

SYNOPSIS: *THE JUDAS TREE*

a full length one act in 21 scenes

TIME: 1958

PLACE: a suburb of Los Angeles

STAGE SETTING: A courtroom, a garden and a boarding house

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 middle-aged detective

ELENA ABRIL FIERO, an alluring middle-aged landlady

WILLIAM THORNFIELD, a middle-aged private detective

LILLIAN BRACKEN, the prosecuting attorney, mid-thirties

TERRANCE COLLARD, the defense attorney, mid-thirties

DOCTOR IRIS VALERIAN, a middle-aged psychiatrist

VINNIE PIMPINELLA, a middle-aged bartender

EARL LUPINE, a middle-aged war veteran

WENDY YARROW, a runaway; seventeen

RITA CATALPA, a middle-aged cafeteria server

DOUGLAS MULBERRY, a middle-aged gambler

SUGGESTED DOUBLING: William Thornfield / Earl Lupine; Rita Catalpa / Doctor Valerian; Vinnie Pimpinella / Douglas Mulberry / Terrance Collard

PLOT SYNOPSIS: Arturo Salvia, a traumatized detective who has been rendered mute, is witnessing the trial of his lover, Elena Abril Fiero. 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 seductive 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 destined 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 the life cycles of 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 cultures that created her in a critical light, and dreams of spreading seeds to reforest the Earth with majestic trees. *The Judas Tree* attempts to weave romantic and ritual elements, while exploring the historical, political, and psychological forces that can give rise to criminal behavior.