NOTES ON THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

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THEATRE OF THE ABSURD: SOME THOUGHT RUNS

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For full text of these items please visit: http://summercitizens.usu.edu (Look under “Course Notes”)

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PROPOSITIONS ABOUT THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

-Is a new convention in the theatre
-Expresses the spiritual climate of our age
-Sometimes its source is in dreams & nightmares. Dreams do not develop logically; they express a poetic image.
-In a conventional play we ask, “what happens next?” in an Absurd play, we ask “what is it that we are seeking”
-Playwrights of the absurd chiefly concerned w expressing a sense of wonder, of incomprehension, and at times of despair at the lack of cohesion and meaning they find in the world.
Unlike a conventional play, there is no implicit assumption in an Absurd play that the world does make sense, that reality is solid and secure; that man is innately good and perfectible.

-Absurd play concerned w/ a critique of language; ordinary language, like you hear at a party, just an exchange of meaningless banalities

-Absurd plays draw on traditions of miming and clowning; comedians like Buster Keaton, Laurel and Hardy, The Marx Brothers, etc.

-Absurd plays a reaction to horrors of wars in 20th century, loss of religious faith that started with the Enlightenment; mass murder and genocide

NEGATIVE METAPHYSICS: Plays are known by what they lack as much as what they are: Lack of place names; lack of children, proper names/ shadows & substance; “There are no value judgments or distinctions in values in the world of the Absurd.” LACK OF WEATHER

DESIRE: characters are known by what they “desire.” What does Hamlet desire?

-Theatre of the Absurd is mainly a dialogue with death, asking IT ”’why, Why?’”

Theatre of the absurd should be called “the theatre of derision.”; the world is an enormous farce, a canular played by God against man, that he has to play God’s game and laugh about it. (Ionesco)

-Theatre of Absurd should be called “Theatre of Alienation” (cf. Bertold Brecht “Verfremdungseffekt” (“strangeness effect”))

-Playwrights of the Absurd do not make assumptions about the audience, who they are, what they want, what they expect, etc.

-Absurd plays do not so much as “end,” or achieve closure,” as they simply stop. There is no sense of an ending.

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SOME PROPOSITIONS ABOUT WAITING FOR GODOT

-Draws on Judeo-Christian concepts: “So Yahweh God expelled him [Adam] from the garden of Eden....and in front of the garden he posted the cherubs...to guard the way to the tree of life” (Genesis 3 23-6); “I had not denied the Holy One’s decrees. But have I the strength to go on waiting?” (Job 6, 10-11); “Better two than one by himself.....If one should fall the other helps him up....Where one alone would be overcome, two will put up resistance; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” (Ecclesiastes 4, 9-12).

-Characters in Waiting For Godot: V=Vladimir; E=Estragon; P=Pozzo; L=Lucky; Boy;
Godot (off-stage); the “Others (off-stage).”

-The relationship between Estragon and Vladimir is one of requited love; the relationship between E & V and Godot is an, as yet, unrequited love. E & V “hear” Godot and obey His/Her/Its commands. P & L do not.

-The relationship between Pozzo and Lucky is a pathology of the will; that is it is evil; by comparison, Shakespeare’s King Lear shows a different kind of pathology of the will; an evil rising out of Lear’s confused mind, the family and Lear’s kingdom.

-These two opposing relationships, between E & V and that between P & L, represent the two basic ones of inter-human relationships

-Laughter and tears are the two extremes of human emotions (Pozzo’s speech p. 138, Clurman text)

-Laughter is prohibited; tears are allowed—Lucky’s tears.

-By crying and suffering we acknowledge our present Postlapsarian world; by laughing we glimpse our lost Prelapsarian one and momentarily lose our present Postlapsarian one. Taking life as a whole, tears are the usual order of things.

-The “others” and Godot in the play are characters in the play. This makes there seven characters in all.

-Beckett “breaks the fourth wall” with this bit of dialogue: V: “I’ll ’be back.” E: “End of the corridor, on the left.” (Act 1)

-Entropy is reversed with new information; new information arrives via the introduction of new characters (P, L, and Boy) and references to Godot. New information introduces a new scene. The playwright and sometimes the audience determines what constitutes new information.

-Eden (Prelapsarian world) is characterized as a garden with plants, trees, and flowing rivers; In Godot the landscape is barren with one stunted tree from which E & V learn nothing from; that is, there is no “tree of knowledge.”

-The long speech of L (Act 1) divides into 3 parts: 1. The universe is ruled by a capricious & enigmatic deity; 2. Man wastes and pines in spite of all his labors; 3. All that s left is a stony indifferent earth littered w/ skulls.

-Staging (the movements of characters on stage & bodily posture) complement the dialogue: circular movement represent waiting; standing up may signify control; falling down loss of control; directionless movements, playing w/ boots or hats, represents the absence of direction or meaning in life; clockwise movement, V finger around his hat, indicate the temporal realm; counterclockwise movements an escape from the world.
Most important speeches made at stage center-L & P & V on time. Most of the play takes place w/ characters away from stage center. No fixed geographical place, no center & no circumference, which implies absence of meaning.

-Skyhooks vs. cranes: E belongs to the earth; V to the sky. E belongs to the stone; V to the tre

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SOME PROPOSITIONS ABOUT ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD

-R&G skews perspectives and disrupts expectations. ...a dramatic amalgam of bits and pieces from Hamlet, Waiting for Godot, Six Characters in Search of an Author, and The Castle.

-R&G is a “misreading” of Hamlet .a pastiche

-The title is ambiguous: notice the present tense, “R&G are dead.” They are certainly not dead in the play

-Problem: Hamlet has “mythic” meaning to audience; i.e., it has multiple interpretations, meanings, etc.

-R&G’s “literariness” (its borrowings from Shakespeare, Beckett, etc,) robs it of emotional appeal.

-IS A PASTICHE: “it suggests the way in which feeling is shaped by culture….it can, at its best, allow us to feel our connection to the affective frameworks, the structures of feeling, past and present, that we inherit and pass on. That is to say, it can enable us to know ourselves affectively as historical beings”

-It takes two to create a three dimensional world: form of a triangle, “I” (the speaker), who can become the listener; “You” (the listener who can become the speaker); :It they, him, her” (the referents of the speaker & listener). This correlates w/ first person, second person and third person.

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FROM A PRE- TO A POSTLAPSARIAN WORLD

We are children of the Enlightenment. We believe that reason, technology and experience will save us. We believe we always improve; we don’t accept the fact that in the long run we will ALL be dead. We try to find our salvation in technology, scientific progress, political and social reforms. The chief We live, as children of the Enlightenment, in a secular world. We try to make sense of our place in the world by reason, science, and objective thought. We try to explain everything by cause and effect,
e.g., the high price of food and fuel is caused by greed on Wall Street; lung cancer is caused by smoking, etc., etc. We believe in material progress; things that seem bad now, for example a falling stock market, will, in “the long run” popularizer of this world view is, of course, the Eighteenth-century philosopher, Kant. Making sense of our place in the world, he argued, is to take ourselves as our own project; to act as reason demands in all our relationships. This is implicit in Kant’s famous categorical imperative: “act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.” All our behavior, habits, and traditions, in other words, should pass the test of reason. Politics, as well as individual behavior, should be a product of slow deliberation and decision-making under the control of reason. We can even imagine Kant agreeing with Nietzsche’s maxim that God is dead insofar as we believe that we can do well enough without listening to Him; unless, of course, He speaks the language of the Enlightenment, that is, of reason.

But there is, in Western thought, another pre-Enlightenment, worldview, one that entered our consciousness with Genesis, one based on the Fall, grace and redemption. Here our history is described as a movement, because of man’s disobedience of God, from a Pre- to a Postlapsarian state while still retaining, in this latter state, “memories” of the earlier, Prelapsarian, one. So from what sort of state did man fall? What did he lose? A simple diagram, like the one below, gives us a rough idea, as the Fall is given in Genesis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRELAPSARIAN</th>
<th>POSTLAPSARIAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>(Or, What Could have Been)</em></td>
<td><em>(Or, What is)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Infinity</td>
<td>Finitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Love</td>
<td>Separation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Unity with God</td>
<td>from God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Innocence</td>
<td>Guilt, shame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Contemplation/Rest</td>
<td>Labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Life</td>
<td>Death</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evil</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Simplicity</td>
<td>Complexity &amp;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“New” information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Naming</td>
<td>Propositions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RHETORIC

9. Only Divine Cause
Multiple Causes &
Effects
(Material,
human, etc)
Chance
Free Will &
Decision-
Making
Confusion of
names
“Calling”
is difficult

Without language there wouldn’t be the Fall. God speaks to Adam about the Tree of Life, forbidding him from eating its fruit; the serpent persuades Eve to eat the fruit. This is the beginning of RHETORIC, using language to both WILL and cause someone else to be an instrument of your WILL.

Prelapsarian life, then, is essentially described in Genesis as a timeless continuation of the last (seventh) day of creation, the day of rest and contemplation. Postlapsarian life, by contrast, is not only the negation of the quality of life in paradise, but also the addition of new, and unexpected, miseries; miseries unthinkable in the philosophy of Prelapsarian schooling. Had someone told Adam and Eve about the quality of life in a Postlapsarian world labor, pain, death, boredom it is conceivable they would have put aside their need for knowledge and left the apple uneaten.

Insofar as we can see the potential for evil in us as perpetuators of torture, slavery, war and the like we can acknowledge, to same degree, the consequences of the Fall. At the same, as if to intensify what has been lost in the Fall, we can “remember” what Prelapsarian life was like, one of rest and contemplation represented in literature, most especially, by images like the Golden Age, Arcadia or the picture (common in pastoral poetry) of rural folk in an eternal summer, singing, composing poetry, or philosophizing.

Memories of our life in paradise, taking together with our life as we conduct it now, creates an unbridgeable gap between what “is” and “what could have been,” the result are the sorrows of nostalgia, failure, regret and guilt. Endless failure delineates infinite longing, infinite because it can never be realized. We detect this situation often in the characters of Hemingway, Cervantes and Shakespeare. In the barking of dogs, the
whine of cats or the neighing of horses we also observe the disquiets of now and the “remembrance” of life in a better place: if only in the backyard, or on a walk, or a run in an open field. As children of the Enlightenment, living in a secular age, we find it difficult to accept life as given in the story of the Fall; that there will always be privation, debilitating labor, pain, death and that we should abandon all hope for their amelioration.

Do cats have a better memory than we do of paradise? They always seem to find the most comfortable, the softest & shadiest, place to lie down in.

The songs of Cheribino (The Marriage of Figaro) exhibit a love-longing (for Suzanna) which can never be realized. Evidence enough that the tension between what “is” and “what could be” can create incomparable beauty and emotive effect.

Authors, like the rest of us, live in a Postlapsarian world with “memories” of Paradise and its return. The question is how this affects their representations of plot, characters, theme and everything else that goes into a literary text. As a preliminary answer to the question,

Absurd plays exhibit a Postlapsarian world in specific ways: the tragic & the comic way; usually a mixture of these, the so-called ‘tragicomic.’ This is realized, essentially, as an unresolvable antimony: whenever one realizes the antimony between the infinite and the finite tragedy is the result; every claim to resolve the antinomy can, in the end, be seen as comic.

Godot is both tragic and comic, a “tragicomedy.” Beckett’s word for it.

Here are some scattered thoughts on how paradise (the pre-lapsarian world) is “remembered” in Godot: Vladimir (V) and Estragon (E) talk about the old days, climbing the Eiffel Tower, swimming in the Rhone River, when they were “respectable.”; they discuss going to the Dead Sea on vacation.

Can paradise be restored? Yes, but only by Godot; V & E agree only he can “save” them from “WHAT IS,” the horrors of their situation.

The world view of Godot is much like that of Jonathan Swift, like Beckett, an Irishman.

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FRAGMENTARY NON LECTURES IN HOW TO WRITE A SCENE IN A PRETTY GOOD PLAY

In music, notes in a sequence are generally called a “melody” (or “harmony”). They happen one after the other. Notes that happen simultaneously, however, are generally called a “chord.” When I write such as this text I proceed in a melody-like manner, “sounding” one part of a play after another. When I write a play, however, I proceed in a chord-like fashion, “sounding” all the part-notes together at once.

Writing a play is essentially no different from writing poetry, stories, academic
papers and so on. They all are fictions; but fictions that require ideas. David Ives, a well-known NYC playwright, has these comments about ideas and the playwright: quoting Cato the Elder writing to a friend who wants to go into the farming business: “Sterquilinium magnum stude ut habeas (get yourself a big dungheap). Good advice for the writer as well as the farmer”; or, quoting Cicero instructing a servant how to prepare the house for a guest, Si aqua in balnia non sit, fac sit (if there is no water in the bath put it there).” [1]

Sterquilinium... a handy word to drop into a conversation at your next party.

Traditionally, a scene is considered a part of an act, an act a part of a play. But at the beginning of the playwriting tradition in the west, and as far as historians have been able to determine, there were only scenes and plays (and monologues) with neither scenes or acts. A few of my plays lack scenes and acts. But none is like Beckett’s Act Without Words.

But since my purpose here is not to write a play, but attempt to describe what goes on in my mind and with my fingers when I compose a play, I take as my starting point, THE SCENE. It is what I see in my mind as I go along…a goal, a destination…a unity attempting to come into being….a unity filled with completed intentions.

So, let’s get naked and jump in here.

Non-lecture #1: Action/Reaction

In order to write a scene in a pretty good play (PGP) it’s not enough to have an opinion. We all have opinions about things, the weather, politics, our spouses, etc, but they seldom, if ever, produce PGP. A PGP is a much more complex event, something that usually begins with a playwright’s reaction. A PGP is a reaction, but there first must be an action to provoke it in the first place, something more than taking an aspirin for a headache or catching the bus. No, action must be something newsworthy, something unusual, rare, something that offends the author’s sensibilities or sense of justice. Will the action resonate with the audience? Will it “move” them? Will it excite them or make them laugh? The death of a child, a racially motivated murder, a marriage going bad or the blinding of a horse by a disturbed person are examples of actions underlying “serious” plays; conflicts in the family, mistaken identities, money (or the lack of it), hair-brained schemes, improbable situations are those of comedy. But the boundary between the serious and the comic is fuzzy: “tragedy and comedy are not so very different from each other. The unresolvable antinomy in the human subject between the infinite and the finite produces tragedy; every claim to resolve that antinomy can, in the end, be seen as comic.”[2]

Shakespeare’s reactions include reacting to certain character traits, jealousy (Othello), ambition (Macbeth); Shaffer’s reaction to the story he about a person blinding a horse is his play Equus; my own play, Yielding, is a reaction to the story of a newly married couple stuck on a stalled chairlift. Playwrights who specialize in comedy typically react to incongruous actions; tragedians react more to actions like death, divorce, fraud, crime
and the like.

Reacting to a complex of ideas, life and universe are without meaning, God is “dead,” communication is impossible with language, and the like may produce what is called “Absurd Drama” and jokes like this: “God is dead: Nietzsche.” “Nietzsche is dead: God.”

These lines from *King Lear* (Act IV, Sc i) express a view of the world, and the human condition as essentially devoid of value, absurd, because of the individual’s recognition that the gods are immortal but he is not; he can be “killed.”: “As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. They kill us for their sport.”

#2: Entrances and Exits:

Begin with picturing the entrance of characters (who and what they are to be determined later) on stage as two overlapping circles:

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  A                     C                       B
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Entrances and exits are represented by points where the lines intersect. Since we take the points as space and time points, they refer to when and where the characters (yet to be determined) entered the scene (if they weren’t already there) and when and where they left it. Here are some possibilities: The Meeting. Character B is there when the scene opens and Character A enters. Why do they meet? That is, what, if any, is the reason for B to be on stage and what is A’s reason for entering the scene? Here are some possibilities: 1) They are there by accident; 2) Since B is female and A is male (of the right age), they meet for a sexual reason; 3) Since B is a doctor and A a patient, they meet for medical reasons; 4) A and B are old friends and meet to re=new their friendship. Other types of meetings raise out of fixed relationships, e.g., master/servant; lawyer/client; detective/crime victim, etc.

#3: Shared Experiences

Now look at the area marked C in the overlapping circles. This can be taken to represent the concerns, experiences or expectations the Characters come to share. These are some of the things that keep them on stage and talking. (The main reason they are on stage, as I will say later, is “for the sake of the dialogue.”) Note that C represents only shared concerns, experiences and expectations; that is, ones that are known to each other. There are many more unshared ones, ones only known to each person’s secrets, dreams.
and un-describable events. Note also that what is not known to one character may be known to the audience.

Secrets that are revealed as he play progresses, please note, may become part of the energy, as new information, that drives the scene (see non-lecture #4).

Whenever information is passed by an actor to the audience with the understanding that other actors do not hear it, it is called the “Aside.” Though not used much any more, it was a common feature of Restoration drama of the 17th and 18th centuries.

#4: New/Given Information and the Reduction of Uncertainty. Ideally, from the time of entry to the time of exit (of a character) new information comes into the scene and is transformed into given information. Typically, a new character entering the scene carries new information; characters switching topics, shifting the reference from present to past to future, changing their body movements or gesturing in new ways also has the potential of conveying new information to the audience.

But new information can also comes into a scene by way of sounds, prop changes, lighting, clues and the like. The violent weather in King Lear, for example, gives us new information about Lear and the inner turmoil he is suffering from in the last act of he play.

New information is the energy the drives the scene. Part of this is the reduction of uncertainty; uncertainty about who and what the characters are, their motives, the situation they are in, the experiences they’ve had and the like. With new information mysteries can be solved.

Most playwrights try to correlate the length of a scene with the change of new information to given information and the reduction of uncertainty. Ideally, a scene should end before all information becomes given and all uncertainty becomes certainty. You want to avoid having the audience get the impression of “sameness, of how parts of the scene are constructed, where each one is and what it is doing.

Please consider this analogy: When hot water is first run into a bath of cold water, most of the fast molecules are at the hot end and most of the slow molecules at the cold end. The contrast is clear enough to be detected by our senses. The orderly structure is the “message” it conveys. At a later time, however, the entire bath is lukewarm. Fast and slow molecules are all mixed up together in a ceaselessly changing confusion, and there is no way an observer can keep track of them.

Don’t allow the scene to become “lukewarm.” End it with the audience waiting, with anticipation, for the next scene to begin as a reaction to an action in the scene preceding it. Murder in a preceding scene can provoke an attempt to establish it as a crime in the next scene; convulsions, sweating, gasping for air and the like in a hospital patient in one scene can results in emergency treatment in the next scene that saves the patient’s life.
Here the analogy might be he scene must end before all the new information becomes given, known to everyone. If everything is known to everyone; old hat, so to speak, then the scene becomes boring; it loses energy and “sameness” (entropy) pervades everything.

#5: Properties and Props: The spaces marked A&B the personal spaces of the Characters. Typically, they move around in them, upstage, downstage, stage right, stage left and so on. The space marked C is the “environment” shared by A&B; it is an environment with things, like the country road and tree (properties) and hats, watch, boots (props) in Waiting For Godot.

Props, unlike character, are not on stage for the dialogue (though they can be a object of dialogue). Talk doesn’t, as it does for characters, keep them on stage. What does is the playwright’s need to convey, by alternate means (make redundant) new information: furniture of a room, as well as their dress, can tell us something about the social class of the characters; writing instruments, books, or newspapers something about their education or intellectual interests; a bed may indicate a sexual relationship; a strap off a ski-pole, as in my YIELDING, may symbolize the back and forth (yielding) of a newly married couple.

#6: Talk/Dialogue: In Beckett’s ENDGAME, Clov asks Hamm “What is there to keep me here?” Hamm replies, “The dialogue.” This, we might add, is what all us academics in business; keeps a marriage, friendships, politicians, and so on going.

Anyway: Language gives speakers the capacity to talk, not only what is present, what can be “sensed” out there, but also to talk about the past, future, the absent and the “unreal,” mythic creatures, ghosts, unicorns, etc. A major part of Talk is that about persons that never appear onstage but have some connection (real or imagined) with the speaker. The characters in Waiting For Godot talk about Godot who never appears onstage. Rosancrantz and Guildenstern talk about Hamlet (who does appear onstage) when he is off-stage.

On-stage characters talking to each other about off-stage persons (events, things, etc.) can be visualized as a triangle, as A talking to B about C (persons, things, ideas, etc.) In my play, “Canton,” two of the characters, Sun Yat-sen and his wife, Soong Ching-Ling talk about, e.g., the revolution they were a part of, about their (off stage) friend Borodin, how they will receive him when he visits them, about their children and host of other things. On-stage characters can, of course, talk about themselves in their off-stage time.

Changing the topic, talking about something “new,” is a form of new information, necessary for keeping the scene moving and interesting to the audience.

The “quality” of talk (dialogue) can take several forms; it can be rich in metaphor (Shakespeare); in can be verse (Moliere); it can be full of double entendres (Dryden & Sheridan) or it can be in contemporary idiom reminiscent of talk you hear in the grocery store, the office, on TV, etc. But there are other kinds, known not so much by what they
are, as by their effects:

There is, you will notice, considerable amount of overlapping in the categories of TALK that follows; especially in #3 and #7.

1. **Tennis Volley Dialogue.** Here the words, in back and forth succession, take on the appearance of a tennis ball being hit between opponents. The intent is not only to score a point but also keep the subject, or idea, “up in the air.” Here is an example from my play, *FIVE BOXES OF LATEX GLOVES FIFTY GLOVES TO A BOX.* The characters, JACK and JILL have just met in a grocery store and are immediately attracted to each other.

   JACK

   Like to travel, Jill?

   JILL

   I love it. I just got back from Kenya.

   JACK

   Wow! My favorite part of East Africa. The wildlife…it's fantastic.

   JILL

   (Taking flight)

   The mountains and long vistas!

   JACK

   (Taking flight more)

   A waterbuck charges up a hill and forages in the shade of a spiky euphorbia tree!

   JILL

   Impala and Thomson's gazelles graze on the plains below!

   JACK

   Rain is in the air!

   JILL

   Squalls scud across the wide valley floor!
Here is another example from Stoppard’s *Rosancrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*: ROS=Rosancrantz; GUIL=Guildenstern.

ROS

We could play at questions.

GUIL

What good would that do?

ROS

Practice!

GUIL

Statement! One, love.

ROS

Cheating!

GUIL

How?

ROS

I hadn’t started yet

GUIL

Statement. Two, love.

ROS

Are you counting that?

GUIL

What?

2. Bewitched Talk. The subject is controversial; but let us assume for the moment that language and thought are separate but equal; joined at the hip, so to speak, twins of the same mother whose existence, at some level, depends on the other; if so, then
we can say that we not only use our language to express our thoughts, but also that we think when we are conscious of our language. (See Stephen Pinker: *Language and Thought*). By extension then, if something happens to language, if it becomes weird, then something becomes weird about thought; one of the twins, turns on the other and “bewitches” the other (cf. Wittgenstein’s statement that “Philosophy is a fight against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language’; Die Philosophie ist ein Kampf gegen die Verhexung unsres Verstandes durch die Mittel unserer Sprache)

Over-concentration on an idea, a topic, etc can produce bewitched talk. In my “So You Want To Be Billy the Kid. Go Ahead and Be Billy The Kid. It Will Ruin Your Life But At Least You Will Be Billy The Kid,” I have this stretch of dialogue. The scene is between Billy and his erstwhile girlfriends, Lily Lantry and Peachblossom Caress. The theme is love and self-knowledge:

: 

(To LILY)

I can't love you, Lily.

LILY

Why not?

BILLY

You don't know yourself.

LILY

I can learn.

BILLY

It's too late. I love Caress because she willing to learn to know herself.

LILY
No she isn't. She just says she is. She's too busy to have enough time with herself to know herself. Besides, even if she knew herself she's not smart enough to know that she knows herself.

BILLY

(To CARESS)

Is that right, Caress? Are you saying that you are willing to know yourself because you know that I can't love anyone who doesn't know herself? Are you someone who is deceived in thinking she is willing to know herself?

CARESS

How can you suggest such a thing? I know enough about myself to know that you couldn't be with anyone who did not know herself and I was willing to take time and a cut in pay in order to teach myself how to know myself.

LILY

(To CARESS)

Is that right? What proof do you have that will inform us that you are willing to know yourself? How do we know that you're not faking knowing yourself? After all, look who you've been hanging out with. None of them has taken time to know himself.

CARESS

And you think you're so smart. I heard from Jesse that while you getting to know yourself so you could be with Billy he getting to know himself so he could be with Gabriella who in the meantime had given up on the idea of knowing herself and therefore on knowing that she could be with Billy.

BILLY

(Starts toward exit)

Well, I'm going away for a while to rustle some cattle. When I return, you'll be surprised
how well I know that I know myself and how I have forgotten how to unlearn that I know myself.

3. **Self-Indulgent Talk.** In a general way we can say that our talk can one of two kinds of referents: we can talk about ourselves or we can talk about the “other,” (persons, things, events) not ourselves. When we reference ourselves we bring into being, as it were, our subjective self (thoughts, feelings, fears, etc.); talk about others makes us appear as part of the world of all things, the objective self, outside the realm of the subjective self. Typically, self-indulgent talk marginalizes the objective realm of ourselves and all others.

Chekhov’s plays are replete with self-indulgent talk. In this scene Anya is talking with her friend, Varya, about Anya’s mother life style:

ANYA.

We went to Paris; it’s cold there and snowing. I talk French perfectly horribly. My mother lives on the fifth floor. I go to her, and find her there with various Frenchmen, women, an old abbé with a book, and everything in tobacco smoke and with no comfort at all. I suddenly became very sorry for mother--so sorry that I took her head in my arms and hugged her and wouldn't let her go. Then mother started hugging me and crying. . . .

VARYA.

[Weeping] Don't say any more, don't say any more. . . .

ANYA.

She's already sold her villa near Mentone; she's nothing left, nothing. And I haven't a copeck left either; we only just managed to get here. And mother won't understand! We had dinner at a station; she asked for all the expensive things, and tipped the waiters one rouble each. And Charlotta too. Yasha wants his share too-- it's too bad. Mother's got a footman now, Yasha; we've brought him here

4. **Oxygen Starved Talk.** Imagine yourself on Mt Everest. You’re at 28,000 something feet. Just lifting your legs and arms is an ordeal. Rational, coherent, talk with someone else is out of the question. What’s going on with your body?

Air has weight. At sea level it is compressed by the blanket of air above it, and is comfortably dense. At high altitudes, air pressure is lower and air is consequently thinner. It’s harder for oxygen to get from the lungs to its destination, the cells. The heart beats faster, the lungs pump harder. Over-breathing causes problems with loss of too much carbon dioxide, causing lightheadedness, fainting, hallucinations and reduced brain functions, judgment, perception, memory and will.
No play, to my knowledge, has ever been performed at 28,000 feet...performed by oxygen starved brains. But you can write dialogue that that sounds like it might have been. Just keep in mind it is dialogue characterized by pauses (“pant, pant”), haphazard syntax, and showing the effects of hallucinations, faulty perception and bad judgments.

This from *American Buffalo* (*pace*, David Mamet)

DON

So?

(Pause)

So what, Bob?

(Pause)

BOB

I’m sorry, Donny.

(Pause)

DON

All right.

BOB

I’m sorry, Donny.

(Pause)

DON

Yeah.

Most of the plays of Harold Pinter, *The Birthday Party, The Homecoming*, etc. and those of Neil LeBute exhibit a lot of this kind of dialogue. In my play, *Two Actors Playing One Role*, I use it to represent aging minds (the two characters are old men) seemingly overwhelmed by long personal problems ¾ and on the verge of committing suicide.

5. **Spiraling Up And Out (Or Making A Mountain Out Of A Molehill).** This, in essence, is where a character takes a small idea and “runs with it”; drawing out its nuances and presuppositions; repeating keywords, adding details, perhaps changing the context a bit. This has a close relationship to Self-Indulgent talk. The main difference is that Spiraling tends to appear in comedy where the intent is to parody some overly
serious talk.

Look for this kind of talk on the Seinfeld show. In one episode, for example, Jerry makes a disparaging remark about people who own ponies. An elderly lady, an immigrant from Poland, responds with the assertion, “I own a pony.” Then she leaves. Jerry then starts expanding on the subject (Spiraling) with statements like “who would have figured that an immigrant would own a pony”… “I’ve watched immigrants coming into New York Harbor and have never seen one with a pony,” etc. Much of the talk in Shakespeare’s plays, especially *Julius Caesar, Hamlet* and *Measure For Measure* follows this pattern.

6. **Pussyfooting.** Picture the talk between two characters like one sort of behavior we cat-lovers often observe between two cats. Much like the signals sent by a pussyfooting cat, one character, may use words intended to have a double effect: first, to signal an intention not to fight *at this particular time* and, secondly, to warn the other character not to push h/h too far; that is, there are limits to what h/s will take. It’s much like saying, as characters do at times in my play YIELDING, that “I will give into you on this but not on… I will give into you only so far on this but not at all on that.” In this, as in most cases, roles can be reversed with one actor playing a pussyfooting character for a while and then handing the role over to another.

This kind of dialogue is useful to create tension, or quiet hostility, between characters, especially those of the opposite sex in a close relationship like marriage, divorced with children, or siblings disagreeing about some important issue. Much of the dialogue between the married couple in Pinter’s BETRAYAL is of this variety.

7. **What Might Have Been/What Might Be Vs. What is.** Characters create themselves as free subjects (as having free will) by making choices and talking about them. What they have chosen to do must be seen in light of what they have no chosen. Their talk can refer both to what is and what might have been. It can refer equally easily to both because each is necessary to the other. In linguistic terms, the subjunctive (“could be, might be” etc) is as necessary a condition for their talk as the indicative (“is, was,” etc). In many situations, characters construct their lives by combining “is-ness” with a longing for “what might have been.” What we know as regret or nostalgia are formed this way.

Differentiation of characters may be made along these lines with one character a “might have been type” and the other one more in the “is/was” mode. Both in WAITING FOR GODOT and ENDGAME, two of Beckett’s play, we see such differentiation: in GODOT Estragon typically exhibits more “is-ness/was-ness” than Vladimir; the same is true of Clovis, in contrast to Hamm, in ENDGAME. In my play GIFT? “is-ness” and “what might have been” confront each other in, respectively, the male and female characters.

#7: **Pastiche.** “Pastiche” is from an Italian word, “pasticcio” meaning “pie” or anything cooked inside a pastry shell. That is, it is essentially a mixture, or combination, of different elements. The first recorded use of the “pasticcio” was in 1535,
vivanda ricoperta di pasta e cotta al forno “(food covered with crust and baked in an oven”). Its translation into English as “pastiche” was in 1843 (OED) But over the years, and what linguists call semantic drift, pastiche has departed from its “pasticcio” meaning to take on many others, pejorative, neutral and positive. Imitation, parody, invocation of previous works, copycat, awareness of what came first, and so on have a family resemblance to pastiche.

Richard Dyer, author of a recent book on pastiche, lists and describes what he believes are 13 discrete and semi-discrete meanings[i]. As a social and cultural commentator, he is especially interested in how “pastiche” can be used—with positive results—to deconstruct various forms of artistic representation. For example, the Western movie, particularly that distinctive Italian form, the Spaghetti Western. Here is a form, having no single source, that is essentially a series of variations on a theme. One cannot point to a past particular literary work, painting, architectural work, etc. as its “authentic” original. Instead, one finds in it a combination of different sources, echoes of past works, characters, plots, and themes reminiscent of melodrama, epic poetry (especially Homer), Ovid’s Metamorphosis, Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus (itself a reworking of Ovid) and elements of the Old Comedy of the Greeks.

In short, pastiche always involves, in Dyer’s terminology, a pastiching work and a work (or tradition, genre, concept, etc.) that is pastiched.

So, what’s the advantage of pastiching? Time travel for one: sending the audience back in time has the potential of increasing their emotional involvement in older forms and a way to evaluate how, and why, new forms have replaced the old.

Examples of pastiching a scene from an assortment of earlier works are Magis Theater Company (George Drance, artistic direction) production (at the West End Theater, NYC; June, 2008) of Francis Burney’s “The Witlings” and my own “So You Want To Be Billy the Kid; Go Ahead and Be Billy the Kid; It Will Ruin Your Life, But At Least You’ll Be Billy The Kid.”. It is also possible to pastiche your own work, as in the case of Neil LeBute’s latest play, “Reasons To Be Pretty,” at the Lucille Lortel Theater, NYC, June, 2008.

Correcting Errors, Excluding Misfits; Or, IT’S NOT A GOOD SIGN WHEN PEOPLE LEAVE THE OPENING-NIGHT PARTY FOR YOUR PLAY EARLY: Ben Jonson said famously of Shakespeare that the scripts came hot from his quill pen “without a blot.” Maybe. More likely Shakespeare did, in conversation with the actors and fellow playwrights (Marlowe, Jonson, Middleton, Webster, etc) a lot of revising, correcting, mending, re-structuring, grammar checking and the like.

At any rate, you’re not Shakespeare. Every play script needs, ideally, multiple revisions, the advice of friends and colleagues, workshops and the like.

How can this be done? That is, are there any guidelines for revising (rethinking, restructuring, etc.) the script. Please be aware that revising can occur at many different levels, at the level of the word, phrase, sentence and so on up to the complete scene; and
it can occur simultaneously; as, for example, with words, phrases and sentences.

Here are some suggestions.

A. Is the scene time-soaked? Every part of a scene, characters, setting, props, exits and entrances, must present themselves to the audience as being what they are (their identity) by being grounded in time. “When is all this happening?” is the fundamental question. Here the “when” has have both an objective and subjective presentation. Objective time is measured by calendars, clocks and the change in the change of seasons. It is sometimes called the “arrow of time,” time going from past through the present to the future. This kind of time needs no observer to exist, but where one does exist, as in the audience of a play, its particular existence must be plausible and explainable. In my play, Yielding, for example, we learn about objective time through references to the weather, the position of the stars and by the BRIDE asking the GROOM what time it is. The play takes place in an open chairlift and runs its course, through seven acts, from late afternoon to midnight.

For the Romans time was weather, weather time, tempus, tempestas and the thought survives in the modern French idiom, *il fait mauvais temps*, etc.

B. Subjective time lies, as the word suggests, in the consciousness of the characters in the forms of (i) what is happening “now,” (ii) memory and (iii) expectation. That is, for the characters to be three-dimensional, or “voluminous,” they must remember what has happened, perceive what is going on now and what is likely to happen “next.” The problem I had with Yielding, the play, was to present “yielding,” the intention and the act, as a time-soaked process. Without the foundation of time there couldn’t have been any such intention or act at least none intelligible to the audience. So we find the BRIDE and the GROOM (newly weds) shifting positions in the chairlift, exchanging information about their past lives, what they expect of each other and second by second assessments of their time on the chairlift, one swinging in the wind and rain.

If you like, you can think of subjective time has having three phases, a elapsed phase, a now-phase and a coming phase. For the motives of the characters to become intelligible, all three phases must be presented to the audience. T. S. Eliot seems to have these three phases in mind with lines from *Four Quartets*: “Time present and time past/Are both perhaps present in time future,/And time future contained in time past.”

Presenting subjective time to an audience, you will find, requires a lot more thought than objective times does. But together they form a unity insofar as they are experienced simultaneously, as one thing composed of two temporal parts.

b. Parts and whole. Try to think of your scene as a whole composed of various sorts of parts. The main questions here are (i) which parts are dependent on the whole, or other parts vs. which ones are nondependent? (ii) Are there any parts “empty” of intention and purpose? Parts with empty intentions we call “phantom” parts, parts without any apparent reason for being there; these are, however, useful, as we will soon see, in creating a certain kind of relationship between characters; (iii) Are all parts of the scene presented, or are there ones also “talked about” by one or more of the characters?
Are the same parts both presented and talked about? What is commonly called “metadrama” always involves a dependent character of the play enacting a role but at the same time talking about h/h-self in the role. In Beckett’s Endgame, for example Clov, who keeps threatening to leave Hamm, asks him, “What is there to keep me here?” Hamm replies, “The dialogue.”

Here are some examples of empty and filled intentions. (a) Empty: talking about something we are to visit, a lake, for example and generally keeping our mind on it even apart from what we say; imagining it, thinking about it. Filled: seeing the lake, swimming in it, hearing the water, doing whatever constitutes the experiencing of lakes. (b) Empty: trying to remember what someone looks like. Filled: successfully remembering his or her appearance, having an image of them in our mind’s eyes. But remembering them is empty in contrast to perceiving them. (c) Empty: in the absence of the object discussed, stating facts about it. Filled: perceiving that such and such is the case in regard to the object, actually seeing that the house is white. In general, a scene should progress from empty to filled intentions. In my play, ”A Universal Drama That Could Only Happen In Utah,” the characters, who are stranded, and starving, in a raft on a lake, talk about eating one of them. Each character, in the manner of a politician, electioneers the other as to the reasons he or she should not be eaten. At the end, when one is chosen and the others move in to prepare him for the meal, their intentions start to become fulfilled. Had they actually eaten the chosen one on stage¾which, of course, couldn’t have happened¾then their intentions would have been completely “filled.”

There is a lot different objects that can, potentially, fill an intention. It can be a thing, a gun, a shovel, etc.; an image, something remembered, an old flame, like a previous visit to Rome or a car accident; words and sentences; propositions, the meaning of what is said or written; a fact or state of affairs, the 2008 Presidential Race, a hurricane; the desire to finish a project, like a novel, etc. And it can be some combination of thing, desire, image, etc. In my play, Gift?, George’s image of Heather (the happiness they had as a couple before) creates in him the desire to re-start the relationship by the gift of a bracelet (the thing) to her. It turns out, however, that his intentions remain unfilled. In Yielding, a longer play, “yielding,” as an empty intention at the opening of the play, begins to fill toward the end. Though, as in any marriage, there will have to be a lot of yielding ahead if it is to continue.

In most cases of fictive cannibalism (Swift, Twain, Lord Byron), needless to say, intentions that way range between empty and filled, but never completely “full.” Mystery writers commonly use the “empty-to-full-intentions” in a highly intelligible way with the “crime committed®crime solved” scenario.

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FACES ON THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR

(A Fifteen Minute Tragicomedy)

Gene Washington
THREE CHARACTERS: The bank-robbers of the 1930s, BONNIE PARKER; CLYDE BARROWS; NARRATOR. BONNIE wears a red dress; CLYDE & NARRATOR wear a suit, tie and an optional hat. The action takes place in the “death car,” represented by B&C sitting in chairs.

In the first performance of the play (St. John’s Episcopal Church, Logan, Utah, 3 June 04) the actors John McReynolds (CLYDE) and Janet Anderson (BONNIE) sat in chair behind a table. A steering wheel, obtained from a junkyard, was passed back and forth between them. Here, with the exception of the two chairs, all the props may be simulated. The author played the NARRATOR. The second performance was in LA, June 12-15, 08 by FirstStage. The actors were, Dennis Safren (NARRATOR); Ruth Otero (BONNIE); Zeff Zwillinger (CLYDE). Dennis Safren directed.

SOUND: Gunfire that ends each scene can be simulated by a drumroll. Or by asking the audience to make the sound of gunfire.

AT RISE: The NARRATOR begins the play with the following remarks.

NARRATOR
Good evening (or afternoon) The following script was found on my porch. It seems to be composed of scenes cut from the final version of Bonnie and Clyde the 1967 film. As you are about to witness, the scenes are all about what was going on with the couple right before they were killed by Texas Rangers in a roadside ambush. Since all the scenes seem to be about “endings” (the end of the film, the end of Bonnie and Clyde, the end of an era, etc.) we may surmise that the director and the editor of the film were experimenting with different ways to end the film; or provide closure for the story.

SCENE ONE

NARRATOR
In this scene we find Bonnie informing Clyde of the reasons she must leave him for Captain Hamer, leader of the Texas Rangers who are lying in wait to kill them.

CLYDE
(Head and shoulders shaking back and forth)
Why are we stopping here?

BONNIE
(Shaking)
I have a rendezvous with Captain Hamer.

CLYDE
You’re not turning yourself in are you Sweetie?
BONNIE
I’m leaving you, Clyde.

CLYDE
Leaving me? How come, Sugar?

BONNIE
You don’t know yourself, Clyde. I can’t rob banks, steal cars, kidnap people with a man who doesn’t know himself.

CLYDE
(Taking flight)
How was I to know, with the kind of background I have, that I didn’t know myself! How was I to know, even if I knew myself, that I was in a condition of un-self-known-ness? How did I know that this would lead to the man who’s waiting in ambush for me would end up stealing the affections of my dear Bonnie? How was I to know that….

BONNIE
(Interrupting)
Don’t sweat it, Sweetie. It’s just that I’m convinced that Captain Hamer knows himself. Self-knowledge in a man, especially one who wears the badge of a Texas Ranger…it’s a powerful attraction for a girl.

CLYDE
Then you haven’t heard?

BONNIE
Heard? Heard what?

CLYDE
Captain Hamer’s a Buddhist.

BONNIE
So?

CLYDE
Buddhists don’t have a self to know.

BONNIE
What? Why didn’t someone tell me?

CLYDE
You could’ve asked.
BONNIE
Ask? Ask? Who’d ever think to ask a Texas Ranger if he’s a Buddhist?

SOUND: gunfire. B&C

Twitch and fall dead.

FADEOUT

SCENE TWO

NARRATOR
Here the director reveals an unusual strategy of Bonnie and, by so doing, pays a compliment to all nail care professionals in Texas.

BONNIE
I have an idea. What if we split up for a few days and I take a position as a manicurist at that beauty salon where Captain Hamer has his nails done.

CLYDE
You mean the one in Work Brittle Texas?

BONNIE
That’s it. Hamer and his fellow Rangers go there once or twice a month…while I work on their nails, I would listen…draw them out…I feel certain I could find out their plans about us.

CLYDE
My Bonnie as a spy manicurist. I like the concept. It’s perfect. It’s so intimate, and at the same time so public. When you care for nails and toenails…caress someone’s hands and feet…you hold him, so to speak in your power. A word, a little pressure…he submits.

(Pause)

Let’s review our situation. We have dangerous, powerful enemies…they will take advantage of our slightest hesitation, our slightest error…to spy on us, to take us prisoner…to kill us. Our most immediate task is to thwart their plans. In other words, to find someone who can infiltrate their circles where their plans are being made.

BONNIE
Right!. As a manicurist spy, I could use the touch of my hand and my wiles to encourage Captain Hamer and his Rangers to stop chasing us and turn their attention to other matters.

CLYDE
It’s perfect! Who could do it more effectively and more discreetly than my Bonnie, the star manicurist spy!

(Pause)
Get out the map. Let’s see what the fastest way to Work Brittle is.

SOUND: Gunfire. B&C writhe and drop dead.

FADEOUT

SCENE THREE

NARRATOR
In this scene we learn about the tedium of driving between bank jobs in a large state like Texas and one solution to the tedium.

BONNIE
It’s no criticism of you, Clyde, but…but….

CLYDE
I noticed that you’ve been a little quiet lately. Is something the matter? You can tell me.

BONNIE
No, I’d rather not. Some other time.

CLYDE
Oh, come on, Sweetie. Tell me what’s on your mind.

BONNIE
I’m not being critical of our work. I love it. My life began with you, the open road in our Ford motorcar…robbing banks…burning rubber…dodging bullets. But….

CLYDE
But…but? Go on. Tell me.

BONNIE
Well…do you suppose we could rob banks a little closer together? All this driving…steering around potholes…dodging stray cows…it’s getting me down, Honey.

CLYDE
You mean go on vacation somewhere?

BONNIE
No, I don’t want to give up our profession…not even for a few days. I mean find some way to relieving the tedium of driving…mile after mile…in driving rain and scorching heat…through flat open country with nothing to delight the eye…or tickle the funny bone.
This is Texas, Honey.
(Pause)
Well, I suppose we could move our operation to a higher density state? How about New Jersey?

BONNIE
No, Texas is our home. It’s us. Chili, fried okra, blackeyed peas…where else can you get real food like that.
(Pause)
No, what we need is entertainment…something to make us laugh as we drive between banks. I’m thinking we ought to snatch a comedian.

CLYDE
To amuse us as we drive along?

BONNIE
Right!

CLYDE
That’s a wonderful idea, Honey. But let’s make it two comedians. Your best ones…think of Abbott and Costello, the Marx Brothers, Seinfeld and Kramer…come in pairs.

BONNIE
Okay. But I’m also thinking…
(Long pause)
It might be a good idea…talking about pairs.
(Another long pause)

CLYDE
What? What?

BONNIE
That maybe we ought to snatch a trauma surgeon and a nurse too.

CLYDE
???

SOUND: Gunfire. B&C writhe and drop dead.

FADEOUT.

SCENE FOUR

NARRATOR
Here Clyde reveals that he has had a full, or diploid, genome mapped of the DNA inherited from his parents. Bonnie drives while Clyde examines his genome map. Remember that your personal genome informs you of what you are now (your physical, mental, psychological, etc. traits) but also what diseases, idiosyncrasies, disorders, etc. you are predisposed to.

BONNIE

What’s that, Sweetie?

CLYDE

(Displaying the map)

It’s called a full or diploid genome. It consists of the DNA of both sets of chromosomes from each of my parents.

BONNIE

Really? Is that normal?

CLYDE

Of course it’s normal. Had it not been normal, I wouldn’t have had it done. It would have been a waste of my money and time.

(Pause)

Would you like to have your DNA mapped? Our kids and grandkids might be interested in knowing just who you were and what genes they’ve inherited. Nothing beats the personal genome of your parents to tell you who you are and what’s going to happen to you.

BONNIE

Such as?

CLYDE

(Holds map up and points at various places on it)

See this gene, it’s the LCT one. It tells me I’m lactose intolerant.

BONNIE

Nothing to be ashamed of.

CLYDE

This here gene, DRD4, tells me I have a novelty-seeking personality.

BONNIE

No mystery there.

CLYDE

And this…it’s ABCC11 gene, it informs me that I inherited my brown, sticky, wet
earwax from my father.

BONNIE
You know what?

CLYDE
What?

BONNIE
Now I know why I was attracted to you in the first place. What gal could resist a lactose intolerant, novelty seeking dude with sticky, wet earwax?

SOUND: Gunfire. B&C writhe and drop dead.

SCENE FIVE

NARRATOR
In this scene we find Clyde informing Bonnie that he intends to give up crime. This change in Clyde is due, it’s suggested, by the storm they have just passed through—not, I should say, an uncommon occurrence in Texas.
(Pause)
If you like an O. Henry type ending, you’ll most likely like this scene.

CLYDE
(Looking around)
It looks like it’s clearing up.

BONNIE
I believe you’re right. I see the sun over there.

CLYDE
You see a lot of storms like that in Texas.

BONNIE
Yes, I’ve heard it said that it has something to do with the fact we have no national parks in our state.

CLYDE
No doubt about it.
(Pause)
Do you feel like you’re a different person?

BONNIE
No, should I? Why do you ask?
CLYDE
I do. I’m different, Bonnie. A drastic change has come over me.

BONNIE
(Examines him)
You look the same to me.

CLYDE
I don’t mean the way I look. It’s on the inside that I’m different. I don’t want to live this way anymore. I’m fed up with it. If anyone wants to rob banks…live in history as a symbol of an anarchic utopia, star in an innovative movie that ushers in graphic sex and violence into the industry, then let them. There are plenty of people around who can do it. Maybe a terrorist? Or a spy for Russia. I’ve done my bit.

BONNIE
(Sad)
I’d never have expected that of you, Clyde. Stop robbing banks? Stop being a cultural icon. Become a conformist. You’re a fine one to talk like this, the best bank robber and media idol in the country.

CLYDE
And fated to be played by Warren Beatty, the best looking actor in Hollywood. Don’t forget that.
(Pause)
But going through that storm back there made me see the light about a life of crime. It’s obvious that we have the best system of laws in the world. Our governor is the most enlightened state leader in the country. That’s why all the bank robbers have confessed their guilt, been pardoned, and gone home. I’m the only one left.

BONNIE
We are.

CLYDE
We?

BONNIE
You said you were the only bank robber left. It should be the first personal plural pronoun, we.

CLYDE
Okay, we.
(Pause)
Now as I was about to say. If only I hadn’t been so ideologically abandoned perhaps I could have gone on longer. But to think that the whole population of our beautiful,
peaceful and fertile state is singing the praises of our governor and our laws...that all the prisons are empty, our banks free of the fear of being robbed, that I alone am....

BONNIE

(Over “am”)
We, we’re alone...ideologically abandoned.

\`

CLYDE
Okay, okay, we.
(Pause, gestures)
Just look out there, Bonnie. See that beautiful meadow. Soon the farmer will come to harvest his crop. His face and the faces of his hands will light up with satisfaction and joy at another bountiful harvest.
(Pause)
And that's not all. See on that hill over there. A new industrial park has gone up there. Progress, Bonnie, progress! If you look close you can see smoke coming up from the smokestacks.

BONNIE
Maybe I shouldn’t tell you this Clyde. But what you’re looking at is a crematorium.

SOUND: Gunfire. B&C
Twitch and fall
dead.

FADEOUT

SCENE SIX

NARRATOR
In this scene we find Clyde giving reasons why he and Bonnie make a perfect couple. Notice that that the director seems to be working from a script that depicts Bonnie as a character with an independent will—in a manner alluded to above.

While C talks, B files her nails,
Combs her hair, etc.

CLYDE
Ours is a perfect union. You, Bonnie, are its soul. I’m its flesh. You give me heaven. I give you the earth.
(Beat)
Although I must admit we do have an occasional difference of opinion.

BONNIE
???
CLYDE
It’s my opinion that God created man and woman to complement one another. You, Bonnie, have intuition, your sensitivity makes you an artist. I, on the other hand, have practical knowledge and a lot of common sense.

BONNIE

???

CLYDE
It’s a natural quality of mind. But if it wasn’t for you, I would be just another pedestrian criminal: shallow and brutal. You make me noble, even a heroic figure. My strength and common sense are at your service. Which is to say at the service of goodness, beauty and art.

CLYDE (con’t)
(Pause)
I protect you from the prose of life.

BONNIE

???


SCENE SEVEN

NARRATOR
In this scene we find Bonnie & Clyde discussing proof for the non-existence of God as a compelling reason for robbing banks. A nice touch here is Bonnie & Clyde passing the steering wheel back and forth between them.

BONNIE
Did you hear what that teller at the last bank said to me?
(Hands the steering wheel to Clyde)

CLYDE
No, I was busy collecting coins from their pinball machine.
(Returns the wheel to Bonnie)

NARRATOR
(Interrupts)
Please note that the one speaking is also the one who has the steering wheel. This is obviously an attempt to invest the words of the speaker with the authority they deserve.
(Pause)
Oh, I forgot to mention…the scenes in the play, with the possible exception of one or two
are in no particular order.

BONNIE
The teller said that bank robbers like us are evil.

CLYDE
Did you inform him that we were also young and in love?

BONNIE
No, I didn’t…anybody could see that we are.

CLYDE
So? What did he say?

BONNIE
Well, it’s not what you’d expect to hear from a standard bank teller every day. He said he
could prove to me why robbing banks is evil and why, in turn, that this proves the non-
existence of God.

CLYDE
That’s interesting. That subject has been on my mind for several days now.
(Beat)
Now it’s my belief that any argument like that…including any argument that aspires to be
a proof…must begin somewhere. It must have premises. And if its conclusion is striking
enough, there will almost certainly be some smart people who will find denying one of
the argument’s premises, even if that denial is itself striking, more reasonable than
accepting its conclusion.

BONNIE
That’s what I’ve always thought. Given philosophy’s track record, I doubt that there will
be any argument with the conclusion ‘God does not exist’ that virtually every
intellectually honest person would find convincing.

CLYDE
Right! I would add that no argument against God’s non-existence would convince even
an intellectually honest atheist…not to say those who believe firmly in the existence of
God.

BONNIE
Of course you are, in general, right. But the idea is a familiar one and our contribution to
it must show ways to motivate it, respond to objections to it and in all to bring new clarity
to various points that can be made about it.

CLYDE
I have no problem with that. I like to think of robbing banks, kidnapping...the things we’re good at...things like evil and the non-existence of God as a zero-horrors game.

BONNIE
I like the term.

CLYDE

Thank you.

(Pause)

Our first premise here must be that free will is a great good, even though free creatures like ourselves might choose to cause pain and suffering as well as other evils. Suppose, for example, we’re sent to prison with the idea of deterring further bank robberies in this area. This good could be had by sending us to prison for ten years. This good could also be had by sending us to prison for less than ten years.

BONNIE
And that means that every day we spend in jail is an evil.

CLYDE
Of course.

BONNIE
Then it follows that sending us to prison for ten years or for less than that does not bring about a good for society. This is implied by a common moral principle. If you are able to prevent an evil, you should not allow that evil to occur, unless allowing it brings about a greater good.

CLYDE
Of course.

BONNIE
And so we arrive at the conclusion that sending anyone like us to prison for zero-days, that is, not sending us to prison at all, results in a greater good than sending us to prison for any days because the zero-days option prevents the evil of sending us to prison.

CLYDE

SOUND: Gunfire. B&C
Twitch and fall dead.

SCENE EIGHT

NARRATOR
Shakespeare, we recall, commonly ends a scene with rhymed lines. Here we find the scriptwriter not only following the Bard’s custom, but going beyond him to write an entire scene in rhyme.

(Pause)

Being the only one standing, and out of a job at the end of our play, I have taken the liberty to add an elegiac stanza. Alas, poor Bonnie and Clyde! I knew their story well.

CLYDE
Ah Bonnie, I love you more by half
Than does the cow the new born calf

BONNIE
Right! From you I learned to read the skis
To know when hail will fall or winds arise
You taught me first the heifer’s tail to view
When stuck aloft, that rain would soon ensue

CLYDE
You bet! Sweet is my toil when you are near
If you should leave, there’s winter all the year,
With you no summer’s heat I know,
In winter, when you’re here, with love I glow.

BONNIE
Amen to that! With you, as sunshine is to day,
Every minute, hour, seems sweet holiday
And holidays, if sadly you were gone,
Like working days I wished would soon be done.

SOUND: Gunfire. B&C writhe
And fall dead.

NARRATOR
(Places a black arm band around his arm)
The sun is set. The night came on a-pace,
And falling dew wets round our place.
The bat takes flappy rounds on heavy wings,
And the hoarse owl a woeful song he sings.
Our couple here knows it’s now too late,
To love, rob banks and to defer their fate.
(Exits)

B&C stand up; count the bullet holes n each one; kiss, wave at us & start to exit. Then Bonnie
BONNIE
People and things ask nothing better than to play, and certain animals too.

FADE TO NIHILISTIC
DARKNESS

***

VOICES FROM NOWHERE

Ay, ... to go you know not where. To lie in
Cold obstruction and to....
—Measure for Measure.

FOUR CHARACTERS: BILL and JIM, DOORMAN and HANDYMAN. All in their 30s to 40s. These may be played by either male or female actors—or a combination of both genders. If played by females, certain male pronouns in the script would, obviously, have to be replaced by female ones. Female names should be “common” ones, e.g., Mary, Jane, etc. BILL and JIM are dressed in suit & tie; the HANDYMAN in working clothes.

NO SYNOPSIS

STAGING: Preferably a black-box in which all the lights are extinguished at the end of the play—to indicate a “nihilistic blackout” for everyone in the theater.

PROPS: Chairs, one each for BILL and JIM and one for DOORMAN and others yet to arrive; briefcases for BILL and JIM. A hood, or blindfold, for BILL and JIM. A toolbelt, or a single tool (like a plumbers helper) for the HANDYMAN. Broom for the DOORMAN. An optional prop would be boxing gloves for the DOORMAN.

AT RISE BILL enters from stage left; JIM from stage right. Each wanders around scrutinizing the place without noticing the other. After a few seconds of wandering BILL bumps into JIM.

BILL
What?

JIM
Who’s there?

BILL
Me. Does that surprise you?
JIM
Me? Extraordinary!

BILL
I was walking along as usual….

JIM
Hardly a care in the world….

BILL
When suddenly…

JIM
Like a bolt of lightning…

BILL
(Becoming aware that he ought to know something about JIM)
How did you get here?

JIM
(As if he would be humiliated if he gave the question a direct answer)
Why don’t you ask what brought me here?

BILL
(Following his own thoughts)
It’s outrageous!

JIM
(Mimicking)
It’s preposterous!

BILL & JIM freeze.  
DOORMAN enters, takes their briefcases;

He reappears with three chairs.  
He puts one down for BILL & JIM And then one for himself near what may be a door.

He then forces BILL & JIM to sit in a chair and he takes his seat

Each time either BILL or JIM rises From their chair the DOORMAN Will force them to sit again
BILL
I was walking, or perhaps, rushing along….

JIM
That’s right…you were hurrying, heading for a specific destination.

BILL
How do you know?

JIM
It’s obvious. I was walking along too, heading for my destination…or, better make that hurrying along.

BILL
You took the words right out of my mouth. As I said, I was heading for my destination when suddenly…

JIM
Was it the destination you had chosen?

BILL
Of course, with full intention and purpose.

JIM
You were on time?

BILL
I’m very punctual. As usual, I left my car in the usual place and was walking the final distance.

JIM
And it was hot.

BILL
Stifling. But of course that’s nothing unusual for this time of year.

JIM
(Shivers)
But it’s cold now.

BILL
Weird!
(Pulls up the collar of his coat)

JIM
Strange!
(Pause)
Were you following the dictates of your conscience on the way to your destination?

BILL
I remember listening to my conscience...at least for part of the way. I had everything planned down to the last detail. My spouse and I spent long hours planning ahead.

JIM
I too had everything mapped out in advance. Even as a child I had a plan...a goal...and savings. I'm a very serious, and organized, person.

BILL
I see. And you had other destinations in mind after you had reached this one?

JIM
Of course...several. For years ahead. Vacations, holidays, anniversaries, funerals to attend....

BILL
So you anticipated that there would be funerals and weddings to attend?

JIM
Of course. They're inevitable.

SOUND: A rumbling
Sound, like an elevator

BILL
Do you hear something?

JIM
You hear it too? It sounds like a machine...loud...maybe a chainsaw.

BILL
Or perhaps a lawnmower. Where could it be coming from?

SOUND: Elevator

JIM
I don't know. There it is again. I think it's an elevator.

BILL
Nonsense. If it was an elevator, there'd be people getting on and off...we'd hear them talking.
JIM
It sounds like an elevator to me. It must have been that that threw me to the ground.

BILL
What would an elevator be doing here? That doesn’t impress me as being a rewarding kind of speculation.
(Pause. Stands up from his chair. Looks around. Sits down, leans forward, elbows on knees)
That’s the worst part, the uncertainty of it.

JIM
(Reflective, taking his time as if he’s forgotten about Bill)
But was I really thrown down? I can’t tell if I was “thrown down” in the exact…you might say the classical…sense of the word. Though I did have the sensation of lying down.

BILL
(Leaning close to Jim, touches him on the shoulder)
Did you see anyone?
(Looking around)
Is anyone here?

JIM
(Aware of BILL. Inhales deeply and looks around slowly)
I suppose there are, but with all this fog it’s hard to tell.

BILL
The bad part is not knowing.

JIM
On the other hand…what’s there to know.

BILL
Yes…what’s there to know. We need help with that.

JIM
(Looking around)
Yes, help, that would be useful. But still…we could do with more information.
(Stretches, rubs his arms)
I suppose we could leave without knowing.

BILL
I like to know where I am. Not only that I also like to know that I don’t know where I am. If we left now, I might not find that out.
JIM
Excuse me. Find out what?

BILL
The uncertainty of it. Whether I would ever want to come back.

JIM
Do we want to come back?

BILL
I like to decide that before we leave.

JIM
Not me. I don’t care.

(Blong pause. Looks around. Brushes something off the leg of his trousers)
Can you see your shadow?

BILL
Now that you mention it, no. What about you?

JIM
No.

(Long pause)
So… I suppose we have to conclude that there’s no sun.

BILL
I suppose so.

(Looks around)
If there are other people here, I’d like to meet them.

(Long pause)
They’ve have to speak our language.

JIM
(Indicates his chair)
Why would there be chairs if there were no people?

BILL
Who says that there are other chairs? We have no evidence of other chairs.

JIM
(Indicating the DOORMAN)
He has a chair.

BILL
So he does. But it not like our chairs.

JIM
Another mystery. Perhaps we should conclude that standing up is not enough for him.

BILL
Perhaps. I’m not sure. There may be other explanations: One, time stops when he sits down and that gives him a certain feeling of security.

JIM
Doubtful.

BILL
Two. Divine intervention. Like Job he cannot refuse not to sit down. Three. He has never known before what it was to sit down and now that he has the opportunity he wants to enjoy it to the fullest.

JIM
Uncertain.

They look around in an edgy way.

BILL
(Fusses with the collar of his shirt)
Are you lonely?

JIM
Now that you mention it…just a little. Nothing to write home about.

BILL
Yes, nothing to write home about. But, it would be nice to have more company.

JIM
Even if they talk too much.

BILL
Even if their manners are imperfect and their jokes are bad.

JIM
That too. Have you heard the one about….

BILL
Yes.

JIM
Yes?
BILL
I’ve heard it.

JIM
Okay…tell it to me. I believe I’ve forgotten it.

BILL
Later. At the right time…when I see an opening.

Long pause. They stare off at
Nothing in particular.

JIM
So, what can we count on now?

BILL
Remembrance.

JIM
A nice word. I like its sound.

(Long pause)
What does it mean…specifically here and now?

BILL
Someone, somewhere, is thinking about us.

JIM
Who? Can you guess?

BILL
It’s hard to say. There are so many of them.

They look into middle
space; tap their shoes;
look at their fingernails
etc.; wasting time.

JIM
Does it strike you that there’s a poverty of stimulus here?

BILL
I believe we could say that. If you mean what I think you mean.

JIM
Are we lying in the same shade on this? The accessibility of sense data?

BILL
It’s in the low range.

JIM
Low to non-existent.
(Becoming aware of something odd about Bill’s head)
Were you hit?

BILL
Yes, I was hit.

JIM
I was hit too.

BILL
Was there a burning sensation?

JIM
More like stinging. Did it cause you to see anything unusual?

BILL
The color red, though shot through with patches of gray.

JIM
I don’t believe that. That’s unnatural.
(Pause)
Don’t you think, in our condition, we should tell each other the truth?

BILL
What condition is that?

JIM
I’m not sure. We need more information.

BILL
I say again. When I was hit, I saw red.

JIM
All right, all right. Have it your own way. This is no time to argue. I need to go on to my destination. I strongly recommend you go on to yours.

BILL
That would mean giving up my not knowing where I am. Do I really want to do that? I’m
It’s bound to get colder here and more lonely.

Perhaps you’re right. So why don’t I accompany you, at least for a ways.

I’m not sure I want you along. So, far you’ve not been very good company. But, all right. Come along.

They get up to leave. The DOORMAN pushes them back
In their chairs.

(JIM con’t)

Later.

Yes, later. We’ll leave later.
(Takes off his coat and arranges it carefully on the back of his chair. Brushes the shoulders of the coat carefully, as if trying to remove dandruff. JIM watches intently)

Are you gay?

Now that you mention it. How would I find out if I am?

I don’t know. Ask the doorman? Maybe he’s a fortune teller?

(Takes his coat off the back of the chair and puts it on)
I’m old fashioned in how to know things. To answer your question I would have to experience the pain.

I have no desire to be gay.
(Yawning)
This is really becoming insignificant.
(Pause)
Did you bring anything to eat?
BILL
Why? Didn’t you eat breakfast? I always start out with a big breakfast and I never eat again until after I reach my destination.

JIM
Good for you.

JIM inhales and then stretches.
BILL leans forward, puts his elbows on his knees and looks at the floor.

Silence fills the place.

BILL
I wonder what the weather’s like at home.

JIM
Like it always is…leaving much to be desired.

BILL
I suppose so.
(Looking up)
I didn’t think to bring an umbrella.
(Long pause)
Better just to wait and see what happens.

JIM
Wait for what to happen?

BILL
Do you have something specific in mind?

JIM
Forget it!

HANDYMAN appears. He wears a toolbelt. He and the DOORMAN Seem to converse, which we don’t hear.

BILL
(Indicating the HANDYMAN)
Ah, look! Someone to listen to us. Someone to sound out our opinions on.

    HANDYMAN passes by
    BILL and JIM and starts to exit.

    BILL half rises out of his chair
    And yells at the HANDYMAN.

    BILL (con’t)
Wait!

    HANDYMAN turns back to
    them.

    HANDYMAN
It wheezes.

    JIM
What wheezes?

    HANDYMAN
Like a flooded lung.

    BILL
I notice your toolbelt. Are you here to fix something?

    HANDYMAN
    (To himself)
You can’t fix it. O, I tried all right. It babbles like a mountain stream. I couldn’t
fix it. The fuse box is filled with wasps. No one told me my hands would get this cold.
I’m having trouble holding my drill.

    (Pulls a drill out of his toolbelt and turns it on. It wobbles in his
    hand. The drill is battery driven.)

    JIM
    (Shrinking away from the drill)
Be careful with that.

    HANDYMAN
    (Venting)
Short circuits everywhere. Too much ice on the power-lines. No one told me about all the
pop, sizzle, pant, pant. No one tutored me in how to obtain replacement parts…for the
washer, the furnace, the toilet, the fax, the telephone, the fridge…something has stopped
the elevator.
BILL
The elevator? You know about the elevator?

HANDYMAN
(Becoming aware of BILL and JIM)
Of course I know about the elevator. Why else would I be here? Of course, there may be other reasons. But they’d have to be temporary ones.

JIM
Where is the elevator?

HANDYMAN
A mystery has it lodged between stops.
(Long pause. Runs his drill)

JIM
Would you show us the way to it? We’re having trouble leaving here. We have important appointments elsewhere you know.

HANDYMAN
It’s my opinion that the spring thaw has stalled the elevator there. It’s my first job of this kind, dislodging it. I’m on a retainer you see. The apartment owner pays me to fix things.

BILL
Apartment owner? Where is he?

HANDYMAN
I’m just now going to consult with him about that elevator. I’ll tell him you asked where he is. I have to caution you though, he’s a hard man to find.
(Starts to exit)

JIM
(Rising from his chair)
Wait! What else can you do besides work on elevators?

HANDYMAN
(Taking flight)
I’m glad you asked me that. I find it so much easier to distribute my résumé by word of mouth. Ready? Here goes: I can unplug most toilets, repair some fences, shovel your snow…unless it falls on Sunday; I can rake your leaves…as long as they’re dry and the wind’s east, southeast but not north, northwest…. I can clean out your eaves…as long as there’s an available supply of water. I can repair your sidewalks…so long as the temperature is between 65 and 80. I can, without any specific conditions, clean your windows, paint your porch, weed your garden, harvest your corn
BILL
Can you take a message to the apartment owner?

HANDYMAN
Times being what they are…
(He reflects on what should be his answer)
Your message?

BILL
Of course, ours.

HANDYMAN
Short or long message?

BILL
Either one…well, short will do.

HANDYMAN
No.
(Long pause)
Though I might improvise one for you. Or employ one stolen from the last person who was here. A Frenchman, I believe.

JIM
No, no, it has to be our message, not the message of the messenger.

BILL
Yes, you might not get the message right. The apartment owner might misinterpret it. We want to know where we are.

HANDYMAN
You two don’t listen very well do you? I just said the times are what they are.

JIM
What are they?

HANDYMAN
Unconcerned…indifferent…pick your predicate.
(Turns to exit)

JIM
Wait! We’re not finished!

HANDYMAN runs his drill.
Exits.
JIM (con’t)
I’d like to leave here. I’m finding it harder to express anything that might be construed as news.

BILL
I’m not sure we can go on….I’m not sure he [indicating the DOORMAN] will let us leave.
(Looks around)
Besides…I don’t think we’re in an apartment building at all. I think it’s some sort of enclosure…maybe a cell. But I don’t see any doors or windows.

JIM
That’s because of the fog. Trust me. It’s highly likely there are doors and we can leave, unimpeded, anytime we want to.
(Indicating the DOORMAN)
Though so far…so far, we haven’t left.

BILL
Is it just us, then, imagining things, having doubts? We both know where we were going. It’s foolish to think otherwise.

JIM
That’s nonsense! Why say we have doubts. Of course we have doubts. Everyone does.
(Pause)
You’re boring me. Let’s drop the subject.

BILL scoots his chair away
From JIM They face off in
Different directions.

BILL
(Looking down, pointing)
Look at this. There’s a line drawn on the floor. Let’s follow it…maybe it leads to a door

JIM does not move. Speaking
In a reflective way.

JIM
What does it say?

BILL
Say?

JIM
(Irritated)
Yes, say. Are there any directions written on the line?

BILL
No, not that I can see. The fog’s thick here.

JIM
Can you see an arrow pointing in a certain direction?

BILL
Now that you mention it, I think I do. I’m not sure.

JIM
Is it going where I want to go?

BILL
How should I know?
(Pause)
You know…you assume too much.

JIM
Why do you say that?

BILL
You just now assumed that we have the same destination.

JIM
Does that make you uncomfortable?

BILL
Of course. It limits my ability to speak my thoughts freely. Don’t you see? If I didn’t have to think constantly about your assumptions about me and where we are, I would be able to say more…in fewer words.

JIM
Speak without assumptions?

BILL
Correct!

JIM
That’s impossible. Are you a mystic who intuits everything?

BILL
Why do you ask?

JIM
Let’s drop it.
  (Pause)
Do you see any footprints on the line?

  BILL
  (Looking down)
Why don’t you look for yourself.

  JIM
I can’t…right now. I’m thinking.

  BILL
Okay, go on with your thinking
  (Pause)
Yes, I see tracks. In places they almost cover the line.

  JIM
What size are they?

  BILL
Would you think of something else to ask me? I can’t tell what size they are, they’re all jumbled up together.

  JIM
Are they pointed in the right direction?

  BILL
  (Scrutinizing the surroundings)
What’s the right direction? Some of the footprints go that way….
  (Pointing)
Some this way….
  (Pointing another direction)
Well, aren’t you going to look at what I’ve found?

  JIM
I’m going to trust you…this time.

  BILL scoots his chair around,
  peering at the floor.
  JIM (con’t)
What is it?

  BILL
They’re all gone…vanished…the tracks, the line. There’s nothing but a blank space here.
JIM
It must be the fog. I think I’ll wait for it to clear

SOUND: Elevator

JIM (con’t)
There it is again. The elevator. The handyman has it running. Do you hear it?

BILL
I heard something. I don’t think it’s an elevator. It sounded to me more like an escalator.

JIM
Elevator, escalator. What’s the difference? They both make the same kind of noise and do the same thing.

BILL
Not always. You might try not being impulsive when you speak.
(Long pause)
Have you been here before?

JIM
No…I’m not sure…I don’t see anything I recognize.

BILL
I think I’ll go on. I don’t want to miss my appointment. I have one you know.

Walks in various directions, with arms out, feeling for a way out stage right, stage left.

The DOORMAN pushes his chair. His chair bumps into JIM’s

JIM
Would you watch where you’re going?

BILL
I can’t. I have to go on. It’s important that I get to my appointment on time.
(Looks at wristwatch)
Do you have the time? My watch seemed to have stopped.

JIM
As long as other people have watches, why carry one?

BILL
I simply have to be on time

JIM
You said that before. Let’s stop talking about an appointment and establish some facts. We both left our house according to a plan and were walking…

BILL
I was hurrying.

JIM
All right, you were hurrying. The morning air was brisk, the sun was shining…our spouses and children were an established fact. Of course, there were things going on that we were unaware of, like the behavior of atoms in the wood and bricks of our house, or what was going on in outer space…with the inhabitants of other galaxies…with water erosion on the moon…the chemical composition of the rings of Saturn…with…

BILL
Would you stop that kind of talk! Of course there were things that we were unaware of…there still are…and ever will be… that’s my belief.

JIM
Are you through? May I continue?

BILL
I don’t object. Proceed.

JIM
If you’re like me…

BILL
Tell me…if we were seen together…would I appear to be like you?

JIM
As I was saying…we got dressed in the normal way. We bathed, brushed our teeth and hair. We ate breakfast…we read the morning newspaper…we took out the garbage for collection.

BILL
Correction. I had taken the garbage out the day before. We have a collection by the city once a week. That, I believe, is normal.

JIM
Believe what you want. Now, before starting out to our destination, we had committed to memory the address of our destination.
BILL
We even took the precaution of writing the addresses down. Don’t forget that.

JIM
Yes, we must not forget that. We are like everyone in that respect. We don’t completely trust our memory whenever we have an important destination in mind.

(Pause)
Now listen closely. This is a point I want to stress. Suddenly, without warning, something stopped us from continuing on to our destination. It was something outside us, something completely external and foreign.

BILL
I don’t disagree. But I can’t absolutely agree either. For whatever reason…maybe the fog…or the mystery surrounding the sound of an elevator…only the presence of footprints, but no people. I think we ought to withhold judgment on the exact nature of the thing that stopped us.

JIM
You don’t agree that it was something independent of us?

BILL
I don’t totally disagree. But I have my doubts. Maybe it was something inside ourselves…perhaps it was our conscience that stopped us.

JIM
Conscience never stopped anyone…at least not for long. And it’s easy to leave it at home…especially if you have an important destination in mind.

BILL
You’re confusing me!

JIM
Excuse me?

BILL
I just had a picture of my destination.

(Long pause)
But now it’s gone. It’s your fault.

JIM
If you want to go on to your destination, then go on. I’m not standing in your way.

BILL
I think I will go on.

(Pause. Hand up)
I can see it again.

JIM
Good for you...Oh, pardon me...bless your heart!
(Long pause, evidence of hard thinking)
I don’t think that this is an apartment room at all. I think it’s some kind of force field. It’s energy, not matter, that we’re dealing with here. I suspect we’re caught in something like a backward propagating wave...like the kind that creates a traffic gridlock. Only this one is more universal...more cosmic you might say.

BILL
You just said that you were walking when you were stopped. Earlier you said you were riding. So which is it? Walking or riding?

JIM
I don’t remember saying that. Anyway, what difference does it make now? I was stopped. That’s what important.

BILL
Maybe we still are walking...on our way to our destination. Or, just as likely, maybe this is our destination. We have no solid evidence that we haven’t arrived there yet.

JIM
Is confusion a normal thing with you? If we were still on our way to our destination, we would be passing things and being passed by other things. Try to think of something else to say.

BILL
(Long pause)
All right. But give me a minute.

JIM
I’m beginning to think that this whole thing is a dream
(Folds his arms and leans back in his chair)

BILL
If that’s right, then all we have to do is wake up.

JIM
How do you wake up from a dream? Especially if it’s not a dream.

BILL
Maybe the apartment owner will come and wake us up. It can see it now. There will be a knock on the door...we’ll dream on...he enters, a big man wearing the cloak of authority...we’re still dreaming...
JIM
What if one of us is snoring?

BILL
No problem.

JIM
I wouldn’t be too sure. It always irritates my wife.

BILL
Would you give me a break? I want to finish my story….
(Interrupted by the noise of a drill)

HANDYMAN enter; motions to
the DOORMAN.

Stands center stage. Hands on
his toolbelt; takes the stance of
an orator.

HANDYMAN
(In a loud voice)
Homeless of the world! Travelers to nowhere in particular! Sojourners under some
forgotten hill! Whoever in wherever. The elevator is now enjoying a state of rapture.
That’s the noise you hear. Rapture, pure rapture. There are precedents for that…available
on demand. Nor can we predict when said rapture will end. But not to worry. The
elevator is from the very oldest, and most reliable, manufacturer of such mode of
transportation. .

(Runs his drill. Turns it off. Points finger upward)
Meanwhile, what should you do until the elevator is unenraptured? Simple. Explore. To
be human is to explore. To push the envelope with the best intentions and skills. Along
the way, your efforts will spawn new breakthroughs. New inspiration, more self-
knowledge. Generations that follow you will be empowered to explore…the voyage must
continue.

(DOORMAN grabs him and pushes him offstage)

JIM
So…all we have to do now is wait for the handyman to tell us the elevator is
unenraptured. Is that your perspective?

(Pause)
I never liked elevators. They are a design in deception.

They yawn and stare off into the
distance.

Suddenly, BILL moves his chair.
To face JIM.

BILL
The only thing that’s making this bearable to me is thinking someone sane will appear.
(Takes a pair of glasses from a pocket, cleans them, and returns them to the pocket)

JIM
Perhaps we need a transition to something else.

BILL
I’ll tell you what. Let’s measure this place…find out how big it is…what it shaped like.

JIM
What good will that do us?

BILL
Well, for one thing, if we’re going to have to stay here, we might want to buy some furniture…or re-model the place. There are lots of things you can do with a room.
(Looks around)
New curtains, a paint job…maybe some pictures, a rug or two…they would do wonders for this place.

JIM
Measure the room? That’s a dumb idea. What are we going to measure it with?

BILL
We could pace it off. That would give us at least a ballpark idea of its size.

JIM
Okay, okay. Go ahead.

BILL rises and starts
To pace off the room. The DOORMAN returns him
To his chair.

JIM (con’t)
Any other ideas?

BILL
Okay, okay, let’s stop bickering and put our heads together. First, what do we know?

JIM
We know we’re in a strange place with no way out.
BILL
There may be a door somewhere.

JIM
But we don’t know where.

BILL
There’s no sun and it’s foggy.

JIM
We can hear the sound of an elevator.

BILL
What may be an elevator. Or something enraptured. We’re not sure. We need more information.

JIM
In any case, we can’t find the elevator. We don’t know which way to go.

BILL
(Indicating the DOORMAN)
He means for us to stay in our chairs.

JIM
So what does all this mean to you?

BILL
It means we don’t know much about our condition.

JIM
But we still have our inner freedom.

BILL
You call this freedom? We can’t find our way out of here…the line we might have followed is gone…we don’t know what time it is…we hear an elevator we can’t use.

JIM
We must be patient.

BILL
Patience is for persons with no destination. I’m going to do something that will cause the man at the door to fall asleep.

JIM
What?
BILL

Just watch.

BILL stands and slowly begins
to turn around in the manner of
Someone turning a car
Around on a narrow road.
He goes forward left; back
Right, then forward left.

JIM

(Watching BILL carefully)
Wait! Do it this way:
(Rises from his chair. Acts out the instructions)
First, back up to the right...then go forward to the left. You save a turn that way.

BILL

I'd prefer to turn around my way. Do you mind?

JIM

Of course I don’t mind. Your way might work after all. I’m just thinking my way may
work better.
(Pointing at the DOORMAN)
You want to get out of here, don’t you? Go on to your destination?

BILL

Of course. But I’m not happy about giving up some of my freedom to you.

JIM

Don’t you see? You’ve already given that up just by being here.

BILL

Okay, okay, let’s do it your way.
(Pause, indicating the DOORMAN)
Is he watching?

JIM

He’s always watching.

They back up to
the right; then go forward to the
left. They are now standing side
by side facing the DOORMAN.
DOORMAN pushes both men back into his chair. Then sits down before his door.

JIM
(Sits a while, tapping his foot. Then he stands up. Starts moving his chair around trying different positions and scrutinizing them)
Want to join me?

BILL
(Stands up, starts to re-position his chair)
Why not? It will make the time go faster.

DOORMAN Returns both men to their seats.

DOORMAN returns to the door
Re-arranges his chair; Folds his arms and sits down.

BILL (con’t)
I don’t know about you…but I’m thinking we ought to be nicer to each other. We may be together a long time. I suggest we start by agreeing completely with each other.

JIM
You maybe right…I stress the “maybe.”
(Pause, looking up)

BILL
Do you see any stars?

JIM
Why? Is it night?

BILL
(Slouches in his chair)
Search me.

JIM
In any case, it may be too early for stars.

BILL
Or too late.
JIM
So...what do we do now?

BILL
It appears that we have some time on our hands.

JIM
So it does. Off hand, I can only think of what we can’t do.

BILL
That’s one of your better assumptions.  
(Pause)
We can’t hang ourselves.

JIM
No rope, nothing to hang it from.

BILL
We can’t read or play cards.

JIM
Eat, drink or...I assume… make love.

BILL
I lack the desire.

JIM
Strange. Even when I had the desire, it wasn’t enough to have it.  
(This should give us a clue as to age of JIM)

BILL
Nor for me. Never enough. Weird.  
(Looks around)
There no sun. So we can’t plant a garden. What we can’t do. It’s a long list.

JIM
And getting longer the longer we’re here.

BILL
There’s no evidence of that.

JIM
I believe you’re right. There’s no evidence of…

BILL
(Over JIM. Standing up, )
Nothing to express.

JIM
(Shaking his chair)
But the need to express it.

BILL
(Suddenly stopping. Back in his chair)
But we know we’re…

JIM
Here…?

BILL
(Repeating)
Here…?

JIM
I believe we’re right. It’s either that or say…say…something like somewhere. We’re somewhere.

BILL
It’s never enough for you not to say anything. Why is that?

JIM
I suppose it’s just the opposite with you.

BILL
I have nothing more to say on the subject.

JIM
What is the subject?
(Shakes in a pocket for something. Pause)
I could use someone else to discuss the matter with.

BILL
Personally, I’d like to have more information.

JIM
(Yawns then leans back in his chair)
Well, of course more information is always useful. But certain things are known. First, we know we’re in a place we don’t recognize…second, we know we can’t leave…at least not now…then we know that the person at the door is stopping us from leaving. He is interfering with our free movement. Would you agree?
BILL
On the whole...yes, I think I agree. But what about the elevator? That seems to be a way out of here.

JIM
Of course we’ll need the elevator eventually. But now we need to deal with the person at the door. He’s one of the keys to our situation. So...are you ready for this?

BILL
Tell me first...then I’ll tell you if I’m ready.

HANDYMAN enters. He is Carrying a flat, rectangular object. He starts to exit.

BILL (con’t)
Wait! Any news about the elevator?

HANDYMAN
(Stopping and turning to BILL)
In its factual being, the elevator is as it already was, and it is what it came to be here for.

BILL
Does the apartment owner know that we’re here...and anxious to leave?

HANDYMAN
All research about the owner...and not least of that which operates within the range of the central question of Ownership...is an ontological possibility of your being. here. In other words, there is no owner without the owned.

(Turns to leave)

BILL
Wait a minute! Are you taking that item to the owner?

HANDYMAN
(Flourishing the object he holds. It should be obvious to the audience that it is a mirror)
It interprets itself by what it casts back and by what it reflects on the world...the one in which it occupies. That is to say, only as long as it does not fall prey to tradition which conceals our access to those primordial sources from which the categories and concepts of being have been quite genuinely drawn.

(Holds the mirror before his face and looks deeply into it)
Perfect! Not a hint of irony or smidgeon self-aggrandizement.

JIM
I suppose you can talk about a mirror that way.

BILL
I suppose…and use it that way. Why not. It’s obvious he hasn’t had the kind of life we enjoy.

JIM
(Gesturing toward the HANDYMAN)
May I look at myself in the mirror? I want to see if I need to comb my hair. I want to look nice for my appointment.

HANDYMAN holds the mirror
Up to JIM. He scrutinizes it for
A time, turning his head this way
And that. HANDYMAN then
holds it up to BILL who repeats
JIM’s Head turning, scrutinizing,
etc.
HANDYMAN exits.

JIM (con’t)
Strange! A blind mirror.

BILL
It casts nothing back…a mystery.
(Long pause)
Is it your perception that there is uncertainty about everything that comes next here.

JIM
Indeed, always some surprise.

BILL
Yes, some degree of unexpectedness.

They slump back in their chairs.
BILL yawns.

JIM
Why didn’t one of us ask him about the elevator?

BILL
No. Strange!

JIM
It’s highly redundant for you to say that.
(Pause)
All right. Here’s my idea. Let’s try to win over the doorman. Persuade him to let us leave.

BILL
Well, how are we going to do that? He wasn’t impressed with us before. Besides, he may not be able to help us. He may not be able to leave either.

JIM
What do you mean?

BILL
He may not know the way out of here. Or maybe there’s another door and another doorman beyond his door blocking his way out.

JIM
Use your imagination. At this very moment millions of ordinary simple people are coming in and going out through doors whenever they want to. They’re opening and closing a door behind them. There are doors that turn on hinges…sliding doors…rotating doors. Doors that need their hinges oiled, doors that clang.

(Pause)
The doorman may belong to those happy people who use all kinds of doors…going in and out, in and out.

BILL
I was only raising a possibility.

(Becoming aphoristic)
Either all things are possible or none is.

JIM
Possibly.

They stare out toward nothing.

JIM (con’t)
My suggestion is that we try persuading the doorman that we’re not what he thinks we are. That we’re someone he admires and wants to see happy.

BILL
Who can he think we are?

JIM
Whoever we can make him believe we are.

BILL
Okay, I guess it’s worth a try. Who should we be?
JIM
Most people like sports. They like the excitement, the noise and bustle of games Let’s pretend we’re boxers in an important match.

From their chair they pretend to box. The

DOORMAN watches Impassively.

BILL (Panting)
Stop! I’m exhausted!
(Pause. Points at the Doorman)
Look at him. It’s obvious…he’s not interested at all. This isn’t going to work.

BILL (Still throwing punches)
Nonsense. We haven’t given it enough of a try. Let’s go another round.

I’m beat.

They scoot their chairs back
And slump in their chairs. Then
BILL scoots his closer to JIM’s.

BILL (con’t)
Let’s review what we do know about the doorman. We know he’s not attracted to boxing as a sport. We know he’s blocking our way out of here. We only have uncertain possibilities and wild guesses about him left.

JIM
Aren’t you overlooking something…we can ask for his forgiveness.

BILL
Ask for his forgiveness? For what? It’s him who ought to ask it from us…for keeping us here.

JIM
That’s beside the point. We have to ask for forgiveness…we don’t have to have any reason for it. It may be the only way we’re going to be allowed to leave here.

BILL
Okay, consider me convinced.
They call the DOORMAN
Over to them,

Alternating

JIM
Oh, dear doorman…Oh, pardon me…dear and most honorable doorman. Listen to us…watch us demean ourselves for you and to ask for your…
(Bowing)

BILL
(On his knees before his chair)
Go on, go on.

JIM
I can’t. I’ve forgotten the words.

BILL
(Crawling, reaching out an arm to the doorman)

The DOORMAN pulls BILL to feet and returns him to his chair.

BILL (con’t)
(After a period of scrutinizing the DOORMAN)
I don’t think he’s a doorman at all.

JIM
He’s sitting by what may be a door.

BILL
True, he’s sitting by what may be a door. But that doesn’t necessarily make him what may be a doorman.
(Pause)
A doorman ought to be a certain way. He doesn’t feel like a doorman to me

JIM
Feel?

BILL
Yes, feel. You know…when you’re around a person for long enough you get a certain feeling about him.
(Pause)
You won’t deny that?
JIM

Deny what?

BILL

What I just said. People give off a certain feeling.

JIM

No, I won’t deny it. I just don’t believe it.

BILL

Believe what you will.

JIM

I will.

BILL

(Indicating the DOORMAN)
It’s my opinion he’s the caretaker. If this is an apartment, which I believe it is, then it must have someone to take care of it.

JIM

This is approaching the level of un-sustainability.

Silence. BILL fusses with his tie
And collar. JIM picks at his
fingernails, folds his arms, etc.
These actions should be
long enough to
Make the point about their
Inner condition.

JIM (con’t)

(Turning to BILL)
Would you mind me asking you a personal question?

BILL

As long as it’s not too personal. I like to protect my privacy.
(Pause)
Is it a question commonly asked?

JIM

I don’t know.

BILL

Okay, good. Is it something that will help us to bear each other’s company?
JIM

Who knows.

BILL

Okay. What is it?

JIM

What’s your name?

BILL

(Long pause)
When do you have to know?

The DOORMAN removes

blinds

glasses from BILL’s pocket.

JIM & BILL with

a blindfold or

hood. Places their hands over

ears. They are now

blind and

DOORMAN then brings in more
Chairs and arranges them in a
Circle around BILL & JIM’s

chairs.

The arrangement of the chairs
Resembles spectators waiting for
A play (show? Movie?) to begin.

DOORMAN goes out and
With a broom…he sweeps
around the place….

LIGHTS OUT IN THE
THEATER. A

NIHILISTIC DARKNESS

DESCENDS

SOUND CUES:

Elevator, p. 3, 4, 17
Drill (of Handyman), p. 12, 14

AIRPORT LOUNGE
VITA 2008


Post graduate work at Cambridge University, UK, studying linguistics, 1971-1972

Reading knowledge of Latin, Italian and German. Some reading knowledge of Greek. Some speaking knowledge of Italian and German.

Three sabbatical years from Utah State University, 1976-77 (Research in England on Jonathan Swift); 1984-85 (Research in Italy on "Jonathan Swift's Reputation in Italy."); 1992-93, periods of time spent (1) in London (studying the pedagogy of writing in the UK), (2) time in classes at Utah State University in German and Italian, and (3) writing up research in Jonathan Swift and various linguistic approaches to the pedagogy of writing.

Return to Cambridge for two terms, 1981, to participate in seminars in creative writing.

Various Activities: Started a joint project with Thiokol Corporation (Brigham City, Utah) technical writers and students of technical writing at Utah State University (1981); Lecture, "On Comedy," Summer Citizens, 1 August 2005, Campus, Utah State University. Formed Monday Night Writing Group which meets every other week at Borders Bookstore (Logan) and St. John's Episcopal Church (Logan). Assistant grader, lecturer on how to write non-fiction to students of ENVS 3600-06, "Living With Wildlife," Spring term, 2006

Tutoring: English Grammar, Style of Writing, Sentence and Paragraph Construction, etc. Mishiko Matasuto (Japanese student); from June 2002 to September 2003; Jose Salcedo, Andres Contrerros, Eduardo Monzon, Yolanda Baez, Masil Estevez Miguel Leonardo and Jonathan Liriano (all from Dominican Republic); Ruandia Vasquef (Nigeria) October 2005 to September 2006.


**Stage Experience.** Played the corpse in Tom Stoppard’s The Real Detective Hound, October 7, 2003. English 2250. Directed his own "Five Boxes of Latex Gloves, Fifty Gloves to a Box" (a seven minute play), *Helicon West*, Logan, Utah, 9 March 2006.

**Professional Experience:** Lecturer in English, University of Missouri 1963-69. Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Professor of English, Utah State University, 1969-1993. Emeritus Professor English, Utah State University, 1993--.


**Teaching Experience:** At The University of Missouri: Expository Writing, Creative Writing, Survey Courses in English Literature, Introduction to Linguistics; Theatre of the Absurd.

At Utah State University: Eighteenth-Century English Literature, Linguistics, Non-Fiction and Technical Writing, Creative Writing, Home Study (Correspondence) Courses in Creative Writing. Classes taught at Utah State were both undergraduate and graduate.

Summer Citizens Courses: Writing of comedy (2004); Stage Comedy (2005); Theatre of the Absurd (2008).

**Honors/Awards:**

1. Researcher of the Year, 1987, Utah State University.
2. Old Main Society Member. Membership in Society awarded for Teaching and the Support of Teaching.
3. English Department, Utah State University, Awards Society Member. Awarded for Financial Support of Scholarly Research and Travel.

**Other Activities:** Book Reviewer for *The Scriblerian, Western American Literature*, USU Press and *American Notes and Queries*. 

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PUBLICATIONS

Please Note: The diversity of the following list of published writings represent, on the whole, my teaching experience.

Fiction:
   (see also, www.skiingmag.com)
   (This story was a runner-up in 7th Annual WHR, Writing Contest for Utah Authors, 1999.)

(Full texts of the stories published in *Weber Studies* can found on the web-site of *Weber Studies*, http://weberstudies.weber.edu/)

14. "Donnina Visconti," 1993 Utah Arts Festival Short Short Story 1st Place Winner
   (Printed, on p. 48, of the Bulletin of the Festival.)
15. "Peto Ugan," 1992 Utah Arts Festival, Short, Short, Short Story 3rd place (printed, on p.33, of the Bulletin of the Festival.)

23. “Self?” *Harbinger* (Australia), online publication www.harbinger.org
Novel

Memoir:

Plays (Performed):
"Yielding": A Ten Minute Play in 7 Acts. First produced at Festival of New Plays, Utah State University, January, 25-27, 2001. Action of the play takes place on a chairlift in which a newly married couple are stranded. Second production was June 3-6, 2002, Wasatch Acting Company, Salt Lake City, Utah. In the 73rd writing Contest, sponsored by *Writer's Digest* the play won an honorable mention. There 18,000 entries in the contest. Brief Acts Company performed the play 24-26 December 2004, Creative Place Theatre 750, 8th Ave; New York City. The play is scheduled for performance at Springboard Theatre, Melbourne, Australia, in 2007


3. "What Time Is It Sweetie? Eleven Prequels and One Sequel to the End of Bonnie and Clyde." Performed at St. John's Episcopal Church, 22 April 03. Actors were, John McReynolds (CLYDE) and Janet Anderson (BONNIE).

4. "That Fatal Brew Pub" performed Lyric Theatre (Logan, Utah), 4 February 2004 Part of annual Comedy and Blues program.


6. "Five Boxes of Latex Gloves, Fifty Gloves to a Box," *Helicon West*, Logan, Utah, 9 March 2006; the actors were Heather Robison (JILL) and Ben Olson (JACK). The author directed; the second performance was by FirstStage (LA), 3:00 PM, 3 June 2006. The actors were Gregory Kenyon (JACK) and Tonia Nitoli (JILL). Gregory Kenyon directed. Accepted for performance (Dec. 06) by City Theatre, Miami, FL, Marco Ramirez, Literary Manager (see his email in folder).


Plays (Honored)
1. Two Actors Playing One Role, Semi-Finalist, First Stage 9th Annual One-Act Contest.

Translation:

Poems:
   (This poem was first read at a meeting of the Emily Dickinson Society, Utah State University, 1 September 1997.)
12. Poem in Utah Sings VIII Anthology (2004) contact poetkmm@msn.com (Kolette Montague)

Scholarly Articles: (Pope, Swift, Sterne, Fielding etc.)

Articles in Anthology
   "Sterne, Laurence" Vol. 2, pp. 1057-1067
   "Swift, Jonathan" Vol. 2, pp. 1085-1093
(Parts of these articles are reprinted in Don L. F. Nilsen, Humor in Eighteenth-and Nineteenth-Century British Literature: A Reference Guide [Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1998], pp. 22-29, 64-65.)

“Cleanup” entries in Wikipedia, online encyclopedia, on Jonathan Swift and Laurence Sterne.

Articles in Scholarly Journals

**Articles in The Explicator:**
3. "Pope's Mary Gulliver to Captain Lemuel Gulliver," 47 (Summer, 1989), 12-12
4. "GULLIVER'S TRAVELS, Bk. 1, Ch. 5," 48 (Summer 1990), 251-52.
8. "Swift's GULLIVER'S TRAVELS, Bk. 2, Ch. 1; Bk. 4, Ch. 1. 46 (1987), 8-10.

**Articles in Swift Studies:**

**Articles in American Notes & Queries:**

**Articles in The Scriblerian:**
16. "Where is Lilliput?" 21 (Spring 1989), 204-5.

**Other Articles in Scholarly Journals**
Reviews of Scholarly Books and Articles in *The Scriblerian*:

Translation:


CONFERENCE PAPERS/LECTURES


Chair of eighteenth-century section, RMMLA, Laramie, WY, October, 1978

Chair of section on eighteenth-century theories of satire, Eighteenth-Century Society, Salt Lake City, Utah, October, 1993.

Articles on the Pedagogy of Writing

4."Teaching the Use of Declarative/Procedural Information," *Technical Communication,*

11. ERIC documents (Resources in Education):
   a. "Writing, Pedagogy, Modality," ED 337799
   c. "Organizing, Concerns and Control Numbers," ED 244278
   d. "Realms, Concerns and Information Cells," EJ 293122.
   Add from web-site
   e. "Questions: Strategies and Intentions," ED 176271
   "Thirdness and Text-Organization," EJ 329480
   h. "From Asking to Answering: Making Questions Explicit." ED 234789

*Work in Progress/Submitted for Publication*

*Linguistics for Fiction Writers*. Describes how a knowledge of linguistics can help the fiction writer to "find" the genre, and style he or she feels most comfortable with and how a knowledge of linguistic "possibilities" can sharpen dialogue, structure and "tone." An important part of the book is a discussion of the correlation between constructing a fictional persona (point of view) and syntax.

"Growing the Business" (fiction).
"Asking the Right Questions about Dogs" (Essay)
"My Life—So Far—In Real Estate" (Essay)
"Woods" (Essay)
"Playing Dugway," a comic skit.

*MISCELLANEOUS (Scripta Minora)*


   (See The Herald Journal, May, 1988, pp. 9-10, story on Gene and Melle Washington, "Writers")
