

# **deathvariations**

**by Jon Fosse**

**Translated from the Norwegian by Sarah Cameron Sunde**

**Translation commissioned by  
Oslo Elsewhere  
Anna Gutto and Sarah Cameron Sunde, Artistic Directors  
New York City, 2006**

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DØDSVARIASJONER by Jon Fosse was first presented by the National Theatre in Oslo, Norway in 2001. This translation, entitled DEATHVARIATIONS, was created for the U.S. premiere of the play, and was first presented by Oslo Elsewhere (Anna Gutto & Sarah Cameron Sunde, Artistic Directors) at 59E59 Theaters, in New York City on August 4, 2006.

The creative contributors and cast were as follows:

Director.....Sarah Cameron Sunde  
Dramaturgy.....Marie-Louise Miller and Oda Radoor

THE OLDER WOMAN.....Diane Ciesla  
THE OLDER MAN.....Dick Hughes  
THE YOUNGER WOMAN .....Deborah Knox  
THE YOUNGER MAN.....David L. Townsend  
THE DAUGHTER.....Natalia Payne  
THE FRIEND.....Charles Borland

Set Designer.....Lauren Helpern  
Lighting Designer.....Marie-Louise Geiger  
Costume Designer.....Courtney Logan  
Composer.....Christian Amigo  
Sound Designer.....David Margolin Lawson  
Casting.....Calleri Casting/Paul Davis & Erica Jensen

### **CRITICAL ACCLAIM FOR THE U.S. PREMIERE PRODUCTION:**

“It is easy to see [Fosse’s] work as Ibsen stripped down to its emotional essentials. But it is so much more. For one thing, it has a fierce poetic simplicity...”

- THE NEW YORK TIMES

“a taut, gripping exploration of – among other things – our frequent and tragic inability to recognize what’s right before us” - NYTHEATRE.COM

“a riveting drama...Fosse’s brilliant, ritualistic language uses obsessive repetition to make [the characters] fate seem inevitable...” - NY THEATRE WIRE

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Novelist, poet and playwright Jon Fosse was born in 1959 on the west coast of Norway and now resides in Bergen. The author of more than 30 books and 30 plays that have been translated into over 40 languages, he is one of the most provocative, celebrated, and produced European playwrights of today. His novels include *Red, Black, Closed Guitar, The Boathouse, The Bottle Collector, and Melancholia I-II*, and his volumes of poetry include *Angel with Water in its Eyes* and *Dog and Angel*. Since 1993, Fosse has focused primarily on playwriting. He quickly received international acclaim, particularly after Claude Regy (legendary French director of Pinter’s work) came out of retirement to direct his play *Someone is Going to Come*. Afterwards, *Le Monde* dubbed Fosse “the Beckett of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” Including *And We’ll Never Be Parted, The Guitar Man, Night Sings Its Songs, Dream of Autumn, Sa Ka La, Girl on the Sofa, and deathvariations*, his plays have been produced on major stages across Europe, as well as around the world in countries such as Japan, Australia, Canada and Chile. Norwegian National Television (NRK) calls Fosse “Norway’s biggest cultural export” and he is the recipient of numerous international awards and honors. He was named Best Foreign Playwright by *Theater Heute* (the leading theatrical magazine for German speaking countries); was designated a Chevalier by the French government; and in 2003 he became the youngest person ever to win Norway’s highest cultural honor, Norsk Kulturråd Ærespris (The Norwegian Arts Council Honorary Award).

### **ABOUT OSLO ELSEWHERE:**

Oslo Elsewhere was founded by Anna Gutto and Sarah Cameron Sunde in 2004 with the mission to bring the most innovative plays and ideas about contemporary theater from Norway to the United States, and vice versa. Oslo Elsewhere develops new translations for American audiences and produces bold, relevant theatrical plays that challenge sensibilities and provoke audiences beyond the everyday.

Oslo Elsewhere has produced US-premieres of *Night Sings Its Songs, deathvariations* and *Sa Ka La* by Jon Fosse, as well as a contemporary adaptation of Henrik Ibsen’s *Rosmersholm*. PAJ (Performing Arts Journal) published American-English translations of *deathvariations* (Fall Edition, 2007) and *Sa Ka La* in their book *NEW EUROPE plays from the continent* (2009).

Sarah Cameron Sunde and Anna Gutto are experts on Jon Fosse and contemporary interpretation of Henrik Ibsen, and active advocates for the importance of American-English translations for American audiences. They have spoken on several panels about translation as well as written essays for a variety of publications such as *PAJ, The Brooklyn Rail, Stikkordet* (Publication of the Norwegian Actors Union) and the Norwegian book *Ibsen’s Women*.

## **NOTES ON TRANSLATION:**

In translating plays there are always things that are 'untranslatable'. Since plays are meant to be experienced live, one cannot simply translate words; one must translate the action that lies underneath the words. Actions and subtleties are cultural, and it is imperative to translate specifically for the culture that one is working in. Thus, Oslo Elsewhere creates American-English translations for American audiences as opposed to using pre-existing British translations.

The Translation Think Tank (a loose affiliation of translators interested in investigating the current status of theater-in-translation in the U.S.) and Oslo Elsewhere have come to the conclusion that in order to create a successful translation, it is necessary for two things to be present in the individual or the group of collaborators working on a new translation: 1) that at least one person understands both cultures and speaks both languages and 2) that at least one person understands theatrical language and the way actions function in a play.

## **NOTES FROM THE TRANSLATOR:**

To translate Jon Fosse is to allow his unique voice come through in the American English language. He has established a new voice in theatre – a voice unlike any we have heard before. A voice that is equally new in Norway as it is in the rest of the world. I want *that* voice to work for an American audience.

### Note on the use and meaning of “yah”:

Yah = Norwegian “ja” = yes

Yah = American “yeah”, only not so nasal, please.

Also, Yah = yep, hmm, ok, so, well, fine, oh, sure, yeah, uh-huh, tsk, ugh...

These other words have not been inserted in place of the ‘yah’ because rhythm and repetition is vital in Fosse’s writing. My goal is to provide an affirmative in American-English that lives somewhere between ‘ja’ and ‘yeah’ and carries a lot of flexibility. It should be simple and not sound foreign. It can be used for emphasis in certain cases, but it should primarily be used as a ‘filler’ where the breath or thought holds for a moment. The ‘yah’ serves to link the characters, while also allowing the interpretation of this one word to be character specific. In all cases, the ‘yah’ should be of help, not of hindrance. I encourage the creative team to find ways into the sound that allows the repetition to help tell the story without putting too much emphasis on it. When the ‘yah’ appears at the beginning of a line, please do not make the mistake of thinking that there is a comma after the yah, before the rest of the phrase. Instead, try to think about it as if the ‘yah’ simply leads to the rest of what is being said.

Lastly, every choice has been made to serve the action of the play, with the knowledge that these words will be spoken out-loud, by live actors on the stage. Please do not hesitate to contact me at [sarah@osloelsewhere.org](mailto:sarah@osloelsewhere.org) if you have any questions about the translation.

*This translation would not have been possible without invaluable insights and support from the following people: Jon Fosse, Anna Gutto, Jake Hooker, Marie-Louise Miller, Oda Radoor, and Einar & Cammy Sunde.*

## CHARACTERS

The older woman

The older man

The young woman

The young man

The daughter

The friend

THE OLDER WOMAN

*talking to herself*

As if it were there always  
and never

and it can't be understood

and it can never be  
abandoned

It is a life

with a different reconciliation

than the one we will see

THE OLDER MAN

*looks at her, wondering*

Will see

THE OLDER WOMAN

*goes on as if he's not there*

And it goes back to its openings

*short pause*

but goes on

and on

into a night

revealing

THE OLDER MAN

What are you talking about

THE OLDER WOMAN

*goes on as if he's not there*

into a night

an illuminating space

where imperfections rule

letting it be understood

that one understands

what it is to understand

THE OLDER MAN

*wondering*

That one understands

THE OLDER WOMAN

*looks at him*

Yah that one understands

*She moves away from him, looks at him*

It's so awful

I don't understand it

*He nods*

That she could

*cuts herself off*

THE OLDER MAN  
*shakes his head resignedly*  
No  
*short pause*  
I don't understand it

THE OLDER WOMAN  
We should have done something  
yah long ago

THE OLDER MAN  
Yah  
*Pause*

THE OLDER WOMAN  
*desperately*  
We have to do something

THE OLDER MAN  
There's nothing we can do

THE OLDER WOMAN  
Is it too late

THE OLDER MAN  
Everything's too late

THE OLDER WOMAN  
Why did she do it

THE OLDER MAN  
I don't understand it

THE OLDER WOMAN  
Our only daughter  
the only  
*cuts herself off*

THE OLDER MAN  
*goes on*  
Our only child

THE OLDER WOMAN  
But it can't be this way  
Not possible  
*Pause*

THE OLDER MAN  
She followed her death

THE OLDER WOMAN  
Don't say that  
She can't be dead  
That's not the way it is  
*Short pause*

THE OLDER MAN  
She is dead  
She is gone  
gone forever

THE OLDER WOMAN  
She can not be gone  
Not possible

THE OLDER MAN  
No  
*Pause*

THE OLDER WOMAN  
And that she could do it

THE OLDER MAN  
*abruptly*  
Can't you go  
I want you to go

THE OLDER WOMAN  
*surprised*  
You want me to go

THE OLDER MAN  
Yah

THE OLDER WOMAN  
But we  
*short pause*  
yah we  
y'know it's just the two of us left  
now that she's gone

THE OLDER MAN  
You have to go  
*short pause*  
because I can't handle  
seeing your face  
*She moves away from him*

THE OLDER WOMAN  
I just thought  
yah but I had to



y'know tell you

THE OLDER MAN

Yah

*Short pause*

But

yah

yah you can't stay here any longer

You have to go

*Pause. The young woman, who is pregnant, comes in and walks towards The older woman, they look at each other*

THE OLDER WOMAN

*to The older man*

It's all so long ago

I remember how it was

when I carried her

*Short pause*

But it feels like

yah almost as if

*short pause*

it never happened

*Short pause*

Don't you feel that way too

*He nods. The young woman holds her stomach, stands there and feels it, and The friend comes in, he looks towards The young woman, looks down. The older woman and The older man look at him, frightened, they look down*

And I don't want to anymore

*short pause*

because it all has a way of vanishing

*short pause*

I no longer have reason

*Pause*

What a stupid thing to say

*The young man turns around and looks at The young man who comes in and goes towards her, they meet, embrace each other, move away from each other, look at each other*

I am no more

I want no more

THE YOUNG MAN

*to The young woman*

Yah ok we're finally here

took awhile back there

talking to that crazy landlord

*Short pause*

But now

*happily, takes out a keychain*

now

yah now we've finally got a place to live

Isn't it great

THE YOUNG WOMAN

Really great  
*Short pause*

THE YOUNG MAN

We have lived  
yah how many places  
have we lived  
A number of places  
anyway

THE YOUNG WOMAN

Ridiculously many  
*The young man looks at The older man, they both look down and The young man looks at The young woman, she stands and looks around*

THE YOUNG MAN

It's not so bad here  
*Short pause*  
Sure we can live here  
for a while anyway  
It is just a basement  
And it's probably damp and cold here  
But  
yah  
*short pause*  
it really was the only thing we could get

THE YOUNG WOMAN

I don't like it here  
well I guess maybe it's ok  
at least when you're here  
it's ok  
yah  
*she smiles at him*  
But that landlord was totally horrible  
*Short pause*  
I just hope he won't come and bother us  
knocking on our door  
and stuff

THE YOUNG MAN

I'm sure it'll be ok

THE YOUNG WOMAN

He was just standing there staring at us  
saying nothing  
just standing there  
*Short pause*  
And it is expensive

we have to pay a small fortune  
just to live here  
We can't afford much else  
after the rent is paid  
we've got just enough to pay the rent  
*short pause*  
and to think that man will get almost all our money  
just so we get to live  
here in his basement

THE YOUNG MAN

It was the only place I could find  
I just couldn't  
*cuts himself off*

THE YOUNG WOMAN

I'm not blaming you  
You did the best you could  
you did  
I know that  
You tried as hard as you could  
and in the end  
you found y'know a  
*cuts herself off*

THE YOUNG MAN

We don't have to live here that long  
But we do have to live some place  
*short pause*  
and it's not that bad  
here  
*Short pause*  
We can live here  
at least for a little while

THE YOUNG WOMAN

*feels her stomach*  
I feel like my belly is growing so fast

THE YOUNG MAN

Yah

THE YOUNG WOMAN

Ridiculously fast

THE YOUNG MAN

We are way too young  
y'know to have a baby

THE YOUNG WOMAN

Way too young

*Short pause*

But since we're stupid  
and not careful  
then

*looks towards him, comforting*

Yah

*Seemingly accusatory*

Yah when you don't know how to be careful  
then

*Short pause*

I'm sure my grandmother  
would've had something wise to say about it  
There was something she said  
something about being careful  
an expression

THE YOUNG MAN

But you can't remember it

THE YOUNG WOMAN

No it's gone

THE YOUNG MAN

Something about paying the price

THE YOUNG WOMAN

Maybe  
yah probably something to that

THE YOUNG MAN

It will be ok  
you'll see  
*Pause*

THE YOUNG WOMAN

But we hardly have any money

THE YOUNG MAN

Yah that man wanted a deposit upfront  
and whatever else he could get  
that landlord  
and now

THE YOUNG WOMAN

*goes on*  
and now we hardly have any money left

THE YOUNG MAN

Just a little

THE YOUNG WOMAN

Very little

THE YOUNG MAN

Almost nothing

THE YOUNG WOMAN

And so what're we going to do

THE YOUNG MAN

I have to try to get a job

THE YOUNG WOMAN

I can try  
too

THE YOUNG MAN

You

THE YOUNG WOMAN

Yah

THE YOUNG MAN

You  
the way you look

THE YOUNG WOMAN

Yah

THE YOUNG MAN

No come on  
*Pause*

THE YOUNG WOMAN

So I have to sit here alone  
In that landlord's basement  
hour after hour  
while you are gone  
at some job

THE YOUNG MAN

I probably won't get a job

THE YOUNG WOMAN

Then we won't have any money

THE YOUNG MAN

No

THE YOUNG WOMAN

But we do have a little

THE YOUNG MAN

A little  
but not that much  
we have  
just a little money  
*Short pause*  
But we'll handle it

THE YOUNG WOMAN

How can you be so sure  
We hardly have anything y'know  
No things  
No money

THE YOUNG MAN

But we have each other  
And we're young

THE YOUNG WOMAN

That's not a lot

THE YOUNG MAN

It's enough

THE YOUNG WOMAN

How do you know

THE YOUNG MAN

I just know  
*Short pause*  
We'll handle it

THE YOUNG WOMAN

If you say  
so  
*Short pause*  
But I'm so worried

THE YOUNG MAN

We're young and strong

THE YOUNG WOMAN

Oh come on

THE YOUNG MAN

It's true

THE YOUNG WOMAN

It's all so up in the air

THE YOUNG MAN

That's the way life is

THE YOUNG WOMAN

I'm so scared and so worried

THE YOUNG MAN

Don't be scared

ok

*He enfolds her, stands there holding her*

THE OLDER MAN

*to The older woman*

Not possible

It can't be

THE OLDER WOMAN

No

*Short pause*

She can't be gone

THE FRIEND

She is gone

THE OLDER WOMAN

*to The older man*

Our only child

She

*short pause*

yah she

yah my only child

she can not be gone

THE OLDER MAN

Not possible

THE FRIEND

She's no longer with you

She's with me

THE OLDER WOMAN

*to The older man*

This is the way it is

*Short pause*

I saw her lying there

*Short pause*

They called

asked me to come

asked me to come and see her

THE OLDER MAN

This is not the way it is

THE OLDER WOMAN

I saw her  
where she lay  
I had to go and see her

THE OLDER MAN

When I see your face  
*cuts himself off*

THE OLDER WOMAN

Yah

THE OLDER MAN

Your face  
*Short pause*  
I can't handle  
seeing your face

THE OLDER WOMAN

I had to come  
They called

THE OLDER MAN

Your eyes

THE OLDER WOMAN

And she was just lying there

THE OLDER MAN

*in a low voice*  
Your face

THE OLDER WOMAN

She just lay there  
*Pause*  
But now I'll go  
I  
*cuts herself off*  
Yah  
yah I'll  
go  
then  
*Short pause*  
But I had to  
*short pause*  
y'know I had to come  
say it to you  
tell you