PYLADES." His gun lies out of reach on the ground, fallen out of his hand. B has gone. A second after the power comes on, multiple screams of different duration and shrill. A shifts, then speaks.]

A

[Shocked, Struggling, Bleeding:] can ... can someone call a doctor?

[A looks down at his wound, then at the word "PYLADES" on the jersey. A slumps over. Screams continue.]

[Lights fade, very, very slowly, with one dying scream.]