

## SYNOPSIS: THE JUDAS TREE

2 Acts; 22 Scenes

TIME: 1958

PLACE: a suburb of Los Angeles

STAGE SETTING: A courtroom and several locations referred to during the trial

CHARACTERS: The Judas Tree can be performed by an ensemble cast of ten:

(three men, four women, and a chorus of three singers.)

ARTURO SALVIA, a retired detective; mid-forties

ELENA ABRIL FIERO, an alluring landlady; early forties

WILLIAM THORNFIELD, a private detective; mid-forties

LILLIAN BRACKEN, the prosecuting attorney; early thirties

TERRANCE COLLARD, the defense attorney; late forties

DOCTOR IRIS VALERIAN, a psychiatrist; late forties

VINNIE PIMPINELLA, a bartender; late fifties

EARL LUPINE, a war veteran, late-forties

WENDY YARROW, a runaway; seventeen

RITA CATALPA, an alcoholic; mid-fifties

DOUGLAS MULBERRY, a gambler, mid-sixties

PLOT SYNOPSIS: Arturo Salvia, a traumatized detective who has been rendered mute, is witnessing the trial of his lover, Elena Fiero, a Chicana landlady. She has been accused of murdering her tenants and burying them in her garden as sacrificial tributes to the earth goddess, La Madreguera. As the prosecution presents its case, Arturo recalls how he was hired to investigate the disappearance of a colleague's niece whose last address was Elena's boarding house. Arturo soon finds himself smitten by Elena's alluring beauty and enthusiasm for life. Their romance blossoms until Elena poisons a sickly tenant, then enacts an elaborate burial rite that is witnessed by another boarder who confides in Arturo. After he unearths the decaying corpse, Arturo confronts Elena who claims her actions were merciful since the tenant was soon fated to degenerate and die. Because Elena is deeply influenced by ancient Mayan rituals, she believes that even the basest life can be transformed by the redemption inherent in flowers and trees. Arturo agrees to keep the burial a secret, but feels compelled to dig elsewhere, and is horrified to discover more corpses. Elena is arrested and a lawyer hired to support an insanity defense. When Elena discovers that Arturo is responsible for her arrest, she curses him, condemning him to life as Judas tree. Devastated, his heart hardens and he abrogates humanity for the life of a sentient tree. While Arturo revels in a new appreciation of nature, he perceives Elena and the society that created her in a critical light, and dreams of spreading his seeds to reforest the Earth with majestic trees. The Judas Tree attempts to weave together romantic and ritual elements, while exploring the historical, political, and psychological forces that give rise to bizarre criminal behavior.

