

ITALIAN PLAYWRIGHTS PROJECT

**THE ORIGIN OF THE WORLD
INTERIOR CONVERSATION PIECE**

L'origine del mondo, ritratto di un interno

written by LUCIA CALAMARO
translated by JANE HOUSE ©



ITALIAN
PLAYWRIGHTS
PROJECT



Martin E. Segal Theatre Center Publications
Frank Hentschker, Executive Director

New York © 2018

PART ONE: MELANCHOLY LADY AT THE REFRIGIRATOR

PROLOGUE: THERE EXISTS A SPECIAL BREED

The mother (DARIA) is attractively dressed, hair very well groomed, bright red lipstick on her pale, washed-out face, hospital style shoes; she enters into a dark place, the kitchen. She is muttering.

Yes, I know
However
there exists a special breed
one that's different
different from mine, it seems to me
A special breed of
. . . lucky people
I'd say.

People who are together
who can take the bull by the horns
who are far sighted
who get a move on
who know how to live in this world.

And use these
and other similar expressions
adjust reality to their own needs
and one must admit to their credit
have always or almost always
been aware of what those needs are.

A special breed that knows
one that's perhaps not really learned
but at least knowing or know-it-all.

Then there's Us, see,
the others
almost everyone:
those who are confused
indecisive

melancholy
apathetic

lazy
those who are alone
the strange ones
the timid ones and the just okay ones
those who are deluded, disillusioned
the cynics
those ideologically and metabolically drugged
and then in addition
those who always feel exhausted, exhausted from the start
in Latin, the word is “fessus.”

So then we . . .
so then . . . We.

We what?
We nothing, that’s just it.
So then . . . I’ll have a little snack.

She opens the fridge. The light that filters out from the fridge is the only light illuminating the following scene.

I. THE REFRIGERATOR

She reaches the fridge, opens it, comments on the contents, those that might meet her fleeting needs . . . jams, cheese, frozen snacks etc. A bit of everything but not enough to satisfy her in her particular state of mind at this moment.

DARIA *(opens the fridge and says nothing for a second)*

What should I eat? . . .

What appeals to me? Mmmm, I'd like something good . . .

(Pause)

It could be something a bit sweet, a bit salty. I don't know . . . A sort of mash . . . Parmigiana *(takes a piece, chews it, puts it back in)*, good, a little dry, with ketchup maybe . . . not properly closed, this is moldy too, pointless for them to say "keep refrigerated after opening," usually gets moldy anyway. What's this . . . a couple of knots *(sniffs)* of mozzarella still good, the mozzarella is fresh, it's filling *(speaks with her mouth full)*, has an almost sweet taste, a clean taste, and the knotted part has more consistency, you have to chew it more. Mmm, it needs . . . some bitter orange marmalade, no, compote of eggplant and truffles for pasta, who on earth bought this? Figs in brandy, *(reads the label)* "ideal when combined with semi-matured cheeses," that sounds like organic agri-tourism talking, my dear, and then it's not very good *(samples it)* really . . . although since there's nothing that appeals to me, at least it's sweet, a camembert would be good with it, but here's a Digestive biscuit, the last one *(munches it)*, mmm another one that goes soft fast, inedible, half a baby tomato, a little black carrot, a dish of grapes . . . etc. etc. . . . *(etcetera; this sequence can be expanded at length according to the food that's in the fridge)*. There was that teensy bit of provolone, I'm sure that little slice, I'd hidden it here or else: Pathetic! It's like Biafra in here . . . bread in a box . . . ah, here it is, with spicy Chinese sauce should satisfy my craving some . . . a strong taste . . . *(chews muttering disappointed)* how is it possible to shop for food every day and there's never anything exciting . . . Ah look, little chocolates from the duty-free shop. *(Reads the description on the side, in mangled French)* "Ces délicieux bâtons de Chocolat fourré à l'eau de vie Suisse de Poire Williams." Mother of God, these French, so stylish, and all it says is "little chocolates with pear liqueur"! anyway when it comes right down to it for me chocolate's not so . . . however *(cracks it open and immediately dribbles the liqueur onto the floor)* what an idiot, it said right there . . .

The DAUGHTER, FEDERICA, enters.

DAUGHTER: . . . (*improvised text*)

DARIA: What are you doing here? (*Gives her the once over.*)

DAUGHTER: Oh, you thought I was acting weird . . .

DARIA: Of course, you're not invisible you know! And wearing that coat . . .

DAUGHTER: I was cold.

DARIA: It's late, do you know the time! Off to bed . . .

DAUGHTER: Right now?

DARIA: Right now. Stand up straight. Normal straight. What's wrong?

DAUGHTER: No nothing, it's just that I was over there and I thought I'm coming over here more, so that we'd be a bit more . . . I'd feel a bit less . . . What's Mamma doing at this time of night. I thought. Come on don't make a face, I'll keep you company (*silence*), I didn't want to be alone . . .

DARIA: Look I'm all on edge, just because you're here now I can't just stop doing what I was doing to dedicate myself to you!

DAUGHTER: No, but I didn't even ask you for anything.

DARIA: Yes, yes, you all say that but then, the guest, and the person who enters a room after you is by convention your guest, ooohhhh . . . especially if it's your daaaughter, (*the daughter asks her for a dictionary definition*),¹ oooh yes, it's a sacred duty, she needs care, warmth, attention. And I'm feeling really out of it so look it's the dead of night, it's past my mothering hours, I guess I'm on strike, you're really not on my mind, adios.

DAUGHTER: Look, a light, Mamma.

DARIA: Look, it's the fridge. (*She closes it.*) Now it's night, it's dark, go over there, to bed, eyes wide open, sheep . . .

DAUGHTER: Ah! You got all dressed up, you look like the lady in that film the other night, *Marnie* . . .

DARIA (*reopens the fridge*): You think? I never know when to wear it . . . why do you say that, am I usually badly dressed?

DAUGHTER: No, not badly, but you're all uncoordinated.

DARIA: Hey, they're my clothes for home, comfy ones.

DAUGHTER: Exactly, but this is beautiful! It's just, the shoes . . . they're a bit . . . well.

DARIA: They're house shoes.

DAUGHTER: But they're ugly.

DARIA: Well, they're like yours.

DAUGHTER: That's right! (*Thinks*) But, sorry, who bought them for us?

DARIA: Who do you think buys things . . . I do . . . on sale.

DAUGHTER: They're comfortable though.

DARIA: Exactly. Practical. For home.

DAUGHTER: Then you're all coiffed with a mushroom thingy . . . you look good.

DARIA: The chignon! It picks me up . . . It's that if I don't do my hair I feel dowdy.

The daughter asks for a dictionary definition. Pause.

DAUGHTER: Mamma, so what are we going to do?

DARIA: See? You want me to pay attention to you. I'm hungry. Are you hungry?

DAUGHTER: No!

DARIA: So then just do your own thing on your own, because if I tell you to do something you won't do it or you'll do something else, a person should know

how to keep busy in their own home, this is not a dorm, this is a place to live.
(Pause) There were some strawberries weren't there?

DARIA remains at the fridge. FEDERICA begins reading from a white booklet, in the tone of a Narrator. (FEDERICA "reads" the entire following text as a basso continuo;² DARIA superimposes her voice in the underlined sections.)

F For weeks I wander about the house with some difficulty, slowly, as if questioning its authenticity, as if I were somewhere else anyway and not there, as if the territory were unknown. **D** Inhospitable anyway. It's being closed in that gives me that feeling. **F** There's hostility in the air. I move from my bed to the computer to the fridge to the computer. I open it, close it reopen it, there's not much to eat, **D** I'm basically not hungry, it's not knowing what to do. **F** I move from one place to another, I think, **D** but not much really, no definite thought when I'm wandering about the house, **F** without tidying up, **D** I never try to tidy up, I should do it of course, and dust, but I don't consider them my jobs, ones that I could do, I've never done them, **F** modalities unknown. I go back to the fridge, **D** nothing good, but all the same I gnaw on a piece of cheese, it's something, what's needed is something quick, something filling, which gives the sensation of filling up the thing that's in there, in my thorax I think, but I'm not sure, although in thinking it over distractedly, because everything has this modality of absence³ when I'm inside the house, I realize that the food isn't getting to my breast. **F** So then what can fill one up? **D** Meanwhile I'll keep on chewing, who knows what. (DARIA closes the fridge, it's dark.) **F** I go back to the computer: if only there were some wonderful letter to answer but that's rare, it takes a lot of effort for someone to write and tell you things, **D** all I receive is invitation after invitation after invitation after invitation to go somewhere and see someone doing something, which basically doesn't interest me at all. (DARIA reopens the fridge.) **F** I go back to the fridge, I open it, I look in, I leave it open, I look more carefully, **D** I think I'll make myself another coffee, it doesn't matter what time it is, **F** I put on the coffee machine, I go back to the fridge, **D** I never know whether I missed something, something important, something that would give me some pleasure, **F** I stare at the food that's in there, the eggs, yogurts, candy bars, the butter I adore I stay like that, mesmerized, spaced out, jams and jellies, there are so many, all half empty, plum, black cherry, most of them moldy, I open the jars and sniff them, in the hope that there'll be something, **D** or someone, while I'm standing there something tells me that my problem is hiding in there, right inside there,

but I've never discovered what it is, in all these years of my obsession with the fridge, I've never come face to face with the problem; I feel cold **F** well, maybe close it, **D** the coffee is ready, I reopen, I take out the milk, because I never drink it black at home, it's almost all gone, I must remember to buy some more, and toilet paper too, **F** I arrange things, big cup with a little plate, hallway, I go to bed, I try to read SavinioFofiValeryArendt⁴ but almost right away I feel sleepy, I doze off, it's sunny outside, it's two or three in the afternoon, I've nothing to do, it's happened again, I've gone back to square one: I no longer exist. I'll have to start all over again from the beginning.

DARIA stretches out on the floor in front of the fridge, the fridge is open.

DAUGHTER: Are you asleep? . . . she's asleep . . . we never talk (*moves toward the fridge, barefoot*)

DARIA: What are you doing?

DAUGHTER: I'm closing the fridge.

DARIA: Oh no or else we'll be in total darkness . . . Barefoot? Watch that you don't get an electric shock, get me a cigarette.

The DAUGHTER looks for one in the fridge, finds a little ball, plays with it.

DARIA: The cigarettes!

DAUGHTER (*messes about with the ball*): I can't find them.

DARIA: Here they are. (*gets them herself; the daughter leaves the ball in the fridge*)

DAUGHTER: Sorry but why are you lying in front of the fridge?

DARIA: It's the coolest spot in the house.

The DAUGHTER returns to her seat, humming; the MOTHER smokes, still stretched out.

DAUGHTER: Let's talk about birds again . . .

DARIA: Please! We talked about them yesterday already, their reproduction, migration, plumage . . .

DAUGHTER: But do you know how they make their nests? It blew me away, sort of sad though . . . they push with their bodies, their breasts, (*begins miming how a bird pushes with its breast*) they crush the material to make it soft, squash it from inside, push with their breasts and circle around, and it's the breast that really gives the nest its circular shape.

DARIA: How come you know all these things?

DAUGHTER: I know them . . . I've read about them. Anyway it's by constantly circling and pushing the sides all around that it manages to make a nice circular rim. It's the female, you know, Mamma, it's the female that circles around, she's really strong.

DARIA: So that's what you thought, and what does the male do?

DAUGHTER: The male looks for things, pieces of straw, grass, twigs, he goes away and comes back and she circles around.

DARIA: Ah poor little thing and it doesn't do her any harm?

DAUGHTER: No, maybe a little, maybe she gets a little tired, but it's because it's difficult, there's not a single piece of straw that exists in nature in the rounded shape that's needed for a nest, so the book says. (*Getting excited*) It's the female who pushes, it says, thousands upon thousands of times, once, twice, and again and then again and she circles around and pushes, and circles and then . . .

DARIA: Okay, I get it.

DAUGHTER: Then it says, "constant repeated thrusting of the breast," what does that mean?

DARIA: Like this (*DARIA lies down and repeatedly raises and lowers her breastbone as she speaks, as if she were having a convulsion*), I think the pressing brings on palpitations, leads to hyperventilation, she ends up totally bewildered . . . Mother of God what an effort the poor winged creatures make for such a wretched hideout. (*She raises herself up.*) Well, I sure didn't know all that.

DAUGHTER: Do you know how peacocks make love?

DARIA: No and I don't want to know, thank you.

DAUGHTER: It's a terrible thing, first of all the male puts his foot on the neck of the female . . .

DARIA: No! ENOUGH. ENOUGH, I said.

Silence.

DAUGHTER: What's the matter now?

DARIA: Nothing.

DAUGHTER: Now you're smoking.

DARIA: Yes.

DAUGHTER: So you feel satisfied?

DARIA: Mmyes.

DAUGHTER: So why are you making a sad face?

DARIA: It's my thoughts.

DAUGHTER: So don't think them then, and it'll go away.

DARIA: What?

DAUGHTER: The sad face.

DARIA: Why should it? No, tell me why. Look at me, yes, I have a sad face, I'm in my own home, it's nighttime, and I can have whatever look I want on my face. It's not about you, you need to understand that: people don't always stay satisfied, especially if they're alone with themselves. I don't know, if I'm outside of course it's best to be happy, see, for a quiet life, I agree with that, take care not to spill over into the personal, but here inside, having patience I don't like it, I don't like it, and sadness is okay, you try to push it back but then you surrender to it, sorrow can be triumphant, for a while, but it passes

eventually, so . . . And then remember . . . ta pathémata mathémata . . . that's Herodotus, you know. No you don't know, from suffering comes knowledge, of course you don't . . .

DAUGHTER (*tries to interrupt her*): Mamma . . . how long does a cigarette last?

DARIA: Yes, and that's what my aunt Brunhilda used to say, in her own way, "the more you suffer, the more you know," she used to say that, the poor thing . . . Sorry what were you saying?

DAUGHTER: How long does a cigarette last?

DARIA (*irritated*): I don't know, how should I know, I've never . . . (*calming down*) Let's test it out . . . so you count . . . out loud and I'll put it here and we'll wait, and meanwhile I'll put my head in the freezer so we can see if the cold will do any good at least . . . (*with her head in the freezer*) I want to feel well, I pay her and she makes me feel well, that's all I ask . . .

DAUGHTER (*rises as she counts*): 1 . . . 2 . . . 7 . . . 4 . . . 9 . . .

The light suddenly goes on: everything is immersed in a white light.

FEDERICA sits down again and puts on the facial mask of the psychoanalyst: clenched teeth, toothy smile, closed eyes with pupils drawn on the eyelids. Her speech is serious and slow when she begins talking.

DAUGHTER/ANALYST: . . . the doctoor of the woooord always smiles.
(*Pause*)

You, you Daria, you have lost your way again . . . Let us say that you, you Daria, have a confrontational modality when connecting with the world . . . Which makes it all the more difficult. Painful . . . And . . . an underlying depressive state, which however sometimes does not remain as such, which tends to make one fall into depression and falling into depression is not the same as having an underlying . . . depressive state.

DARIA (*sitting on her lap*): May I?

DAUGHTER/ANALYST: That is something rare, Daria . . . an underlying depressive state that won't go away, that never disappears once it's formed, but can be managed, but that's not your case, at this time . . . Look, I believe that you finally, although painfully, but it couldn't be otherwise, that you are freeing yourself from the feeling of death which has dwelled within you ever

since birth. *(Pause)* And even though you've been retracing that grief, the original one, I'd like to reassure you: from here on, from today, it will never really be the same grief, it cannot recur with the same intensity as formerly, don't you agree? The original grief will not be repeated.

DARIA: Yes, about losing myself periodically, about perpetual conflict, yes . . . explain one thing to me . . . What exactly is depression?

DAUGHTER/ANALYST: Yes, Daria, ask me any question you want . . . well then . . . depression is like being in perpetual mourning . . . it's like always weeping over a death, am I making myself clear? . . . I'm unable to come up with any other images at this precise moment. Do you follow me?

DARIA: This thing about conflict, it bothers me, some dear people, people who are close to me, people who I really believe wish me well, they tell me that I snap at them, that I turn nasty, that I'm frightening.

DAUGHTER/ANALYST: In what way, what do you do?

DARIA: Well I scream, I yell, I get all wound up, my nerves get all jangled, I blow everything out of proportion, everything becomes gigantic, a deep voice comes to me, a really fierce sound, it's somewhat fake, not completely but somewhat, it's all external agitation, as if my hackles were rising, you know, but there's only skin, no claws, swollen skin, maybe it's not obvious that it's not real even though I'm doing it, but it's all a scene, it's something that runs on automatic, something I've had since I was a little girl, and I'm not in control, it's as if it were part of the sympathetic system . . .

DAUGHTER/ANALYST: Ah, the sympathetic system, the old days . . .

DARIA: Hackles have their own life, they become erect to instill fear.

DAUGHTER/ANALYST: And why do you want to instill fear, Daria?

DARIA: Because I am, I was, I am, frightened, I think. I'm often frightened, scared, you know, of so many things, especially with regard to people, and so I defend myself and first of all I instill fear and when I do that, people either stiffen up or sometimes do what I tell them, or else no one obeys me they don't listen to me, they don't listen to me . . . And you're not listening to me either!

DARIA gets up and turns toward the fridge.

FEDERICA jumps up and opens her eyes, the DAUGHTER is back.

DAUGHTER: Yes, I am listening to you, even when I'm not listening to you I'm listening to you. But right now I don't know what else to say, I don't know what to do. Now I'm hungry.

DARIA: Come on then. Eat. *(The Mother makes various suggestions to entice her DAUGHTER to eat: "do you want this, would you like that, what about this," but she doesn't like anything, it's always "no," her Mother gets fed up.)* Fine, so you're not hungry, I'm going to bed, are you coming?

DAUGHTER: I'll be there.

(Now alone, she rages against the fridge: slaps, thumps, kicks, shakes, then gives it even harder blows.) (To the fridge) Does that hurt? (Yells inside it) Does it hurt!?? (Listens, moves away.) No, objects don't suffer. *(Then she repents, strokes the fridge.)* I'm sorry pal, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean it, we are still pals, aren't we? Who was it who always used to say that . . . pals . . . who was it spoke like that? But of course, my uncle Aldo.