

The Cup of Zarathustra

For Saturday after Ascension

Written 1962

Cast

SALOME	a large, mighty lady with broad face and grey hair, dark blue tunic, light blue wrap, over her head to below her shoulders
MARTHA	yellow long tunic, rust-coloured wrap, from her head over her shoulders
THOMAS	dark hair, low brow, beard, he is broad-built and stocky, green tunic with brown wrap; he speaks rather too loudly and his laughter sounds like a bark
JAMES	brown beard, strong, blue tunic, rusty coloured wrap
JOHN	youthful, shy, beardless, bright red tunic, red wrap
FIRST MAIDSERVANT	
SECOND MAIDSERVANT	
FIRST MAN	} short garments, armed with clubs
SECOND MAN	
VEILED FIGURE	
VOICE (of Veiled Figure)	the voice comes from afar, and is high and young

In the house of Salome, the mother of Zebedee's two sons, John and James. It is evening of the first Easter Sunday. Stillness, twilight and peace rest over the whole scene. From the street at times the steps of passers-by sound; occasionally there is also a loud voice.

A dark room; in the centre background a broad large easy-chair, above it a round window through which the last evening twilight fills the room. To right and left of the easy-chair are some chairs and stools; at the right wall is an upholstered bench, next to it a chest, above it a square window without panes, showing delicate evening light. In the centre foreground is a large heavy table with a wooden bowl with fruit, a jug, some cups and a basket with unleavened bread, as well as three oil-lamps in high stands; one is lit.

SALOME sits in the easy-chair, and to her left, on a stool, sits MARTHA. When the curtain opens both are in conversation.

MARTHA:

Who shall fathom, who understand
 What happened today?
 Can you grasp what my sister saw
 When the appearance met her
 At the grave of the Lord?
 Who was it, who asked her
 Not to touch him,
 Because he was not yet
 Ascended to Heaven?

SALOME: You know that Magdalene
 Used to often have visions
 And was never afraid
 To take them for reality.
 But we know
 That the life she led
 Often confused her thinking
 And thrust her feeling
 Into crazy distortion.
 What do you want?

Do you expect
The dead to rise again and live?
MARTHA: Did not my brother
Rise again
When he was already dead
And lay buried three days long?
Until the Lord then called upon him
And he stepped out
From his grave-cavern
Wrapped in a shroud,
To the dread and amazement
Of all who saw it?
SALOME: O Martha!
Your brother Lazarus was not dead.
He was, like Magdalene,
So given up
To the storm of his passions
And the excess of his ideas
That he forgot about daily existence
And this earthly world.
He languished in the fiery breath
Of his uncurbed feelings.
With that he deteriorated,
Faded away
Into a kind of temple-sleep.
And you and your sister,
You just believed
That he had died.
MARTHA: Yet the Lord awakened him!
Was it not so?
SALOME: Yes, in His great love
He perceived
Lazarus's dimming consciousness
And called him once again
Back into life.

He has set him free
Not from death
But from wanting to die.
MARTHA: O Salome,
In the clarity of your thinking,
In the relentless composure
Of your mind,
Every riddle finds its answer.
Yet tell me:
Where is the Lord?
Now, at this hour?
SALOME: The Lord?
His body is dead.
The soul returned
Into Abraham's bosom.
His spirit, however,
Rests in Jehovah's hand.
He brings tidings to it
From the earthly land.
His spirit is speaking,
Like the spirit of every human being,
Into the ear of the divine hand
The words he heard here
When he was still alive.
MARTHA: Yet was he not
Also the Messiah?
SALOME: Him, the Messiah?
He who died on the Cross?
You're wrong!
He wanted to be the Messiah,
But His time didn't want it.
And also His will was too weak
To accomplish that.
MARTHA: Was he not the one
Of whom He Himself said

That it was He?

O Salome,

May one think that?

[There is knocking at the door – twice short, twice long and once more short-long. MARTHA and SALOME, startled, turn their heads to the door.]

SALOME: Who is it?

THOMAS *[from outside]*: Can I speak to you,
Mother Salome?

SALOME: Come, step in.

[turning to Martha] It is Thomas Didymus,
He too seeks advice and help.

THOMAS *[entering]*: My greetings!

And thanks that I may also come.

[turning to Martha] Do you too seek

Advice and reassurance

In these most difficult days

When doubt is gnawing in our breast

And lack of faith

Paralysing the limbs?

SALOME *[to Thomas]*: Are you desperate and forsaken?

I thought you were

In the circle of the other disciples.

Have you fled away from there?

MARTHA *[to Thomas]*: Yes, I sought advice.

I came to Salome

And asked her to explain to me

What happened early today

To my sister,

When at the grave –

Alone by herself –

She beheld the Lord.

THOMAS: I've heard the tale

From her own mouth.

But who can tell

Whether it's the truth?

SALOME: For Magdalene it was truth;

But only for her.

For ourselves,

Who are not confused and bewildered,

Another truth matters.

We know that death –

Final and unalterable –

Is the entrance into a new life.

Why should the gate of Heaven

Which Death opens to us

Be suddenly and unexpectedly

A gateway to the Earth?

MARTHA: With your words, Salome,

All the darkness is lit up.

It becomes understandable and clear.

Thank you

For your advice and your help.

[She stamps three times on the floor.

Steps are heard and two MAIDSERVANTS

enter. They carry a grey mantle, which

they hang around Martha.]

MARTHA: Farewell, Thomas,

And you too, Salome.

The way is far

And I want still

To reach Bethany today.

[MARTHA exits with the MAIDSERVANTS.]

SALOME *[following her with her eyes]*:

How simple-minded she is!

How believing, how trustful,

How stupid!

And yet she's the support

Of both other sisters.

Through her alone
 Is their life bearable.
 She holds together
 What Lazarus and Magdalene
 Would just squander and waste.

[turning to Thomas]

But tell me,

What d'you want here in my home?

THOMAS: Me? I want release;

Give me knowledge

And once again the certainty in life

Which I have so entirely lost

Since that dark night

When together with the other apostles

I betrayed the Lord

In the garden of Gethsemane.

Yes, my soul is roaming to and fro,

Guilty and bewildered,

In the borderland

Between death and life.

Do you know what it means

That Simon Jonas,

That your sons,

That all of us

Did not withstand

His having to die

And then scattered

Like straw in the wind?

The power of death

Has cloven us asunder.

Love was not strong enough.

And so He went to the Cross

And died – for us.

But we?

We who were upraised, loved,

Led and taken on by Him,

Where are we now?

Lost and forsaken

We stand together!

The herd without a shepherd,

The clouds without a light,

The hands without a heart.

*[He works himself ever more into his despair,
 shouting at Salome]*

But you, with your calm and loftiness,

Always knowing the truth,

You sit and look and smile.

Don't you then notice

How my heart is now

Perishing in torture?

Can't you understand it?

No, no,

You remain gazing!

SALOME: Why your outbreak, Thomas?

Don't you know yet

That understanding doesn't deceive?

Have you forgotten

That we are held by Ananke's law?

Have you quite lost the insight

That placing, sitting,

Laying down the law and possessing

Are the fateful finger of Ananke?

What do you want?

We are standing in the power

Of thought and of destiny.

And our friend

Who wanted to become the Messiah

Died on the cross of destiny,

Condemned by the law of the Jews

And by the stoa of Rome.

THOMAS: And his love?

His light? His words?

Where are they now?

[At this moment there is loud knocking at the lower house door. SALOME gives a start, takes THOMAS by the hand and pushes him into a partitioned area hidden behind her easy chair. She then draws the chair again in front of it and sits down. Repeated knocking, footsteps approach, knocking at the door of the room, which is immediately flung open. Two Men enter.]

FIRST MAN: The Chief Priests

Have sent us to you

To ask where your sons

John and James are.

SECOND MAN: We want an answer,

Brief and conclusive.

SALOME: My sons?

They are both

Where the law

Compels them to be:

In the room of the Passover meal.

FIRST MAN: There, in the Cenacle?

Where the betrayer Jesus

Gathered his band

To defile our Passover?

SALOME: Just as you too say;

My sons are there.

SECOND MAN: The council of chief priests

Wants to speak to

Your sons.

But the house

Is a property of the Essenes,

With access forbidden

By stern agreement.

What shall we do now?

SALOME: Go!

Tell the Sadducees

That I shall convey the message

To my sons.

They will certainly

Obeys

The summons of the High Council.

FIRST MAN: Is that all?

We had instructions

To bring your sons along.

SALOME: Then you must

Fetch them yourselves.

SECOND MAN: But how?

You know that the house of the Essenes

Is strictly closed to us.

SALOME: Then go

And bring the message

I told you

To your masters.

[The FIRST and SECOND MAN leave with a clatter. SALOME lets THOMAS out from his hiding-place.]

THOMAS: Did you hear?

They want us!

John and James,

Philip and Andrew,

All of us, all!

We're for the cross as well!

Oh, if I had never

Trodden on this path

Which led me out where I had been

Embedded into humanity,

Making me homeless,
 A beggar and a doubter!
 SALOME: Are you complaining against destiny?
 Isn't it enough
 That it has battered
 And nearly destroyed all of you?
 THOMAS: O Salome!
 Can you not now advise me
 What to do?
 Where is the Lord?
 His grave was empty!
 His body vanished!
 Where, where is our Lord,
 Whom we betrayed
 And abandoned?
 Has he also abandoned us?
*[He holds his head despairingly in his hands
 and sinks into thoughtful brooding. During
 the last words the VEILED FIGURE appears
 by the right wall in front of the bench,
 with outstretched arms as if in supplication.
 THOMAS remains completely sunk in thought,
 not noticing the Veiled Figure, but SALOME
 looks at it.]*
 SALOME [*softly stammering*]: Jesus, you?
 My child, my nephew?
 How did you come here?
 You died
 Over twenty years ago
 There in Nazareth.
 What's up with you?
*[The VEILED FIGURE sits down on the
 bench and points to Salome in a suppliant
 gesture, giving the impression that it wants
 to speak.]*

SALOME [*turning to Thomas*]: Thomas, wake up!
 The streets are now empty.
 I don't know the answer.
 Go to the other disciples
 And come again tomorrow.
 THOMAS: I can't leave you
 Without explanation,
 Without interpretation!
 SALOME [*sternly*]: Go!
 I must be alone. Go!
*[THOMAS goes off astonished and shaking his head.
 SALOME rises, while the VEILED FIGURE remains
 sitting. A dialogue between Salome and a VOICE
 which seems to come from far away ensues. The
 VEILED FIGURE accompanies the Voice with gestures.]*
 SALOME: Are you my nephew Jesus?
 Joseph's first son
 And Mary's child?
 VOICE: He was that, and is that no more.
 He came and went.
 He bore and suffered.
 SALOME: But who are you,
 Appearing here before me?
 VOICE: He, who he was
 Is now no more.
 Yet he who he is
 Has been him.
 SALOME: My thinking falters
 At your words.
 It breaks,
 Like an arrow
 Shattering
 Upon hard rock.
 VOICE: Has the Sun passed away
 When night arises?

Has the Moon vanished
 When day appears?
 Has the word perished
 When the lip is silent?

[SALOME approaches the Veiled Figure. She loses her self-confidence, as she goes to the table and bends over the light of the oil lamp. It flares up, brightening the whole room, causing the Veiled Figure to almost vanish.]

VOICE *[closer]*: Do you now perceive
 What you hitherto denied?
 Does your heart which was deaf
 Now become hearing?
 Do you see the nephew
 Who passed away,
 So that the other,
 The inward one,
 The Christophorus
 Might live?

SALOME *[to herself]*: The light of these dark words
 Does not penetrate my understanding.
 Yet divining stirs
 In the depths of my heart.
 Like the beat of angels' wings
 Rises the sound of these words
 Within me.
 Is it awakening?
 Is it a dream? Fulfilment?

[Deeply moved, she sits down on one of the stools near the table. Her hands tremble.]

SALOME *[turning to the VEILED FIGURE]*: O Jesus,
 You long-lost child,
 Tell me
 Where you have been
 In these long years
 Which have passed

Since the passing of your soul.
 Where were you?
 We sought you,
 But you were gone.

VOICE: He was not gone!
 He remained with you,
 But you did not
 Perceive him,
 Though he was around you.
 He went into Nazareth,
 He wandered
 Along ways familiar to you.
 He was in Bethlehem
 And in Jerusalem.
 He paced down the roads
 His father had once cleared for him
 And his mother had pointed out to him,
 A shadow of himself.
 One prematurely fulfilled,
 Who was absorbed
 In service to one greater.

SALOME: How shall I grasp this,
 How understand?
 He went around
 And was never seen by anyone?
 He trod along the roads
 And his feet were semblance?
 He lived with us
 And was dead?

VOICE: He is
 And yet is not,
 Because his It,
 His ego, his Zarathustra,
 Was transformed into another
 And forsook him.

SALOME: So you are but sheath?
 And bearing with you
 The gleam of the gold star
 Which once penetrated you?
[The VEILED FIGURE – as though it felt understood – stretches out its arms, spreads them wide, rises and steps towards the table. The nearer it approaches, the brighter it becomes. SALOME falls to her knees before it.]

VOICE: The gleam of gold,
 The strength of myrrh
 And the fragrance of frankincense –
 They still live in his sheath.
 What the kings
 Once gave him
 He bears with him.
 It is in him
 A living memory.
 Has your heart understood?

SALOME: My heart
 Falts in its beat.
 Angels' wings are swishing up.
 They resound
 And, resounding, it speaks:
 Hark!
[An infinitely soft ringing, like the note of a bell, sounds. One or two chords are heard. SALOME listens enchanted and tries with rapt attention to render the sound into words.]

SALOME: I the gold star –
 Who – shone –
 Through millennia –
 My gleam – expires.
 It glimmers up anew –
 In the heart –

[to herself, questioning] Has Zarathustra risen again?
 Is he Zarathas, the prophet?

[The sound becomes clearer and stronger.]

[as if translating] Hold – the meal –
 For bread – and wine –
 Are now ready –

VOICE: Follow the voice's advice.
 Stir the hands unto deed.
 Consecrate the new seed
 That it become and arise.

[SALOME, kneeling, pours wine from the jug into two cups; she takes a piece of bread and breaks it into two pieces. The VEILED FIGURE kneels down before her.]

SALOME *[deeply moved]*: O Lord, O Christ,
 O Messiah, you, my God,
 You speak in my heart.
 All-wielding is the love
 Wakening from you in me.
 It warms and shines
 And I know:
 You are in me,
 Even if I have denied you.
 You work in me
 Even if I betrayed you.
 You send comfort and healing
 Even to those wanting to avoid you.
 Come, dear child,
 Receive from my hand,
 Through me,
 Who has despised Him
 And whom He yet redeemed,
 The Bread of the World,
 The Wine of the Earth.
 And be baptised
 In His name.

I take the Bread
And hand it to you
And hand it to me.

[She sets out the bread]

I grasp the Wine
And raise it to you
And raise it to me.

*[She sets out the cup. Now the sound rises again
and becomes more intense.]*

SALOME *[listens and translates.]:* The Cross –

In it alone – is salvation –
Consecrate – with it –
The Bread –
Sanctify – through it –
The Wine –

*[She makes the sign of the cross over bread and wine.
She takes the bread and eats; she takes the wine
and drinks.]*

What has been reality
Is miracle.
Heart awakens in the comfort of love.
Hard thinking
Melts at the offering table.

[Turning to the Veiled Figure]

My dear child,
I strew sacred crumbs
Into your hands,

[She does it.]

I pour consecrated juice
Onto your head.

*[She performs it. As soon as this has happened, the
VEILED FIGURE vanishes and only its veils remain
behind. SALOME takes the garments, feels something
hidden there, grasps and touches and pulls out a cup
from the linen.]*

VOICE: What was sheath
Became a cup.
What was sacrifice
Became a dish.
In it shall once shine
The healing which shall work
In centuries to come.
A Grail
Shall it one day be called.

*[SALOME places the cup on the table. She takes the
garments and hides them in the chest beside the bench.
Then she lights the two oil-lamps. Now all is once
more sense-world. Only the cup stands there as a
sign for what has been. There is the sound of steps.
The lower house door is opened and steps are heard
hurrying up the stairs. Brief knocking, then JAMES
and JOHN enter.]*

JAMES: Mother, we greet you.

JOHN: Mother, forgive us
For still coming so late
To visit you.

JAMES: We felt compelled
To come
In order to tell you
The tidings
Which are still so incomprehensible
And yet true.

SALOME *[lying down again in her easy-chair]:*
Speak, my sons, speak
And tell me
Wherefore your hearts
Overflow.

JOHN: Mother,
The Lord has visited us!
He was with us –

He stood in our circle
 Like one who is here
 Present.

JAMES: Will you be able to believe it,
 Mother? Speak!
 Oh, don't say 'No' –
 Don't say it's not possible.
 I, just as I stand before you,
 I saw Him, just now,
 Scarcely an hour ago.

JOHN: And do you know, Mother,
 We wondered in our hearts
 If it was a spirit,
 If it was a spectre.
 Then He spoke:
 [His voice chokes in a sob]
 Mother – He spoke!
 He asked for a piece of fish,
 For a little honey –
 And ate it before us
 So that we should become believing
 And know
 That it is He
 Who was with us.

JAMES: Mother, you are silent?
 You don't say 'Yes'?
 Do you believe
 That we are the victim
 Of our suffering,
 Which has cast a spell on us
 With illusions
 And crazy ideas?

SALOME: James and John, come!
 Sit down beside me.
 We want

To be united
 In this hour of community.
 The Lord was also here.
 He spoke in my heart.
 He broke the bread
 Through the instrument of my hands.
 He offered up the wine
 Through me
 Out of the ground of his love.

JOHN: Did you also see him,
 O Mother?

SALOME: Only to the chosen
 Is vision now granted.
 He showed Himself in the mirror
 Of your discipleship.
 He could
 So densify
 In the love-pain
 Filling Magdalene's heart
 That she saw Him.

JAMES: But also Cleopas and his friend
 On their way to Emmaus
 Encountered a third.
 And when they asked Him
 Into their house,
 He broke the bread at their table
 And they recognised Him ...
 It was the Lord!

SALOME: The simplicity of their hearts
 Gave Him the ground
 Upon which He could step
 And take on bodily form.

JOHN: So you think
 It was Him, the Lord!
 You believe it too?

SALOME: I don't believe it:
 I know!
 Do you see the cup
 There on the table?
 It is the sacrificial vessel,
 Which your playmate, Jesus,
 Mary's firstborn son,
 Handed over to me.
 I was allowed
 To give him food from the supper.
 He took the Bread,
 He received the Wine.
 They transformed him
 Into the cup
 Standing before us.

JOHN: I don't grasp it.
 I can't
 Hold it in the circumference of my thinking.
 And yet I do know
 That it's true and real.

JAMES: What we could not believe
 Has now been accomplished.
 What to us was first a hope
 Became reality.
 You too, O Mother,
 Are transformed and redeemed.

SALOME: I know
 That the Messiah lives
 And that he was called Jesus
 Who has walked among us.
*[They remain quiet for a while, with downcast
 eyes, as if they were ashamed to look at one
 another. SALOME is the first to collect herself.]*

SALOME: James, go back
 To your brothers in the Cenacle,

Speak with Thomas Didymus
 And tell him
 That I am asking him
 To be at my house tomorrow.
 And you, John,
 Go to Bethany.
 Tell Martha that
 Just as soon as it is possible for her
 She should visit me.
 And ask her
 To bring along Magdalene as well.

JOHN: Magdalene? Do I hear rightly?
 You want to see her?
 The sinful woman?
 Here, in your house
 Which is so sacred to you?

SALOME: Yes, Magdalene!
 She dried the Lord's feet
 With her hair
 After having anointed them.
 She will bear the sacrificial cup
 In her hands
 Through distant lands
 In order to work there
 Where I can only keep silence.
 I shall become mute
 But she will testify
 Through the power of love
 Streaming from her heart
 Into her lips.
 The cup
 Will enliven her mouth,
 Just as it
 Has now closed my own.
 My heart alone shall speak,

But my mouth must be silent.
It is sealed for the rest of my life
By the cross of the Lord.
Farewell, you sons.
Ask Thomas
And the two sisters
To be at my house tomorrow
For one last word.

[JAMES and JOHN go off without taking leave.

SALOME begins softly sobbing. Curtain.]