

A Director's Gut and Craft

Robin A. Eriksen

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in the Theatre Department
of the School of the Arts

Columbia University

May 1st, 2017

A Director's Gut and Craft	3
Six Questions	3
Breaking an entry	5
<i>Finding the Anchor</i>	5
<i>Finding the Necessity</i>	6
Inspiration	7
<i>The Music</i>	8
<i>Birch Trees and Pando</i>	9
<i>Munch and Stuff</i>	11
<i>Poetry</i>	12
<i>The Prelude to the Fugue</i>	12
Characters and Actors	13
<i>A Multiway Mirror</i>	13
<i>Casting</i>	15
The Makeover	21
Working with Designers	24
<i>The Set</i>	24
<i>The Space</i>	25
<i>The Symbolic, Imaginary and Real</i>	28
<i>The Lights</i>	29
<i>The Costumes</i>	30
<i>The Props</i>	30
<i>Meeting with the Designers</i>	31
The Director as a Leader	31
<i>The Four Pillars</i>	31
<i>The Parents</i>	36
The First Read	37
<i>Adding Music and Dance</i>	44
Balancing Poetry and prose	45
<i>Text and Style</i>	46
<i>The 'Associative Effect'</i>	47

Rehearsals	48
<i>Table Discussions</i>	48
<i>Hands On, Hands Off</i>	50
<i>Confidence and Relaxation</i>	51
Three Roles	53
<i>Applying the Roles</i>	56
Conclusion	60
Turning the page	65
Bibliography	66
<i>Books</i>	66
<i>Web</i>	66
Appendix A	67
Appendix B	68

A Director's Gut and Craft

I was sitting on the subway from Queens to Manhattan, on my way to audition for Columbia, thinking about what they would potentially ask us to do. “What if they ask us to choose a text?” I thought, “What would I choose?” A poem by Mary Oliver popped into my mind out of nowhere. It was a poem I knew well, and one I had been quite fond of a few years earlier. Throughout the rest of the day I couldn't get the poem out of my head. I couldn't shake it. So when Anne Bogart asked us that day to choose a text and stage it, even though I tried to look elsewhere, the poem by Oliver had attached itself so firmly in my mind and gut that it left me no choice: I had to do it.

One year later I heard about a playwright, his name was Charles “Chuck” Mee. After discovering that all his plays were available online, I figured I should check out his work. I downloaded a few plays, and decided quickly to make a play called *Summertime* my first read. I finished it in one sitting, and didn't think in that moment that it was anything more than a fairly good play. It was only in the coming days, weeks and months that I realized that the play had made an impression much deeper than I first thought. I couldn't shake it. The story, the text, the images it had provoked kept popping into my mind. It attached itself so firmly in my mind and gut that it left me no choice: I had to do it. At least twice during my time at Columbia the unshakeable idea has become the beacon to follow. Looking back on both instances, I'm thrilled, grateful and humbled by these minor obsessions, and proud of my gut for embracing them.

Six Questions

Summertime by Chuck Mee is a multifaceted beast, and while the play is saturated with issues one must be aware of when choosing to tackle it, it also presented itself to me with a number of challenges I had not foreseen. These challenges and trials forced me into quite a bit of searching

and exploration, both in form, process and approach. In addition they allowed me to experiment with and study questions I had been grappling with during my time at Columbia – six of which I'll be presenting in this dissertation. Three of my central questions revolve around the form in which I tend to work, in other words they hone in on the creative part of being a director. The remaining three questions regard a notion that has fascinated me throughout my time at Columbia, one that I will continue to explore in my career, that of the director as a leader, and the execution of good leadership in the rehearsal room and process.

The creative questions are the following: 1) In what way can we help the audience hear an abstract or complex text as if it was conversational? 2) What can emerge from combining different forms of text with “commercial” entertainment and “pop culture” references? 3) Based on the notion that abstract and concrete can not truly exist without the other, how can one achieve a successful result when working with both an abstract text and an abstract form?

The leadership questions are: 4) How can we as directors create the absolute best conditions for the whole team (actors, designers, stage managers, etc) to succeed? 5) What do the dynamics of control mean in a rehearsal process? 6) In what way must the director change his/her focus throughout a process?

This dissertation is part memoir, part contemplation and part result of accumulated studies. My goal with the following text is both to accurately reflect the process of bringing *Summertime* by Chuck Mee to life, and to challenge myself to organize my thoughts about central topics I have been and still am grappling with as a stage director.

Over the following pages I will describe the process of working on *Summertime* by Charles Mee, and in doing so hopefully touch on and explore the questions at hand. The thought

is to not have the questions themselves guide the structure of the text, but rather to let experiences and theories from the work put down in the process guide the exploration, and then hopefully the sum of it all will allow for answers to emerge.

Breaking an entry

When I started working on *Summertime*, several months before we started rehearsals, I thought I had a good vantage point, having read the play and already juggling clear ideas about aesthetics and deeper meanings. I was wrong. There was a connection between the text and myself that was clear as day, but for some reason I couldn't seem to fully enter the text in a way I had gotten used to doing with other scripts. What I mean by this is that I found myself not able to translate the text into theatrical, or even non-theatrical, situations in my mind. The text remained words on the page. William Ball speaks about the movie playing in your mind when you read the play (Ball 1984: 93-96), Michael Chekhov offers imagination exercises to enter a scene or situation (Chekhov 2002: 21-28), none of which were happening for me. While reading the script I found myself occasionally jotting down thoughts, questions, and ideas, but they were mainly intellectual, and not thoughts that were sparked by a deep communication with the text. This went on for a long time.

Finding the Anchor

Before leaving New York for the summer, I was playing around with a thought that it would be fun to use references that my generation ties to its teenage years in order to access something in the way we view topics like love, commitment, romance, etc. Because of this somewhat loose thought, I was able to leave my designers with a starting point, asking them to draw inspiration from the 90's in their design. Beyond this they didn't have much to go on, mainly because I

myself didn't have much to go on, and so followed a summer filled with endless conversations between the designers and myself, each conversation with a new large idea to base the play on.

I had for a while tried to use the three steps I had learned from director Liesl Tommy when she came to Visiting Directors in 2015; 1) What is the story? 2) What is my connection with the story? 3) How do I connect the audience to this story? Because I couldn't seem to find what the story was, the two remaining steps were redundant. Simultaneously I was working with an approach Brian Kulick once presented to us "Can you gather the whole play in one active sentence?" And after much trying, I was able to come up with something I found to be close to the core of the piece. Reading the play one night an image popped into my head where the characters were trying to grasp a slippery piece of soap. Using this image I boiled the play down to the active sentence "A play where 13 people each try to grasp that slippery bar of soap called love." This then became the anchor for the piece, and is ultimately what informed most of the big decisions. I was still not able to envision the text and the situations, but at least the intellectual understanding of it had lead me to find an anchor.

Finding the Necessity

This anchor-line offered more than just a starting point for big decisions. It allowed us a more focused perspective into why this play was important today. I like to think that part of why the play spoke to me in the first place was because it touched on 1) something I myself needed to deal with, and 2) something going on in our world today, needing addressing. When putting together the copy for the play, we decided to end it in the following way "As [the characters] search, one by one, they discover they may not know how love works at all. Do you think you do?" For those of us working on it, we found a common denominator in the struggle today's

society seems to have in creating lasting inter-personal relationships. That humans are pack animals, but somehow we've forgotten how to make a pack. Be this because of technology, or globalization, or politics, to me the reason wasn't important. What was important was to show that it *is* possible, but we have to try, we have to open up, and we have to take a chance. Another thing, and perhaps most importantly, we need to spend some time talking about, thinking about and learning about human connection. To me the essential human connection is love, be it romantic, familial or just neighborly, and *Summertime* by Charles Mee offers almost a manual on how to talk, think and learn about these things, and from remarkably many angles. Based on this I was able to build on the idea I had had with using my generations pop culture references, both tying the text and situations to times of our lives where many of the ideas about love were shaped, i.e. our teenage years, and using a shock effect caused by immediate cultural reference to allow for personal reflection by the audience. I believe music has a huge influence on our growth and understanding of things during our teenage years, and so music became for me – as it very often is – an immensely important element of what was in the making.

Inspiration

After finding the anchor for the piece, it was time for me to put my own stamp on it. The most important thing for me to find early on in any process is the world in which the play will exist. Anne Bogart tells the story of how they on *Miami Vice* hired a designer who's only job was to point at things (clothes, props, cars, etc) and say "That's *Vice*." or "That's not *Vice*." Her job was to create the holistic aesthetic of that show, and it's a story I constantly have in the back of my mind when working on a play. However, to me there needs to be a process before I can fully start saying those two lines, and I'll take you through that over the next few pages. Although I don't know what the world of the play is from the get go, I usually have a hunch. Based on this hunch I

start gathering inspiration that will help me create it. This is a somewhat long endeavour, which with this play became even longer because of my struggling to break into it, but it usually starts with the same step; finding the music.

The Music

One of the first things I do in a preparation process is to create a playlist for music that I can see/hear connected with the play. I add and add and add music to the playlist, sometimes reaching way over one hundred songs, and listen to it non-stop, every day, for a long time. Because I very often find myself quite engulfed in the material I'm working on, having the music playing in my ear while walking down the street has served to be incredibly helpful. The thoughts sparked by the play, and the canvas provided by the music together create fascinating images and inspirations. As I get more and more familiar with the play – the story, the text, the life of it – , it eventually becomes easier for me to discern which of the songs in the playlist that no longer fits, and so I start removing them, distilling the list. To me this process is almost like gold panning; imagine the play being the sieve, the music being the sand, and all the thoughts and ideas the water that washes the grains of sand away from the hidden gold. After a while I'll be left with perhaps 10-20 gold pieces, and it's from these I select the music that will go with the play. What I've come to realize though, is that this whole process is a two-way street. It is not only the play that informs the selecting of the songs, but the music itself informs the world of the play – feeding the aesthetics that are shaping in my mind. For *Summertime* especially, the music would prove to be very important. I was blessed to be dealing with a playwright who uses music abundantly in his pieces, which allowed the music to exist in the play without any extraneous finagling. Several times in *Summertime* Chuck has written in aria's to be sung, or background music, like "Violin music, quietly in the distance." (Appendix A). I decided to take his

suggestions as suggestions and inspirations, using them as a guide for where to place music, instead of trying to use the suggestions themselves, or fitting replacements. Even before spending loads of time with the play I had started collecting music on a Spotify playlist. Because of my intent to use references from 90's pop culture, the first music I put in was of course just that. But I quickly decided to widen my horizons and include music from a wider time scope. I was struggling with the idea of limiting the cultural references to reach just one age group or generation, and wanted to expand and include both an older and younger audience. In the early summer I decided to get input from the "audience" itself, and posted the following text on Facebook:

*Dear FB friends,
I'm doing a show and you might be able to affect the outcome! If you had to pick one love song from your teens that meant a lot to you, which one would it be? After lots of consideration I think I have to go with Teenage Dirtbag by Wheatus - what about you?? Please comment below (o: Go!*

The post didn't have a whopping outcome, I only got thirty two responses and I didn't really end up using any of them, but what it did was solidify the fact that everyone has one special piece of music (or more) that has meant a lot to them at some point and set a mark on their life – so the idea was at least on the right track.

Birch Trees and Pando

The very first stage direction in *Summertime* is "A hundred slender white birch tree trunks." (Appendix A) I think Dedalus Wainwright, our set designer, wanted to kill me after a while because of my obsession with these birch trees. "We have to have birch trees!", "Don't forget the birch trees!", "Just make sure to include the birch trees!", I'm amazed he even let me have them in the end after having nagged so much about them. I can't tell you exactly why the trees were so important to me. I think perhaps it has something to do with my own idea of

summer, and somehow linked to the nature in Norway where most of my summers have been spent. My favourite Norwegian national song has the lyrics “Look a white trunked birch on the hill, framed by stripes of bluebell in, ‘gainst the red painted cottage by the road, that’s the flag waiving in the wind.”, and so there is a small chance that my national identity played a role in it, but I can’t say for sure. What I can say for sure is that the trees were important, and so when it came to choosing an image for the poster, they were a natural element to include. Don’t worry, I’m not going to go into the designing of the poster for the show, but it was while I was searching for images for birch trees that I came across pando.

Pando (Latin for "I spread"), ⟨...⟩ is a clonal colony of a single male quaking aspen (Populus tremuloides) determined to be a single living organism by identical genetic markers and assumed to have one massive underground root system. ⟨...⟩The root system of Pando, at an estimated 80,000 years old, is among the oldest known living organisms. (Wikipedia 1)

I was nothing short of amazed by this network of trees when I first read about them, but more than anything it led me to a new thought and realization. It struck me that even though we humans may have forgotten how to make a pack, there is something deeper that still draws us towards a pack mentality. This deeper connection, this inter human relationship which exists underneath our conscious social awareness was perfectly illustrated to me with the hidden roots of pando. It allowed me to see humans as stand alone trees for any on-looker. We seem to be in no contact with one another, gathered together as a forest, but never touching, never reaching out to our neighbor, except when a wind stirs our leaves. But underneath it all, we are in fact connected. We are tied together with one “massive root system”, and this became an important inspiration for me in the staging of the piece. As much as I was uplifted by the thought of this image, it scared me to read on about pando. “Pando is currently thought to be dying. Though the exact reasons are not known, it is thought to be some combination of drought, insects and

disease.” (Wikipedia 1) In drawing a parallel to our collective human reality we could do the following replacement: “Human connection is currently thought to be dying. Though the exact reasons are not known, it is thought to be some combination of hunger for love, parasitic technology and destructive self-centredness.” The obsession with the birch trees never went away, and I was thrilled when Dedalus found a way to make the trees not simply a copy of nature, but rather round white canvases reminiscent of love letters – they were all covered in “XOXO”. Furthermore our trees were not connected to the ground, but rather suspended from the ceiling, allowing the roots to connect between the people onstage, as opposed to in the set. This was perhaps the only physical representation of pando in the show, but the inspiration I took from reading about it greatly informed my staging later on, and so it was an essential part of the pallet.

Munch and Stuff

When working on the cabaret *Baals to the Walls* in 2015 I came across an Edvard Munch painting that I felt captured the essence of *Baal* by Brecht, and in extension also the cabaret. The painting is called *The Death of Marat*, and it spoke to me about both the aesthetics, the characters, and the atmosphere of the piece I wanted to make. I later found myself returning to Munch for inspiration on other pieces, and *Summertime* was no exception. In August 2016 I visited the Munch Museum in Oslo, Norway for the first time, and because *Summertime* at that point was so very present in my mind, I found myself taking pictures of a wide array of the paintings, seeing clear links to a character or a feeling or a moment in the play. I was gathering inspiration. Later that same week I went to the National Gallery in Norway, and did an equal amount of gathering there. It was especially expressive postures or naked bodies in relation with nature that fascinated me and sparked a link with the play. I knew in my mind that they fit

somehow, but in later regard I'm not sure that I was able to translate any of this to my designers. Pictures and images were shared, and perhaps they did in themselves, in a collage-like way, convey a certain kind of aesthetic to the designers, but I can't speak to their experience.

Poetry

Mary Oliver, Rumi, Charles Bukowski, Frances LeMoine, Dylan Thomas, they all could be included in this play. There are so many ways to speak about love and human connection, from Oliver's soft and nature inspired voice to Bukowski's directness and crudeness to the parable-like verses of Rumi. Their wisdom and reflections became important texts that gave Chuck's text even more meat. Like with the music and paintings not all of it fit with the play, but by the time rehearsal started I had marked at least twenty poems that contributed with its own light on the play, and one of them even made it's way into the show itself.

The Prelude to the Fugue

When working on Baal I had *The Death of Marat* that captured the essence of it – this was not the case for *Summertime*. It was a combination of many, many elements that was needed to catch the complex essence of Chuck's play. Collectively they gave me a feeling of where the play wanted to exist. Several years ago I read in *Anne Bogart: Viewpoints* that Anne Bogart had asked a dramaturg to bring all the research into the rehearsal room, and asked everyone else in the production to bring in inspirational materials as well. This material was then put on a wall in the rehearsal space, so that it could always be readily available to affect the artists in the room (Dixon/Smith 1995: 49–56). I tried this myself, on several occasions while at Columbia, and it didn't work. What I hoped would eventually become elements we could include or let shape parts of the shows, just ended up being elements kept in a box and discarded after closing night. I still haven't figured out why this didn't work – I think it mostly has to do with how I handled it

all –, but what I now realize is that I do go through this process on my own with every project. The main differences are that the actors aren't necessarily directly involved, and it mostly happens before the rehearsal period starts. One can of course go back and forth on the pros and cons of one or the other, but ultimately I see the effect of it as being the same. One uses other elements to open up the play. To break into it if you will. In this writing moment I'm listening to *Prelude (Fantasy) and Fugue in G Minor* by Bach, and it strikes me that my process with the inspirational material has a somewhat similar structure to the music playing in my ears. The play *Summertime* has a main theme, because of Chuck's genius writing that theme is repeated in a multitude of variations, making up the Fugue. My inspiration research/gathering is not part of this Fugue, but rather the Prelude (Fantasy) leading into it. Sure, there might be times where a motif from the Prelude appears in the Fugue, but it's main purpose is to ready the listener for what comes next. The etymology of Prelude is simply put a combination of the words “pre” (before) and “ludere” (to play), and to me that sums up my attempt to find the world in which the play can exist; it's the work I do before I play, allowing me to hear the fugue of the script in the right way.

Characters and Actors

A Multiway Mirror

As one reads and reflects on and digs in the script, one gets to know all the characters more and more. I've heard several people talk about certain things they need to happen before they “get” or “understand” a play, like dream about it or make a drawing of it or something. I don't really have one thing like that, but I've discovered that I tend to get to a place before starting rehearsals where I see each character in myself, and myself in each character. Not as in seeing myself playing the role, but rather as in understanding at any given point where the character is coming

from, because I can see how I could have those same thoughts and/or say/do the same things. Perhaps it is the actor gene in me that does this somewhat automatically, but I believe it's immensely important for how I will later deal with guiding the actors. Because of this, my connection with each character becomes very personal, to the point that I can start crying or laughing not just because of the situation itself, but because I can hear a dialogue between two characters onstage as a dialogue between two parts of myself. I tend to say before a first read at some point that "I am these people, and they are me. Eventually I hope you'll find the same thing to be true with you." and eventually I hope for the same with the audience. Richard Schechner talks about how an actor playing a role never ceases to be himself when playing the character. On the contrary, the role is added to how we perceive the person, so that when John is playing Hamlet we are in fact seeing both John and Hamlet at the same time (Schechner 2006). The person embodies two beings. If we were to stretch this even further, we could argue that the playwright infuses every role they ever write with parts of themselves. We could even argue that when an audience member sees a character onstage, they inevitably project themselves onto the characters, allowing for the unique self reflection that theatre offers. This month I was watching *The Glass Menagerie* with Sally Field and Joe Mantello, and even though I have never been in similar circumstances as the characters are in, so many times I found myself relating to the son in Tom, or the guardian in Amanda, or the flirt in Jim, or the scared mouse in Laura, or even the wanderer in Mr. Wingfield. So taking all of this into account, one can suggest an expanding of Schechner's notion: When Vanessa Vaché (the actor) goes onstage to play Tessa (the character) in *Summertime*, she is indeed both Vanessa and Tessa simultaneously, but she is *also* Chuck (the playwright), Robin (the director) and Pavlina (the audience member). The person doesn't only embody two beings, but five! Or maybe even more. In my eyes this is a

mind-blowing concept, and speaks to the profound richness of theatre. To round it back up, it's essential for me to reach the point of familiarity with the characters where I am them and they are me. It's only then that I can contribute to the richness of each human element in the performance, and that's not something I would want to miss out on.

Casting

There are many things to consider when choosing an actor for a role. For me the most important factor is energy. In my auditions I go to great lengths to make the audition room as safe, playful and relaxed a place as possible. I believe that the true colors of a person only shine through when they don't feel a need to defend themselves or impress anyone. Unfortunately auditions has become an unavoidable thorn in this business, one that many actors dread. It seems that over the years we've gotten stuck in an unfortunate tendency in the theatre business: With more and more actors, the supply and demand for jobs has gone askew, resulting in actors scrambling to land gigs plural, or at least just one. As the struggle to book a job has grown more intense, the people offering the jobs have relished (shamelessly, in my opinion) in the power to choose whomever they want for whatever they want. What this has resulted in is a wish to please rather than express, to stroke the ego of the person sitting on the job, and give off a perfect first impression. They're taught in audition classes to smile nicely, to speak clearly, and stand up straight, as if they're contestants on some kind of beauty pageant, pushing them towards what I sometimes experience as an Oliver Twist/Mr. Bumble situation. Personally, I'm not a fan. With the pageant mindset comes not a soft natural exterior, but rather a hard plastic mask or porcelain facade, set in it's ways and non-transformable. In the business we need to navigate away from this mindset, so that we can arrive at a place where we see each other as people, talk to one another as people, and work together as people. In trying to recognize the complicated host/

auditioner relationship, I've experimented with structuring a way to circumvent porcelain facades, so that everyone's feet are a bit wobbly - aiming to make the audition mask slip, uncovering the human color underneath, their personal energy. Even though the formula in no way is finished, I've found that even my current practices has an effect on the dynamic in the room, allowing for a whole different vantage point for considering potential collaborators. I'd like to offer a glance at what I do:

I start auditions with a workshop, which unapologetically lasts about an hour. This workshop has nothing to do with the play we're casting, and is solely constructed to achieve the slipping of the mask. Ten to twenty actors are invited into the room, and we all gather in a circle. I welcome everyone, thanking them, and saying that I'm happy they're all here. Next I think it necessary to explain why we do the workshop, and add that our focus during the next hour should be to let go of any preconceptions we have about auditions, and just be together in a room making theatre and having fun. Fun and laughter are important, both to relax, to elevate confidence, and to achieve a sense of joy, so a few jokes and silly gesture go a long way. I've found that even though the first few laughs in the group are polite I-laugh-because-I-know-I'm-supposed-to laughs, already after the first exercise they start becoming more genuine. That exercise is one I call *The Little Duck*, and is a warm-up exercise to activate both voice, body and mind. But the best thing about it – it makes everyone look ridiculous! I insist on participating, and ask everyone else in the room to participate as well, because I think by looking silly together we tie a bond of trust, we're put on the same page, and most importantly the inherent fear that builds up before an audition is lowered. It's almost as if by being ridiculous together, we ridicule the big scary monster that is the audition. In the third Harry Potter book and movie, there's a scene where the students are taught how to fight a "boggart", a monster that shapes itself after

your biggest fear. Their Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher Lupin teaches them the Riddikulus spell, turning the boggart into something ridiculous – this has the same effect. After the warm up we go into the larger part of the workshop, which relies on the actors' creativity and collaborative spirit. Before the audition I send out a short fairytale, and ask the actors to read through it before coming to the audition. After having been ducks together, the group is divided into smaller groups of three or four, and asked to stage that fairytale with a modern twist – in ten minutes. This is always a good time, and having done this now for a couple of years, I'm repeatedly amazed by how creative these artists are. We've had many of the same iterations, but so many more that are unique, original, and loads of fun! There are two reasons why I do the fairytale: 1) It allows the actor to create a distinct character and run with it, to make something they think is funny come alive and put it on a stage. 2) It requires them to think on their feet, and make split second decisions. The latter becomes especially the case in the second part of the workshop. After they have, group by group, presented their rendering of the fairytale, I ask them to repeat what they just did, but this time in a certain style, or with a certain twist. My favorites are to have them do it as an opera, or in different languages I yell out, or speaking as Christopher Walkin. I know it's kind of mean, and that not everyone is comfortable with improv, but what is revealed in those moments is invaluable: There is no longer time to think about presentation. There is no longer time to think about first impression. There is no longer time to think about the mask. You see straight in to the person. And it's when you've been 'persons' together, when you've seen the true colors that you can really start considering future collaboration. *The Little Duck* and the fairytale usually takes about an hour. After the workshop is done, I for now go back to the one-on-one audition. I did one where the group performed their monologues in front of each other, and while it worked for that particular play, I'm not sure if it's ideal. What usually

happens then is that the mask slowly slips back into place, thus losing the effect of the workshop. So for now it's back to the actors coming in alone to do their monolog. This part is one that I'm particularly interested in looking more at, because it is in no way perfect. I've found that actors get back into their thoughts and worries very fast, and especially when they have to wait till the very end. I usually talk with each person before they perform, a relaxed and genuine conversation can loosen the grip of the mask, and hope to keep as many of the personal colors as possible. I believe it's these colors, these energies that come from the person himself that inform my casting. Most of my evaluation is already done before the actor even gets to the monolog. By this point I've also usually reached a point of being quite familiar with the play I'm casting, and the world has started to shape, so I'm starting to become comfortable with saying what is and is not "Vice". The selection of actors is mostly done based on how the person fits with the character. Not in looks, but in energy.

A perfect example of this is the casting of Frank in *Summertime*, who was played by Steve Jones. I knew about Steve beforehand, and had him in mind when preparing the play. There is something about Steve that's very happy-go-lucky, not to mention he's a genuinely kind and good man. After having spent time with Frank, this is exactly how I saw him. At first glance in the script he may seem like a stern, somewhat dull and almost bitter guy, but the Frank I learned to know was so much more than that. He was a genuinely happy and positive guy, who just keeps receiving one blow after the other. I thought in order to achieve this in the best way, I had to have someone like Steve to set the right tone for Frank, allowing the audience to understand his bitter remarks as always coming from the blows that he takes. With the character Mimi the story was a bit different. I had experienced Mimi in reading the play as a very flirtatious and possibly somewhat overly-dramatic character, so in auditions I was looking for

someone who could match that energy. Little did I know that Nadia Sepsenwol would come in and change my mind entirely. Nadia's energy is one of rock'n roll coupled with fragility, and is very different from how I had originally seen Mimi, but spending time with Nadia in the audition room allowed me to see Mimi in a new light. Her energy actually fit better with the character than what I was originally looking for. Something happens when an actor goes from speaking as themselves to speaking as the character, perhaps it's linked to what I spoke of earlier with Schechner's idea of the actor possessing several beings at the same time, and when an actor takes the inhale to start their text you know you're at a crossroad. When that inhalation starts going the other direction you will find either all things you've perceived up to that point to be true, or you'll get the surprise/disappointment of your life. You know, to put it dramatically... Not all actors have yet cracked the code for how to keep their personal energy flowing when they're on stage, and this unfortunately becomes very clear in auditions. On the other hand there are plenty of actors that have mastered that skill, and the pleasure of watching them work is to me indescribable. This performance energy (which in fact is just the actors own energy radiating through the character) lets me know so much about how the actor will be to watch for the audience.

There is also something to be said about the way I work. I like to think that I very often create worlds that are somewhat outside of reality, but for the most part acted out as pure realism. However in order to achieve that, you need an actor who has an understanding of both the real and the fake in theatre. One that can be in full contact with their emotions in one moment, and in the next step into a detailed, slow-moving choreography. As we all surely know, not all actors can do both, but I've found that the universe in which most of my plays take place requires a certain understanding of it, and so I look specifically for it, or the immediate potential for it, in

auditions. For this play we actually found ourselves lacking an actor for one of the roles, Edmund. We had some potential candidates, but neither I, Janelle Caso (our Production Stage manager) or Vanessa who were helping me cast it, were comfortable with our options. We knew we needed one who could possess the strength of Edmund, the big expressions and the subtle emotions, who could sing and move and act. It was a hard role to cast. Thankfully in the program at Columbia you get to know a lot of actors, and there's no doubt that by the end of your time here the roster available to you is quite extensive. I had had Justin Ivan Brown in the back of my mind as Edmund since we read *Wintertime* in my play reading group in the spring, but thought he wouldn't be available for the production seeing that he didn't come to the invited callback. Vanessa and I, who had both worked with him, said after turning our options over for the fiftieth time "We need Justin." Thankfully he was available, and he ended up doing a marvellous Edmund. We were lucky that he was available.

Lastly, when you've gone through the whole audition round, all the people energies in consideration has to blend. When narrowing down actors I will at some point reach a place of having slightly more actors than I need for the casting, and often several of them without a role in mind. I then write all the characters on a big white board and start filling in actors in pair with them. For a short time then, I play around with different combinations of people. Moving one actor to that role, while adding this actor to the mix, and taking that one out, but realizing I have to keep that one – it's a lot of back and forth –, but what I'm looking for at that point is the lining up of personal energy, performance energy, and group energy. To me the combination of people is just as important as the combo actor/character. I believe that a rehearsal room functions best when it is a safe space, and so I try my hardest to avoid any rotten apples when filling the basket. I have colleagues who will go for talent over anything. I'm not like that. I will gladly sacrifice

talent if it means I can get a person who's nice to work with. Greg Mosher said to my classmates and I sometime last year that 90% of a director's work is in the casting – and to some degree I totally agree with that.

The Makeover

When I directed Chekhov's *Platonov* in 2015 there were so many edits and cuts that had to be made to the play that it made most sense to put together a new script. I started transcribing the parts that I wanted to keep into a script writing software called Final Draft, and this process opened up a new approach to me that I now keep returning to.

There are mainly three things that happen when I do this transcribing work. 1) Firstly it makes me so much more familiar with the play and the text. One can quickly think that one is simply moving a word from one page and onto another, but I like to think of the process as slightly more sophisticated than that. The amount of time that passes from when I see a word on the printed version I have of the original to that same word has been written on my screen is almost non-existent, however, the journey the word goes on is quite remarkable. As most others, I'm trained to read words or even chains of words at a glance, but – in a transcribing process – when I *see* a word it travels through my eyes and into my mind, where the meaning of it is registered before it's broken down and split up, almost like separating the atoms of a molecule, and the letters are sent out from the brain and through the body, some letters into the left arm, some into the right, and then reassembled by my fingers, allowing my eyes to register it for a second time on the screen. All of this in a split second. When each word of a script has gone through this process, there is no wonder that one has a different relationship to the text when it's finished.

2) The second benefit from this process is perhaps rather ego-based, but meaningful nonetheless. I discovered when I did this for the second time, transcribing the play *The High Cost of Loving*, that I wanted to use the same layout for it as I had the first time – which is now the layout that I use every time. When I say layout I simply mean where different elements are placed on the page, like character name, dialogue, stage directions, etc, as well as font, size, underlinings, italics, etc. I’ve found a specific way I like the script to appear (if you look at the scripts for my shows these past years, they all look the same), and I put the text, whatever it is, into that layout (For example, please see Appendix B). I consider this the first shaping of the play. Not necessarily in a directorial way, because the shape isn’t coming out of the plays’ individual needs, but rather in a ‘taming of the beast’ kind of way. By forcing the text into a shape I’ve decided on, I am taking ownership over it and showing it who’s the boss, so to say. It sounds silly, but it was a hugely important part of my work with *Summertime*. Like I’ve mentioned before, I had a hard time breaking into the text. I didn’t know how to approach it. I certainly had no idea how to “tame” it. And it wasn’t until I started the transcribing process that I finally was able to find my way in. This partly because it allowed me to make the text mine.

Chuck writes on his website

Please feel free to take the plays from this website and use them freely as a resource for your own work: that is to say, don't just make some cuts or rewrite a few passages or rearrange them or put in a few texts that you like better, but pillage the plays as I have pillaged the structures and contents of the plays of Euripides and Brecht and stuff out of Soap Opera Digest and the evening news and the internet, and build your own, entirely new, piece—and then, please, put your own name to the work that results.
(charlesmee.org)

It was always very present in my mind that I had the chance to play around with the text, even though it was never my intention to fully rewrite it into an entirely new piece as he suggests.

Some of my difficulty with approaching the text was my deep admiration and respect for Chuck

Mee and his work. Because of this almost reverence I think on some level I was scared of the text, and felt inferior in my handling of it. Knowing how he wants artists to approach his texts probably added to the fear. An irrationally felt pressure, a feeling that somehow I needed to prove myself and show that I could do something radical with Chuck's piece. I knew I wanted to include the music, as I mentioned before, but had yet to find where, what and how. With earlier plays I had been able to take a hammer to the text in order to break it open and then use my process to put it back together, but it seemed now that I wasn't dealing with a brick or a window, but rather some kind of blob. Whenever I swung a hammer at it, it just wiggled a bit and then went back to the way it was. But when I finally then took it by the horns and removed it from Chuck's layout to place it in my own, I could feel my confidence elevated, and the creative ideas coming much more rapidly and being of much better quality. And as I at that point was starting to shape it, taking control (even though it was only on a visual level with the text), it opened the door for what meant most in this preparation process; the makeover of the text. As my confidence grew, as I was shaping it to my layout, I did the unspeakable thing that I had feared so much – I made a cut. I remember how it was only one small line, though I cannot remember which line it was. That cut is what finally opened the whole play up for me, and I realized that with Chuck's text it wasn't a matter of using a hammer, I had to use a scalpel. The cutting of that one little line allowed the makeover to really start, and so began the third part of the transcribing:

3) When I was working on the script for *Platonov*, I very often found myself needing to patch two textual parts together, so I had to come up with small lines to lead into the next part. The same with stage directions. With *Platonov* I also had a specific aesthetic in mind, and inspired by Chuck's writing back then, I allowed myself to add stage directions that were very stream-of-consciousness like and quite fantastical. When working on *The High Cost of Loving* I

even changed stage directions to fit with how I imagined the staging of specific scenes. These things put me in a creating relationship with the text, where I wasn't only reading it and interpreting it, but shaping it, treating it and adding my own creativity. The ownership of the text grows immensely, and it's after having done this that I feel good about handing the play over to the actors. With *Summertime* there weren't any profound changes made. Lines were rewritten, sections were cut, some scenes were moved – perhaps the biggest edit made was the adding of the music, and the impact of the lyrics of the songs – but by the end the script had still gone through a makeover. In retrospect I wish I had discovered this approach much sooner in my time at Columbia, although in all fairness I probably wouldn't have time to do it for every showing, as it is quite time consuming. It might even at times be quite tedious. But you certainly have a different relationship with the text after having done it!

Working with Designers

The Set

Because I now was allowing myself to push and pull both the text itself and the story in the directions I wanted, my communication with the designers also became a lot more effective, and we were able to talk on a different level. The work with the set was still quite hard, and I'd like to touch on some specifics of that process. I believe theatre lends itself perfectly, almost by nature, to a dream logic, and I believe that Chuck's texts to a large extent embraces and feeds on this that logic. What I wanted to achieve with the play was not a sense of it taking place in a dream, but rather just existing in a dream reality. That the play would exist in a world where anything could happen at any given point, without needing explaining, and without necessarily being sparked by something that would rationally lead into it. Dedalus and I had multiple conversations about what this meant and how we would achieve it. He wanted us to centre it

around one of the characters, so that the dream was actually Tessa's and everyone else existed in that universe. I, on the other hand, didn't want that, as I was scared that by doing so we made the play into Tessa's story – for me it was important that the story was in fact everyone's. I will admit that when we started working on the staging of it, it eventually became clear to me that the dream logic needed some kind of centre, and Tessa was an obvious choice. That doesn't necessarily mean that we made everything to be about her, but at the core of this play is Tessa and James' story and the ripening of their relationship, so even though we didn't explicitly stage it in a way to express that, it was certainly in the back of our minds. And yes, I have told Dedalus that he was indeed right in thinking that way. Other than struggling to figure out what the dream logic meant, the implementation of the dream logic pushed us to widen our creative and associative states, and Dedalus and I got plenty of fun ideas out of it. At one point we wanted a boat onstage, we talked about filling the whole space with inflatable pool animals, we wanted there to be grass, and we even discussed making a rainstorm. We knew for certain two things, we wanted elements of nature invading the space, and we wanted everything to come out of things we associated with summer. Dedalus did a fantastic job placing the different elements, and I'm not sure how many iterations he had made of the floorplan by the end, but it was a lot.

The Space

Early on in our summer break we got an email from Joe Novak saying he had found us space. Because we were doing the thesis in the fall, the Connelly Theatre was not available, so a different space had to be found. The space Joe found for us was a large downstairs theatre on the Lower East Side, and it had certain sight restrictions and spacial difficulties that Dedalus worked around beautifully. He came up with at least four or five different ways for how the audience could be seated in the space, and it was based on these that we eventually ended up with wanting

to do it in the round. It just made sense somehow. It's an odd thing seeing theatre in the round, as the sightlines are never perfect, and at the same time you see other audience members at any given point. That's why we had to do it. It added to that feeling of dream that we wanted; that it somehow wasn't perfect, happening all over, and spoke to a sense of human connection – the audience member seeing and registering the audience member through the action of the play. I had never worked on something in the round like that before, so it also presented a great challenge for me that I really wanted. When we had found the placement of the audience, Dedalus could start working on where the rest would be. I had an idea that I wanted the space to include several places existing simultaneously, but without actually representing different places. I had a year prior to this written a play for a class at Columbia where I wrote in the following note “The set is not so much one room, as it is a combination of several spaces at once. However, when the characters are on stage, they should all be perceived as being in the same space.”, and I wanted to achieve the same effect here. We brainstormed what spaces were related to summer, as well as pulling places and references out of the script. One thing I knew early on was that I wanted to remove any reference in the script relating it to the US. I wasn't sure how to go about it, but I knew I wanted the play to have the ability to be presented anywhere and still be seen as happening right there. This odd summer encounter which the play is should just as easily exist in Norway as in the US, so I asked Dedalus to not draw inspiration from Martha's Vineyard which is referenced in the play. Everything else was quite freely approached. As Dedalus came with suggestions I would push back on those, as he would do with my suggestions, and eventually we were able to take some of the ideas, expand on them and come closer to what we thought the space would look like. This went on until we were told that we didn't have a space after all. The space downtown and the school never signed a contract, and so when a more

lucrative deal came along, the space dropped us and left us hanging. This happened about a month before we started rehearsals. I will say I wasn't too worried at first, thinking that it should be a piece of cake to find an empty theatre space in New York City. Let's just say that it was a lot harder than expected. This unfortunate event put a halt to a lot of our creative process, especially for set and lights. We knew we would have to rethink some of the set, and possibly that we wouldn't even be able to do it in the round. After a lot of looking, a suggestion of doing it at the Schapiro Theatre came up, and I have to admit it was hard for me to entertain the thought. It felt like I would be taking a step back in my trajectory, and that I eventually wouldn't be having the same thesis experience as the rest of my classmates. But after several conversations with Dedalus, with my producer Andrew Joy, with Joe, and my teachers Anne Bogart and Brian Kulick, I realized that there would be more benefits from doing it at the Schapiro than there would be losses. I knew the space well, and so had the upper hand already, and it was a large enough space to serve the ideas we had already been planning, plus it cut down on the amount of travel that both me and the people from Columbia would have to do during load in and tech. Andrew Joy and I went many rounds back and forth, and we ended up requesting a meeting with the management. In the meeting was Joe, Christian Parker (the chair of the theatre program), Andrew and myself, and the topic was the options at hand. The meeting quickly centred on the Schapiro option, and having considered this before hand, I expressed very clearly to Christian and Joe that I didn't want to feel that my thesis experience was in any way lesser than that of my classmates'. Christian was kind enough to assure us that the school would do whatever they could to make the Schapiro look great, that they would work extra hard to get industry people to come, and that we wouldn't in any way feel underprioritized by Columbia. All of this lead us to decide to go forward with doing it at Schapiro and in retrospect, I actually couldn't have been

happier with that decision. Out of kindness from Columbia, we were also able to spend most of our rehearsal time in the space, which was such a gift. The decision on the space came late, though. I actually think we made it after we had completed the casting, and we were under a lot of pressure to get the set drawings and decisions in for the shop to start working. Dedalus and I started nailing down placements and elements that we wanted, found ways to transition, found ways that spaces could exist at the same time. I went back and adjusted the script, and out of the adjustments came also new decisions, and so things were finally moving smoothly. When we then got Alex DeNevers, the lighting designer on board, things got really fun. He was able to support and saturate the feeling of dream and romanticism.

The Symbolic, Imaginary and Real

During the summer I had spent many nights sitting outside with a beer and a cigarette thinking about the play, and I realized that so much of the romantics of summer is related to the nighttime. Best example, *Summer Nights*’ from the musical Grease “Summer dreams ripped at the seams, but oh those summer nights.” There are references in Chuck’s text to lunch, indicating that it takes place in the daytime, but I wanted to embrace this idea of summer romanticism, and so decided to start the play right before dusk and leading into the nighttime, ending with the start of a new day. This also allowed the dream reality to work even better, and it was in the darkness of the nighttime that the most colorful and bright scenes of the play happened. There is something liminal about the nighttime. It’s like it opens for a certain otherworldly and transformational reality. Brian speaks a lot about Jacques Lacan in his classes, and one of the things he taught us was Lacan’s notion of people moving through three different stages in their lives; the symbolic, the imaginary, the real. The idea is that people have different functions in different settings, for example he used the case of the classroom. When the class gathers, to begin with there is a

certain symbolic order in place. Brian is the teacher, and the rest of us are students. I myself view myself as a student, and look up to Brian as the teacher. We both have our roles and we respect them in ourselves and each other. But as the class goes along, something might start to change, perhaps we all find ourselves deeply involved in a discussion, and without being aware of it, the order that was in place at the beginning is now gone. I'm discussing with Brian as my peer, just as he's talking to Ines as her peer. We've moved into an imaginary 'order', where the limits of a woke reality aren't present anymore. Lastly we return to a certain order, but by this point with small internal changes because of our encounter in the imaginary. We see ourselves as who we are, and at the same time question parts of it because of our previous experience. Brian also adds that these aren't steps people go through once in their life, but we constantly move between the three. Now, when using this in looking at a play, I like to think beyond just roles and personal reflection. There is something about a world moving between the three stages, and for those familiar with van Gennep's three liminal phases (Gennep 1999), this is very reminiscent of it. What if an orderly world transforms to a world where there are no rules, and then returns to the real thereafter? *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is perhaps the best example here, where you have the very orderly and proper life of Athens totally flipped on its head in the forest, before returning to its previous order, but slightly altered. In *Midsummer* it is also night time while they are in the forest. And it was based on all of these things that I wanted the majority of *Summertime* to take place during the night, to help move the world from symbolic to imaginary to real.

The Lights

Alex (lights) very much supported this idea of nighttime, and he did a wonderful job making it into a beautiful visual experience. Alex and I usually don't talk much before tech week (he did

two other thing with me at Columbia), but we have a great communication going during tech. He's the kind of artist who's intuition is just so in sync with his knowledge of his craft, and so he's able to quickly catch onto what the scene needs and respond to it with the right instruments in a matter of seconds. I can also throw things at him last minute, and he's able to accommodate. I remember especially one point during the *Summertime* tech where we were slightly pressed for time, and we were closing in on the end of the play. We had just finished lighting a scene, but before we went on I went over to him and said "I know it's late, but I have something to ask of you. I need you to take us to Italy." He thought for a few seconds, said "Alright, let's go.", and then he brought us to Italy. I cannot express how much designers like this mean to me.

The Costumes

Jessica Harrison, the costume designer, and I had been able to keep up with each other throughout the summer, and we had been sending sketches and thoughts back and forth for a while. It was a wonderful collaboration in that we could brainstorm and help each other move ideas to increasingly better quality. My work with Jessica was not as extensive as it was with Dedalus, but I still think we were able to land on a great look for the whole cast.

The Props

I know from experience that I tend to use a lot of props in my shows, and because I figured we would need props that could be more than what they immediately seemed to be, there was no doubt in my mind that I had to bring onboard the person who'd been responsible for the props on all my large shows prior to this, Rebecca Marken. Rebecca had also been my producer and stage manager before, so she knows me well, and also knows the space and Dedalus. It's always nice to have people on board whom you trust, and who you know will do a good job, and she absolutely did. Her job mostly was linked to Dedalus' design, so they ended up dealing a lot with

each other. So much that at some point there was confusion as to who was responsible for what, but they were able to find the right dividing of tasks eventually.

Meeting with the Designers

During our collaboration class with the designer at New York University, the group would work very closely, usually meeting all at the same time, and bouncing ideas off one another. I thought this process would be similar, but I actually found it to be quite different. Occasionally the five of us would check in in a group, occasionally just two of them, but mostly the conversations were had one on one with me. I haven't made up my mind yet whether I liked this less or more yet, and perhaps it's not either, but simply different. What I do know is that the result in my opinion ended up being a piece where all the design elements truly complimented each other, and when that's the case I guess one shouldn't complain.

The Director as a Leader

The Four Pillars

One of the things that I've spent the most time contemplating and reflecting on during my time at Columbia is the conditions of the rehearsal room. Some years ago I was assistant directing to the Artistic director of Oslo Nye Teater in Norway, Catrine Telle. After having dealt with some difficulty between two actors in rehearsal one day, she came and sat down next to me, leaned over and said "Robin, there's one thing you need to know about directing. It's only twenty percent creative work, and the remaining eighty percent is all psychology." Out of the many things I've learned about directing over the years, this is one of the lessons that is ever present in my mind, and while at Columbia I've tried to figure out what it really means. I early on had a hunch that it was related to good leadership, which is something I've later found to very much be the case. A director is that person who people look to when there's a problem, who's ultimately

expected to make large decisions for the project, and for better or for worse who sets the work environment for so many people. From 2005–2008 Gallup conducted a formal study on leaders and their important qualities, but through the lens of their employees instead of the leaders themselves. Their incentive was “we have studied leaders in isolation from the connections that make them great. (...) if we want to know why people rally behind a leader, shouldn’t we ask *them* why they follow – or how a great leader has improved their lives?” (Rath/Conchie 2008: 79–80) In the study then, they were asking employees around the world to “define how leaders make a difference ... *in their own words*.” (Rath/Conchie 2008: 80) The four words that people wrote the most were Stability, Trust, Compassion and Hope. To back up the study they write “If you want to lead, it is critical to know what the people around you need and expect from you.”, and so these four pillars have made their way into my everyday life as a director, and make up the principles of how I want to build a good rehearsal space. Allow me to jot down a short list for each, relating them to theatre:

Stability	Trust	Compassion	Hope
Keeping time	Having a plan, and executing it	Treating your collaborators as people	The show will go up
Keeping agreements	Saying things of quality	Meeting people where they are	The show will be good
Meeting deadlines	Honesty	Appreciation	The show will be appreciated
Continuous progress	Continuous progress	Listening and responding	Everyone involved will have a good time working on it
Not too many last-minute changes	Taking questions and/or concerns seriously	Small gestures of care: <i>fresh coffee, an extra break, a private conversation, a smile, physical contact, compliments, socializing</i>	Relationships built will still exist beyond the show

As mentioned, I think that as directors we set the tone for the work environment, especially in the rehearsal room, and ultimately the environment will affect the outcome of what is being made. One of the key skills of a good director is communication, with the actors and the creative team as a whole, and I've been told time and time again that my way of communicating makes everyone feel included, heard and supported, resulting in a strong team operating on the same page. This leads me to believe that in order for creativity to blossom, there first needs to be a safe environment in which it can exist. Therefore I seek to build, in any creative room, a foundation of safety resting on these Four Pillars, as I've named them. Allow me to expand:

By following set plans and schedules, informing people about what lies ahead, and then keeping to that, people know that the framework they step into is safe and **stable**, and doesn't become an element of worry. I take much pride in my delineating and distributing plans, schedules, and goals, not to mention diligently following them. Once the framework is established as safe, it's equally important for the people stepping into the framework to trust one another, and also me.

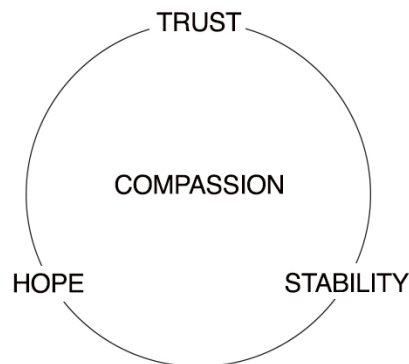
Firstly I assure the actors that they can **trust** that I have a plan, as well as the tools and knowledge to complete that plan. Secondly the actors will experience that open communication is encouraged in the room, and that they stand free to say and/or ask what's on their mind without it being critiqued, questioned or shut down by me or anyone else in an authority position. Thirdly everyone in the room is encouraged to the same level of communication, so that the *fear* to express oneself, if not eliminated, is at least somewhat replaced by a fundamental *eagerness* to express oneself.

In harmony with trust and communication, I go great lengths to assure that everyone in my rehearsal rooms are seen, heard, respected and cared for. My goal is to never let my

collaborators feel invisible or excluded, and therefore take that extra little step to respect and care for everyone involved. The element of **compassion** is one that I demand of myself, and expect of others.

It's a slippery slope to talk about results when one is in the middle of a rehearsal process, but I think we can all agree that it's constantly on everyone's minds. Because of this, an occasional reminder of how the audience will respond to a moment, the promise that every phase will lead to another (table work leads to on our feet, rehearsal studios lead to the theatre, runs lead to tech, tech leads to opening), and mentioning of potential projects to come, I've found to help everyone focus their gaze, and keep their excitement about the project alive, because they have a **hope** relating to what's to come. One would think that looking ahead would be distracting, but my experience tells me the opposite. "Hope gives followers something to look forward to, and it helps them see a way through chaos and complexity." (Rath/Conchie 2008: 89)

Personally I find Compassion to be the central pillar, and that the three others exist around it, draw on it, and feed it. Consider a circle like this:



By following these principles I've seen how the communication in the room can be elevated to one of deep sharing and understanding, not to mention the sense of collaboration strengthened. I believe a happy team, is a great team, and use these Pillars to invite everyone involved into that team.

In extension of Compassion, or perhaps of them all, I am teaching myself to be more and more attentive to my collaborators' need for praise. I don't think that's just something that *actors* need, but rather I think as *humans* we have a constant craving for it. Now, praise like this can become addictive, exemplified in our compulsive checking for likes on Facebook or matches on Tinder, but on a deeper level I think we seek to be acknowledged in relation with other people. John Maxwell, a leadership guru from Michigan, writes that "All people feel better and do better when you give them *attention, affirmation and appreciation*" (Maxwell/Parrott 2005: 13–14). Because of this I think that focusing on the positive when giving direction can actually help the actor to more effectively achieve the goals they have in a process, and we have together. Greg Mosher once said in a class with me and my classmates that all actors really want to hear is that they're good. But beyond this, I think that by focusing on what is good in their acting we're actually strengthening their strengths, and avoiding a feeling of being bogged down by unnecessary critique, which ultimately can hinder their flow of creativity. I must admit I find it hard.

Personally I'm programmed to look for problems and I diligently seek to fix them. In other words, my focus tends to lie on what is not working. But as I've said, I'm slowly teaching myself to shift my view. In *Summertime* I saw the benefits of this shift several times. The best example was in working with one of the actors on a monolog, and for some reason the whole monolog seemed aggressive and monotone. At one point however, the actor showed the tiniest glimpse of warmth at a moment where the monolog needed a new color. In my feedback to him I decided not to say what I wanted to say: "Let's push into that warmth that you showed there, cause I think that will make the performance better.", and instead chose to say "That was really great, and I think my favourite part was that element of warmth you brought to it in the middle." Next time the actor did the monolog, that middle part was saturated with warmth, and he told me how

he felt so much better about performing it. That's just one example, but I think it speaks to what I'm trying to point to; the effectiveness of positive reinforcement.

The Parents

The skill of communication is central not only in working with the actors, but also with all other collaborators in a piece. It can relieve so much tension, and help avoid unnecessary conflicts. In a rehearsal process I find the relationship and communication with the stage management team to be integral for the health of the creative space, and I was lucky in this production to work with a team where the appreciation for good communication was mutual. Through my working with different stage managers I've developed this silly feeling that we together take on the roles as parents in rehearsals, for our actor children. It's not something I speak openly about in the process, but I think it's an idea worth entertaining. Janelle Caso and I very much had this kind of relationship. We had each our areas of focus, but ultimately we had a shared sense of responsibility for the whole ensemble. Beyond this we even made sure not to argue in front of the cast, we would always deal with any disagreements in the evenings when we were alone, which is also when we would talk about the strengths and weaknesses of the actors, reminisce about wonderful things they had done, and talk about how to now move forward. Yes, these are natural things for a stage manager and director to do after rehearsals, but I'm sure you can see how I draw the link to parents. For me theatre is really about family, community and connection, and even though this relationship parallel isn't something I explicitly push for, it's something I think helps strengthen the bond between everyone involved – this vague understanding of everyone as a specific family member. Janelle brought two children of her own into this marriage, Morgan Beach and Megan Webb. When it came to assigning and executing stage manager tasks, I tried my best not to meddle with that – I sometimes have a tendency to micromanage. It's something I'm also teaching myself to do less of. But the professional

standard of this team made it very easy to relax, and not be too nosy. Under Janelle's leadership they always had a solid grasp on everything that needed to be done, and it allowed me to fully relax, knowing that things were in safe hands. The relationship with the three of them really helped me in my journey to ease up on my micromanaging, and having worked with great stage managers before, I now saw how having a full team can make things even better. But adding that the more family members you have, the more important communication becomes.

The First Read

The very first day of rehearsals is always an exciting one. You've been planning, and discussing for weeks, maybe months, and finally you are really going to start putting action to the thoughts. Not to mention the most important collaborators join the process, the actors. There are many ways to do conduct a first rehearsal, and I'm sure that every director will have different focuses, for different reasons. For me, this is the only moment in the process where everyone is on the exact same page until again opening night. Even though some of us at the point of the first reading will have had spent much longer time with the piece, trying to lay out plans, all of those plans are about to change, and we know it. No, they might not change drastically, but a whole new set of collaborators joins the team on this day, so changes will inevitably happen when their impulses are also taken into account. For the actors, who have not spent much time with the piece, perhaps having only acquired the original script on their own to read it, it is the start of the race. In a way, it's like we're all lining up for a race, and we know that this is the day when the marathon really starts. Because of all of this, and because I want to support the feeling of being on the same page, I usually help the lining up a bit, and I've come into a few rituals for the first read to do that.

Firstly I think it's very important to gather around a table. Don't ask me why, but I don't want to do a first read just sitting in a circle – there needs to be a table. I think this is partly to

allow everyone to take up space on it. I have a personal thing I've discovered related to taking up space. I've found that I tend to make a mess around me very quickly in any new space, if I am supposed to feel at home there. When I sit down at a table I always take off my glasses and my watch and put them on the table. (I am also couch surfing at the moment, and the room I'm staying in while writing this now has clothes, bags and effects scattered everywhere, despite the fact that I haven't even been here for 48 hours.) I think I do this as an odd, subconscious marking of territory. As a way to assert my presence in a space. Some people are different, and need things tidy around them. I've heard many artists say "I need everything to be tidy around me so that I can be messy in my art." I have discovered and accepted that I am the opposite. I need everything to be messy around me so that I can be tidy in my art. A table for a first read allows me and everyone to take up space on the table and treat it according to our own will. Just notice in your next first read how people relate to their space in the beginning. Some will throw their stuff out and take it up right away, some are more shy and will not, and be very careful not to let their things slide over to their neighbor's area. This however is only in the beginning. From what I've noticed, towards the end of a first read everyone has in some way taken control over their area on the table, and by doing so everyone has asserted themselves in the space, resulting in everyone truly being present with each other. Some kind of circle formation is also necessary, so that one can peek up and look at each other during the session. I would never conduct a first read with people sitting in the auditorium, everyone facing one direction.

When everyone is seated and we're all ready to begin, I do a quick welcome. Usually my focus for this is how excited I am to start the journey with them, and how happy I am to see them all in the same room. **Secondly** I think it's important to do an introduction round. For some reason it never seems that actors are very interested in mingling before an introduction has been made (I'm sure people are different here too). The introduction round can have many shapes, but

for *Summertime* I asked them to do a very classic introduction where they one by one said their name, where they were from, and what they were playing. I think it's super important to remember that most of the actors in the room don't know each other from before, and that they might have read the text, but have no idea who's playing who. Allowing everyone a chance to just place people in their mind I think is essential. *Summertime* is the first production I've directed where most of the design has been done before the rehearsal process started, so we had a great opportunity to do a design presentation. It wasn't very extensive, but I think it was fun and good for the actors to hear Dedalus and Jessica talk some about the design process, and see both how the set and costumes were going to look. It was also a very good thing to have leading into the little talk I do before we start the read itself.

Similarly to the Prelude and Fugue I mention above (page 13), I think it's nice to give some context and provide the actors with a certain imaginative pallet before reading. This is one of the ways I actively try to line us all up, by welcoming them into the bubble that I and the designers have been living in for the past few months. So **thirdly** I hold an introduction speech where I touch on a few things;

A) I'm very open about how I feel about what lies ahead, which usually includes being ecstatic and at the same time terrified. I think it's important that the actors realize that we're in this together. That I'm at the helm, but that we're all going to need each other. I also think that honesty fortifies trust between people, and by being honest with the actors I hope that they feel they can be it back.

B) Next I tell them a bit about the play, some about it's history and about the playwright. It was fun in this one because I wouldn't only use anecdotes and historic facts, but actual conversations between myself and the playwright. Chuck and I have over the past two years gotten to a place where we'll have the odd coffee or dinner, and during our conversations in

2016, I was of course trying to push talking about the play a lot. Chuck on the other hand was not very interested in sharing his thoughts, but I was able to draw some good stuff out of him all the same. He told me during dinner once that director Robert Woodruff likes working with this set designer who designs sets that are impossible to stage in, and he followed up this with “And I thought, so what if I write plays that are impossible to stage!?”. He told me that the fantastic thing with doing this is the completely different productions that come out of it, and when you think about it that makes total sense. It doesn’t mean it makes the tackling of it easier though. He didn’t say much about the play itself, but there was one story he told me several times, so I took it to be important. He said that when the play was first done he was watching it and thinking how they had done it all wrong. They had made a tragedy out of it, and in Chuck’s mind *Summertime* is a romantic comedy. Having heard this a few times, I was dead set on not making it into a tragedy, and conveyed this very openly to the actors. We were going to make a romantic comedy!

C) I was excited to bring them (i.e. the actors) the idea with the 90’s pop references, because I wanted to open up for their suggestions as well throughout the period. I made it clear that the script was in no way finished, and that they should feel free to bring in whatever suggestion they thought would fit for the staging or execution of any scene. In essence I encouraged again what I had realized so many times before didn’t really work (ref. the story on inspirational material on page 10), but in a different way. Now it wasn’t a matter of gathering things as collective inspiration, I made it much more specific to scenes and moments, and pointed out that it should be something that could be turned into or used in action. At this point in the process I had an idea that I would locate the core of every scene and find a memory that I saw as having a similar core, and use that as a premise for the staging of it. It was actually a really cool idea, and I did execute it with a few scenes, but ultimately I ended up not doing the work to find one for each scene. One example for when it was used is the opening scene with Tessa and

James. The meeting between the two reminded me of a meeting I had with a girl whom I was struck by, just like James is struck by Tessa. In my memory the girl's hands were wet because she was cleaning a counter at the time, and she had a rag that she wiped her hands on. This inspired Tessa being in the middle of cleaning when James arrived. This same way of thinking was then encouraged in the actors, and though it didn't grow into a fully realized practice (I'm sure it could have if I had pushed it more), we did experience a few times where actors would bring up a memory or a reference that later would find its way into the telling of the scene. Vanessa shared an intimate memory of a moment with someone which informed the staging of one of Tessa and James' scenes in the second act, and Levi Morger (who played Francois) brought in a reference to a CNN reporter for one of his monologues, resulting in us using a white board as a central element for that scene. Some things came out of it, but not everything, but regardless I think it's a good idea to always talk about how we'll be working together in the weeks to come.

D) Why are we doing this play at this point? For *Summertime* this was all about what I mentioned earlier with a lost or hidden human connection (see page 4–5). That in a world where individuality is being lauded more and more, plays like this are needed to remind and teach people about reaching out to each other. And more than this, that we need to remember love. We need to teach ourselves and others about love, and by doing a play where 13 people are all trying to figure out what love is, we're taking some steps in the right direction. The hope here is to give the actors, and the rest of the team, a feeling of being part of something larger than just the play. It's something I've very much picked up from Brian, both in his classes and while assisting him on *Macbeth* last year. The way he draws big lines from a play and into the realities of our current world is truly fascinating, and I've slowly been doing it more and more in my own work over the years. For the first read of *Macbeth* I noticed that Brian started with the largest line, speaking about why the play is important in the world right now, and then slowly he made the lines

smaller, so that we came closer and closer to the play and the version we were doing. At the end of the read he then brought back the lines reaching far out into the world, and you felt a certain wholeness about the experience, making it truly an exercise reminding of the hermeneutic circle. You look at the whole, then zoom in to look at a detail, before zooming out again to re-look at the whole. I wanted to achieve something similar, and think I succeeded to some extent. The most important thing was to provide the actors with some larger thoughts, and to have everyone have them fresh in their minds for when we started reading.

E) Bringing everyone into how we'll be dealing with the different elements is also part of this session. With seeing a design and hearing about ideas there's bound to be many questions, and so I like to address the world we'll be existing in and how we'll relate to it. I recently had a friend ask me "How do you get your actors to be so unified in their expression, as if they are all part of the same world?" It's a question I've been asking a lot myself, and I can't say for certain I've found an answer for it, but I told him what I consciously have been doing: When getting to the aesthetics of the piece, I explain to the actors what the world of the play is like (i.e. for this play a dream logic) and then attempt to explain where the acting style should lie in relation to that. For *Summertime* I wanted them to think of the style as slightly heightened, but without going too far. Think sitcoms, like *Friends*, where the acting seems to be realistic, you accept it as realism, but if you really look its all slightly heightened. There are two reasons why I do this, because I) I think it's important for them to have to reach for something that's not what they're used to, and II) it unifies their acting, because they're all trying to achieve the same thing. Now part of my job over the following weeks will be to make sure they reach the bar that was set. Towards the end of the rehearsal period however, I usually remind them explicitly of the bar, and consciously push it even higher when I do. This is to activate those final juices as we're in the

sprint, but also to again have them reaching for the same goal. I think these things are part of how I get everyone unified in their expression, and it all starts with that first bar that's set.

F) Lastly before we start reading I like to address the reading itself. I hear that directors have very different practices here. I used to say to the actors at a first read "Don't worry about acting. We're just reading the text, and there's no need or pressure to do anything more." I did this, and I know other people do this, to literally take the pressure off of the actors on their first day at work. I get it. It can be scary, and one doesn't want the actor to feel scared or awkward, but I have to admit I've completely changed my practice on this. Last year I started a reading group where a bunch of actors would come to my house every Sunday, and we would read a play and discuss it after. It was a blast. In those readings I encouraged the actors to act out the text one hundred percent, even though most of the plays were for most people cold readings. What we saw then was that the actor intuition, especially when coupled with well written plays, is just so strong and on point, that scenes and situations usually didn't need translating. They were able to pick up on what the scene needed and where it needed to go right away, just by acting out the words as they were reading them. Because of this experience I now tell the actors on the first read "I know it's your first day and that some of these things will be read for the first time, but just go for it. Use each other and play off of each other. Devour the text! Have fun!!" The difference is enormous!

When I've done my 'big speech' (it's usually not that long), it's time to go to the script. As I've mentioned, there has by this point been a makeover of the play, and I like that all actors are getting the scripts for the first time at the same time, and that it's the same version. This is another way of lining everyone up for the race. By not letting anyone spend time with that specific version before the first read, we achieve that we're all on the same page for the reading.

For me it's usually the first time I hear the play read out loud, just like everyone else. And off we go.

In addition to checkpoints like I've mentioned here, there are some other things I think are important for a first read, like small gestures of care. Having coffee ready for everyone when they come, greeting everyone with a smile and a hug – for this read we even gave everyone a binder with their name on it for their script. Small gestures like that help creating an environment that people want to return to.

Adding Music and Dance

I think there were a few unexpected things for the actors that were revealed during the first read. For some reason I had not mentioned to the actors that there would be songs in the show, and I had put in, I believe, six songs by that point. Many were kind of shocked to learn that they were expected to sing (of course I did not ask them to sing on the first read), and furthermore I hadn't really checked that all of them *could* sing. Those I had worked with before I knew about, but the new ones? No idea. Took a risk. And it turned out great! They all could sing, and what do you know, they even ended up rapping. I think the shock was just as big when I introduced our choreographer, Liv Marie Skaare Baden. They weren't aware there was going to be dancing. Now granted, a lot of the movement that was planned, was in fact just that, movement. But I guess we ended up pushing the choreography quite far on a couple of numbers. The actors were true sports when it came to these things, and didn't complain one bit. At least not to me... They threw themselves head first into both singing and dancing, and I'm very proud of what they were able to accomplish, seeing that only one in the cast was actually trained in musical theatre. Liv Marie and I had a great collaboration. She was visiting from Norway during the rehearsal period and was crashing at my apartment while here, so we ended up spending a lot of time discussing

the show. Her input was invaluable. And even more invaluable was the chance to let someone have rehearsals that I didn't need to be present for. It was challenging to do that at first, having spent so much of my time over the past years doing absolutely everything, but it was so freeing after a bit. The same was the case with our brilliant music director Ryan Buchanan. He did all the vocal arrangements, as well as making music scores for all of them. He conducted the music rehearsals, and would also have some rehearsals without me being present. I think if you were to ask the actors they would speak very highly of both Liv Marie and Ryan. They are both genuinely nice, pedagogical and professional people, which made the actors feel both challenged and taken care of at the same time. To me it was helpful to also experience that kind of collaboration. Because we were conducting rehearsals independent of each other, it was extremely important that the three of us were on the same page. And we all could feel when that was the case and when it was not. Navigating that and finding the right level of communication to achieve it ended up teaching me a lot about that kind of artistic collaboration.

Balancing Poetry and prose

During rehearsals we had many challenges, but one of the most challenging elements, that both the actors and myself were struggling with, was the text. When we made *Platonov*, we also created a dreamlike world, especially in the second and third act, but we were dealing with a very concrete text. It was a classical text, and there was nothing supernatural about it. In Chuck's texts though, it seems that all is supernatural, and everything is certainly poetic. The challenge became then to translate this poetic language into a realism-like expression, and especially hard was it because the world in which the play took place was also quite poetic. We had a hunch early on that the text should be treated almost like Shakespeare, in that the actor had to transcend it in order for it to truly flow. If the actor were to just say the text without owning it, the meaning of it would be gone before the words left the lips. This was especially the case in monologues.

It's an interesting text though, and just like in Shakespeare you can almost divide *Summertime* into verse and prose. Chuck uses a blend of very poetic and very conversational language, and on some level one could say that his more poetic text is written like verse, and his conversational text is in prose. We didn't do an extensive breakdown of this for rehearsals, but on some level the idea of it was present for us. The style of acting we had set at heightened, sitcom realism. This turned out to be very helpful and aesthetically correct when dealing with his prose text. Because the text in these moments was not abstract, and rather straightforward, it made sense that the execution of it offered a counterweight to the concrete, putting the actor in a heightened acting style. Not much, just a touch. And likewise going the other way; in the monologues where the text took large poetic turns, or in passages of dialogue where the text was heightened, the only thing to do was to play it down, making it as realistic as possible, and removing any form of heightened acting.

Text and Style

For example, in the second act Tessa has a monolog where she uses images that in no way could exist in a realistic setting. She tells James about when she imagined being him, and uses examples like going to the store and it being an Arabian tent, and buying him red thermal underwear, and how he would throw roses at her thorn first (Appendix B: 84–85). The imagery is completely fantastical, and it was during the auditions that Vanessa and I discovered how this monolog needed to be performed. We used this monolog as a text in callbacks, and most people would come in and offer strong feelings to match the imagery, or delve into the hurt the imagery spoke to, or add gestures that would reflect on it. After having seen a few, I started pushing them towards a 'matter of fact' approach, where the text was just said without much emotion at all, but rather as a retelling of ones thoughts in the moment. Almost like reading out a grocery list. That's when the text really started to pop, and we were able to deeply understand what Tessa was saying

in that moment. Needless to say, when Vanessa performed it, it was done very straightforward without too much acting or emotion added on. We decided to add tempo towards the end to help the rhythmical dramaturgy, but beyond that, the text was said in a ‘matter of fact’ kind of way.

The ‘Associative Effect’

During first year Anne talked to us about the balance of poetic and prosaic, abstract and concrete. How one cannot exist without the other, and they're in some sort of yin-yang relationship. I remember how it stuck with me then, and realize how it's still very present in my decision making. It was most likely this that informed finding the balance between text and execution, letting the poetic character in one strike a balance with the prosaic character of the other. Adding to this we used underscoring abundantly in the piece. When finding the music for it we tried to hone in on not just the atmosphere of the song, but also what reference string we were hitting. For instance, in one of Francois' monologues (Appendix B: 36–37) we started out trying the monolog as very expressive, almost over-acted. My reference at that point was a video of William Shatner reciting *Rocket Man* by Elton John at The Science Fiction Film Awards in 1978, which when parodied can be done quite dramatically. But something didn't seem right about it. Although I think many people would've gotten the reference if the music was playing in the background and Levi performed it with similar gestures and inflections, it just wasn't what the monolog needed or the play needed at that point. Levi felt this earlier than me, and we did many iterations of it before we landed on something very simple. He was just going to speak it. Perhaps it was a rehearsed speech, perhaps it was in the moment reflections. That didn't matter, what mattered was that his style of performing it was so down to earth. Now with the text being what it is, and him doing it the way he did, the text could've easily become a very serious and heavy monolog, which dramaturgically was also wrong for that point of the play. Which is why we added *Nature Boy* by Nat King Cole. By adding this music – which also is very dramatic, but

it's one that most people know well – we were able to strike at the parody strings of the monolog, and people found themselves laughing at a very heartfelt moment. Not because they didn't know what was going on, not because they were thinking about it or questioning it, but because the reference instantly pierced all the layers (the situation, the text, the acting, the action) and nailed the sum of them to a personal foundation in the audience member, allowing for a deeper understanding of it. It's almost like the reference offers a highway into the core of the situation. I've tried wrapping my head around how this relates to Brecht's alienation effect, and have landed on a theory. Stephen Unwin writes in *The Complete Brecht Toolkit* "The 'alienation effect' occurs when the audience is encouraged to question its preconceptions and look at the familiar in a new and different way – that is, to make it strange." (Unwin 2014: 47) I offer the opposite, and for clarity propose the term 'associative effect':

The 'associative effect' occurs when the audience is encouraged to perceive a seemingly unfamiliar situation through the lens of their own emotion, awakened by an immediate recognizable reference – that is, to make the strange familiar.

When hearing the vague and poetic text that Francois offers, said without much expression, it might seem so strange at first that one has a hard time hearing it. This was the case for me several times when rehearsing the piece, even though I knew what the actors were saying, the text was not striking a chord with me – I wasn't able to perceive it because it was in fact too strange. The music then, not because of the atmosphere it sets, but because of the reference it strikes to something that exists in one's associative emotional library, resonates with something deeply personal and provides a lens through which the strange can be seen, making it familiar. And so Francois monolog went from being a text one had a hard time understanding to a text one emotionally connected with, because of the 'associative effect'.

Rehearsals

Table Discussions

Rehearsing the play itself was very much like any other rehearsal period. Usually before any given scene we would gather around a table and discuss what we were about to tackle, so that everyone could chime in with their thoughts, analyses and ideas. These gatherings proved to be quite helpful in figuring out the relationships of the characters. *Summertime* is a complicated play when it comes to relationships, as everyone seems to somehow be connected to each other. And also, why are they all at this place at the same time? For instance; Francois is Maria's lover, but the first time we meet him he's trying to seduce Tessa, Maria's daughter. The next time we meet him he gets into a fight with Mimi, Tessa's friend, and it turns out that Mimi and Francois were also once involved. When more characters join after this, Maria and Francois' relationship becomes apparent – although it seems that they ended things a while ago – and Natalie who enters with the rest of Tessa's family seems to also have had a romantic relationship with Mimi, but she doesn't know Tessa. Now, here's the tricky part: why are they all there? Especially Mimi and Francois who seem to have come on their own accord without an invitation? None of these things are specified in the script, and so it became our job to figure them out. We decided that it was a large case of stalking happening; so Francois had followed Maria there to win her back, and decided to use Tessa in his plan to do so. Mimi had followed Francois there, and was planning to have a confrontation with him, but then ended up running into her friend Tessa. Natalie had followed Mimi, but instead of just walking onto the estate, she had 'befriended' a group of people going to the estate so as to randomly appear. These are of course minor things, and ultimately we all know that these decisions rarely plays out to the audience, but it does help in that it informs both relationships, precipitating circumstances, and some staging choices. It's actually quite fun not to be given all the answers in a script, and even though we might find answers as we keep digging, sometimes one just has to make something up. I believe the actors enjoyed this too, but it's tricky with table discussions. Actors are very different. Some just want

to do, and too much discussion bogs them down. On the flip side, others can't really get into a scene unless they've discussed a few things. Because you can't make everyone happy, you have to settle for a middle way that works for all, and so the table discussions were had, but they never lasted very long. It would occasionally happen when working on a monologue that the actor and myself would stay at the table. This was in order to fully explore the depth and implications of the text without adding too much performance. But when with a group of actors I tried being quite efficient. After this came exploration onstage. As I've mentioned we were lucky to spend most of our rehearsal time at the Schapiro Theatre. This made spacial exploration a lot easier of course, and it allowed us to always be working with the energy that specific space needs in order not to feed negative energy back. Beyond this it was very straightforward. The most noteworthy thing was perhaps my own approach to the explorations.

Hands On, Hands Off

When I first started at Columbia the actor in me was still very much alive, and I think that on some level I just wanted my actors to act whatever role or scene the way that I would have acted it myself. I was very hands on, was on stage showing a lot, and not using my words to allow for the actors creative freedom. I clocked this in my own rehearsals some time during the first semester, and have after that worked hard on removing myself more and more from the stage and toning down the showing. It's been a long process, and one that I've found to be both thrilling and frustrating as hell. The impulse to show the actor creeps up on me very easily, and I've now grown accustomed to swallowing that impulse. I've forced myself again and again to use my words instead of my body, and I've seen how I'm getting so much more out of the actors when I let them do their job. Now, there are times where you have to show. But I've found that it's not often you have to show exactly. You can hint. And whenever I do that I take the thing I want the actor to do and caricature it. Making it much bigger and more accented than it needs to be, and

then I say “Please don’t do it like that.” Usually it will then hint to what the actor should be doing, and yet allow them the freedom to find it themselves.

Confidence and Relaxation

Something happened to me over the summer. I don’t know what, but I remember talking to my therapist in the spring of 2016, explaining how I doubted myself as a director. I wasn’t working on a show at that moment, but for some reason the feeling of inferiority was very present. Later that same spring I started rehearsals for my materials show *The High Cost of Loving* and I found that whenever I was in a rehearsal room I wasn’t so much in doubt anymore. It was almost like the familiar surroundings made me feel comfortable, and I found that directing had become second nature. Not as in being on autopilot, but something Brian said to us during first year “Everything you learn now you’ll be hyper-aware of in the rehearsal room, but then you’ll see how it slowly becomes second nature” (paraphrased). I felt during that period how this was very much the case, but I was still very hands on, and got very much stressed out about the play and the success of it. The need for it to be good.

Anne took me aside before Christmas 2015 and told me “Robin, now you just need to relax and trust yourself. You’ve got a feeling for theatre and you have the chops to make good work.” (paraphrased), and while this was ever-present in my head throughout the spring, I hadn’t been able to fully let go yet. When I say let go, it’s aimed at control. I’m very much a control freak. I come from a family of control freaks, and I have a tendency to try and take control of every aspect of my life. Letting go of control is not something I do easily. But like I said, something happened over the summer. Perhaps it was getting to spend time with Brian in San Diego and to see him at work. Noticing that he has many of the same worries that I have, and realizing we deal very similarly with situations. Or maybe it was spending time in Norway with a group of actors who looked up to me, feeling respected by peers and even idols, and feeling

confident in my job. Or perhaps it was just a long line of personal reflections finally aligning and allowing me to take a step towards maturing as a person and artist. It's really not important what it was that happened, but what is important is that I felt very differently in this process than I have had before. At some point I realized the main difference: on prior projects I was terrified, I didn't know what I was doing, and it freaked me out. With *Summertime* I was terrified, I didn't know what I was doing, but it didn't freak me out. Somehow I knew that it was all going to be alright, because hell, I had wonderful actors with me, incredibly professional stage managers, a creative team you could die for, and most of all: I knew that I could do this. It was during rehearsals for *Summertime* that I for the first time felt that *I am a director*. I don't need to prove it anymore. I don't need to question it anymore. I don't need anymore 'badges' telling me I am one. Because I am one. The confidence that came with that realization made me let go of the need for control. Not fully – I'm not sure if that's possible – but certainly to the point where I was generally calmer about things. Whereas I before could get very nervous or tense about a scene not working, or my ability to not communicate something correctly to an actor, I now felt very calm about it all. One of the actors who's done several things with me actually asked me halfway through the period "Are you ok? You seem very calm, and it's starting to freak us out." ("us" indicating the actors who've worked with me before), and I just had to tell him that I wasn't scared. I knew that we were all going to make this work. Now, as I mentioned above, when I was very hands on I noticed how stifling that could be for the actors, which is why I started making the shift in the first place towards a more verbal, less hands on approach. And now that I feel confident in what will come out at the end, and I allow the actors more room to explore and do their own job, I see the scenes blossom in a richness they never had before. None of this is to say that I don't assert my thoughts or guide the explorations. That's what a director does. What I'm

saying is that during *Summertime* I think I found the magic thin line that the director balances, between taking control and relenting control. A line I'm excited to keep dancing on.

The ease of the rehearsal room helped me to more easily take use of some of the inspiration I had found as well. Several of the Munch paintings I had found actually inspired staging moments. They were usually not large moments, but they were there in gestures and spacial relationship. There was a monolog that one of the actors were having a very hard time with. It's a tricky monolog, and we didn't exactly lay out his route so that it was easy to execute. At one point I remember him asking, "I just don't know what to do here, can we find something to do with my arms?" And immediately I churned out five gestures/postures from Munch paintings that was then kept as part of the staging. He didn't know where they came from. Normally I would have encouraged him to find the gestures on his own, or in collaboration with me, but at that point I could see that he was desperate for me to take the lead, and so I fed him the gestures. Moments like that are fascinating to me, and one can deal with them in so many different ways. What I think is important in those settings though is knowing which hat one is wearing as the director. Allow me to elaborate:

Three Roles

I believe a director plays three roles during the process of a production, roles which I've called the Creator, the Shepherd and the Audience. There are perhaps many many more, and perhaps there are even variations on these three, but they're the three I've clocked as the major ones. There are probably more humble names than these as well, but I have yet to come up with any better ones. These roles can be roughly divided into three phases, each of which are part of the production period. When a production starts, the director finds him-/herself shaping the world of the play. This happens, as I've described above, in conversations with the designers, in thinking

about how to solve situations, in imagining the scenes, in casting, etc. All of these things are shaped by the director, and this first process is mainly a creative one. Perhaps there is a concept planned, perhaps there are central questions that the play itself will be exploring. How to do that? How to accomplish this? How to express the essence? All of these things are answered, or at least attempted answered in the first part of the process. Ultimately it's the painter finding a motif, blending the colors and sketching what's about to be painted. We gather, and create. Finding the undercurrent, the deeper message of the piece, and on that basing a form, a style, an expression. Because this process is so very much based on the directors creativity, I believe that he/she during that is wearing the hat of the **Creator**.

Now, as of the first read all of this changes, we transition into taking on the role as the **Shepherd**. Without going too much into the details of this, my father has done a lot of historic research on Israel and the ancient traditions there, mostly in trying to better understand imagery in the Bible. Because of this I've heard so many stories and practices from that time, and one that's always stood out to me is regarding the shepherds. Back in the good ol' days the shepherds would carry a stick. The stick was used to scare away predators, but more than that it was used when the herd was moving from one place to another. When doing so the shepherd would always walk behind the flock, because the animals would know on intuition and by following the more experienced sheep where to go. If one or a few sheep for some reason started diverging from the rest, the shepherd would throw his stick on the outside of where they were going, so as to signal them back into the flock and in the right direction. In other words a shepherd's job was not so much to lead the flock anywhere, as it was to make sure that the group was always moving in the same direction. Now, there are pastures in Israel that are located on the northern side of pointy mountains, where the sun doesn't burn off the grass so fast, and the only way to get there was by following narrow pathways on the mountainside, stretching around the mountain, with a very

steep drop on one side. This is especially common in the Judean desert area which is the background for the famous Psalm of David, Psalm 23. On these pathways the shepherd would go in front of the herd, tapping his stick on the ground as they walked, so that the sheep could look down at where they were walking, and still hear the leader in front. It's from this image you get the text "I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." (NIV 2011: Psalms 23, 4) Now based on these things, I've chosen to call the second role the director assumes the Shepherd. Not because the director is the smart human and the actors the dumb sheep, but because our job at that point is no longer to be a creator, but rather to be a guide and make sure we're all walking in the same direction. Because of the preliminary work we've done, we've planned out the most efficient way to reach our goal, and so we can recognize when anyone starts diverging and need help getting back on track. This is basically guiding the exploration that is done in the rehearsal room, where the actors are walking in front. And then we encounter sections of the text that are very hard, and not easy to navigate. In those moments we step up as leaders, and choose to walk in front, leading the way so that the actors can safely follow and not risk taking a wrong step. The example with the actor and the Munch gestures is a good image for this (page 53). He had been exploring and exploring, and we had done much great work, but at the point where he reached out to me about his arms, he was so tired and couldn't see clearly where he was going any more. It was necessary that I stepped up in that moment and walked in front. This second phase is perhaps the most important one, because it's all about how we communicate with our collaborators, and it's so hard to let go of the role of the Creator, but so important for a collective good experience.

Towards the end of the process we enter the last phase we go through, when we take on the role as the **Audience**. I think that in order for the production to reach a certain level of quality, one has to consider how the audience will react to it. Ultimately the first audience to any

production is the director, and so we must at some point let go not only of the Creator, but also the Shepherd, and experience the play as an audience member seeing it for the first time. I consider this part almost as a director's Meisner-repetition, where the goal is just to take in and react to what is going on in front of you (Esper 2008). Very often I feel myself completely engaged in what is played out onstage, and then all of a sudden I'm not any more, or I have a different reaction to it than what I thought we were going for. When these things happen I take note of them, and then deal with them later, so as to not get caught up in analysing when I should be paying attention. But the trick then, when having seen it all, is to figure out where and why the connection was broken, and/or why the reaction was different than expected. By doing this, at least I have found, that I'm able to locate small cracks, or rhythmical jerks, or even large staging errors. Things I didn't necessarily see when I was looking as Creator or Shepherd, but saw when I took on the role as the Audience.

What I've offered now is a very sectioned breakdown of the three, and I have been referring to them as phases. If one were to break down the process into three phases I do think that these are the sections where the respective role would be most prominent, but I actually think that these three are similar to Lacan's concept of symbolic, imaginary and real (page 28–29), in that one is constantly moving between them. I think it's impossible to have one without it in some way, shape or form being accompanied by the others, but more than that I think it's inevitable that we move between them.

Applying the Roles

One example of this is the opening of *Summertime*. We started the show with Vanessa climbing over a tall pile of mattresses in the corner, as if climbing a mountain. When she had reached the top, pleased about her conquest, she looked out on the “landscape” below and saw that there was a spilled drink on the table, the pillows were undone and there were flower petals everywhere – a

mess she had to deal with. She slid down the mattress pile, and once she had regained her balance on the ground, she noticed and waived to the band, who were sitting there from start. Then she got a broom and started sweeping the flower petals into a pile. A few moments after she started sweeping, Ryan started playing a slow waltz. Vanessa, as Tessa, very quickly singled him to stop, indicating that she was not in the mood for that kind of music. She even said, “Play something else”. She went back to sweeping, and soon after the band started playing *All by Myself* by Eric Carmen, which she then indicated was ok. The sweeping took a long time, seeing that we had 13,000 flower petals scattered across the stage. And when she had gotten it into a pile, not really knowing what to do with it, she decided to sweep it under the couch. Out of sight, out of mind. She then proceeded to remove the spilled drink and the stained tablecloth, and while she was cleaning up the spilled wine under the table, James (played by Paul Lemonier) walked in.

I wanted to use the working on this scene as an example for moving between the three roles. It lends itself well as an example because of when and how it was made. You see, because the working of the scene required both the mattresses, the broom and the petals, it was hard to approach this scene before we had all the elements, so when we finally got to it we were deep into tech week. If one were to follow the phases I proposed we would now be very much in the role of the Audience, but because it was a scene that had never been worked we needed to start from scratch, and so I had to start as the Creator. I had ahead of time planned the steps for the scene, creating the route for it and building the structure for it. Vanessa and I went through all these steps, not really rehearsing them – it was more like we were mapping it out, so that when she jumped into it she could go all the way through. Seeing that she then was improvising, based on the map we had played out before hand, I took on the role as Shepherd when watching it. The whole point was for us to communicate and try things out. The first try she climbed of the

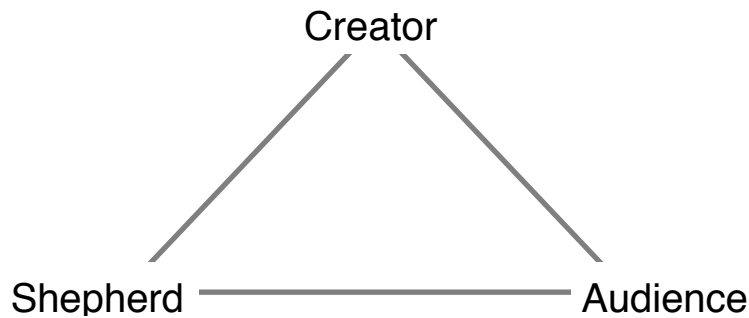
mattress, happy about her conquest, slid down when she saw the mess and went for the broom. Here's when the first thing happened; without being consciously aware of it my Audience eyes were still paying attention, and asked why on earth she wasn't taking in the band – they were right there. I let it go and payed attention, looking for if she ever moved away from the path we'd laid out. Everything was great, and she followed the steps beautifully, and even found new ways of doing things that were much better than I could ever thing of. Ryan had started playing the waltz when she started sweeping, and he was still playing it when Vanessa after having struggled with these several thousand petals for a bit stopped. She felt it was too hard, and she was quite exhausted by the action of it. My Shepherd role kicked in, as I had noticed that she was pushing the broom very hard against the floor and tensing her body as she was sweeping. I asked her to relax her body a bit, and let the broom do the work, so that she wouldn't become so tired. In addition I had felt that something wasn't right with the waltz playing, and it turned out Vanessa wasn't very happy with it either. She said "Can't they play something else?" and my Creator hat came flying on, answering "Just say that. Say that to Ryan when he starts playing the waltz, and then.. and then, Ryan, play 'All by Myself' instead!" We tried it, and it turned out to be very funny. Because there was something very beautiful, fascinating and funny about seeing a woman sweep for so long, I was watching as Vanessa did it the second time, realising that I wanted to laugh again. The break with the music change had sparked the room to stat laughing, but now (towards the end of the sweeping) I was starting to get slightly bored by the action, and was craving for something to wake me up. In other words, the Audience in me signalled to the Creator to come up with something for that moment, and so I quickly rearranged some moments in the scene in my head and conveyed them to Vanessa. She then pushed back with some suggestions, and we were able to map out the new trail for that part. When all the petals had been put in a pile, instead of sweeping them right under the couch, we agreed that she would have a

moment where she didn't know what to do with it, and rest the broom against the table while she was dealing with the tipped over glass and the stained tablecloth. Then after having dealt with that she would have another look at the pile, look at the couch, and sweep it under. She tried it once, and it was much funnier, but I had noticed that the way she was sweeping it under the couch wasn't quite as funny as the Audience in me wanted it to be, and so I guided her to sweep it under and actively pretend it wasn't a big deal. When she did that the moment punched like crazy. The next time we then went through the whole thing, I was able to watch the whole thing as the Audience, and not become distracted. That's when I knew the scene was what it needed to be. Perhaps it's possible to surmise that a goal in some sense is to achieve watching whatever one is working on all the way through as the Audience without becoming distracted. One could think that if that happens there is nothing that needs recreating and the actors need no guiding, and so it's essentially ready to go. Most likely however, this is idealism. I'm not sure if one can ever become so happy with every moment of a piece that one thinks it's in no need of adjusting.

Bartlett Sher said when he came to Visiting Artists "People talk about the result. I don't work to get it done, I work to explore, and in some sense we're never done exploring" (paraphrased).

This is very interesting, and to some degree I appreciate what he said. I must say that personally I have to have a goal to which I am working, but that doesn't mean I have to reach it. I need to get within a certain distance, but I too in a way think it is unreachable. It's like if you keep splitting something in half, it will never run out – you'll always shorten the distance by 50%, but never actually get to 0%. Sure, I believe that parts of a play can be like this. Parts can be in no need of fixing. But I don't think it's possible to achieve a whole piece where every moment is worked to perfection. Wouldn't that also take away some of the essence of a live performance? It seems to me that that's what Bob Wilson does in his pieces. Only for Bob it seems that the third role doesn't ever matter. He's guiding the actors to solely fulfil his Creator impulse. But I'm not sure

if even he can achieve perfection. To me the three make up a triangle which is ever turning at the centre, putting a new role on top. The other two are still there, and must be, but they have less priority in that moment than the one on top. Consider this, and how it would turn:



Conclusion

There are many more things that could be said and told about the process and the outcome itself, but it's time to bring this back around and look at the questions that I set out to answer at the beginning. I will now go through them one by one and offer references to the text and 'answers' that I feel the process has provided.

My very first question revolves around the notion of complex text, and what we can do to help the audience hear an abstract text more clearly. 1) In what way can we help the audience hear an abstract or complex text as if it was conversational? Based on what I write in *Balancing Poetry and Prose* (page 45–48) my experience says that it is all linked to the style of acting applied to the different types of text. In *Summertime* we discovered that the texts that were abstract and very fantastical needed a certain realism to them in order to be heard, as well as real human emotions. By removing the heightened acting in those moments, the style I had defined as a sitcom style, the text was balanced by its execution and could exist in harmony with how it was said instead of on top of it. Likewise the prosaic text in the script wanted a certain heightened approach in the speaking, and for this we would work much more on technical details to

structure the execution of it. Tessa's monolog is the best example of finding the balance, where the fantastical text that Chuck provided had to be presented in a 'matter of fact' way in order to be fully heard. One can draw the same conclusion in working with Shakespeare, that when the verse is performed "trippingly on the tongue" (Hamlet 3.2), that's when one really connects with it as an audience member. And so one can surmise that in order to make complex text heard, one must remove any desire to act it out, and instead let the text do the work on its own.

For *Summertime* it was clear for me from the very beginning that I wanted to use pop culture references to get at a certain core of the piece, and to allow for audience members to have associations to their teenage years. The second questions I posed was 2) What can emerge from combining different forms of text with "commercial" entertainment and "pop culture" references? In the show we used songs from the 90's as well as songs of a more contemporary character. All the songs that were sung seemed to have a strong impact on people, because the placement of them helped saturate and highlight the situation we were currently in. For example, *Bed of Lies* by Nicki Minaj was performed in the middle of Mimi's long rant about a certain lover (read Francois) and how he by favouring his wife ignored her. It was also clear that Maria, also his lover, had never heard that he was married. The song was almost written for that situation, and because the audience had at that point learned so much about the different relationships, it made sense that everyone through the course of the song joined in and sang to their respective lovers. This song offers an example of a pop culture reference where everyone sang, but I have previously talked about our use of underscoring. In the example of Francois' monolog, coupled with *Nature Boy* by Nat King Cole I deepen the theory on which all of these references are based. In my theory about the 'associative effect' I present how an immediate association to something stored in ones emotional library not only makes one get the reference right away, but it actually links all the elements at hand, tying them to the same point and

allowing the audience to see experience a seemingly unfamiliar situation as something familiar. And so one can say that what emerges from the associative effect is the ability “to make the strange familiar” (ref page 46).

I’ve touched on the balance between abstract and concrete in handling text, but my third question revolves around handling the material itself. 3) Based on the notion that abstract and concrete can not truly exist without the other, how can one achieve a successful result when working with both an abstract text and an abstract form? I think when dealing with a dreamlike text like the one Chuck provides, one must not be afraid to embrace the dreaminess, but rather jump into it wholeheartedly. Granted this I believe is most pertinent when creating the world that the piece exists in. There is no doubt that along with the designers, actors and rest of the team, I set out to make a world based on dream logic, but because of this it became triply important to me to find and delineate the rules of the world. This is why the table work before each scene became such an important part of the process (page 46-47), so that we could discuss the rules and the actual logic of the scene. The piece was never intended to have a collage-like feel, so making sure that the dramaturgical thread went all the way through, and that we were in fact following a ‘plot’ in a sense became a huge part for everyone. In light of that the form of the play was very much approached the same way as the text. Whenever there were larger sections of prosaic speech, the style in both acting and staging was allowed to move to a slightly heightened level, but as soon as the text became a bit poetic, we needed to push towards realism – to me that meant treating it in those moments as almost a kitchen sink drama. The exception was in dealing with the songs, and certain other moments. Songs exist on a different plane – it’s like it’s a different reality altogether. In opera I’ve heard people refer to recitatives as when the action moves forward, but when the aria starts, time stands still. We used similar effects in *Summertime*. In the songs, which were perhaps the most dreamlike moments of the piece, we pushed their

reality into a different aesthetic than anything else, and by doing so we broke the pattern that we had already set up. Some of the most effective things you can do to intrigue someone is to set up a pattern and then break it. The trick with this is that you get so focused on breaking the pattern that you forget to set it up. I dare to say that we were able to achieve both, and so we were able throughout the piece to elegantly deal with an abstract text, but only by balancing it OR highlighting it with the form it existed in.

Beyond the creative explorations this piece crated the framework in which I could put many of my leadership theories into practice. Most of them I had been dealing with and exploring over a longer time, but *Summertime* was where they all existed at once. The first questions I posed on leadership in this paper was 4) How can we as directors create the absolute best conditions for the whole team (actors, designers, stage managers, etc) to succeed? From the survey done by Gallup in 2005–2008 I was able to find the four most appreciated qualities in a leader, and delineate how to apply them to a rehearsal room setting. By implementing the Four Pillars; Stability, Trust, Compassion and Hope in the rehearsal room, we might be able to achieve the safe conditions that I believe are necessary for a fruitful creative process to thrive. Furthermore we as directors must accept our responsibility as leaders of the creative process, and acknowledge that we have an enormous effect on how our collaborators experience the process. It is my opinion that we need to take our role as leaders seriously, understand that a large portion of our job is in dealing with other people, and use whatever tools we can to make sure we get the best out of those people.

One thing that I realized for the first time in the *Summertime* process was my own relationship with control. As I've mentioned I have a tendency to try and control everything in my life, and it's something I am working on toning down. This process however was the first time I was able to a certain degree relent control as a director, which lead me to answer question

5) What do the dynamics of control mean in a rehearsal process? I found that by giving up control, and not worrying too much about outcome, or things being perfect, I was able to let the actors do their job more fully, and allow for both inspirational materials and intuition flow much easier in my own process. Anne has said since the beginning that we need to “look without desire”, basically meaning that we should try to see what is there instead of seeing what it’s not yet. This process was the first time I was able to do this over an extended period of time, and because of it I think the richness of the scenes moved to a level I could never imagine – and certainly never get to by controlling the process. All of this is deeply linked to a feeling of confidence and security, and even though it took almost a year, it was in this process that I was finally able to relax and trust myself.

Lastly I asked the question 6) In what way must the director change his/her focus throughout a process?, and I provided a suggestion to break the process into three parts, in which each part the director would assume a different role. The three phases are: I) From the start of the project until the first read, where the director assumes the role of the Creator, II) From the first read and through towards the end of the rehearsal process (for the hell of it let’s just say until we start doing runs), where the director assumes the role as Shepherd, and lastly III) The remainder of the process until opening night, where the director assumes the role as the Audience. I think by changing focus into these roles throughout the process, we are able as directors to attack the material from a variety of angles, and by having an understanding of which role we assume at any given point, we will be more adept to deal with the situation at hand. Is it necessary to be consciously aware of them at any given point? Probably not. But can it help us adjust to where our focus should be at any given moment? I think so.

Turning the page

As mentioned, this process was so rich and full of experiences and moments of learning, and there are many more things I could have, and would like to touch on. My goal however was to approach these topics that I had been grappling with for a while, and I feel that by revisiting my working on *Summertime* and putting words to my whole process helped in that endeavour, and gave me a possibility to organize thoughts that otherwise would still be floating around. I hope that anyone reading this will be able to take something from my experiences and theories, but to me this is not so much a closed chapter as it is the turn of a page, and I'm confident that both these topics and new ones will be subject to much more exploration in the years to come. This might be the last line I write during my time at Columbia, but the journey to understand of the director's art and craft has just begun. And so to end on a quote from Charles Mee himself, from the play that attached itself so firmly in my mind and gut that it left me no choice but to do it:

James:

Do you dance?

Tessa:

Of course I dance.

Bibliography

Books

Ball, William. 1984. *A Sense of Direction*. Drama Publishers. California

Chekhov, Michael. 2002. *To the Actor. On the Technique of Acting*. [1953] Routledge. New York

Dixon, Michael Bigelow & Smith, Joel A. 1995. *Anne Bogart. Viewpoints*. Smith and Kraus. New Hampshire

Esper, William & DiMarco, Damon. 2008. *The Actor's Art and Craft*. Anchor Books. New York

Gennep, Arnold van. 1999. *Rites de passage. Overgangsriter*. Norwegian translation Erik Ringen. Oslo.

Maxwell, Jon C. & Parrott, Les. 2005. *25 Ways to Win With People*. Thomas Nelson, Inc. Tennessee

NIV. 2011. *The Bible. "Psalms"*. USA

Rath, Tom & Conchie, Barry. *Strengths Based Leadership*. 2008. Gallup Press. New York

Schechner, Richard. 2006. *Performance studies. An introduction*. [2002] Routledge. New York

Unwin, Stephen. 2014. *The Complete Brecht Toolkit*. Kindle Edition. Amazon

Web

Mee, Charles. 2017. *About the Project*.
<<http://www.charlesmee.org/about.shtml>>

Wikipedia 1. 2017 [last edit]. *Pando (tree)*.
<[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pando_\(tree\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pando_(tree))> Nedlastet 04.10.17

Appendix A

Summertime Original

This script was freely downloaded from [the \(re\)making project](http://the(re)makingproject.charlesmee.org),
(charlesmee.org). We hope you'll consider supporting the
project by making a donation so that we can *keep it free*.
Please [click here](#) to make a donation.

Summertime

by CHARLES L. MEE

A hundred slender white birch tree trunks.

A scattering of casual, summer-house furniture all covered in white muslin.

Grass grows on a desk,
and there are stars in the sky.

A woman's white summer dress hanging from a tree branch.

Later on, there might be 300 wine glasses half-filled with rose wine.

There is not so much a set for a play, as an installation piece
in which a performance occurs.

Violin music, quietly in the distance.

Tessa wears something in the colors of Spring.
She may have a flower in her hair.
She sits at the desk.

James enters.
He, too, is wearing something the color of Easter eggs,
and he carries a bright yellow umbrella.

JAMES
Excuse me?

TESSA

Yes?

JAMES

I didn't mean to barge in...

[he closes the umbrella]

I was told I might find a translator here.

TESSA

Oh, well, I...

I do some translation sometimes.

JAMES

You are?

TESSA

Tessa.

JAMES

Tessa.

Right.

Good.

I have a few things

I need to have put into Italian.

You see,

I work for someone

a photographer

who took photographs

and then asked certain people to look at the photographs

and say things or write things

that he would then put with the photographs.

TESSA

Captions.

JAMES

Yes. Right.

Well, no, not exactly.

More like thoughts or I don't know, feelings.

That is to say, he asked Roberto Calasso to write something or, as it turned out, he thought he asked Roberto Calasso whereas in actuality he asked a journalist named Francesco Ghedini to speak to Calasso and ask Calasso to write something do you know Calasso?

TESSA

I know *of* Calasso, sure.

JAMES

Right,

and Francesco said he had spoken to Calasso

and that Calasso had written these things

the things I have here.

TESSA

I see.

JAMES

but actually Calasso never did write them

I guess Francesco made them up

or even someone else made them up and told Francesco

that they had been written by Calasso

TESSA

This is really complicated.

JAMES

What is?

TESSA

This whole story.

JAMES
Right.
Well: life itself.

TESSA
Right.

JAMES
So, when the proofs were sent to Calasso for his final approval because the book is going to press— Calasso said he had never heard of these things and if we printed them he would sue. And so we had to stop the presses and I came here to talk to Calasso.

TESSA
Calasso is here? What, for the summer?

JAMES
I guess.

TESSA
What's he doing here?

JAMES
I don't know, I guess he's on vacation.

Anyway,
when he heard what had happened with Francesco he didn't want to get Francesco into trouble

TESSA
Francesco.

JAMES
I don't know why
I suppose because he understood Francesco, you know, is just trying to make a living

and Calasso felt sympathy for Francesco, I guess, because Calasso's a nice man
and so he suggested maybe someone else could sign the words
and he suggested Benigni

TESSA

Roberto Benigni.

JAMES

Right.

Because Benigni is well known as a lover in a way
a person who loves life and women

And Calasso knows Benigni and he said he would call him—
because he's here too, vacationing...

TESSA

He is?

JAMES

Do you know Benigni?

TESSA

I know *of* Benigni.

JAMES

Right....

and the pictures are...uh...

did I say what the pictures were?

TESSA

Nudes.

JAMES

No.

Did I say that?

TESSA

I guessed.

JAMES

Well, yes.

Or, no.

Not entirely.

Some are nudes, but some are not.

I mean, many are not.

And there are men, too. And old people.

And children, I mean: as friends.

You know.

[silence]

Love.

[silence]

Sex for sure. But: also love.

TESSA

Oh, well, love.

No wonder it's so complicated.

JAMES

Right.

TESSA

These days especially.

JAMES

Right.

TESSA

With what we all know now
what we've come to know.

JAMES

Exactly.

[silence]

JAMES

Anyway the texts are in English
because we have them in type for the American edition

TESSA

and Benigni doesn't speak English

JAMES

Right. Well, not so well.

TESSA

So you need them translated back into Italian.

JAMES

Right.

[silence]

TESSA

No problem.

JAMES

What?

TESSA

No problem.

I can do that.

JAMES

Oh. Oh, great, thank you.

TESSA

Do you have them?

JAMES

Sure.

They're right here.

TESSA

So.

Why did you want Calasso to speak about love?

JAMES

Because he's, well,
he's Italian....

TESSA

Right.

JAMES

You know,
from Europe,
from an ancient civilization in a way,
the old world.

TESSA

Greece and Rome.

JAMES

Right.

And still in touch with the deeper ways of life and love
the things that are deep in human nature and eternal

TESSA

close to the dreamtime of civilization

JAMES

Right.

TESSA

The time of mythology.

JAMES

Right.

Deeper than Freud, even.

TESSA

Right.

Deeper than Freud.

[silence]

JAMES

Or, you know, I suppose we could have gotten a woman to write about it.

TESSA

Right.

Though probably that wouldn't have helped.

JAMES

No.

[silence]

Do you think I could wait here while you do it?

TESSA

This could take a while.

JAMES

Right. Of course,

and you'd rather have some privacy I guess.

I only thought,

if you had any questions.

TESSA

Sure, sure. You can stay.

You can sit there.

[silence]

JAMES

Do you mind if I just lie down?

I'm sort of jet-lagged.

TESSA

No. Fine. Please do.

JAMES

Thanks.

[he lies down;

she looks at the text for a while, quietly.]

TESSA

This line—

"deer heart" —

what is that?

JAMES [sleepily]

Um...

I don't know.

I guess it's just something that...uh...you know
someone thought of.

TESSA

Unh-hunh.

I mean, it's supposed to be an animal, a deer,
a fawn, a wild animal,

but at the same time it should suggest sweetness: d-e-a-r.

In English, you have this play on words.

JAMES

Yes. Right. I suppose you do.

That's one of the challenges of translation I guess.

TESSA

Well. Yes, it is.

[Music comes up.]

Francois walks vertically down the sky,
or steps out of a wardrobe
or up out of a steamer trunk
or through the wall
or out of the trees.

He carries a rose umbrella;
and he too wears flowered or brightly colored clothes
and has a flower in his buttonhole]

FRANCOIS

Are you free for dinner?

TESSA

No.

I'm busy.

As you can see.

FRANCOIS

Everyone has to eat.

TESSA

I'm not dressed.

FRANCOIS

I have something for you.

JAMES [waking up]

Uh, excuse me.

[he hands her a crimson satin slip]

TESSA

Oh, Francois.

This is a slip.

FRANCOIS

Everyone's wearing slips these days.

TESSA
As a dress?

JAMES
Pardon me.

FRANCOIS
Yes.

TESSA
To go out?

FRANCOIS
Sure.

TESSA
Not in Martha's Vineyard, I don't think.

FRANCOIS
Of course in Martha's Vineyard.
It all started here.

TESSA
I like it.

[she steps out of her dress
and into the slip;
she wears, otherwise,
black boots, and socks that are falling down around her ankles;
or else, she takes off the dress and doesn't put the slip on,
wearing nothing else but stockings and red high heels]

JAMES
What is this?
I beg your pardon,
but you seem to have interrupted something here.

FRANCOIS
Do you believe in love at first sight?

TESSA

No.

JAMES

What's going on?

FRANCOIS

It's the truth.

TESSA

So?

FRANCOIS

So what?

TESSA

So why do you tell me this?

FRANCOIS

Because perhaps this is how it is for us.

TESSA

How can this be after all these years we've known one another?

FRANCOIS

Because sometimes you don't see the other person at first.

And then suddenly you do.

You sense something in one another.

You might not even know what it is.

In fact, probably you never know,

the connection is so deep,

beneath the place where language even starts.

And then, if you let the moment pass, it is past forever.

And what you never know is:

was this a great love or not?

Was this your one great love

that you've just missed.

Because each of us is given only one great love in life.

That's what all the poets have known.

We've forgotten it in our times.
I think we get too caught up in our daily lives.
But people used to know:
you are born,
you have one great love,
you die.
There's nothing else to life.
That's why, in Romeo and Juliet,
after they find their love,
they die.
Because that's the truth of it:
birth, love, and death,
that's all there is.
Your great love may come at the beginning of your life,
or in the middle,
or near the end.
Or not at all.
But there is only one
and if you miss it,
you've missed it forever.

JAMES

This is exactly what I meant to say to you.
This is what I myself was thinking when I first met you.

TESSA

Is this what you always say to women?

FRANCOIS

No.

JAMES

I was going to say the very same thing to you
but I was afraid you would think I was too forward.

FRANCOIS

Do you dance?

TESSA

Of course I dance.

JAMES

Excuse me.

Wait a moment.

Uh...I beg your pardon.

Goddammit.

[Music comes up.

They dance—

not just for a moment

but this dance is a long performance event of its own.

James paces back and forth,
wanting to interrupt, feeling too uncertain and shy,
until finally he does.]

JAMES

Well, look, finally,

I don't mean to interrupt, but...

TESSA

I'm sorry.

James, this is my friend Francois.

JAMES

Yes, so I gather.

It seems that I happen to doze off for a minute
and now you're dancing with someone else.

TESSA

What?

JAMES

You're dancing with someone else.

[she hurriedly puts on the slip— if she didn't have it on]

TESSA

Someone else?

[the following is all on top of one another]

JAMES

Well, yes.

Excuse me,

Tessa and I...

I thought we...

well, I might have been mistaken,

but I thought we were...

taken up with one another.

FRANCOIS [withdrawing]

Oh, I beg your pardon.

I didn't realize.

TESSA

What?

Taken up with one another.

What he means is...

FRANCOIS

I didn't realize....

I didn't mean to intrude.

TESSA

You're not intruding.

This is a...

we have a business relationship.

I mean we are...

I am working for him

in the sense that...uh....

FRANCOIS

That's quite all right. I'll just be....

JAMES

Business relationship, yes.

I suppose so, but I thought there was something more than that.

I thought...

FRANCOIS

Possibly we'll have the pleasure again....

[he exits;

at the same moment, Mimi enters,
coming out of the woodwork or the woods
also with a brightly colored umbrella
and brightly colored clothes.

She doesn't speak for a while;
she just stands there, drinking an iced tea, and watching.]

TESSA

What have you done?

JAMES

Done?

I hope I haven't done anything.

I certainly didn't mean....

TESSA

This was my friend!

I was dancing!

JAMES

Yes, I see.

And I didn't mean to....

TESSA

What are you,
some kind of stalker?

JAMES

No. No.

All this happened totally by chance
by pure chance.

Stalker!

TESSA

We might have been....

I mean, you can't tell what you might have interrupted....

JAMES

I know.

I'm sorry.

Well, in fact, of course,

I don't mean to presume,

but I also thought that perhaps you felt....

that is to say,

we met,

and frankly I felt something right away,

and I even thought perhaps you might have felt something, too.

TESSA

Felt something?

For you?

JAMES

Yes, for me.

I thought I sensed something special possibly.

Are you telling me you didn't feel some connection?

TESSA

No. No, I didn't.

JAMES

I was just a stranger with whom you were doing business
and, knowing nothing about me, you let me sleep here with you
and you felt no connection?

TESSA

Sleep with me?

JAMES

From the first moment I saw you
I thought
here is a wonderful person
and I thought you felt something of the same
but now you seem, well,
as though you might be denying your impulse.

TESSA

Impulse? I don't have an impulse!

JAMES

What do you call it?

TESSA

I call it nothing.
Are you crazy?
You thought
we were in love?

JAMES

Not that I thought we were in love,
but that perhaps there was some feeling of a connection.
You have such beautiful eyes.

TESSA

Eyes? Eyes?
I have nothing to do with my eyes.
They have nothing to do with me.
Get out! Get out! Just get out!

JAMES

I'm sorry. I apologize.
I'm leaving.
I wouldn't think of staying another minute.

TESSA
Then go!

MIMI
Excuse me.

[Tessa wheels around to see Mimi]

TESSA
God, Mimi, am I glad to see another woman.
I am so sick of men
and all their talk of love and sex

JAMES
I don't think I mentioned sex.

MIMI
Love, I hate love

TESSA
do you know has it ever been anything but a cover
for some kind of manipulative bullshit
some kind of exploitation

JAMES
I don't think I was trying to....

TESSA
has anything ever done more damage to me than love?

MIMI
These men what is sex to them
but some way to avoid any sort of reality altogether

TESSA
call it love
and it's nothing but a hideout.

MIMI

I know just how you feel.
I feel the same way exactly.

TESSA

A woman wants another person with whom she can relate

JAMES

And so does a man.

TESSA

one who sympathizes

MIMI

who can know how she feels

JAMES

Just like a man.

TESSA

and know who she is in some deep sense

MIMI

accept her for exactly who she is

JAMES

As a man hopes as well.

TESSA

not try to keep just to the surface of things

MIMI

avoid the real involvement with the deeper things
that are inevitably more complex

TESSA

and sometimes not entirely easy to deal with

MIMI

but this is the real human exchange
the exchange with the inner being
that feels really good and consoling

TESSA

and, as far as that goes, really hot

MIMI

and sexy

TESSA

Exactly.

JAMES

Excuse me, but is there maybe something
are you two having some sort of....?

TESSA

Certainly not.

JAMES

Because I thought I sensed...

TESSA

You sensed something again?

JAMES

If not on your part for her
then possibly on her part for you.

MIMI

Certainly not.

JAMES

I think so.

MIMI

Absolutely not.

TESSA

I am a person without any involvements whatsoever!
And that is exactly how I intend to keep it!

JAMES

And all the while
doesn't it mean anything to you
that I think I love you?

TESSA

Love me?

MIMI

You think you love her?

JAMES

It happened so suddenly—
who's to know?
it was all the most fortuitous event
but, in fact, this could be our real chance in life, Tessa.

TESSA

I hope not.
[to Mimi]
He could be some kind of narcoleptic.

JAMES

You don't know anything about me.
We've only just met.
Maybe I seem like a jerk to you

TESSA

Well....

JAMES

but that could be just because it's an awkward time
I'm not at my best
something like that
I mean everybody has these potentials within them

to look like a jerk
or even to be a jerk
but they might be more
like 90% of the time or even 98% of the time
really fine people
or good people
or funny
or even,
you know,
hot.
I might be like that
and then that would be good for us
because I tell you
I'm crazy about you.

TESSA

You walk in on me with some random project.
You don't even know me.

JAMES

You don't think I do?
People are smarter than we think.
We think
it takes a long time to get to know someone
and in a way it does
but we know so much from the first second
it's not just the words another person speaks
we right away take in
their, you know, body language
the way they hold themselves
cock their heads
how their hair falls and how they push it away from their eyes
whether impatiently or gently
whether they are irritable or thoughtful people
gentle or violent
caressing or insensitive
how they smell
whether they look directly in your eyes
or they can't look up from the ground

or meet your gaze directly
or their eyes dart from side to side
because they are anxious in a way
they will never change
I saw you
and I knew:
I've looked for you all my life.
I love you.

[Francois enters,
sees Mimi, starts to sneak back out.]

MIMI
Francois!

FRANCOIS
Oh,
Mimi.
Imagine that. It's been...

MIMI
A long time.

FRANCOIS
Yes. Precisely.
How extraordinary.

TESSA
You know each other?

MIMI FRANCOIS
We were... We had a...

FRANCOIS
We lived together...

MIMI
Briefly.

We spent the weekend together in San Remy.

FRANCOIS

A wonderful time...

JAMES

Excuse me, but we were having a conversation here.

MIMI

Until what?

You walked out the door...

FRANCOIS

We were outdoors at the time.

MIMI

Right. In a little outdoor cafe.

TESSA [to Mimi]

You never told me this?

FRANCOIS

So, technically speaking...

JAMES

Perhaps you would excuse us....

FRANCOIS [to James]

I'm sorry....

MIMI

You walked out of the cafe
and got into some woman's car.

FRANCOIS

Not some woman.

That woman was a friend.

I mean,

I had known her....

which is to say
I had been friends with her at one time
and then there she was in San Remy
she asked for my help.

MIMI
Your help?

TESSA
Who was this?

JAMES
Do we care about your love affairs?

FRANCOIS [to James]
I beg your pardon.

[to Mimi]

It seems she was there with a fellow
who wouldn't let her out of his sight
and she needed to phone her husband
so I said I would drive her to a telephone I knew
by the side of the road
where she could make a call
with the motor running as it were
and I could bring her back.

MIMI
But?

FRANCOIS
Well, but it turned out, of course,
the phone was out of order
and then she was frightened to return
so she convinced me to drive her to another town
down towards Les Baux
and

[shrugs]

by that time it had become so late
and I thought you would have been angry
so that, for me to return....

MIMI

So instead you disappeared.

[He shrugs.]

Men! Men!

You appear and then you disappear!

[She turns away from him,
not knowing which way to go.

Four people come out of nowhere
simultaneously,
in mid-sentence:

Natalie,
Maria,
Frank,
and Edmund.

They are all dressed in summer clothes,
beachwear perhaps,
or linen things in greens and whites.
They all wear sunglasses.

This is a multiracial and differently abled cast.]

MARIA

...which is not what I meant to do at all.

FRANK

So you say

so you always say when you do these things

EDMUND

That happens to me all the time
finding I've done something I never meant to do

FRANK

and yet how could you not mean it
when it happens over and over again

NATALIE

Me.

I do what I mean to do
and when it's done
I've done it.
What do I care?

MARIA

Francois!

NATALIE

Mimi!

[Francois spins around one way,
Mimi spins around the other.]

FRANCOIS

Maria!

MIMI

Natalie!

NATALIE

What are you doing here?

MIMI

Yes, well...

I might ask the same of you.

And yet, how wonderful to see you.

[to Tessa]

This is my friend Natalie.
This is Tessa.

MARIA
Ah, Tessa!

TESSA
Mother!

MARIA
I didn't realize you knew Francois!

TESSA
Well, *know* him.
I don't know that I *know* him.

FRANK
It would seem that's just as well.
And yet,
we step out of the house for what seems a few minutes
and already you're having a house party.

MARIA
It's alright, Frank,
she's a grown woman,
this is her home, too,
she should do as she likes.

FRANK
And yet, entertaining men.

NATALIE
Can you just say
how wonderful to see you
and that's that?

MIMI

What's what?

NATALIE

I thought,

well,

I thought

getting to know you

you changed my life.

Really.

Everything I thought.

Who I was.

Who I thought I was.

What I meant to do with my life.

How I meant to live.

How it was to see the world with new eyes

and feel all my feelings completely transformed.

And yet it seems

I meant nothing to you!

Nothing!

I thought you would be my whole life!

[She bursts into tears,

turns around

and disappears.]

MIMI

Natalie!

Natalie!

[Everyone is looking quizzically at Mimi.]

It was just a casual thing, you know.

Not that I'm not really fond of her.

Women,

sometimes they like a dalliance with another woman

or the warmth of friendship

whatever

but I am definitely heterosexual.

I just happen to be someone who likes men.
I like men!
That's just who I am.
Of course maybe I've had some relationships with women

JAMES
Exactly what I thought.

MIMI
But I've had a lot of relationships with men,
I shouldn't say a lot
but, on balance....

JAMES
Who are these people?

[Note: Throughout the piece, all the characters are meant to inhabit the setting
with a physical life independent of the dialogue and actions

—

that is, they are meant to lounge and do their nails and write books
and despair and try on various outfits and practice solo dances
and perform tai chi and carry on lives as others occupy center stage.]

TESSA
This is my family.

MIMI
And friends.

TESSA
And friends.

JAMES
I thought we were going to be alone.

TESSA
Where did you get that idea?

EDMUND

No one is alone.

We all come into the world with a family.

We all have a past.

MARIA

And a present, too, it would seem!

FRANCOIS

None of us starts a new day carte blanche, do you think?

JAMES

Yes. Yes, I do.

Why does a bride wear a white wedding dress?

Because she starts anew.

But what chance is there for us?

TESSA

What chance was there ever?

JAMES

This is a minefield!

FRANCOIS

A battlefield.

MIMI

A rubblefield.

JAMES

How is anyone supposed to know where to put a foot?

FRANK

You're a friend of my daughter?

JAMES

Your daughter?

FRANK

Yes, Tessa is my daughter.

JAMES

Well, friend I don't know.

I'd certainly like to be.

FRANK

Indeed.

MARIA

And, in fact, Francois,
what exactly are you doing here?

FRANCOIS

It's not entirely clear to me
what I'm doing here.
As it started out
what I thought was
it was a perfectly straightforward life plan
as clear as the plot of a novel
I was setting out in life
to find a woman I could love
and who loved me
and then one thing led to another
I found myself with a friend
the next thing I knew I was at a chateau in the country
where there were many people
there was a party
I couldn't find the woman I had come with
you know

[he shrugs]

I became disoriented.
But as I think about it
I think
is this not how life is?
You think you are doing one thing

it turns out you have been doing something else entirely
life has no plot
you only think it does
while all the time something without a plot is happening to you
over and over until you reach the end of your life
and you think you've had a beginning and a middle and an end
but all you've had is a start and a stop
and a lot of disorientation in between
trying to get a grip
hoping for true love
maybe you have a chance and you lose it
you don't know where it went
you're not sure if you had it
or who it was with
maybe the time you least thought it was meaningful at all
that was your one chance
you walked right past it
while you were pursuing another woman
and then you kick the bucket....

[Maria slaps Francois.]

FRANCOIS

What?

MARIA

How can you flirt with her like this?

FRANCOIS

Flirt with her?

Flirt with whom?

MARIA

I was always the one who loved you.

FRANK

Excuse me.

I'm feeling a little....

MARIA

I called you all the time.
You never called.

FRANK

I don't think this is meant for me....

FRANCOIS

Maria, please,
this is hardly the right occasion....

MARIA

What?
You can't bear to hear the truth?

EDMUND [kindly]

Frank,
would you do me a favor?
Would you get me a little milk for my tea?

FRANK [disoriented]

Milk. Yes. Of course.

[he leaves]

JAMES [stupefied, looking at Maria]

So, this is your mother?

TESSA

Yes! Yes! So you see!
This is what I grew up with!
What chance did I have with a family like this?
And you want to fall in love with me?
How can anyone expect me to form any kind of relationship
with another human being?

[Tessa goes to the couch
where she lies down,
face buried in a pillow,
like a Balthus girl,
disconsolate.

James follows her to the couch, uncertain what to do to help.
During the following conversation,
James moves toward her, then away,
toward her again, then away.

Finally, James finds a blanket
and gently puts it over Tessa;
she accepts the blanket without acknowledging him.]

MARIA

So
you ignore me,
you neglect me,
you're always running around with these sluts

MIMI

I beg your pardon?

MARIA

Actresses, then, actresses!

MIMI

Sculptors!

MARIA

Artists. Whatever.
I love you, Francois,
I was always the only one who ever loved you.
You will end up alone and lonely
because you can't know what it is to be loved.
You think I am clinging and demanding

FRANCOIS

And neurotic, frankly.

Let's be honest.

MARIA [to Francois]

You think you'd like to get rid of me
but I could take care of you forever, Francois!
Sometimes, Francois, I think you are a good person
if only sometimes you wouldn't try so hard
if you would just relax
let life come to you
take it as it is
don't always be on the prowl
because, in the end,
all we have is one another
you're not a boy any longer
you won't live forever
and what you will have had will be your friends
these days like today
where nothing special happens to you
but you have been with me

[she is weeping now]

I don't want to go through life
always bickering, always unhappy
feeling cheated
I could be content just to have a glass of wine
to dance
to hear you sing
I don't care what kind of voice you have
I love you
I can be with you as long as we have on earth
it's not so bad
just to love and be loved

FRANCOIS

On again off again!

On again off again!

You are a lunatic!

MARIA

I'm a person who says what I feel
when I feel it.

With me you always know where you stand.

You can count on it.

That is a kind of certainty and security
that is almost impossible to come by in this world.

We could have another chance, Francois!

FRANCOIS

Would you stop this holding on to me?

Can't I take a breath?

Can't I go out to dinner?

You are a married woman!

This is disgraceful!

Can't I do my job without you calling
tracking me down,

you'd think you were my wife

asking me, can you see me now,

can I come with you,

where are you now?

Who are you with?

Are you having an affair?

You're more than neurotic

[Barbara, the cook,
enters wiping her hands on a dish towel,
stands there listening to Francois.]

you're psychotic

with your crying and your pleading
and what else

your taking pills to go to sleep

pills to wake up.

I have to live my life,
you would suffocate me,
you would pull me down and bury me alive!
I wish you were dead!
Dead!

[silence;

all this time,
James is getting a cup of tea for Tessa, which,
again,
she accepts from him
but without acknowledging him]

BARBARA

So this is how people speak to one another these days?
Men.
Who wants you?
With a man, every act of love is an act of rape.

A man will swim through a river of snot,
wade nostril-deep through a mile of vomit,
if he thinks there'll be a friendly pussy waiting for him on the other side.
He'll screw a woman he despises,
any snaggle-toothed hag,
and furthermore, pay for the opportunity.
A man will fuck mud if he has to.
And why is that?
Because every man, deep down,
knows he is a worthless piece of shit
hoping some woman will make him feel good about himself.

Eaten up with guilt, shame, fears and insecurities
obsessed with screwing,
to call a man an animal is to flatter him;
a man is a walking dildo,

a completely isolated unit,
trapped inside himself,
incapable of love, friendship, affection or tenderness
his responses entirely visceral, never cerebral
his intelligence a mere tool of his drives and needs;
a half-dead, unresponsive lump of flesh,
trapped in a twilight zone halfway between humans and apes.

Why did god create man?
Because a vibrator can't mow the lawn.

I went to the County Fair.
They had one of those "Believe it or not?" Shows.
They had a man born with a penis *and* a brain.

Why were men given brains larger than dogs?
So they wouldn't hump women's legs at cocktail parties.

My feelings about men
are like a Jew just released from Dachau.
I watch the handsome young Nazi soldier
fall writhing to the ground with a bullet in his stomach
and I look briefly and walk on.
I don't even need to shrug.

Men pretend to be normal
but what they're doing sitting there
with benign smiles on their faces
is they're manufacturing sperm.
They do it all the time.
They never stop.
They are suffering from testosterone poisoning.

You know what they say:
What do you call a man with half a brain?
Gifted.

Why do men name their penises?
Because they want to be on a first-name basis
with the person who makes all their decisions.

What do you call the useless bit of fatty tissue
at the end of a penis?
A man.

Will all these people be staying to lunch?

FRANCOIS

I wouldn't eat a lunch you made if it were the last piece of uncooked shit on the
planet.

What is it with you women
you think men can't live without you.

Have you noticed
how uncomfortable it is for most women
to put their elbows on the table while they eat?
Because the table is too high for them.
But for most men,
it is uncomfortable not to put their elbows on the table
because they are taller.
But it's not proper to put one's elbows on the table.

And why is that?
Because etiquette is a system that defines as appropriate
what is natural for a woman,
and defines as inappropriate what is natural for a man.

[In the middle of this,
a slimy young Italian guy enters
to deliver a pizza.
He stands there holding the pizza box.]

So, of course,
similarly,
perhaps one should not be so surprised that pornography,
which appeals to men

is condemned,
while soap operas and romance novels,
the female equivalent of pornography
is acceptable.

And so, of course, men have become ashamed that they are men.
And so women control men as they wish, at their whim,
they get men to do whatever women want them to do.
The women get the men to do the dirty work, the violence,
the bad stuff
whatever women want but don't want to do with their own hands
so they can have whatever they like
and blame the men for it.

BOB [holding the pizza box as he speaks]
And yet, I think, nonetheless,
forgiveness is possible.

FRANCOIS
You do.

BOB
Well, sure.
Really under any circumstances.

Uh, primarily, uh, uh, the, uh, the...
primarily the question is
does man have the power to forgive himself.
And he does.
That's essentially it.
I mean if you forgive yourself,
and you absolve yourself of all, uh,
of all wrongdoing in an incident,
then you're forgiven.
Who cares what other people think, because uh...

EDMUND
Was this a process you had to go through over a period of time?
Did you have to think about it?

BOB

Well, no.

Not until I was reading the Aquarian gospel did I,
did I strike upon,
you know I had almost had ends meet because I had certain
uh you know
to-be-or-not-to-be reflections about of course what I did.
And uh,

EDMUND

I'm sorry, what was that?

BOB

Triple murder.

Sister, husband. Sister, husband,
and a nephew, my nephew.

And uh, you know, uh, manic depressive.

EDMUND

Do you mind my asking what instruments did you use?
What were the instruments?

BOB

It was a knife.

It was a knife.

EDMUND

A knife?

BOB

Yes.

EDMUND

So then, the three of them were all...

BOB

Ssssss...

(points to slitting his throat)

like that.

EDMUND

So, uh,
do you think that as time goes by,
this episode will just become part of your past,
or has it already...

BOB

It has already become part of my past.

EDMUND

Has already become part of your past.
No sleepless nights? No...

BOB

Aw, no. In the first three or four years there was a couple of nights where I would stay up thinking about how I did it, you know. And what they said...they told me later there were so many stab wounds in my sister and I said no, that's not true at all, you know. So I think I had a little blackout during the murders, but uh...

[he sits,
making himself at home]

Well, uh, they said there was something like thirty stab wounds in my sister, and I remember distinctly I just cut her throat once. That was all, you know, and I don't know where the thirty stab wounds came from. So that might have been some kind of blackout thing. You know, I was trying to re- re- re- uh, re- uh, uh, resurrect the uh, the crime—my initial steps, etc. You know, and uh, and uh, I took, as a matter of fact, it came right out of the, I was starting the New Testament at the time, matter of fact I'm about the only person you'll ever meet that went to, to do a triple murder with a Bible in his, in his pocket, and, and, listening to a radio. I had delusions of grandeur with the radio. Uh, I had a red shirt on that was symbolic of, of some lines in Revelation, in the, in the New Testament. Uh I had a red motor...as a matter of fact, I think it was chapter 6 something, verses 3, 4, or 5, or something where uh it was a man, it was a man. On a red horse. And, and, a man on a red horse came out, and uh, and uh uh, and he was given a knife, and unto him was given the

power to kill and destroy. And I actually thought I was this person. And I thought that my red horse was this red Harley Davidson I had. And I wore...it was just, you know, it was kind of a symbolic type of thing. And and and uh, you know, uh after the murders I thought the nephew was, was the, was a new devil or something, you know. This, this is pretty bizarre now that I think back on it. I thought he was a new devil and uh, uh. I mean basically I love my sister, there's no question about that. But at times my sister hadn't come through uh for me. You know and I was in another, one of these manic attacks. And uh, and uh, uh, uh, you know, uh, I was just uh, I was just you know, I mean I was fed up with all this you know one day they treat me good and then they tell all these other people that I was a maniac and watch out for me and etc. and like that. And uh, uh, so I went to them that night to tell them I was all in trouble again, you know, and could they put me up for the night, you know, and they told me to take a hike and uh so uh, believing that I had the power to kill, uh you know, that was that for them. You know. I mean when family turns you out, that's a real blow. You know. But uh, back to the original subject of forgiveness. If I forgive myself I'm forgiven. You know that's essentially the answer. I'm the captain of my own ship. I run my own ship. Nobody can crawl in my ship unless they get permission. I just (he nods) "over there." You know. "I'm forgiven." You know. Ha-ha. You know. (Laughs.) It's as simple as that. You know. You're your own priest, you're your own leader, you're your own captain. You know. You run your own show, a lot of people know that.

Who ordered a pizza?

TESSA

I did, but that was hours ago.

BOB

Well, here it is.

TESSA

I'm sorry, it's too late.

[Frank returns, holding a glass of water.]

BOB

Too late?

I don't think so.

Who's going to pay for the pizza?

FRANK

Here you are Edmund.

EDMUND

What is this?

FRANK

You asked for a glass of water.

EDMUND

No, Frank.

[he laughs]

Not a glass of water.

A little milk for my tea.

FRANK [confused]

I'm sorry.

I don't know what I was thinking.

EDMUND

Never mind.

FRANK

No, no,

I'll be right back.

[Frank leaves.]

BOB

Who's going to pay for the fucking pizza?

EDMUND

I'll pay for it.

Give it to me.

BOB

Plain cheese.

EDMUND

Right.

Here.

Keep the change.

BOB

Thanks. I appreciate it.

Which way did I come in?

EDMUND

That way.

BOB

Are you sure?

EDMUND

I'm sure.

BOB

Don't fuck with me.

EDMUND

I would never fuck with you.

BOB

Right.

Thanks again.

[Bob leaves.]

BARBARA

I'll take the pizza.

[Barbara exits with the pizza.]

MIMI [to Francois]

You know,

I myself knew a woman,

I won't say who,
who was in love with a man who was married,
and this married man went away on vacation with his wife.

FRANCOIS

Mimi, this is
this is probably not a perfect moment.

MIMI

And the woman I knew, who was left at home,
spent every day thinking
not just what *she* was doing at every moment
but what this *man* was doing at every moment, too,

MARIA

Who was this?

[Francois paces back and forth, moping his brow
as Mimi assaults him with this story of their past]

MIMI

knowing, as she got up in the morning
that her lover was waking up with his wife

MARIA

Who was this, Francois?

FRANCOIS

I wouldn't know.
This is some sort of I don't know what.

MIMI

and behaving as he always did in the morning
lying in bed,
turning over to embrace his wife
perhaps making love

MARIA

Are you saying that you were married?
That you have a wife?

FRANCOIS [to the others]

There's not a shred of truth to this.
Essentially.

MIMI

and lying there under the covers afterwards
as his wife went to make a cup of tea for him
bringing it back to bed

MARIA

All this time you've been married
and I never knew?

FRANCOIS

No, not married.
Of course, in the past....
in a different time,
at another time,
as you yourself are married at the present time.

MIMI

the conversation then, the planning for the day,
the breakfast in the cafe

MARIA [totally thrown, sinking to the ground, talking to herself]

How could this be
and I didn't know?

EDMUND

There's only so much pain a human being can endure
before they cave right in.

MIMI

his reading things out loud from the newspaper
every moment, for two weeks,

FRANCOIS

How can you say this?

MIMI

this woman thought all the time, every moment, of what her lover was doing
waiting for the moment that he would return
and call her

FRANCOIS

What could I have done?
Given the circumstances!

MARIA

I can't believe I never knew this!

MIMI

and come by and take her out to dinner
and spend the night with her

MARIA

How do human beings keep themselves from knowing things all the time?

MIMI

she knew the hour and the minute that he would return

MARIA

This is inconceivable.

MIMI

and when at last he did return
and the woman waited by the phone for him to call
he did not call that evening

MARIA

We do this with everything.

MIMI

he might have been delayed by the weekend traffic
and he did not call late that night
or early in the morning

FRANCOIS

Well, I couldn't call.

MARIA

We make ourselves unconscious
and then we wonder why we are so tormented.

MIMI

not from home or from the road saying he had been delayed
he did not call all that next day or night
he did not call until the following day
in the afternoon

FRANCOIS

I couldn't very well get to a phone.

MARIA

Couldn't get to a phone?

MIMI

from his office

FRANCOIS

Mimi....

MIMI

to suggest dinner the following week.
So what did this woman do?

FRANCOIS

What?

MIMI

She waited for her lover.

She waited until the time he said for dinner.
She waited for him,
and she is still waiting.

[She sinks to the ground
next to Tessa
so that now, Tessa, Maria, and Mimi are all on the ground.]

EDMUND
Human beings are as tough as cockroaches, really.
They can take so much more than they can imagine.
But, at a point, you can crush them.

JAMES
You know,
I can understand how perhaps he couldn't call.
I mean, I myself have been in a similar situation.
Sometimes it's not easy to call.

[silence]

TESSA [speaking quietly, sadly to James]
So
it turns out
you mean you meant nothing of what you said to me.

JAMES
What?

TESSA
You lied to me.

JAMES
I never lied to you.
What are you saying?

TESSA [still quietly]
I think you did.
You came to me with someone else still in your heart.

You said you loved me.
But, in fact, you weren't free to say such a thing at all.
Part of you still belonged to someone else.
Part of you was stuck to someone else.

JAMES

What who are you talking about?

TESSA

This other woman you didn't call.

JAMES

It was not.

I was just saying—this was long ago.

I was not stuck to someone.

I mean,

of course, as you say yourself, we never shed our pasts entirely.

But I wasn't *stuck* to anyone.

TESSA [close to tears]

I'd like to be able to trust someone, you know.

You see the sort of life I've had

I could turn out to be a totally fucked up person myself

[now she is crying]

and what I need more than anything is someone I could trust

and I thought

even though you were a jerk

I could trust you.

JAMES

I'm a jerk?

TESSA

I mean, I'm sorry,

I mean even though you came on to me,

well, face it, James,

the way you came on to me

it wasn't exactly so suave
but I thought you were sincere
and honest
and innocent

[she is sobbing]

and for a moment I thought:
oh, I could trust you
I could trust you
and now it turns out
you're just like every other man!

[she curls up in a fetal position
underneath the desk]

JAMES

I'm not!

I'm not!

I'm not like a man at all!

[He throws himself to the ground in a heap,
bouncing and rolling several times
before he settles down in a funk.]

FRANCOIS [trying to whisper, or speak privately]

Maria, I think, perhaps, frankly,

we just need to make love

it's been so long

we need to be close to one another again to have some hope.

MARIA

Are you serious?

This is disgusting.

I wouldn't touch you.

I wouldn't touch you.

Not now.

I could vomit.

FRANCOIS [still trying to keep this conversation from the others]

We've just gotten off track.

If you come to bed with me it'll go away.

It always does.

MARIA

You're pathetic.

You've never really made love to me.

To *me*.

You don't even know who I am.

You don't even notice.

FRANCOIS

You're really crazy if that's what you think.

MARIA

Oh, I'm crazy?

You think you're in love with someone
who is repulsed by the very smell of you
and I'm the one who's crazy?

Everyone kept telling me what a great guy you were.

So I looked past the fact that you bored me to tears.

I suffered through your endless inane monologues about rocks.

I tried to see you for what you think you are,
strutting around the house as if you were a man:
you're a fucking dwarf!

I could kick you across the room.

MIMI

What a beast.

FRANCOIS

What do you mean, I'm a beast?

MIMI

Yes!

TESSA

Would you people get out?

Would you just get out?

Don't you know some people are trying to lead their lives
trying to lead lives that are not all FUCKED UP?

Don't you people know

how you treat people

this is who you are!

A person is not what job he does

or how the neurons work inside his skull

or how he looks in the suit he wears

but how he is with other people

and this then is the world he makes

for others to live in

whether this world is happy or savage!

[silence]

FRANCOIS

It's true. It's true.

I am a beast.

Oh, god.

I'm sorry.

What can I do?

I can't say that I can't do anything about it

because I have to try

that's my responsibility

but I can't seem to do anything about it.

God, what a loathsome person I've become.

MARIA

Francois I never want to see you again.

FRANCOIS

What's wrong with me?

What do you mean?

MARIA

Just what I say.

FRANCOIS

Never?

You never want to see me again?

[to James]

You know when people say never,
I never believe they really mean it.

MARIA

Okay, then, okay:

For five years!

I don't want to see you for exactly *five* years,
not a moment before!

[she vanishes]

FRANCOIS

Oh right! Great!

You never know where you stand with women, do you?

Whatever you do is wrong.

One day they call you a satyr,
the next day an impotent idiot.

You can never tell what they want.

In a word, then, the poisoning has begun.

The man has been used, that's all.

One of a number of equally acceptable items

taken down from the shelf, used, put back,

never valued for himself, no,

but only for what can be gotten out of him.

And then women will complain about physical satisfaction!

Or gossip to her friends about her lover.

A man, on the other hand, would consider it a betrayal of her trust,
her privacy.

It never occurs to a woman to think he

might have miscalculated about her
Might have second thoughts about *her*—
in giving her what she needs to feel secure,
having given away himself
so that he no longer *possesses* himself
so that he no longer knows who he is
or if he even exists any longer!

[he turns on the radio at full, hostile volume,
rips off his shirt in a rage and throws it across the stage
and does a quick, hostile, sexually suggestive dance step
and then he takes off his belt and hurls it across the stage
and does another hostile dance step;

this is strip music he is working to
and soon he is taking off his shoes and hurling them across the stage
then unzipping his trousers
and he is totally into a striptease—still with anger and defiant sexuality—
and he does the full Dionysian thing,
completely into it and wild.
This goes on for a long time—a full performance.

Eventually the music stops,
and he is left alone there,
suddenly embarrassed.
He stops, looks around;
everyone is just looking at him,
and he is humiliated.
Sheepishly, he starts to gather up his clothes and awkwardly put them on.]

FRANK
Here you are, Edmund.

EDMUND
What is this?

FRANK
Your tea.

EDMUND

My tea?

Frank, do you never listen to me?

FRANK

What?

EDMUND

I asked you for milk for my tea.

FRANK

Milk?

EDMUND

Do you never pay attention to me?

FRANK

I'm sorry.

I'll get it for you right away.

EDMUND

Never mind.

FRANK

No, no, I'll be right back.

EDMUND

Never mind, Frank, it doesn't matter any more.

FRANK

I said I'll get it!

EDMUND

Fuck it!

I don't want it!

FRANK

I said I'd get it goddammit!
And I will goddam get it!
Am I not always getting things for you?
Get this, get that,
you stand here like the Prince of Wales
while I fetch things for you night and day
and one time I happen to get the wrong thing
and you say I never listen to you?

EDMUND

Because in fact you don't!
I think I have no respect for you
or common courtesy
certainly no real sympathy
or empathy
or love as one might expect
even from simply another human being passing in the night.
Think how it is:
you are sleeping with another person.

FRANK

That's not true.

EDMUND

You are sleeping with Maria.

FRANK

Oh, Maria. Well....

EDMUND

Well, what?

FRANK

Well, she's my wife.

EDMUND

You mean, yes, you are sleeping with Maria.

FRANK

Sleeping with her yes.

But she's my wife, my wife.

EDMUND

So?

FRANK

It's not as though we were lovers.

EDMUND

You say you're not.

But you sleep with her.

You love her.

You love to be with her.

She makes you laugh.

She thrills you.

FRANK

Yes, yes, yes.

So?

EDMUND

Well, there are many kinds of lovers in the world,
many kinds of relationships,
marriages even, you might say.

You are married to her.

FRANK

Only in the sense of being married
not in the sense of being married as you use the term.

EDMUND

You sleep in the same bed.

FRANK

So what?

You can sleep with us, too, if you like.

EDMUND

I beg your pardon?

FRANK

Well, we *are* friends.

EDMUND

Who?

You and I?

FRANK

Well, yes,
also you and I.

I mean you and I *are* friends, aren't we?

I hope.

EDMUND

You hope?

You hope?

What do you mean you hope?

FRANK

Forget it! Just forget it!

I'll be right back, goddammit!

[Frank leaves.]

EDMUND

Forget it!

And what do you suppose happened when I went over for dinner
the other night?

I arrive, and he says, what is it you're doing here?

I've come to dinner, I say.

Did I invite you to dinner, he says. No I don't think so.

Why don't you have dinner with me, I say.

I can't. You know, he says, this is too much. I can't....

Just dinner, I say. Nothing more.

You say so, he says, and then you just want to stay on after dinner....

When you talk this way, I say to him, I begin to feel like I'm expecting a death sentence.

Then we argue, he says, you cajole me, you don't leave and you don't leave, I begin to feel cornered.

I shout at him: I'm just talking about dinner!

Next thing you know, he says, you think there's no reason you shouldn't spend the night....

If we just sleep together, I say to him, just sleep in the same bed, nothing more

And then, he yells at me for no reason at all, when you fall asleep I look at you and I see how ugly you are when you're relaxed.

What, I say, what?

That's when you're at your ugliest, he says, when you're asleep so that I can't stand it.

When I'm asleep I'm ugly, I say, that's what you're saying?

Or really anytime after twelve o' clock, he says: old and ugly

Every night?, I say. Are you saying every night?

Yes, he says, yes. Almost every night. Ugly and repulsive. Like another person altogether. So that I hardly recognize you except I say to myself: right, yes, there you are again the way you really are. Last night I woke up with palpitations and a pain in my head and I thought: right, there you are again, attacking me in the middle of the night when I'm defenceless.

I'm attacking you?, I say!

Like the time you tried to hyptonize me while I was asleep, he says, setting my nerves on edge so I had to hit you in the face that time to get you to stop, you remember that and you said you were being eaten alive by worms.

I did not. You didn't hear a word I said.

EDMUND AND MIMI TOGETHER

I hang on every fucking stupid word you ever say!

EDMUND

Every stupid word I say!

You are stupid.

Stupider than ever.

MIMI

And black and venomous. Poisonous really, more poisonous now than ever before.

FRANCOIS

Ever before when?

EDMUND

Before you used to give me that filth at the dinner table—on purpose, on purpose—so that it made me shiver?

MIMI

Before that?

FRANCOIS

Before you would seek some intimacy with me, force yourself on me,

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND

demanding I make love to you....

MIMI

Excuse me, would this be after you had turned your back on me?

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND

[not necessarily exactly together, but both of them saying the line on top of one another]

Excuse me, if I remember correctly you always turned your back on me, always.

FRANCOIS

I was supposed to pursue you,
put my arms around you so I was always in the position of the suitor,

EDMUND AND MIMI

you were always cool, no, cold,

FRANCOIS

I was supposed to be the beggar the suppliant
and then,

EDMUND AND MIMI

[not necessarily exactly together, but both of them saying the line on top of one another]

if I *had* to turn over because my arm had gone to sleep
and my shoulder feels broken
and I have a pain in my head,

EDMUND AND MIMI AND FRANCOIS

and I turned over because I couldn't bear the pain of holding you in my arms,
then did you

FRANCOIS

ever,

JAMES

ever,

MIMI

ever once,

FRANCOIS

did you ever a single fucking time turn over and hold me the way I held you?

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND AND MIMI AND JAMES—EVERYONE

[not necessarily exactly together, but all of them saying the line on top of one another]

No.

EDMUND

Did you ever pursue me the way I pursued you?

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND AND MIMI AND JAMES—EVERYONE

[not necessarily exactly together, but all of them saying the line on top of one another]

No.

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND AND MIMI AND JAMES—EVERYONE

[not necessarily exactly together, but all of them saying the line on top of one another]

You just got finished saying I come over to dinner and try to stay the night.

Is this not pursuing you?

Oh, sure! Now! Now! Now it's too late!

Why is it too late?

EDMUND

Because I woke up this afternoon in the middle of the afternoon with women's voices in the apartment below and I thought I had come to live finally in a home invaded by sluts! And I began to cry! I'm a man, and I began to cry! I can't take this bullshit forever! What kind of person do you think I am? Do you know why the earth has governments and dictators and none of the other planets do? Because this is the only planet where all the inhabitants do not say what they think, where people lie all the time, lie and lie and lie all the time, and I am sick of it. No, you cannot stay for dinner. No! Just fucking leave me alone!

Love! Love!

Do you think love is possible these days?

EVERYONE [variously]

No. No. Love is not possible these days. No. No. No.

[Music.

A big hostile dance

with everyone throwing everyone else to the ground over and over again,
venting their aggression

by running into the walls and trees,

throwing themselves to the ground all together in repeated synchronous
movements,

until, finally, still seething with rage or disgust,

or given over to hopelessness and despair,

they are exhausted,

sprawled on the ground or on the couch or in a chair,

and the music ends.]

Act Two

FRANK [gently]

Here's your milk.

EDMUND

Thank you, Frank.

FRANK

I'm sorry.

EDMUND

Thank you.

I apologize.

FRANK

One looks for things
and finds something else.

There's no simple story of boy meets girl
any more
these days.

And other stories, too,
are gone entirely.

And those people
who once loved in some other way
they're gone forever, too,
their lives, their loves
their sensibilities
we will never see anything that remotely resembles them again.
How people used to love
the ways for which we now have complete contempt.

We think because the past is no longer who we are
that the age that came before us is stupid
and that how we are today
or what it is we wish to be
is the true way and the good way—
even if, in fact, we are tormented every hour of our lives—
and, in any case, our true way is passing too
to yield to yet another true way
and who's to say the past
did not have pleasures as deep as those the future holds
or deeper
or perhaps simply different?

The aging gay man who had to keep his life a secret
and found ruses and manners to hide himself
and find another who would share his inner world
we don't know how it is to live like this today
that sense of nuance and subtlety
the decor of a home
that would suggest but not declare
the inner life of its host
that finely developed ability
to discriminate the gentlest hint

all this is gone
and it would be wrong to mourn its loss
and the suffering that so often went with it
and yet I still have friends who are lost
because it is lost
their lives
the lives they thought they would live all their lives
vanished suddenly
with nowhere to go
just as all of us
will one day be gone

our lives unrecoverable
the civilizations of the past
so distant from us
as to be more alien than foreign countries
human beings we recognize
are in some way related to us
and yet so different we cannot know
their inner lives
the only lives that matter
their private lives
the lives they thought they lived
are lost forever

and even as we live today from day to day
each day is lost as we live it
never to return
we shed our lives as we live them
we die each day
our lives becoming first stories
and then barely remembered dreams
the fleeting stuff of mortality
so that even as we live
we disappear
and all that we have treasured most
disappears along with us.

[James sits down next to Tessa,
trying to entice her into conversation.]

JAMES

You know,
maybe everybody does have a past.

[silence]

And, you know,
it's like they say,
when you go to bed with someone,
you bring six people to bed with you,
each other,
and the other person's parents
and your own parents.

[silence]

Well, or maybe even more people than that
because....

[silence]

TESSA

Are you trying to start a conversation with me?

JAMES

Yes.

TESSA

You should probably say something else.

JAMES

Right.

I was only just saying
it's like, you know,

you were saying you have this family
and this past you can't escape
and I was only saying....

TESSA

Right.
And I was saying,
maybe you want to talk about something else.

JAMES

But what I was saying was that other people
are not just your past
they are also your future.

TESSA

You mean, you're planning on having an affair with someone I know?

JAMES

No, no, no.
I mean, what we are is humanity,
I mean, part of humanity,
we just have to accept that,
we can't separate ourselves from that
from one another
so all of us all the time...
you know...

TESSA

What?

JAMES

Are part of humanity.

[silence]

You can't escape that.

[silence]

I'm a person too, you know.
You feel you grew up with certain
difficulties in your upbringing
but so did I!
So did everyone I suppose
and this is our chance
to love one another
because of our backgrounds
to console one another
to feel close *because* of the pain we've felt
to feel intimate
and to know even better how to take care of each other
because we know how important that is
and how it feels
and just where another person needs support.
Being fucked up, you know,
might be a *basis* for love.

TESSA

You're an American.

JAMES

Yes?

TESSA

I don't think I could like an American
or love an American
or really even have fun with an American.

JAMES

Aren't you an American?

TESSA

I'm half Italian.

JAMES

So you can't love someone who is all American?

TESSA
I don't think so.

JAMES
That's crazy.

TESSA
Why?

JAMES
Because Americans are just—Americans.

TESSA
So?

JAMES
Well, they're just Americans.

TESSA
So?

JAMES
So, what is that?

TESSA
Well, I don't know.

JAMES
So, you see?

TESSA
No, I don't see anything.

JAMES
You see, you could come to love me.
I'm crazy about you, Tessa,
you know, if somebody's crazy about you,
you can't resist it finally
because it feels so good to have someone be just crazy for you

and just love everything about you and everything you do
and just be delighted in you
and laugh at your jokes and feel for you
and love to do things with you
and look out for you
and all that sort of thing
I think I'm going to become irresistible to you.

TESSA [smiling]
You do?

JAMES
I'm really pretty sure of it.

Think, how,
you know,
I found my way to you,
which, in a way,
you have to believe is the most important thing in life
so you have to believe I know how to do the most important things
to have enough a sense of adventure to throw myself into the world
to see what happens
and to come up successful,
this couldn't be such a bad partner for someone.

TESSA
But what if you're not, I don't know, funny
or fun or something.

JAMES
I might not tell jokes
but I might just be ridiculous
which, in time, once you got to know me
could be constantly amusing to you.
Plus I think you're in a situation where anything could happen.

TESSA
I guess that's true.

JAMES

What else do you want of life?

TESSA

What do you mean?

JAMES

To live a life where anything could happen.

And then, of all the anythings,
you can choose what you like.

TESSA

I guess.

JAMES

Well, then.

TESSA

There's just a whole lot to fight your way through these days
how men are,
for that matter: how women have become
all the stuff
you know what I mean
you watch television
I'm doing a twelve-step program
I'm trying to work it through
but simple love
even if you're an OK guy
I don't think you can get there from here any more.

I was just wondering a little while ago
how it would be if we were sleeping together
and I imagined we had to sleep on a giant mattress on the floor
and you were chilly
and the cat was giving birth to eight kittens in the room
and it made you cranky.

So I went out to buy you some
red thermal underwear
and I came back with the wrong thing but by then
you weren't cold anymore but you needed a travel toiletry bag.
So I went back to the store for groceries
and the store was an Arabian camel tent
with pyramids of canned foods and regular check out grocery scanners
and I bought ten dozen yellow and red roses and a bunch of six foot high gladiolas
and a silver mesh Gucci toiletry bag for ten thousand dollars

And when I got home
you were asleep
wearing the red thermal underwear that was too small for you
and a pair of red gloves
with each finger labelled with random words on colored tapes

and you were wearing my black RayBan sunglasses
that you had already stretched out and ruined with your giant head.

I crawled on top of you and started kissing you
and you opened your eyes and yelled,
"How the fuck am I supposed to pay for a ten thousand dollar toiletry bag?!"
And you climbed up on the scaffolding at the foot of the bed
and started throwing the yellow and red roses at me—thorns first
and there were thorns stuck all over my arms and legs and chest
and the roses were hanging off me
and I was rolling around the mattress trying to get them off
and you told me you knew a guy named Todd
who had thrown batteries at his girlfriend and killed her
when she had done something like that
and then you smashed a tape recorder under your boot
and took out the batteries and threw them at my head
and you climbed higher and higher up the scaffolding
saying that the higher you went the more the batteries would hurt
and that even a penny could break my skull
from way up there.

[silence]

That's what I see when I fantasize about our being together.

[She looks at him for a moment
and then turns away from him.

In rage and despair, he grabs a chair,
takes it to an upstage corner, and sits facing into the woods.

[Maria appears]

FRANCOIS

Maria!

How time flies!

MARIA

No wonder your family won't speak to you
and every woman you've ever been with has gone crazy
or killed herself.

Did you ever think about that?

It's not them, it's you!

You're like a baby with a switch blade.

So fucking needy

and when you get everything just the way you want it
you attack whoever gives in to you
for being weak and pathetic and worthless.

FRANCOIS

Okay. Okay.

This is how it is.

We're through.

Forget everything I ever said to make up.

The truth is: Frank is a better person than I am anyway.

I've never been a good person

or even an acceptable person

I'm actually a person of almost despicable character.

You should go back to Frank

what more could you want?

He's a wonderful person
loving and kind and considerate and generous.
What could you have been thinking
not just to be grateful for that?

MARIA

Probably you're just saying that,
but I think it's true.

FRANCOIS

It is true.
In fact, all you've ever done is string me along
out of some sense of discontent
you never could define!
You never loved me if you think about it.
Your heart has always been with Frank.

MARIA [to Frank]

What he says is true, Frank.
I do love you.
I'm sorry for all I've done to hurt you.
I don't know why I ran away from you.
I think I never felt you wanted me
but I want you, Frank,
let's never leave one another's side again.

FRANK

It's too late, Maria.

MARIA

Too late?

FRANK

I'm sorry.
I would never do anything to hurt you
because I do love you.
But now, you see, without you,
I've turned more and more to Edmund
for solace and companionship and,

finally,
love.
And now I couldn't betray him
after all he's done for me
his being there for me
his loyalty
he's completely won me over
and I think I never could find my way back to you.

EDMUND

Don't say that, Frank.
The truth is, you've never left her.
You've never been with me.
I've always felt you left half yourself behind.
And you could never let go completely
and be with me
the way I need someone to be
for my sake.
Go back to her.
She's your family.
You'll never be happy without her.

FRANK

Love these days:
it is such a strange and difficult terrain
so often we don't know where we are
or whether we're in the right place at all
we can't find a place that feels like home
our hearts are lost.
And I have to admit,
the place that feels like home to me
is with you, Maria.

MARIA

Oh, Frank,
I'm so happy
to feel we can start out again in life together
and have a whole second life.
One doesn't just throw away a marriage on a whim

for some fleeting romance or sudden passion
all those years
the chance of having an entire lifetime together
that's the truest treasure of all.

Shall we all have a drink—
or shall we have some tea?
Is this tea, Tessa?

TESSA
I don't think it's hot.

[Maria spills it down the front of Francois's trousers.]

FRANCOIS
Oh! Oh!
Yes, it is hot.

MARIA
Oh, Francois, I'm so sorry.

FRANCOIS
No, you're not!

MARIA
Here, give me your trousers,
you don't want to have a stain.

[she unbuckles his belt, starts to take off his trousers;
Tessa slowly stands up,
horrified by this further display of her family's behavior]

TESSA
Mother!

FRANCOIS
Excuse me. Please.
I don't think I'll be taking off my trousers.

TESSA
Mother!

MARIA
I'm only thinking what's practical!

FRANK
Let's all take off our trousers, then,
so you don't feel embarrassed.

FRANCOIS
Frank, you are the perfect host, but...

TESSA
Are you going to do this?

[he takes off his trousers
as Maria helps to remove Francois's;

meanwhile,
Gunter and Natalie enter;
they stand, their clothes dishevelled,
obviously having been in bed together,
looking at what's going on]

FRANCOIS
I don't think this is necessary,
a little tea can't hurt.

MIMI [to Natalie]
Natalie, where have you been?
And who is this?

NATALIE
This is Gunter.

MARIA
Hello, Gunter.

FRANK
Hello, Gunter.

GUNTER
How do you do?

MIMI
Is this your idea of getting even with me?

NATALIE
I don't know what you mean.

MIMI
Oh, yes, you do.

GUNTER
I'm not taking off my trousers.

MIMI
Oh,
taking off your trousers.
Right. Good idea.
I have an idea.
All the men take off their trousers
and I will make a sculpture of all of you.
I've always thought:
what would it be
to do a whole set of modern torsos?

GUNTER
Is this what people do here?
Everyone takes off his trousers?

JAMES
I'm not taking off my trousers I can tell you that.

EDMUND
I'm taking off my trousers.

NATALIE

Here.

I'll help you with your trousers, Gunter.

[Natalie goes for Gunter's pants.]

GUNTER

No, no.

I don't remove my trousers.

NATALIE

Come, Gunter.

What's the difference?

You could be wearing a swimming suit.

Lift your foot, Gunter.

GUNTER [seeing all the other men taking off their trousers]

Well, I don't know if this is right.

MARIA

Come along, James.

Is it James?

JAMES

Yes.

MARIA

Don't be shy.

We're among friends here.

Let me help you get your pants off.

JAMES

I don't think so.

I'm not a stripper.

MARIA

Of course you're not.

Taking off your trousers doesn't make you a stripper
or all men would be strippers.

TESSA

How can I have a relationship with a man
when my mother takes off everyone's pants
who comes into the house.

[Maria starts to take off his trousers]

MIMI

Now, if you will all lie down,
come,
lie down here in a row
on your backs, not your fronts,
not too close together....

[Tessa has ended up sitting in a corner,
like a Schiele doll,
her knees pulled up under her chin,
her dress pulled up to her waist,
and she is naked under her dress
and looking forlorn,
like a broken doll,
her head tilted over to one side.]

NATALIE

Come, Francois.

FRANCOIS [as he cooperates, led by Natalie]

You never think
I may have feelings, too.
Just because it seems to you I am indifferent
or cold
or interested only in conquests,
but I am a vulnerable person too in my way
I want just as much as you
to have a deep and meaningful relationship
but it may be that in my own way
I don't know any better than you in your way
just how to go about achieving it.

MIMI

that's good
I'll show you what I'm going to do
I'm going to make
plaster casts of your torsos
five male torsos I will call them.

Here, Francois,
I'll take you first.

[she starts to mix water and plaster of Paris
in a bucket;

Natalie gets Francois settled,
his head in her lap;

in fact,
though all the men have their pants off,
Mimi will never get beyond the cast of Francois;

suddenly, now, there is a tableau:
the men all lying down, propped up on their elbows,
the women arrayed around them
as though at a picnic;
we are at a salon
where there will be a philosophical conversation]

MARIA

I love art
and artists
people who make things in general
creative people
there are people who make things
and the other sort
and my feeling is
I love a person who makes something.

[Sentimental Italian music comes up
under the dialogue,
a violin or mandolin]

Because art
art is where we discover
in the freedom of our imaginations
what it is to be a human being

FRANCOIS

Or else, we discover it in love.
Because human beings are social animals
not isolated imaginations
and so we discover truly who we are
in our relationships
that's where we can see the full complexity
and wonder of a person
where we see the mystery of what it is to be a human being.

FRANK

Of course, you're talking here
not just about sensual love
what the Greeks called *erotike*
but also about love as friendship,
what they called *philia*.

Because the Greeks thought
love is not just a sentiment
but is actually the physical principle of the universe itself
the very stuff that binds the universe together.
And without it the whole world just falls apart.

GUNTER

This is fine for you to say
but it's not so clear you can know what it is to love
and so what it is to be a human being
unless you live the life of a bourgeois person in a bourgeois country
because
under Stalin

the Russians only made love an average of 1.2 times a month
the same is true in Bulgaria as I happen to know
and then not very happily
and mostly in the doggie position
this is a statistic
this is a fact.
And some people, in prisons,
they forget entirely how to reach out to another human being
to touch another person in any way
that isn't cruel.

How do you think it is for the street hookers
who live in the alleys of Istanbul and Havana?

TESSA

You look around the world,
and you think:
should there be love in a world like this?
Of should there only be politics?

JAMES

This is true.
I think this is true.

FRANK

Still, we carry on.

TESSA

We shouldn't.

MARIA

No matter what,
you can't stop living.

GUNTER

And yet, it can seem strange
to live in a world where, just to get a lipstick,
you have to choose between

Red
or Hot Red
or Classic Red
or Real Red
or Radiant Red
or Russian Red
Reggae Red
Love that Red
Uptown Red
Drop Dead Red
Red Red Red
Crimson Splendour
Guerlain no 102 Rouge Boléro KissKiss Hydro-soft
Guerlain no 103 Rouge Satin Tango KissKiss Hydro-soft
Guerlain no 104 Rouge Passsion KissKiss Hydro-soft
Cherry
Crushed Cherry
Cherry Blossom
Very Very Cherry
Cherries Jubilee
Hard Candy Tramp....

[silence;
bewilderment and awe at Gunter's knowledge of lipstick]

FRANCOIS

The world can be so confusing,
what are the rules, what is allowed, what is not allowed
and we live in constant anguish.

You have to reinvent your relationship every day
discover all over every day what it might be
what a woman wants
what you yourself might want.

MARIA

And then, sometimes
you might live apart from your wife or lover
and so you have love affairs

or you even agree to have love affairs
even while, at the same time, in your own way,
you remain faithful to one another in your love for one another
whatever you might be doing physically
and yet, no matter how you sort it out,
even at the moment you are going to bed with another person
it makes you feel even more alone and betrayed

FRANCOIS

And then
when you say, for example, do you love me?
then she replies I don't know you
because in fact she never will, she never will.

JAMES

Why not?

FRANCOIS

Because I rediscover who I am every day,
it's a moving target, you can't hit it.
How can you have love at all these days?
These days,
it's not easy for a man and a woman to fall in love.

MARIA

It never was.

GUNTER

One needs courage.

EDMUND

Human beings.

MARIA

It turns out life is nothing but loose ends.
It's not that, just because one has many love affairs
or love affairs with people one shouldn't
that that makes you a person incapable of love
or a person who has no feelings

I myself
I pray for a better world
a world where there will be no such thing
as unrequited love and pain and suffering
and women can return the love of any man
where people live in peace
where the whole world will be like Tuscany
the evening sunset on the vines
and olive trees
a golden glow
roses growing up the sides of farm houses
a glass of wine in the lingering twilight
grandchildren playing down by the arbor
reading by the pool
the circus performers from the village
coming out to the house for lunch
entertaining the children with their clowning
and juggling
the family in the kitchen
making dinner together
the children picking fresh vegetables
the neighboring farmer holding forth
reciting Dante by heart
stanza after stanza
and bursting into song
arias from Verdi
the mother sitting at the hearth
giving her breast to her baby
fresh herbs
the fennel and the basil
the roasted garlic and the fish stew
we'll have our own wine
from the vines nearby the house
our own olive oil
from the trees on the nearby hillside
we will laugh and cry and tell stories
we will have love affairs
and no one will be hurt
aunts and uncles will gather every Sunday

to take care of the children
while we have a nap in the upstairs bedroom
oh Tuscany Tuscany
how I long for you and love you.

FRANCOIS

In the olden days
you were married for life, that was it
and then you have your love affairs.
But nowadays these love affairs cause nothing but pain or death,
and it seems you shouldn't have them.

EDMUND

Or you might say,
this wonderful married love
this is not for me.
What I long for is a moment
and nothing more
an intense moment
a moment even of pain
or especially of pain
never mind the falling in love
the consummation
the lifelong pleasure
let us cut right to the end of it
the searing pain
that lets us know
we did once long and love
we are alive
and this awful pain proves it
over and over again.

FRANK

This is not my idea of love.

GUNTER

Or it may be
rather than feeling the pain ourselves
we like to inflict it on others

to enable them to feel what we ourselves cannot
and this can be a form of generosity
giving the sensation of life to another
life at its most intense and intimate

MARIA

Oh, Gunter, really....

[Natalie now launches into an aria
whose sole purpose is to get Mimi's attention
and seduce her.]

NATALIE

Sometimes you might like to say to someone
hey! go ahead
do your worst
stick it in me,
up my ass,
piss on me,
double up your belt,
make it sting
make me lie still
make me whimper
make me beg

Because I like to feel some leather
up between my legs from time to time
with a little silk
a knee up in my crotch
nails down my sides
bone against my clit
a little bit of rubbing
The old double dildo
and you've got to like an animal from time to time.

Or you might say to your partner
make it hurt
spank me, pinch me
give me an enema

bite me, burn me,
but watch out for the joints, the nerves,
watch out for the blood vessels, you know
I'm taking this for granted,
this will be safe
think about the front of the thigh,
the shoulder, the upper arm,
use a little soap and water,
alcohol, Betadine,

keep it perpendicular to the skin
make a gentle cut
wait a minute before the blood begins to flow
and then another cut or prick
like lightning going through the body

and when it's done
rub it with wine
stain it
leave a mark there
because these marks are here for life
these are commitments being made
we're never going back

MIMI
never.

NATALIE
And what do you need in life finally but
some bandaids
smelling salts
sterile cotton

MIMI
bandage scissors

NATALIE
bolt cutters

MIMI
aspirin

NATALIE
spare keys

MIMI
a marlinspike

NATALIE
ice pack

MIMI
hydrogen peroxide

NATALIE
rectal thermometer

MIMI
KY jelly

NATALIE
tweezers.

MIMI
And then you can feel free to say to your mate
you could tie me down
so I can't jump when you cut me
you know
Do it slow
then work me over
this is what I like
and tell me bedtime stories

NATALIE
You could powder me.
You could oil me.
You could dress me up.
You could take me out.

[Mimi, having gotten caught up in Natalie's fantasy,
has been worked up into a sweat.
She takes a deep breath now.]

MIMI

There.
I'm done.

I call these plaster casts of torsos
my erection series
because
no matter what a man does
when he feels the heavy warmth of plaster on his torso
he can't keep himself from getting an erection
don't ask me why.

[Silence.
Mimi and Natalie are fixated on one another.
All the others look at Francois.]

Maria bursts into song,
an aria from an Italian opera,
leading to a chorus

so that everyone joins her in singing the opera,
even Tessa;

while they sing,
Mimi takes Natalie by the hand
and guides her into the woods
or to the steamer trunk,
opens the trunk, and gets into it with Natalie and closes the lid;

and also, while they sing,

beautiful things ascend from beneath the ground to heaven

or rose petals rain down

or ten thousand brightly colored beach umbrellas descend from the skies;

at the end, there is silence,
and the sound of the surf]

GUNTER

Dear God,
did you hear these women singing together?

MARIA

Thank you, Gunter.

GUNTER

But, no,
could you hear yourself?
I am speaking of you and your daughter.

TESSA

I was only singing.
I wasn't listening.

GUNTER

The two of you
mother and daughter
your voices flowing in and out of one another
like quicksilver
like a mountain brook
like satin sheets

MARIA

Oh, Gunter, really.

GUNTER

Like the spring breeze in the branches
like the silk camisole
beneath the summer dress

MARIA

Gunter, please.

GUNTER

Like the summer light
falling on the pillow
in the late afternoon
and the ocean waves are quiet
as the tide goes out once more

FRANK

Gunter.

GUNTER

My mother sang to me every night
when she put me to bed
and sometimes my grandmother would join her
the two of them singing to me
their duets and solos
from the operas we had attended all together
and I have often thought
one never knows
what one seeks in life
why this man loves a woman with fair hair
or this woman needs a man who seems substantial
while that woman needs a man who is tender
or even weak
a man may love a woman
or a man may love a man
but why will he love this woman or that man
these things that make us long for another human being
or need another
that make us unable to sleep
or make us tremble
make us perspire with a passion we don't understand
it is so specific and so sickening and so potent
it frightens us
we run from it
we choose instead some more peaceful seeming love
some love we can bear from day to day
even though eventually it may come to bore us
and we forget what it is that makes our knees buckle

until, by accident,
we come across it again in the most unexpected place
as I have just done this moment
with you, Maria, and with you, Tessa
hearing the two of you sing
I recognize: I love you
I love the two of you together, singing
and I need you
I want you
I need to marry you
please, Maria, please
[he is on his knees and weeping now]
I beg you
I can't help myself
I can only plead that I can't help myself
or else I would
I only thank god in this moment
that the passion I can't resist is this one
instead of, as it could have been—
who knows? we seem to have no control of these things—
a passion to whip someone or shoot them
I beg you, Maria
I beg you, Tessa

MARIA
Gunter.

GUNTER
come with me
sing to me
I'll take care of you as you've never been cared for before.

FRANK
Gunter.

GUNTER
What do you say, Tessa?
I pray to God
I'll give you anything you want.

EDMUND

This is too bizarre.

GUNTER

The Mormons love two women all the time
or three or four

EDMUND

Because of the way they sing?

GUNTER

Perhaps!

I don't know.

And why not?

JAMES

This is insane!

GUNTER

I don't say it's not insane.

I apologize for it.

But I can't control the way I feel.

MARIA

You should!

GUNTER

I can't.

I won't.

I love you, Maria.

MARIA

You are a creep, Gunter!

No one likes this sort of weird
kinky kind of thing.

I am a normal person, Gunter,
with normal sorts of normal feelings.

GUNTER

What I feel feels normal to me.

FRANK

I've never heard of such a thing.

GUNTER

This happens all the time
someone becomes transported by another person
this is what is called love.

MARIA

This is sick.

JAMES

Sick.

MARIA

Sick.

FRANCOIS

Do you think you can just come in and take another man's love
right from under his nose
and this is an acceptable thing to do.

GUNTER

I tell you, I can't be blamed.

FRANCOIS

Who would you ever blame then
if not you yourself?
Would you blame a man
who likes to be tickled with pheasant feathers?

GUNTER

No. No, I wouldn't.

FRANCOIS

That was a bad example.
Would you blame....

GUNTER

You can't blame anyone for love.
You can weep for them
but you can't blame them.

I could be so happy with the two of you
so filled with joy
it would overflow and fill your whole world
so that finally
you would be happy, too,
I know it
just as my mother and my grandmother were
taking care of me when I was a little boy
chastising me when I had done wrong
spanking me if I needed it
and sometimes I must admit
I did need it.
And we could be just this happy together
if you would just give me a chance.
I beg you, Maria.
I beg you.

[he has Maria's foot, which he is trying to kiss;
and she is trying to get away from him;

Francois comes and gently pries Gunter loose,
and takes him to one side,
putting an arm around his shoulder]

FRANCOIS

Here, here, Gunter, come with me.

GUNTER [weeping]

I love her.
I'm afraid I can't get over it.

FRANCOIS

Many people have had to get over it, Gunter.
She is a wonderful woman,
with a big heart,
but she can't love everyone.

[Francois helps Gunter to a place to sit down,
where Gunter sits in absolute desolation
and then gradually rolls under the desk in a fetal position.]

MARIA

I wish I could love you, Gunter,
I would if I could,
but it is the nature of women
they are able to love only one man

or two

or so
but there comes a limit
or not
but with me this is how it is.

[Bertha, an elderly woman, enters.]

BERTHA

I'm terribly sorry
we've been having a party next door
and suddenly I looked around and my little boy was gone.
I suppose he just ran out.
Have you seen my son?

MARIA

Oh. No.
I'm sorry.
Let's look for him.

EDMUND

Could he have come in through the kitchen?

FRANK

Or he might have come in through the terrace.

MARIA

Oh, how unsettling.

I remember I lost Tessa when she was a tiny little thing
and we didn't find her for hours
do you remember Frank
and she was down by the ocean playing in the surf
and just as I spotted her
she tipped upside down in the water like a little cork
and of course she couldn't swim
and so she couldn't get herself right side up
I got to her just in time
and I thought
thank God
if we'd found her a moment later
it would have been too late.

[an awkward silence at this story she shouldn't have told Bertha
at this moment]

FRANK

I'm sure he's fine.
Children these days are tough little creatures.

MARIA

We should branch out
so we cover all directions.

JAMES

How old is your little boy?

BERTHA

He will be forty-three on his next birthday.

[Silence.

Everyone—on the verge of scattering in different directions—stops.
They all look at the same time toward Gunter, under the desk.]

Gunter!
Whatever are you doing there?
I was worried sick!
Where have you been?

GUNTER
I don't know.
I was taken outdoors by—someone—
I don't see her here.

[Hilda, an even more elderly woman enters.
She shouts everything she says.]

HILDA
Have you found him, Bertha?

BERTHA
It seems he has been here all the time.

HILDA
What have you been doing, Gunter?

GUNTER
I'm sorry.

MARIA
And this must be your grandmother?

HILDA
I beg your pardon?

MARIA
Would you be Gunter's grandmother
he was talking so much about.

HILDA

Not at all.

I am his mother's lover.

We have been together fifty-seven years this September
and never had an unhappy day.

MARIA

Oh,

well,

I'm so glad to hear it.

FRANK

Relationships can be so complicated these days.

HILDA

Relationships have always been complicated.

Why is it people these days think they have invented complications?

Bertha and I had a hell of a time getting together

it was never easy

all the people who thought they had a corner

on the one true way of living on earth

and they ought to bury anyone else who had hold of a different stick

BERTHA

Hilda....

HILDA

but we did it

because what the hell is the point of life

if it's not to live it?

FRANK

Yes, well, no doubt.

HILDA

What?

FRANK [shouting]

I say, no doubt.

HILDA

What the hell,
do you think I'm hard of hearing?
It's a timid age we live in.

BERTHA

Hilda....

HILDA

The landscape of love has always been a rocky one,
filled with swamps and pitfalls
brambles and sticky bushes
and slippery slopes and precipices
what the hell has ever been the point
except to slash your way through the underbrush to score?

BERTHA

Of course, without hurting anyone.

HILDA

Of course. I'm not a Visigoth.
Although sometimes, let's face it,
shit happens.
You give it your best effort.
I try to be very, very careful—
but you can't hold back just because there's no such thing as life insurance.

Sometimes we don't find anyone.

Sometimes we hurt someone.

Sometimes it doesn't last.

BERTHA

Hilda....

HILDA

Sometimes a love has the lifespan of a butterfly.
So does life itself.
We make the best of it.

Because time is running out.
Time is running out!
This is the only shot you've got!

BERTHA
Hilda....

HILDA
You've got to set a course and damn the torpedoes.
And what do they mean you can pursue happiness
but you can never find it.
Why do they tell you such a thing,
just to keep you from doing it?
Bertha and me: we've found happiness.
We are happy people.
I recommend it!

BERTHA
Hilda: sometimes she gets a little carried away

HILDA
On a rant....

BERTHA
But she's really a very nice person.

MARIA
Will you stay for tea?

HILDA
No, thank you, it's naptime for Bertha and me.
And for you, too, Gunter.

GUNTER
I was having a little nap.

HILDA
You're going to be much more comfortable in your own bed.
Come along, Gunter.

BERTHA

Thank you so much for looking after Gunter.

MARIA

Not at all.

BERTHA

Come, Gunter.

GUNTER

Goodbye.

[Bertha exits, followed by Gunter.]

HILDA

Nice chatting.

You'll have to come and visit us sometime
if you like to get naked in a hot tub.

Bertha likes things a little kinky
but I'm always telling her:

not with the guests, Bertha,
not with the guests!

People don't like things out of the ordinary.

Well, they're young.

Once you get to be my age,
you like to make sure you haven't missed anything.

Do come and visit us.

You're lovely people.

And don't forget,
for us it's open house every day.

[She leaves.]

Barbara enters, carrying the pizza box.]

BARBARA

Have you decided about lunch?

The pizza's getting cold.

MARIA

Oh, Barbara, we forgot all about it.
Come, people, what would we like?

TESSA

Whatever.

JAMES

Do you have any peanut butter?

FRANK

Salmon would be nice.

EDMUND

Just some raspberries for me.

[Bob enters.]

MARIA

Raspberries?

EDMUND

Some pale yellow raspberries.

BOB

This is the same place.

MARIA

Oh, it's the pizza man.

BOB

Did you phone for another pizza?

EVERYONE

I didn't phone.

Did you phone?

No.

No, I didn't phone.

EDMUND

We didn't phone.

MARIA

I'm terribly sorry if there has been some confusion....

BOB

You know, pizza is not returnable.

MARIA

I don't think anyone here is going to pay for a pizza we didn't order.

BOB

I am not taking this pizza back to the pizza parlor.

Who is going to pay for the pizza?

TESSA

What is this, some form of extortion?

EDMUND

I'll pay for the pizza.

Here.

BOB

Last time, if I'm not mistaken
you gave me a good tip as well.

EDMUND

Here's a tip.

BOB

What's happened?

You've lost your job since we last saw one another?

EDMUND

OK. Here.

TESSA

This is enough.

I, for one, I have to get back to work.

Maybe no one else has to work,
but I have to work.

And work is good.

This is another way to spend your life.

MARIA

Work?

What are you working on, Tessa?

TESSA

I am doing a translation for James.

MARIA

A translation.

JAMES

About love.

And women.

MARIA

Love, of course. Love.

Well, we know.

TESSA

What do you know?

FRANK

What is it you have?

It's not as though none of us has ever worked.

MARIA

Or loved.

FRANCOIS

Or loved.

All of us have worked.

It may be we can work with you.

FRANCOIS

Let me see.

TESSA

Please don't get mixed up in this
and make everything all topsy turvy.

MARIA

Well, I don't think anyone would make it topsy turvy.

FRANCOIS

What is this?

JAMES

It's for a book.

It has some photographs and some text.

FRANCOIS [looking at the pages on the desk]

Right. Right. Right.

I think we can help with this.

I think, you know,

what you have is good

but it doesn't go quite far enough.

JAMES

Far enough?

FRANCOIS

I think love is more intense, clearly, than what you have here....

JAMES

I don't think you ought to get....

FRANCOIS

You know, tragedies
and people fighting
slamming car doors,
driving off and leaving a woman by the side of the road at night.
At least,
this is what I hear.
Probably I could help you.
Let me have a pen.

MARIA

Here.

TESSA

Pardon my saying so
but I don't think any of you knows anything about love
and now you think you're going to write the book!?

FRANCOIS

We're not going to write anything
or even change what has been written.
But, well....
for instance, this, with this photograph:
"a slender, lovely, graceful girl,
just budding into supple line" —
who would say such a thing?
it would be pretentious
of course I'm not a writer,
still, nonetheless....

MARIA

Who could speak of love
if not you?

FRANCOIS

That's kind of you to say.
Not that I know so much
but perhaps I can help a little bit.

[handing the paper to Maria]

Now this is just a suggestion, but,
you might try, for example—
here....

[as she reads it and passes it to Frank
who passes it to Edmund who passes it to James while
Francois continues]

JAMES

Everyone seems to be an expert....

FRANCOIS

And then, too....

[he begins to edit another bit of paper]

you might say....just as an example....

TESSA

What is this?

FRANCOIS

What is what?

TESSA

"in copulating
one discovers
That."

What is "That?"

FRANCOIS

That's what Roberto wrote.

TESSA

Or Francesco.

FRANCOIS
Or Francesco.

TESSA
I know that.
But what is "That."

JAMES [sitting, head in hands]
God.

FRANCOIS
That's what I have translated from his Italian.

TESSA
I thought it was already in English and you were translating into Italian.

FRANCOIS
Oh.

TESSA
So now you are translating from English into English. Okay.
But the "That" that you have in that.
[pointing to the piece of paper]
What is "That"?

FRANCOIS
That's what he says.
It's his idea, it's his sentiment.
What do you mean, what is that?
I'm not going to change it.

TESSA
Look here at the phrase:
"In copulating
one discovers
That."
What is the "That" that one discovers.

FRANCOIS

Oh, "That."

Well,

I don't know.

TESSA

You don't know?

You are translating this

whatever you are doing to it

and you don't know what it means?

FRANCOIS

It's a mystery.

It's an unknown.

It is the great, wonderful unknowable deep knowledge

one discovers that is different for everyone.

Possibly.

I don't know.

I'm just trying to bring a little depth and sophistication and complexity to the text

because, let's face it, our young friend James here is, after all,

an American

and it may be that he doesn't know a great deal about love.

TESSA

Who doesn't know anything about love?

FRANCOIS

I don't say he doesn't know anything about it,

possibly just not so much

in its details and subtleties.

TESSA

Are you crazy?

You know nothing about love, nothing!

I've never known a man

who had so much tenderness as James

so much caring

a man so solicitous

who had so much regard for another person
and so much respect
and loyalty
and steadfastness
and dependability and sweetness.
Someone you could count on
when you're feeling vulnerable
to take care of you
even when you yourself are maybe not so friendly
in a bad mood
to have the strength and goodness
not to be put off by that
but to stay right with you
until you could accept his caring
and his kindness
and his carefulness
and his thoughtfulness
and his gentleness
and his honor

[silence;
everyone is stunned by her outpouring of affection for James;
no one is more stunned than James;
then she realizes what she has done
and turns away]

MARIA

That's lovely, Tessa,
and yet, to be fair,
it's not as though Francois knows nothing about love.
In fact, he knows a great deal about love, about passion
and excitement
about what it is to thrill to life
and to be thrilling to a woman
to make a woman laugh
to make her quiver and cry with happiness
to make her weep with sorrow that her life will ever end
to hold a moment in her heart as though it were forever
and you would never let it go

and you long for it and pine for it to return
you carry it with you in your heart your entire life
you cherish it
you never forget it
because it was the moment that made your entire life worth living.

[silence;
everyone is stunned by this confession of love for Francois]

FRANK
Indeed,
I think I know something about love myself,
about patience and forbearance and generosity
about wishing for happiness for another person,
Maria:
whatever might bring that to her
wishing that for her
even if it means
not having such happiness oneself
but taking real joy in the happy life of another.

[silence;

Francois takes Maria's hand]

FRANCOIS
Maria.

MARIA
Francois.

[A love song of the 50s or a heartbreaking aria by Caruso
on a record with scratches and crackles.

Francois and Maria leave together.

Frank starts to follow them out, stops, looks after them.]

JAMES

Will you go away with me?

TESSA

Live with you, do you mean?

JAMES

Yes.

TESSA

How could anyone do that
when you see how hard and painful it is?

JAMES

Not for everyone it seems to me.

TESSA

For everyone. Yes. For everyone.

[Edmund is watching Frank from the other side.]

JAMES

And yet, at the same time,
maybe love is something that will grow,
these things
you never can tell
not every love begins like in the movies
where a person is swept off her feet
sometimes it grows and deepens over the years
you grow together
until in old age
you are so close
so intimate
you are like the home you live in
indivisible
and so deeply happy in the place you live
you can't even understand it.

Maybe this is not your only choice
but this could still be one of your options, Tessa.

How about just going out to dinner with me?
There's no food in the house, right?

[silence]

There's food in the house, but you don't feel like cooking.
Am I right?

TESSA
Right.

JAMES
You throw on a little something,
we go to Tre Scalini,
what's to lose?

TESSA
Well....

[Frank continues to look in the direction in which Maria left.]

JAMES
How many times have you eaten at Tre Scalini?

TESSA
My parents took me there when I was a kid.

JAMES
Now you go back as a grownup.
Tessa, time is passing,
you've been to Tre Scalini only once in your life
already you're a grownup
you could get to be sixty years old
still sitting home
waiting for the right person to call,
hoping to go to Tre Scalini one more time before you die.

Let me take you out.
Let's go somewhere.
Maybe go on from dinner to a party
maybe stay up all night
go for a walk on the beach in the early morning
maybe not
this is how it is to be alive
it's no big deal.

[Edmund turns and leaves.]

TESSA

I don't know.
Nowadays it seems to me
you have to be so brave
even to accept a dinner invitation—
and to fall in love
that seems like a calamity,
even life or death,
and at the least a swamp.

[Frank turns around—sees Edmund has gone]

And, anyway,
I'm not dressed.

JAMES

I have something for you.

[he hands her a red satin slip]

TESSA

This is a slip.

JAMES

Everyone's wearing slips these days.

TESSA

As a dress?

JAMES

Yes.

TESSA

To go out?

JAMES

Sure.

TESSA

Not in Martha's Vineyard, I don't think.

JAMES

Of course in Martha's Vineyard.

It all started here.

[she steps into the slip;

[Frank, looking lost,
sits on the couch.]

TESSA

I like it.

JAMES

I thought it would be good on you.

JAMES

Do you believe in love at first sight?

[a long pause]

TESSA

Yes.

[James and Tessa kiss—a long, long kiss.]

JAMES

Do you dance?

TESSA

Of course I dance.

[They dance.

Frank puts his head slowly into his hands.

The lights fade to twilight and darkness.]

Charles Mee's work has been made possible by the support
of Richard B. Fisher and Jeanne Donovan Fisher.

Appendix B

Summertime Makeover

Summertime

by

Charles Mee

*At Schapiro Theatre
Columbia University, Fall 2016*

*Directed by Robin A. Eriksen
Produced by Andrew Joy
Stage Managed by Janelle Caso*

A hundred slender white birch tree trunks. *

*A scattering of casual, summer-house furniture,
Grass grows on a desk,
and there are stars in the sky.*

*In one corner 50 mattresses are piled on top of
each other. A collection of memories perhaps;
or a fort to protect from night terrors.*

*Later on, there might be 300 wine glasses half-
filled with rose wine,
but for now a million flower petals
cover the stage.*

Violin music, quietly in the distance.

ACT I, PROLOGUE

*

*Tessa crawls over the pile of mattresses,
like she is climbing a mountain.
Eventually she slides down and starts to
clean.
She gathers all the petals in a heap,
like she's raking leaves
Perhaps she sweeps all of them
under the carpet*

ACT I, SCENE 1

*

James enters. *
*He is wearing something quite earthy and
brown, and carries a leather briefcase.*

JAMES

Excuse me?

TESSA

Yes?

JAMES

I didn't mean to barge in...
I was told I might find a translator here.

TESSA

Oh, well, I...
I do some translation sometimes.

JAMES

You are?

TESSA

Tessa.

JAMES

Tessa.
James.

*

TESSA

James..

*

*

JAMES

Right.
Good.

*

I have a few things
I need to have put into Italian.
You see,
I work for someone
a photographer
who took photographs
and then asked certain people to look at the photographs
and say things or write things
that he would then put with the photographs.

TESSA

Captions.

JAMES

Yes. Right.

Well, no, not exactly.

More like thoughts or I don't know, feelings.

JAMES (CONT'D)

That is to say, he asked Roberto Calasso to write something or, as it turned out, he thought he asked Roberto Calasso whereas in actuality he asked a journalist named Francesco Ghedini to speak to Calasso and ask Calasso to write something do you know Calasso?

TESSA

I know *of* Calasso, sure.

JAMES

Right,
and Francesco said he had spoken to Calasso
and that Calasso had written these things
the things I have here.

TESSA

I see.

JAMES

but actually Calasso never did write them
I guess Francesco made them up
or even someone else made them up and told Francesco
that they had been written by Calasso

TESSA

This is really complicated.

JAMES

What is?

TESSA

This whole story.

JAMES

Right.
Well: life itself.

TESSA

Right.

JAMES

So, when the proofs were sent to Calasso for his final approval
Calasso said he had never heard of these things
And so we had to stop the presses
and I came here to talk to Calasso.

TESSA

Calasso is here? What, for the summer?

JAMES

I guess.

Anyway,
when he heard what had happened with Francesco
he didn't want to get Francesco into trouble
and so he suggested maybe someone else could sign the words
and he suggested Benigni

TESSA

Roberto Benigni.

JAMES

Right.
Because Benigni is well known as a lover in a way
a person who loves life and women
Do you know Benigni?

TESSA

I know *of* Benigni.

JAMES

Right...
and the pictures are...uh...
did I say what the pictures were?

Nudes. TESSA

No. JAMES
Did I say that?

I guessed. TESSA

Well, yes. JAMES
Or, no.
Not entirely.
Some are nudes, but some are not.
I mean, many are not.
And there are men, too. And old people.
And children, I mean: as friends.
You know.

(Silence)

Love.

(Silence)

Sex for sure. But: also love.

Oh, well, love. TESSA
No wonder it's so complicated.

Right. JAMES

These days especially. TESSA

Right. JAMES

With what we all know now
what we've come to know. TESSA

Exactly. JAMES

(Silence)

Anyway the texts are in English

And Benigni doesn't speak English TESSA

Right. Well, not so well. JAMES

So you need them translated back into Italian? TESSA

Right. JAMES

(Silence)

No problem. TESSA

What? JAMES

TESSA

No problem.
I can do that.

JAMES

Oh. Oh, great, thank you.

TESSA

Do you have them?

JAMES

Sure.
They're right here.

TESSA

So.
Why did you want Calasso to speak about love?

JAMES

Because he's, well,
he's Italian....

TESSA

Right.

JAMES

You know,
from an ancient civilization in a way,
the old world.

TESSA

Greece and Rome.

JAMES

Right.
And still in touch with the deeper ways of life and love
the things that are deep in human nature and eternal

TESSA

Close to the dreamtime of civilization

JAMES

Right.

TESSA

The time of mythology.

JAMES

Right.
Deeper than Freud, even.

TESSA

Right.
Deeper than Freud.

(Silence)

JAMES

Or, you know, I suppose we could have gotten a woman to write about it.

TESSA

Right.
Though probably that wouldn't have helped.

No. JAMES

(Silence)

Do you think I could wait here while you do it?

This could take a while. TESSA

JAMES
Right. Of course,
and you'd rather have some privacy I guess.
I only thought,
if you had any questions.

TESSA
Sure, sure. You can stay.
You can sit there..

(Silence)

JAMES
Do you mind if I just lie down?
I'm sort of jet-lagged.

TESSA
No. Fine. Please do.

JAMES
Thanks.

*He lies down;
she looks at the text for a while, quietly.*

TESSA

This line–
“deer heart” –
what is that?

JAMES

(Sleepily)
Uhm...
I don't know.
I guess it's just something that... uh... you know
someone thought of.

TESSA

Unh-hunh.
I mean, it's supposed to be an animal, a deer,
a fawn, a wild animal,
but at the same time it should suggest sweetness: dear.
In English, you have this play on words.

JAMES

Yes. Right. I suppose you do.
That's one of the challenges of translation I guess.

TESSA

Well. Yes, it is.

ACT I, SCENE 2A

*“I'll make love to you” by Boyz II Men starts
playing.*

*Francois walks vertically down the sky,
or steps out of a wardrobe
or up out of a steamer trunk
or through the wall
or out of the trees.*

*There's smoke coming from the forest, and
perhaps a disco ball is spinning.*

Are you free for dinner?
FRANCOIS

No.
I'm busy.
As you can see.
TESSA

Everyone has to eat.
FRANCOIS

I'm not dressed.
TESSA

I have something for you.
FRANCOIS

Uh, excuse me.
JAMES

Francois hands her a crimson satin slip

Oh, Francois.
This is a slip.
TESSA

Everyone's wearing slips these days.
FRANCOIS

As a dress?
TESSA

Pardon me.
JAMES

Yes. FRANCOIS

To go out? TESSA

Sure. FRANCOIS

I like it. TESSA

What is this?
I beg your pardon,
but you seem to have interrupted something here. JAMES

Do you believe in love at first sight? FRANCOIS

No. TESSA

What's going on? JAMES

It's the truth. FRANCOIS

So? TESSA

So what? FRANCOIS

TESSA

So why do you tell me this?

FRANCOIS

Because perhaps this is how it is with us.

TESSA

How can this be after all these years we've known each other?

FRANCOIS

Because sometimes you don't see the other person at first.
And then suddenly you do.
You sense something in one another.
You might not even know what it is.
In fact, probably you never know,
the connection is so deep,
beneath the place where language even starts.
And then, if you let the moment pass, it is past forever.
And what you never know is:
was this a great love or not?
Was this your one great love
that you've just missed.
Because each of us is given only one great love in life.
That's what all the poets have known.
We've forgotten it in our times.
I think we get too caught up in our daily lives.
But people used to know:
you are born,
you have one great love,
you die.
There's nothing else to life.
That's why, in Romeo and Juliet,
after they find their love,
they die.
Because that's the truth of it:
birth, love and death,
that's all there is.
Your great love may come at the beginning of your life,
or in the middle,
or near the end.

FRANCOIS (CONT'D)

Or not at all.
But there is only one
and if you miss it,
you've missed it forever.

JAMES

This is exactly what I meant to say to you.
This is what I myself was thinking when I first met you.

TESSA

Is this what you always say to women?

FRANCOIS

No.

JAMES

I was going to say the very same thing to you
but I was afraid you would think I was too forward.

FRANCOIS

Do you dance?

TESSA

Of course I dance.

JAMES

Excuse me.
Wait a moment.
Uh...I beg your pardon.
Goddammit.

ACT I, SCENE 2B

*Francois sings,
she steps out of her dress
and into the slip;
she wears, otherwise,
black boots, and socks that are falling down
around her ankles;
or else, she takes off the dress and doesn't put
the slip on, wearing nothing else but stockings
and red high heels*

FRANCOIS

GIRL RELAX, LET'S GO SLOW
I AIN'T GOT NOWHERE TO GO
I'M JUST GONNA CONCENTRATE ON YOU
GIRL ARE YOU READY?
IT'S GONNA BE A LONG NIGHT

THROW YOUR CLOTHES ON THE FLOOR
I'M GONNA TAKE MY CLOTHES OFF TOO
I MADE PLANS TO BE WITH YOU
GIRL WHATEVER YOU ASK ME YOU KNOW I CAN DO

I'LL MAKE LOVE TO YOU
LIKE YOU WANT ME TO
AND I'LL HOLD YOU TIGHT
BABY ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT
I'LL MAKE LOVE TO YOU
WHEN YOU WANT ME TO
AND I WILL NOT LET GO
TILL YOU TELL ME TOO

*they dance—
not just a moment
but this dance and song is a long performance
event of its own.*

*James paces back and forth,
wanting to interrupt, feeling too uncertain and
shy,
until finally he does.*

ACT I, SCENE 2C

JAMES

Well, look, finally,
I don't mean to interrupt, but...

TESSA

I'm sorry.
James, this is my friend Francois.

JAMES

Yes, so I gather.
It seems that I happen to doze off for a minute
and now you're dancing with someone else.

TESSA

What?

JAMES

You're dancing with someone else.

*She hurriedly puts on the slip – if she didn't have
it on*

TESSA

Someone else?

(the following is all on top of one another)

JAMES

Well, yes.
Excuse me,
Tessa and I...
I thought we...
well, I might have been mistaken,
but I thought we were...
taken up with one another.

FRANCOIS

(Withdrawing)
Oh, I beg your pardon.
I didn't realize.

TESSA

What?
Taken up with one another.
What he means is...

FRANCOIS

I didn't realize....
I didn't mean to intrude.

TESSA

You're not intruding.
This is a...
we have a business relationship.
I mean we are...
I am working for him
in the sense that...uh....

FRANCOIS

That's quite all right. I'll just be...

JAMES

Business relationship, yes.
I suppose so, but I thought there was something more than that.
I thought...

FRANCOIS

Possibly we'll have the pleasure again....

he exits;

ACT I, SCENE 3A

*at the same moment, Mimi enters,
coming out of the woodwork or the woods,
maybe she's coming from the beach
or the pool*

*She doesn't speak for a while;
she just stands there, drinking an iced tea, and
watching.*

TESSA

What have you done?

JAMES

Done?
I hope I haven't done anything.
I certainly didn't mean....

TESSA

This was my friend!
I was dancing!

JAMES

Yes, I see.
And I didn't mean to....

TESSA

What are you,
some kind of stalker?

JAMES

No. No.
All this happened totally by chance
by pure chance.
Stalker!

TESSA

We might have been....
I mean, you can't tell what you might have interrupted....

JAMES

I know.
I'm sorry.
Well, in fact, of course,
I don't mean to presume,
but I also thought that perhaps you felt....
that is to say,
we met,
and frankly I felt something right away,
and I even thought perhaps you might have felt something, too.

TESSA

Felt something?
For you?

JAMES

Yes, for me.
I thought I sensed something special possibly.
Are you telling me you didn't feel some connection?

TESSA

No. No, I didn't.

JAMES

I was just a stranger with whom you were doing business
and, knowing nothing about me, you let me sleep here with you
and you felt no connection?

TESSA

Sleep with me?

JAMES

From the first moment I saw you
I thought
here is a wonderful person
and I thought you felt something of the same
but now you seem, well,
as though you might be denying your impulse.

TESSA

Impulse? I don't have an impulse!

JAMES

What do you call it?

TESSA

I call it nothing.
Are you crazy?
You thought
we were in love?

JAMES

Not that I thought we were in love,
but that perhaps there was some feeling of a connection.
You have such beautiful eyes.

TESSA

Eyes? Eyes?
I have nothing to do with my eyes.
They have nothing to do with me.
Get out! Get out! Just get out!

JAMES

I'm sorry. I apologize.
I'm leaving.
I wouldn't think of staying another minute.

TESSA

Then go!

ACT I, SCENE 3B

MIMI

Excuse me.

Tessa wheels around to see Mimi

TESSA

God, Mimi, am I glad to see another woman.
I am so sick of men
and all their talk of love and sex

JAMES

I don't think I mentioned sex.

MIMI

Love, I hate love

TESSA

Has it ever been anything but a cover
for some kind of manipulative bullshit
some kind of exploitation

JAMES

I don't think I was trying to...

TESSA

Has anything ever done more damage to me than love?

MIMI

These men what is sex to them
but some way to avoid any sort of reality altogether

TESSA

Call it love
and it's nothing but a hideout

MIMI

I know just how you feel.

TESSA

A woman wants another person with whom she can relate

MIMI

Yes!

JAMES

And so does a man.

TESSA

One who sympathizes

MIMI

Who can know how she feels

JAMES

Just like a man.

TESSA

And know who she is in some deep sense

Accept her for exactly who she is MIMI

As a man hopes as well. JAMES

Not try to keep just to the surface of things TESSA

Avoid the real involvement with the deeper things
that are inevitably more complex MIMI

And sometimes not entirely easy to deal with TESSA

But this is the real human exchange
the exchange with the inner being
that feels really good and consoling MIMI

And, as far as that goes, really hot TESSA

And sexy MIMI

Exactly. TESSA

Excuse me, but is there maybe
are you two having some sort of....? JAMES

Certainly not. TESSA

Because I thought I sensed... JAMES

You sensed something again? TESSA

If not on your part for her
then possibly on her part for you. JAMES

Certainly not. MIMI

I think so. JAMES

Absolutely not. MIMI

TESSA
I am a person without any involvements whatsoever!
And that is exactly how I intend to keep it!

JAMES
And all the while
doesn't it mean anything to you
that I think I love you?

*Everything stops for a second. There are birds
chirping far away. Perhaps the sound of a brook
nearby*

Love me? TESSA

You think you love her? MIMI

It happened so suddenly—
who's to know?
it was all the most fortuitous event
but, in fact, this could be our real chance in life, Tessa. JAMES

I hope not.
(To Mimi) TESSA
He could be some kind of narcoleptic.

You don't know anything about me. JAMES
We've only just met.
Maybe I seem like a jerk to you

Well.... TESSA

But that could be just because it's an awkward time JAMES
I'm not at my best
something like that
I mean everybody has these potentials within them
to look like a jerk
or even to be a jerk
but they might be more
like 90% of the time or even 98% of the time
really fine people

JAMES (CONT'D)

or good people
or funny
or even,
you know,
hot.
I might be like that
and then that would be good for us
because I tell you
I'm crazy about you.

TESSA

You walk in on me with some random project.
You don't even know me.

JAMES

You don't think I do?
People are smarter than we think.
We think
it takes a long time to get to know someone
and in a way it does
but we know so much from the first second
it's not just the words another person speaks
we right away take in
their, you know, body language
the way they hold themselves
cock their heads
how their hair falls and how they push it away from their eyes
whether impatiently or gently

whether they are irritable or thoughtful people
gentle or violent
caressing or insensitive
how they smell
whether they look directly in your eyes
or they can't look up from the ground
or meet your gaze directly
or their eyes dart from side to side
because they are anxious in a way
they will never change

JAMES (CONT'D)

I saw you
and I knew:
I've looked for you all my life.
I love you.

*Francois enters looking for his coat,
sees Mimi, starts to sneak out.*

ACT I, SCENE 4

MIMI

Francois!

FRANCOIS

Oh,
Mimi.
Imagine that. It's been...

MIMI

A long time.

FRANCOIS

Yes. Precisely.
How extraordinary.

TESSA

You know each other?

MIMI

We were...

FRANCOIS

We had a...

*

FRANCOIS (CONT'D)

We lived together...

MIMI

Briefly.
We spent the weekend together in San Remy.

FRANCOIS

A wonderful time...

JAMES

Excuse me, but we were having a conversation here.

MIMI

Until what?
You walked out the door...

FRANCOIS

We were outdoors at the time.

MIMI

Right. In a little outdoor cafe.

TESSA

(To Mimi) You never told me this?

FRANCOIS

So, technically speaking...

JAMES

Perhaps you would excuse us....

FRANCOIS

(To James) I'm sorry....

MIMI

You walked out of the cafe
and got into some woman's car.

FRANCOIS

Not some woman.
That woman was a friend.
I mean,
I had known her....
Which is to say
I had been friends with her at one time
and then there she was in San Remy
she asked for my help.

MIMI

Your help?

TESSA

Who was this?

JAMES

Do we care about your love affairs?

FRANCOIS

(To James) I beg your pardon.
(To Mimi) It seems she was there with a fellow
who wouldn't let her out of his sight
and she needed to phone her husband
so I said I would drive her to a telephone I knew
by the side of the road
where she could make a call
with the motor running as it were
and I could bring her back.

MIMI

But?

FRANCOIS

Well, but it turned out, of course,
the phone was out of order
and then she was frightened to return
so she convinced me to drive her to another town
down towards Les Baux
and

(shrugs)

by that time it had become so late
and I thought you would have been angry
so that, for me to return....

MIMI

So instead you disappeared.

He shrugs

MIMI (CONT'D)

Men! Men!
You appear then you disappear!

*She turns away from him,
not knowing which way to go.*

ACT I, SCENE 5

Four people come out of nowhere

*simultaneously,
in mid-sentence:*

*Natalie,
Maria,
Frank,
and Edmund.*

*They are all dressed in summer clothes,
beachwear perhaps,
or linen things in greens and whites.
They all wear sunglasses.*

MARIA

...which is not what I meant to do at all.

FRANK

So you say
So you always say when you do these things

EDMUND

That happens to me all the time
finding I've done something I never meant to do

FRANK

And yet how could you not mean it
when it happens over and over again

NATALIE

Me.
I do what I mean to do
and when it's done
I've done it.
What do I care?

MARIA

Francois!

NATALIE

Mimi!

TESSA

Mother!

Tessa! FRANK

Maria! FRANCOIS

Natalie! MIMI

(Pause)

I'm... I'm James. JAMES

(To Mimi) What are you doing here? NATALIE

MIMI
Yes, well...
I might ask the same of you.
But, how wonderful to see you.
(To Tessa)
This is my friend Natalie.
This is Tessa.

MARIA
Tessa, I didn't realize you knew Francois!

TESSA
Well, *know* him.
I don't know that I *know* him.

FRANK
It would seem that's just as well.
So we're having a house party?

Note from the playwright:

Throughout the piece, all the characters are meant to inhabit the setting with a physical life independent of the dialogue and actions

—

that is, they are meant to lounge and do their nails and write books and despair and try on various outfits and practice solo dances and perform tai chi and carry on lives as others occupy center stage.

Who are these people? JAMES

This is my family. TESSA

And friends. MIMI

And friends. TESSA

I thought we were going to be alone. JAMES

Where did you get that idea? TESSA

No one is alone. EDMUND
We all come into the world with a family.

You're a friend of my daughter? FRANK

Your daughter? JAMES

Yes, Tessa is my daughter. FRANK

Well, friend I don't know.
I'd certainly like to be. JAMES

Indeed. FRANK

Can you just say
how wonderful to see you
and that's that? NATALIE

What's what? MIMI

NATALIE
I thought,
well,
I thought
getting to know you
you changed my life.
really.
everything I thought.
Who I was.
Who I thought I was.
What I meant to do with my life.
How I meant to live.
How it was to see the world with new eyes
and feel all my feelings completely transformed.
I thought you would be my whole life!
And it seems
I meant nothing to you!

NATALIE (CONT'D)

Nothing!

*She bursts into tears,
turns around
and disappears.*

MIMI

Natalie!
Natalie!

Everyone is looking quizzically at Mimi.

MIMI (CONT'D)

It was just a casual thing, you know.
Women,
sometimes they like a dalliance with another woman
or the warmth of friendship
whatever
but I am definitely heterosexual.
Not that I'm not really fond of her.
I just happen to be someone who likes men.
I like men!
That's just who I am.
Of course maybe I've had some relationships with women

JAMES

Exactly what I thought.

MIMI

But I've had a lot of relationships with men,
I shouldn't say a lot
but, on balance....

ACT I, SCENE 6A

MARIA

So Francois, what exactly are you doing here?

*

FRANCOIS

It's not entirely clear to me
what I'm doing here.
As it started out
what I thought was
it was a perfectly straightforward life plan
as clear as the plot of a novel
I was setting out in life
to find a woman I could love
and who loved me
and then one thing led to another

I found myself with a friend
the next thing I knew I was at a chateau in the country
where there were many people
there was a party
I couldn't find the woman I had come with
you know

he shrugs

I became disoriented.
But as I think about it
I think
is this not how life is?
You think you are doing one thing
it turns out you have been doing something else entirely
life has no plot
you only think it does
and you think you've had a beginning and a middle and an end
but all you've had is a start and a stop
and a lot of disorientation in between

*

*

FRANCOIS (CONT'D)

maybe you have a chance and you lose it
maybe the time you least thought it was meaningful at all
that was your one chance
you walked right past it
while you were pursuing another woman
and then you kick the bucket...

*

Maria slaps Francois

ACT I, SCENE 6B

FRANCOIS

What?

MARIA

How can you flirt with her like this?

FRANCOIS

Flirt with her?
Flirt with whom?

MARIA

I was always the one who loved you.

FRANK

Excuse me.
I'm feeling a little....

MARIA

I called you all the time.
You never called.

FRANK

I don't think this is meant for me....

FRANCOIS

Maria, please,
this is hardly the right occasion....

MARIA

What?
You can't bear to hear the truth?

*She slaps him again
and goes to sit in a corner*

EDMUND

(kindly)
Frank,
would you do me a favor?
Would you get me a little milk for my tea?

FRANK

(disoriented)
Milk. Yes. Of course.

He leaves

JAMES

(stupefied, looking at Maria)
So, this is your mother?

TESSA

Yes! Yes! So you see!
This is what I grew up with!
What chance did I have with a family like this?
And you want to fall in love with me?
How can anyone expect me to form any kind of relationship
with another human being?

We all have a past.
EDMUND

And a present, too, it would seem!
MARIA

None of us starts a new day carte blanche
FRANCOIS

I think so
JAMES
Why does a bride wear a white wedding dress?
Because she starts anew.

But what chance is there for us?
MIMI

What chance was there ever?
TESSA

*Tessa goes to the couch
where she lies down,
face buried in a pillow,
like a Balthus girl,
disconsolate.*

This is a minefield!
JAMES

A battlefield.
FRANCOIS

A rubblefield.
MIMI

FRANCOIS

How is anyone supposed to know where to put a foot?

*James follows Tessa to the couch, uncertain
what to do to help.*

*During the following conversation,
James moves toward her, then away,
toward her again, then away.*

*Finally, James finds a blanket
and gently puts it over Tessa;
she accepts the blanket without acknowledging
him.*

MARIA

(aimed at Francois)
you ignore me,
you neglect me,
you're always running around with these sluts

MIMI

I beg your pardon?

MARIA

Actresses, then, actresses!

MIMI

Photographer!

*

MARIA

Artists. Whatever.
I love you, Francois,
I was always the only one who ever loved you.
You will end up alone and lonely
because you can't know what it is to be loved.
You think I am clinging and demanding

FRANCOIS

And neurotic, frankly.
Let's be honest.

MARIA

You think you'd like to get rid of me
but I could take care of you forever, Francois!
Sometimes, Francois, I think you are a good person
if only you wouldn't try so hard
if you would just relax
let life come to you
take it as it is
don't always be on the prowl
because, in the end,
all we have is one another
you're not a boy any longer
you won't live forever
and what you will have had will be your friends
these days like today
where nothing special happens to you
but you have been with me

(she is weeping now)

I don't want to go through life always bickering, always unhappy
feeling cheated
I could be content just to have a glass of wine
to dance
to hear you sing
I don't care what kind of voice you have
I love you
I can be with you as long as we have on earth
it's not so bad
just to love and be loved

FRANCOIS

On again off again!
On again off again!
You are a lunatic!

MARIA

I'm a person who says what I feel
when I feel it.

*

With me you always know where you stand.
That is a kind of certainty and security
that is almost impossible to come by in this world.
We could have another chance, Francois!

*

FRANCOIS

Would you stop this holding on to me?
You are a married woman!
This is disgraceful!
Can't I take a breath?
Can't I go out to dinner?
Can't I do my job without you calling
tracking me down,
you'd think you were my wife
asking me, can you see me now,
where are you now?
can I come with you?
Who are you with?
Are you having an affair?
You're more than neurotic

*Barbara, the cook,
enters wiping her hands on a dish towel,
stands there listening to Francois.*

FRANCOIS (CONT'D)

you're psychotic
with your crying and your pleading
and what else
your taking pills to go to sleep
pills to wake up.
I have to live my life,
you would suffocate me,
you would pull me down and bury me alive!
I wish you were dead!
Dead!

*Silence;
all this time,
James is getting a cup of tea for Tessa, which,
again,
she accepts from him
but without acknowledging him*

ACT I, SCENE 7

BARBARA

So this is how people speak to one another these days?

Men.

Who wants you?

With a man, every act of love is an act of rape.

A man will swim through a river of snot,
wade nostril-deep through a mile of vomit,
if he thinks there'll be a friendly pussy waiting for him on the other side.

He'll screw a woman he despises,
any snaggle-toothed hag,
and furthermore, pay for the opportunity.

A man will fuck mud if he has to.

And why is that?

Because every man, deep down,
knows he is a worthless piece of shit
hoping some woman will make him feel good about himself.

Eaten up with guilt, shame, fears and insecurities
a man is a walking dildo, *
obsessed with screwing, *
incapable of love, friendship, affection or tenderness, *
a half dead, unresponsive lump of flesh. *

Men pretend to be normal *
but what they're doing sitting there *
with benign smiles on their faces *
is they're manufacturing sperm. *
They do it all the time. *
They never stop. *
They are suffering from testosterone poisoning. *

BARBARA (CONT'D)

I went to the County Fair. *

They had one of those "Believe it or not?" Shows. *

They had a man born with a penis *and* a brain. *

Why did god create man? *

Because a vibrator can't mow the lawn. *

Why were men given brains larger than dogs? *

So they wouldn't hump women's legs at cocktail parties. *

What do you call a man with half a brain? *

Gifted. *

Why do men name their penises? *

Because they want to be on a first-name basis *

with the person who makes all their decisions. *

What do you call the useless bit of fatty tissue *

at the end of a penis? *

A man. *

Pow, mother fucker! *

Will all these people be staying for supper? *

ACT I, SCENE 8

FRANCOIS

I wouldn't eat a meal you made if it were the last piece of uncooked shit on the planet.
What is it with you women
you think men can't live without you.

Have you noticed
how uncomfortable it is for most women
to put their elbows on the table while they eat?
Because the table is too high for them.
But for most men,
it is uncomfortable not to put their elbows on the table
because they are taller.
But it's not proper to put one's elbows on the table.

And why is that?
Because etiquette is a system that defines as appropriate
what is natural for a woman,
and defines as inappropriate what is natural for a man.

*In the middle of this,
a creepy guy enters
to deliver a pizza.
He stands there holding the pizza box.*

FRANCOIS (CONT'D)

So, of course,
similarly,
perhaps one should not be so surprised that pornography,
which appeals to men
is condemned,
while soap operas and romance novels,
the female equivalent of pornography
is acceptable.

And so, of course, men have become ashamed that they are men.
And so women control men as they wish, at their whim,
they get men to do whatever women want them to do.

FRANCOIS (CONT'D).

The women get the men to do the dirty work, the violence,
the bad stuff
whatever women want but don't want to do with their own hands
so they can have whatever they like
and blame the men for it.

ACT I, SCENE 9

MIMI

You know,
I myself knew a woman,
I won't say who,
who was in love with a man who was married,
and this married man went away on vacation with his wife.

FRANCOIS

Mimi, don't

MIMI

And the woman I knew, who was left at home,
spent every day thinking
not just what *she* was doing at every moment
but what this *man* was doing at every moment, too,

MARIA

Who was this?

*Francois paces back and forth, moping his brow
as Mimi assaults him with this story of their past*

MIMI

knowing, as she got up in the morning
that her lover was waking up with his wife

MARIA

Who was this, Francois?

FRANCOIS

I wouldn't know.
This is some sort of I don't know what.

MIMI

and behaving as he always did in the morning
lying in bed,
turning over to embrace his wife
perhaps making love

MARIA

Are you saying that you were married?
That you have a wife?

FRANCOIS

(to the others)
There's not a shred of truth to this.
Essentially.

MIMI

and lying there under the covers afterwards
as his wife went to make a cup of tea for him
bringing it back to bed

MARIA

All this time you've been married
and I never knew?

FRANCOIS

No, not married.
Of course, in the past...
in a different time,
at another time,
as you yourself are married at the present time.

MIMI

the conversation then, the planning for the day,
the breakfast in the cafe

*James sitting by the park table start playing on
the wine bottles that have been placed there.
He plays the bass line for "Bed of Lies" by Nicki
Minaj, at some point a piano is rolled on and
Tessa starts playing with him.*

MARIA

(totally thrown, sinking to the ground, talking to herself)
How could this be
and I didn't know?

*

MIMI

his reading things out loud from the newspaper
every moment, for two weeks,

FRANCOIS

How can you say this?

MIMI

DO YOU EVER THINK OF ME WHEN YOU LIE?
LIE DOWN IN YOUR BED, YOUR BED OF LIES
AND I KNEW BETTER THAN TO LOOK IN YOUR EYES
THEY ONLY PRETEND YOU WOULD BE MINE

MIMI AND MARIA

AND YOU KNOW HOW YOU MADE ME BELIEVE
YOU HAD ME CAUGHT IN EVERY WEB THAT YOU WEAVED

MIMI

BUT DO YOU EVER THINK OF ME WHEN YOU LIE?
LIE DOWN IN YOUR BED YOUR BED OF LIES

*They keep playing,
Edmund has joined on percussion
and is using the trees
as rain-sticks*

MIMI (CONT'D)

(speaking) this woman thought all the time, every moment, of what her lover was doing
waiting for the moment that he would return
and call her

FRANCOIS

What could I have done?
Given the circumstances!

MARIA

I can't believe I never knew this!

MIMI

and come by and take her out to dinner
and spend the night with her

MARIA

How do human beings keep themselves from knowing things all the time?

MIMI

she knew the hour and the minute that he would return

MARIA

This is inconceivable.

MIMI

and when at last he did return
and the woman waited by the phone for him to call
he did not call that evening

MARIA

We do this with everything.

MIMI

he might have been delayed by the weekend traffic
and he did not call late that night
or early in the morning

FRANCOIS

Well, I couldn't call.

MARIA

We make ourselves unconscious
and then we wonder why we are so tormented.

MIMI

not from home or from the road saying he had been delayed
he did not call all that next day or night
he did not call until the following day
in the afternoon

FRANCOIS

There was never a good time.

MARIA

A good time?

MIMI

from his office

FRANCOIS

Mimi...

MIMI

to suggest dinner the following week.
So what did this woman do?

JAMES

What?

MIMI

She waited for her lover.
She waited until the time he said for dinner.
She waited for him,
and she is still waiting.

MIMI (CONT'D)

DO YOU EVER THINK OF ME, WHEN YOU LIE?
LIE DOWN IN YOUR BED, YOUR BED OF LIES

*She sinks to the ground next to Tessa
so that now, Tessa, Maria, and Mimi are all on
the ground.*

MIMI AND MARIA

AND I KNEW BETTER, THAN TO LOOK IN YOUR EYES
THEY ONLY PRETEND, YOU WOULD BE MINE

MIMI AND MARIA AND TESSA

AND YOU KNOW HOW YOU MADE ME BELIEVE
YOU HAD ME CAUGHT IN EVERY WEB THAT YOU WEAVED

MIMI

BUT DO YOU EVER THINK OF ME WHEN YOU LIE?
LIE DOWN IN YOUR BED YOUR BED OF LIES

*Natalie and Frank have both started coming
back and are now standing somewhere in the
forest, looking at the situation*

MARIA

I JUST FIGURED IF YOU SAW ME, IF YOU LOOKED IN MY EYES
YOU'D REMEMBER OUR CONNECTION AND BE FREED FROM THE LIES

MARIA AND NATALIE

I JUST FIGURED I WAS SOMETHING THAT YOU COULDN'T REPLACE
BUT THERE WAS JUST A BLANK STARE AND I COULDN'T RELATE

MARIA AND NATALIE AND MIMI

I JUST COULDN'T UNDERSTAND AND I COULDN'T DEFEND
WHAT WE HAD, WHAT WE SHARED, AND I COULDN'T PRETEND

MARIA, NATALIE, MIMI AND FRANK

WHEN THE TEARS ROLL DOWN IT'S LIKE YOU DON'T EVEN NOTICE 'EM
IF YOU HAD A HEART, I WAS HOPING THAT YOU'D SHOW IT SOME

FRANCOIS

WHAT THE FUCK YOU REALLY TELLING ME, WHAT YOU TELLING ME

MARIA

I COULD TELL YOU LYING,

MIMI

GET THE FUCK OUT,

FRANCOIS

DON'T YELL AT ME!

MARIA

I DON'T MEAN TO CUT YOU, I AIN'T WANT TO CATCH A FELONY

NATALIE

THIS AIN'T HOW TO BE A PLAYER,

ALL

(AT THEIR RESPECTIVE FOCUS OF ANGER) YOU AIN'T BILL BELLAMY

FRANK

THEY SAY YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU GOT 'TIL IT'S GONE

TESSA

THEY SAY THAT YOUR DARKEST HOUR COME BEFORE YOUR DAWN

NATALIE

BUT THERE WAS SOMETHING THAT I SHOULD'VE ASKED ALL ALONG

MIMI AND MARIA

I'M GONNA ASK ON THE SONG

EDMUND

SO DOES SHE KNOW I'VE BEEN IN THAT BED BEFORE
A THOUSAND COUNT, AND NOT A SINGLE THREADED TRUTH

EDMUND AND MIMI

IF I WAS JUST ANOTHER GIRL

EDMUND AND MIMI AND NATALIE

THEN I'M ASHAMED TO SAY THAT I'M NOT OVER YOU

EDMUND, MIMI, NATALIE, MARIA

THERE'S ONE THING I NEED TO KNOW, SO CALL ME

ALL

WHEN YOU'RE NOT SO BUSY JUST THINKING OF YOURSELF

MIMI AND MARIA

DO YOU EVER THINK OF ME, WHEN YOU LIE?
LIE DOWN IN YOUR BED, YOUR BED OF LIES
AND I KNEW BETTER, THAN TO LOOK IN YOUR EYES
THEY ONLY PRETEND, YOU WOULD BE MINE

ALL

AND YOU KNOW HOW YOU MADE ME, BELIEVE
YOU HAD ME CAUGHT IN EVERY WEB, THAT YOU WEAVED

MIMI

BUT DO YOU EVER THINK OF ME, WHEN YOU LIE?
LIE DOWN IN YOUR BED YOUR BED OF LIES

EDMUND

Human beings are as tough as cockroaches, really.
They can take so much more than they can imagine.
But, at any moment, you can crush them.

ACT I, SCENE 10

JAMES

You know,
I can understand how perhaps he couldn't call.
I mean, I myself have been in a similar situation.
Sometimes it's not easy to call.

(Silence)

TESSA

(Speaking quietly, sadly to James)
So
it turns out
you mean you meant nothing of what you said to me.

JAMES

What?

TESSA

You lied to me.

JAMES

I never lied to you.
What are you saying?

TESSA

(still quietly)
I think you did.
You came to me with someone else in your heart.
You said you loved me.
But, in fact, you weren't free to say such a thing at all.
Part of you still belonged to someone else.
Part of you was stuck to someone else.

JAMES

What who are you talking about?

TESSA

This other woman you didn't call.

JAMES

It wasn't.
I was just saying – this was long ago.
I was not stuck to someone.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I mean,
of course, as you say yourself, we never shed our pasts entirely.
But I wasn't *stuck* to anyone.

TESSA

(close to tears)
I'd like to be able to trust someone, you know.
You see the sort of life I've had
I could turn out to be a totally fucked up person myself
(now she is crying)
and what I need more than anything is someone I could trust
and I thought
even though you were a jerk
I could trust you.

JAMES

I'm a jerk?

TESSA

I mean, I'm sorry,
I mean even though you came on to me,
well, face it, James,
the way you came on to me
it wasn't exactly so suave
but I thought you were sincere
and honest
and innocent

(she is sobbing)

and for a moment I thought:
oh, I could trust you
I could trust you
and now it turns out
you're just like every other man!

*She curls up in a fetal position
underneath the desk*

JAMES

I'm not!
I'm not!
I'm not like a man at all!

*He throws himself to the ground in a heap,
bouncing and rolling several times
before he settles down in a funk.*

EDMUND

There's an inherent guilt
that lives in us
It was planted long ago
and has grown with time

ACT I, SCENE 11A

BOB

(Still holding the pizza box)
And yet, I think, nonetheless,
forgiveness is possible.

ALL

You do?

BOB

Well, sure.
Really under any circumstances.

Uh, primarily, uh, uh, the, uh, the...
primarily the question is
does man have the power to forgive himself.
And he does.
That's essentially it.

BOB (CONT'D)

I mean if you forgive yourself,
and you absolve yourself of all, uh,
of all wrongdoings in an incident,
then you're forgiven.
Who cares what other people think, because uh...

EDMUND

Was this a process you had to go through over a period of time?
Did you have to think about it?

BOB

Well, no.
Not until I was reading the Aquarian gospel did I,
did I strike upon,
you know I had almost had ends meet because I had certain
uh you know
to-be-or-not-to-be reflections about of course what I did.
And uh,

EDMUND

I'm sorry, what was that?

BOB

Triple murder.
Sister, husband. Sister, husband,
and a nephew, my nephew.
And uh, you know, uh, manic depressive.

EDMUND

Do you mind my asking what instruments did you use?

BOB

It was a knife.
It was a knife.

EDMUND

A knife?

Yes. BOB

So then, the three of them were all... EDMUND

Ssssss... BOB

(points to slitting his throat)
like that.

EDMUND
So, uh,
do you think that as time goes by,
this episode will just become part of your past,
or has it already...

BOB
It has already become part of my past.

EDMUND
Has already become part of your past.
No sleepless nights? No...

ACT I, SCENE 11B

BOB
Aw, no. In the first three or four years there was a couple of nights where I would stay up thinking about how I did it, you know. And what they said...they told me later there were so many stab wounds in my sister and I said no, that's not true at all, you know. So I think I had a little blackout during the murders, but uh...

he sits, making himself at home

Well, uh, they said there was something like thirty stab wounds in my sister, and I remember distinctly I just cut her throat once.

BOB (CONT'D)

That was all, you know, and I don't know where the thirty stab wounds came from. So that might have been some kind of blackout thing. You know, I was trying to re- re- re- uh, re- uh, uh, resurrect the uh, the crime – my initial steps, etc. You know, and uh, and uh, I took, as a matter of fact, it came right out of the, I was starting the New Testament at the time, matter of fact I'm about the only person you'll ever meet that went to, to do a triple murder with a Bible in his, in his pocket, and, and, listening to a radio. I had delusions of grandeur with the radio. Uh, I had a red shirt on that was symbolic of, of some lines in Revelation, in the, in the New Testament. Uh I had a red motor...as a matter of fact, I think it was chapter 6 something, verses 3, 4, or 5, or something where uh it was a man, it was a man. On a red horse. And, and, a man on a red horse came out, and uh, and uh uh, and he was given a knife, and unto him was given the power to kill and destroy. And I actually thought I was this person. And I thought that my red horse was this red Harley Davidson I had. And I wore...it was just, you know, it was kind of a symbolic type of thing. And and and uh, you know, uh after the murders I thought the nephew was, was the, was a new devil or something, you know. This, this is pretty bizarre now that I think back on it. I thought he was a new devil and uh, uh. I mean basically I love my sister, there's no question about that. But at times my sister hadn't come through uh for me. You know and I was in another, one of these manic attacks. And uh, and uh, uh, uh, you know, uh, I was just uh, I was just you know, I mean I was fed up with all this you know one day they treat me good and then they tell all these other people that I was a maniac and watch out for me and etc. and like that. And uh, uh, so I went to them that night to tell them I was all in trouble again, you know, and could they put me up for the night, you know, and they told me to take a hike and uh so uh, believing that I had the power to kill, uh you know, that was that for them. You know. I mean when family turns you out, that's a real blow. You know. But uh, back to the original subject of forgiveness. If I forgive myself I'm forgiven. You know that's essentially the answer. I'm the captain of my own ship. I run my own ship. Nobody can crawl in my ship unless they get permission. I just (he nods) "over there." You know. "I'm forgiven." You know. Ha-ha. You know. (Laughs.) It's as simple as that. You know. You're your own priest, you're your own leader, you're your own captain. You know. You run your own show, a lot of people know that.

Who ordered a pizza?

ACT I, SCENE 11CTESSA

I did, but that was hours ago.

Well, here it is. BOB

I'm sorry, it's too late. TESSA

Frank returns, holding a glass of water.

Too late?
I don't think so.
Who's going to pay for the pizza? BOB

Here you are Edmund. FRANK

What is this? EDMUND

You asked for a glass of water. FRANK

No, Frank.
(He laughs)
Not a glass of water.
A little milk for my tea. EDMUND

(Confused)
I'm sorry.
I don't know what I was thinking. FRANK

Never mind. EDMUND

FRANK

No, no,
I'll be right back.

Frank leaves.

BOB

Who's going to pay for the fucking pizza?

EDMUND

I'll pay for it.
Give it to me.

BOB

Plain cheese.

EDMUND

Right.
Here.
Keep the change.

BOB

Thanks. I appreciate it.
Which way did I come in?

EDMUND

That way.

BOB

Are you sure?

EDMUND

I'm sure.

BOB

Don't fuck with me.

I would never fuck with you. EDMUND

Right. BOB
Thanks again.

Bob leaves.

I'll take the pizza. BARBARA

Barbara exits with the pizza.

ACT I, SCENE 12

FRANCOIS
(Trying to whisper, or speak privately)
Maria, I think, perhaps, frankly,
we just need to make love

*

Are you serious? MARIA

*

*

FRANCOIS
it's been so long
we need to be close to one another again to have some hope.

*

*

This is disgusting. MARIA

*

We've just gotten off track. FRANCOIS

MARIA

I wouldn't touch you.
I wouldn't touch you.
Not now.
I could vomit.

*

FRANCOIS

(still trying to keep this conversation from the others)
If you come to bed with me it'll go away.
It always does.

MARIA

You're pathetic.
You've never really made love to me.
To *me*.
You don't even know who I am.
You don't even notice.

FRANCOIS

You're really crazy if that's what you think.

MARIA

Oh, I'm crazy?
You think you're in love with someone
who is repulsed by the very smell of you
and I'm the one who's crazy?
Everyone kept telling me what a great guy you were.
So I looked past the fact that you bored me to tears.
I suffered through your endless inane monologues about rocks.
I tried to see you for what you think you are,
strutting around the house as if you were a man:
you're a fucking dwarf!
I could kick you across the room.

MIMI

What a beast.

FRANCOIS

What do you mean, I'm a beast?

MIMI

Yes!

TESSA

Would you people get out?
Would you just get out?
Don't you know some people are trying to lead their lives
trying to lead lives that are not all FUCKED UP?

Don't you people know
how you treat people
this is who you are!
A person is not what job he does
or how the neurons work inside his skull
or how he looks in the suit he wears
but how he is with other people
and this then is the world he makes
for others to live in
whether this world is happy or savage!

(Silence)

FRANCOIS

It's true. It's true.
I am a beast.
Oh, god.
I'm sorry.
What can I do?
I can't say that I can't do anything about it
because I have to try
that's my responsibility
but I can't seem to do anything about it.
God, what a loathsome person I've become.

MARIA

Francois I never want to see you again.

FRANCOIS

What's wrong with me?
What do you mean?

MARIA

Just what I say.

FRANCOIS

Never?
You never want to see me again?
(to James)
You know when people say never,
I never believe they really mean it.

MARIA

Okay, then, okay:
For five years!
I don't want to see you for exactly *five* years,
not a moment before!

She vanishes

ACT I, SCENE 13

FRANCOIS

Oh right! Great!

You never know where you stand with women, do you?
Whatever you do is wrong.
One day they call you a satyr,
the next day an impotent idiot.
You can never tell what they want.
In a word, then, the poisoning has begun.
The man has been used, that's all.
One of a number of equally acceptable items
taken down from the shelf, used, put back,
never valued for himself, no,
but only for what can be gotten out of him.
And then women will complain about physical satisfaction!
Or gossip to her friends about her lover.
A man, on the other hand, would consider it a betrayal of her trust,
her privacy.

FRANCOIS (CONT'D).

It never occurs to a woman to think he
 might have miscalculated about her
 Might have second thoughts about *her*—
 in giving her what she needs to feel secure,
 having given away himself
 so that he no longer *possesses* himself
 so that he no longer knows who he is
 or if he even exists any longer!

*He turns on the radio at full, hostile volume,
 some version of Blue Danube by Strauss
 rips off his shirt in a rage and throws it across
 the stage
 and does a quick, hostile, sexually suggestive
 dance step
 and then he takes off his belt and hurls it across
 the stage
 and does another hostile dance step;*

*and soon he is taking off his shoes and hurling
 them across the stage
 then unzipping his trousers
 and he is totally into a striptease – still with
 anger and defiant sexuality –
 and he does the full Dionysian thing,
 completely into it and wild.
 This goes on for a long time – a full
 performance.*

*Eventually the music stops,
 and he is left alone there,
 suddenly embarrassed.
 He stops, looks around;
 everyone is just looking at him,
 and he is humiliated.
 Sheepishly, he starts to gather up his clothes and
 awkwardly put them on.*

ACT I, SCENE 14A

Here you are, Edmund. FRANK

What is this? EDMUND

Your tea. FRANK

My tea?
Frank, do you never listen to me? EDMUND

What? FRANK

I asked you for milk for my tea. EDMUND

Milk? FRANK

Do you never pay attention to me? EDMUND

I'm sorry.
I'll get it for you right away. FRANK

Never mind. EDMUND

FRANK

No, no, I'll be right back.

EDMUND

Never mind, Frank, it doesn't matter any more.

FRANK

I said I'll get it!

EDMUND

Fuck it!
I don't want it!

FRANK

I said I'd get it goddammit!
And I will goddammit get it!
Am I not always getting things for you?
Get this, get that,
you stand there like the Prince of Wales
while I fetch things for you night and day
and one time I happen to get the wrong thing
and you say I never listen to you?

EDMUND

Because in fact you don't!
I think I have no respect for you
or common courtesy
certainly no real sympathy
or empathy
or love as one might expect
Think how it is:
you are sleeping with another person.

*

FRANK

That's not true.

You are sleeping with Maria. EDMUND

Oh, Maria. Well... FRANK

Well, what? EDMUND

Well, she's my wife. FRANK

You mean, yes, you are sleeping with Maria. EDMUND

Sleeping with her yes.
But she's my wife, my wife. FRANK

So? EDMUND

It's not as though we were lovers. FRANK

You say you're not.
But you sleep with her.
You love her.
You love to be with her.
She makes you laugh.
She thrills you. EDMUND

FRANK

Yes, yes, yes.
So?

EDMUND

Well, there are many kinds of lovers in the world,
many kinds of relationships,
marriages even, you might say.
You are married to her.

FRANK

Only in the sense of being married
not in the sense of being married as you use the term.

EDMUND

You sleep in the same bed.

FRANK

So what?
You can sleep with us, too, if you like.

EDMUND

I beg your pardon?

FRANK

Well, we *are* friends.

EDMUND

What? *

FRANK

I mean you and I *are* friends, aren't we?
I hope. *

EDMUND

You hope?
You hope?
What do you mean you hope?

FRANK

Forget it! Just forget it!
I'll be right back with you tea... milk goddammit!

*

Frank leaves

ACT I, SCENE 14B

EDMUND

Forget it!

And what do you suppose happened when I went over for dinner
the other night?

I arrive, and he says, what is it you're doing here?

I've come to dinner, I say.

Did I invite you to dinner, he says. No I don't think so.

Why don't you have dinner with me, I say.

I can't. You know, he says, this is too much. I can't....

Just dinner, I say. Nothing more.

You say so, he says, and then you just want to stay on after dinner....

When you talk this way, I say to him, I begin to feel like I'm expecting a death sentence.

Then we argue, he says, you cajole me, you don't leave and you don't leave, I begin to feel
cornered.

I shout at him: I'm just talking about dinner!

Next thing you know, he says, you think there's no reason you shouldn't spend the night....

EDMUND (CONT 'D).

If we just sleep together, I say to him, just sleep in the same bed, nothing more

And then, he yells at me for no reason at all, when you fall asleep I look at you and I see how ugly you are when you're relaxed.

What, I say, what?

That's when you're at your ugliest when you're asleep so that I can't stand it.

When I'm asleep I'm ugly, that's what you're saying?

Or really anytime after twelve o' clock, he says: old and ugly

Every night? Are you saying every night?

Yes, yes. Almost every night. Ugly and repulsive. Like another person altogether. So that I hardly recognize you except I say to myself: right, yes, there you are again the way you really are, attacking me in the middle of the night when I'm defenceless. *

I'm attacking you?

Like the time you tried to hypnotize me while I was asleep, so I had to hit you in the face to get you to stop, and you said you were being eaten alive by worms. *

I did not. You didn't hear a word I say.

ACT I, SCENE 14C

EDMUND AND MIMI

I hang on every fucking stupid word you ever say!

EDMUND

Every stupid word I say!
You are stupid.
Stupider than ever.

MIMI

And black and venomous. Poisonous really, more poisonous now than ever before.

FRANCOIS

Ever before when?

EDMUND

Before you used to give me that filth at the dinner table – on purpose, on purpose – so that it made me shiver?

MIMI

Before that?

FRANCOIS

Before you would seek some intimacy with me, force yourself on me,

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND

demanding I make love to you....

MIMI

Excuse me, would this be after you had turned your back on me?

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND

Excuse me, if I remember correctly you always turned your back on me, always.

FRANCOIS

I was supposed to pursue you,
put my arms around you so I was always in the position of the suitor,

EDMUND AND MIMI

You were always cool,

EDMUND AND MIMI AND JAMES

no, cold,

*

FRANCOIS

I was supposed to be the beggar the suppliant
and then,

EDMUND AND MIMI

if I *had* to turn over because my arm had gone to sleep
and my shoulder feels broken
and I have a pain in my head,

EDMUND AND MIMI AND FRANCOIS

and I turned over because I couldn't bear the pain of holding you in my arms,
then did you

FRANCOIS

ever,

JAMES

ever,

MIMI

ever once,

FRANCOIS

did you ever a single fucking time turn over and hold me the way I held you?

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND AND MIMI AND
JAMES – EVERYONE

No.

EDMUND

Did you ever pursue me the way I pursued you?

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND AND MIMI AND
JAMES – EVERYONE

No.

You just got finished saying I come over to dinner and try to stay the night.

Is this not pursuing you?

Oh, sure! Now! Now! Now it's too late!

Why is it too late?

EDMUND

Because I woke up this afternoon in the middle of the afternoon with women's voices in the apartment below and I thought I had come to live finally in a home invaded by sluts! And I began to cry! I'm a man, and I began to cry! I can't take this bullshit forever! What kind of person do you think I am? Do you know why the earth has governments and dictators and none of the other planets do? Because this is the only planet where all the inhabitants never say what they think, where people lie all the time, lie and lie and lie all the time, and I am sick of it. No, you cannot stay for dinner. No! Just fucking leave me alone!

Love! Love!

Do you think love is possible these days?

EVERYONE

No. No. Love is not possible these days. No. No. No.

ACT I, SCENE 15

Over the last lines, the intensity has been building down, and the last "no"s are almost whispered. A pause after the last "no".

Then

Edmund starts singing

"Somebody to love" by Queen

and everyone joins in.

As a matter of fact,

they will never get beyond singing:

ALL

CAN ANYBODY FIND ME SOMEBODY TO LOVE *

PLEASE, ANYBODY FIND ME SOMEBODY TO LOVE *

I WORK HARD EVERYDAY *
AND I TRY AND I TRY AND I TRY *
BUT EVERYBODY WANTS TO PUT ME DOWN *
THEY SAY I'M GOING CRAZY *
THEY SAY I GOT A LOT OF WATER IN MY BRAIN *
AH, GOT NO COMMON SENSE *
I GOT NOBODY LEFT TO BELIEVE IN *
YEAH YEAH YEAH YEAH *

PLEASE, ANYBODY FIND ME SOMEBODY TO LOVE *

//: FIND ME SOMEBODY TO LOVE :// (X TIMES) *

//: SOMEBODY, SOMEBODY, SOMEBODY :// (1 TIME) *

SOMEBODY FIND ME SOMEBODY TO LOVE *
CAN ANYBODY FIND ME SOMEBODY TO LOVE *

//: FIND ME SOMEBODY TO LOVE :// (6 TIMES) *

*Because as the music grows:
A big hostile dance
with everyone throwing everyone else to the
ground over and over again,
venting their aggression
by running into the walls and trees,
throwing themselves to the ground all together in
repeated synchronous
movements,
the surrounding bushes start to grow,
the grass on the desk becomes greener,
and flowers start growing out of the couch,
perhaps a cloud appears and starts raining on
the bed.*

*Finally, all still seething with rage or disgust,
or given over to hopelessness and despair,
they are exhausted,
sprawled on the ground or on the couch or in a
chair,
and the music ends.
Silence,
as the lights go down
slowly.*

ACT II, SCENE 1A

*James comes on and places a mic on a stand in
the middle of the room,
perhaps on the table.
The sound is already amplified,
so the loud noises make everything a bit
awkward.
Eventually he starts singing "Big Black Car" by
Gregory Alan Isakov.
this is a performance for Tessa's benefit,
who's on the couch, or in the hanging chair,
staring out into the air
When James gets into the song, it really has the
feel of an intimate concert*

JAMES

YOU WERE A PHONOGRAPH, I WAS A KID
I SAT WITH AN EAR CLOSE, JUST LISTENING
I WAS THERE WHEN THE RAIN TAPPED HER WAY DOWN YOUR FACE
YOU WERE A MIRACLE, I WAS JUST HOLDIN' YOUR SPACE

WELL, TIME HAS A WAY OF THROWING IT ALL IN YOUR FACE
THE PAST, SHE IS HAUNTED, THE FUTURE IS LACED
HEARTBREAK, YA KNOW, DRIVES A BIG BLACK CAR
SWEAR I WAS IN THE BACK SEAT, JUST MINDING MY OWN

AND THROUGH THE GLASS, THE CORN CROWS COME LIKE RAIN
THEY WON'T STAY, THEY WON'T STAY
FOR TOO LONG NOW
THIS COULD BE ALL THAT WE KNOW
OF LOVE AND ALL.

WELL, YOU WERE A DANCER, AND I WAS A RAG
THE SONG IN MY HEAD, WELL, WAS ALL THAT I HAD
HOPE WAS A LETTER I NEVER COULD SEND
LOVE WAS A COUNTRY WE COULDN'T DEFEND.

AND THROUGH THE CARNIVAL WE WATCH THEM GO ROUND AND ROUND
ALL WE KNEW OF HOME WAS JUST A SUNSET AND SOME CLOWNS

WELL, YOU WERE A MAGAZINE, I WAS A PLAIN JANE
JUST WALKING THE SIDEWALKS ALL COVERED IN RAIN
LOVE TO JUST GET INTO SOME OF YOUR STORIES
ME AND ALL OF MY PLAIN JANE GLORY,
JUST ME AND ALL OF MY PLAIN JANE GLORY

ACT II, SCENE 1B

JAMES

(after a pause after the song, speaking into the mic)
You know,
maybe everybody does have a past.

(Silence)

And, you know,
it's like they say,
when you go to bed with someone,
you bring six people to bed with you,
each other,
and the other person's parents
and your own parents.

(Silence)

Well, or maybe even more people than that
because.... uhm...

(Silence)

TESSA

Are you trying to start a conversation with me?

JAMES

Yes.

TESSA

You should probably say something else.

JAMES

Right.

I was only just saying
it's like, you know,
you were saying you have this family
and this past you can't escape
and I was only saying....

TESSA

Right.

And I was saying,
maybe you want to talk about something else.

JAMES

But what I was saying was that other people
are not just your past
they are also your future.

TESSA

You mean, you're planning on having an affair with someone I know?

JAMES

No, what? No!
(he steps away from the mic)
No, I mean
what we are is humanity,
I mean, part of humanity,
we just have to accept that,
we can't separate ourselves from that
from one another
so all of us all the time...
you know...

What? TESSA

Are part of humanity. JAMES

(Silence)

You can't escape that.

(Silence)

I'm a person too, you know.
You feel you grew up with certain
difficulties in your upbringing
but so did I!
So did everyone I suppose
and this is our chance
to love one another
because of our backgrounds
to console one another
to feel close *because* of the pain we've felt
Being fucked up, you know,
might be a *basis* for love.

*

(Silence)

So, you see?

No, I don't see anything. TESSA

JAMES

You see, you could come to love me.
I'm crazy about you, Tessa,
you know, if somebody's crazy about you,
you can't resist it finally
because it feels so good to have someone be just crazy for you
and just love everything about you and everything you do
and just be delighted in you
and laugh at your jokes and feel for you
and love to do things with you
and look out for you
and all that sort of thing
I think I'm going to become irresistible to you.

TESSA

(smiling) You do?

JAMES

I'm really pretty sure of it.

Think, how,
you know,
I found my way to you,
which, in a way,
you have to believe is the most important thing in life
so you have to believe I know how to do the most important things
to have enough a sense of adventure to throw myself into the world
to see what happens
and to come up successful,
this couldn't be such a bad partner for someone.

TESSA

But what if you're not, I don't know, funny
or fun or something.

JAMES

I might not tell jokes
but I might just be ridiculous
which, in time, once you got to know me
could be constantly amusing to you.
Plus I think you're in a situation where anything could happen.

TESSA

I guess that's true.

JAMES

What else do you want of life?

TESSA

What do you mean?

JAMES

To live a life where anything could happen.
and then, of all the anythings,
you can choose what you like.

TESSA

I guess.

JAMES

Well, then.

ACT II, SCENE 1C

TESSA

There's just a whole lot to fight your way through these days
how men are,
for that matter: how women have become
all the stuff
you know what I mean
you watch television
I'm doing a twelve-step program
I'm trying to work it through
but simple love
even if you're an OK guy
I don't think you can get there from here any more.

I was just wondering a little while ago
how it would be if we were sleeping together
and I imagined we had to sleep on a giant mattress on the floor
and you were chilly
and the cat was giving birth to eight kittens in the room
and it made you cranky.
So I went out to buy you some
red thermal underwear
and I came back with the wrong thing but by then
you weren't cold anymore but you needed a travel toiletry bag.
So I went back to the store for groceries
and the store was an Arabian camel tent
with pyramids of canned foods and regular check out grocery scanners
and I bought ten dozen yellow and red roses and a bunch of six foot high gladiolas
and a silver mesh Gucci toiletry bag for ten thousand dollars

And when I got home
you were asleep
wearing the red thermal underwear that was too small for you
and a pair of red gloves
with each finger labelled with random words on colored tapes

and you were wearing my black RayBan sunglasses
that you had already stretched out and ruined with your giant head.

I crawled on top of you and started kissing you
and you opened your eyes and yelled,

TESSA (CONT'D)

"How the fuck am I supposed to pay for a ten thousand dollar toiletry bag?!"
And you climbed up on the scaffolding at the foot of the bed
and started throwing the yellow and red roses at me – thorns first
and there were thorns stuck all over my arms and legs and chest
and the roses were hanging off me
and I was rolling around the mattress trying to get them off
and you told me you knew a guy named Todd
who had thrown batteries at his girlfriend and killed her
when she had done something like that
and then you smashed a tape recorder under your boot
and took out the batteries and threw them at my head
and you climbed higher and higher up the scaffolding
saying that the higher you went the more the batteries would hurt
and that even a penny could break my skull
from way up there.

(Silence)

That's what I see when I fantasize about our being together.

*She looks at him for a moment
and then turns away from him.*

*In rage and despair, he grabs a chair,
takes it to an upstage corner, and sits facing into
the woods.*

ACT II, SCENE 2

FRANK

(gently) Here's your milk.

EDMUND

Thank you, Frank.

FRANK

I'm sorry.

EDMUND

Thank you.
I apologize.

FRANK

One looks for things
and finds something else.
There's no simple story of boy meets girl
any more
these days.

And other stories, too,
are gone entirely.

And those people
who once loved in some other way
they're gone forever, too,
their lives, their loves
their sensibilities
we will never see anything that remotely resembles them again.
How people used to love
the ways for which we now have complete contempt.

We think because the past is no longer who we are
that the age that came before us is stupid
and that how we are today
or what it is we wish to be
is the true way and the good way –
even if, in fact, we are tormented every hour of our lives –
and, in any case, our true way is passing too
to yield to yet another true way
and who's to say the past
did not have pleasures as deep as those the future holds
or deeper
or perhaps simply different?

FRANK (CONT'D)

The aging gay man who had to keep his life a secret
and found ruses and manners to hide himself
and find another who would share his inner world
we don't know how it is to live like this today
that sense of nuance and subtlety
the decor of a home
that would suggest but not declare
the inner life of its host
that finely developed ability
to discriminate the gentlest hint
all this is gone
and it would be wrong to mourn its loss
and the suffering that so often went with it
and yet I still have friends who are lost
because it is lost
their lives
the lives they thought they would live all their lives
vanished suddenly
with nowhere to go
just as all of us
will one day be gone

our lives unrecoverable
the civilizations of the past
so distant from us
as to be more alien than foreign countries
human beings we recognize
are in some way related to us
and yet so different we cannot know
their inner lives
the only lives that matter
their private lives
the lives they thought they lived
are lost forever

FRANK (CONT'D)

and even as we lie today from day to day
each day is lost as we live it
never to return
we shed our lives as we live them
we die each day
our lives becoming first stories
and then barely remembered dreams
the fleeting stuff of mortality
so that even as we live
we disappear
and all that we have treasured most
disappears along with us.

ACT II, SCENE 3

Maria appears

FRANCOIS

Maria!
How time flies!

MARIA

No wonder your family won't speak to you
and every woman you've ever been with has gone crazy
or killed herself.
Did you ever think about that?
It's not them, it's you!
You're like a baby with a switch blade.
So fucking needy
and when you get everything just the way you want it
you attack whoever gives in to you
for being weak and pathetic and worthless.

FRANCOIS

Okay. Okay.
This is how it is.
We're through.
Forget everything I ever said to make up.

FRANCOIS (CONT'D)

The truth is: Frank is a better person than I am anyway.
I've never been a good person
or even an acceptable person
I'm actually a person of almost despicable character.
You should go back to Frank
what more could you want?
He's a wonderful person
loving and kind and considerate and generous.
What could you have been thinking
not just to be grateful for that?

MARIA

Probably you're just saying that,
but I think it's true.

FRANCOIS

It is true.
In fact, all you've ever done is string me along
out of some sense of discontent
you never could define!
You never loved me if you think about it.
Your heart has always been with Frank.

MARIA

What he says is true, Frank.
I do love you.
I'm sorry for all I've done to hurt you.
I don't know why I ran away from you.
I think I never felt you wanted me
but I want you, Frank,
let's never leave one another's side again.

FRANK

It's too late, Maria.

MARIA

Too late?

FRANK

I'm sorry.
I would never do anything to hurt you
because I do love you.
But now, you see, without you,
I've turned more and more to Edmund
for solace and companionship and,
finally,
love.
And now I couldn't betray him
after all he's done for me
his being there for me
his loyalty
he's completely won me over
and I think I never could find my way back to you.

EDMUND

Don't say that, Frank.
The truth is, you've never left her.
You've never been with me.
I've always felt you left half yourself behind.
And you could never let go completely
and be with me
the way I need someone to be
for my sake.
Go back to her.
She's your family.
You'll never be happy without her.

FRANK

Love these days:
it is such a strange and difficult terrain
so often we don't know where we are
or whether we're in the right place at all
we can't find a place that feels like home
our hearts are lost.
And I have to admit,
the place that feels like home to me
is with you, Maria.

MARIA

Oh, Frank,
I'm so happy
to feel we can start out again in life together
and have a whole second life.
One doesn't just throw away a marriage on a whim
for some fleeting romance or sudden passion
all those years
the chance of having an entire lifetime together
that's the truest treasure of all.

Shall we have a drink –
or shall we have some tea?
Is this tea, Tessa?

*Maria spills it down the front of Francois's
trousers.*

ACT II, SCENE 4A

FRANCOIS

Oh! Oh!
Yes, it is hot.

MARIA

Oh, Francois, I'm so sorry.

FRANCOIS

No, you're not!

MARIA

Here, give me your trousers,
you don't want to have a stain.

*She unbuckles his belt, starts to take off his
trousers;*

*Tessa slowly stands up,
horrified by this further display of her family's
behavior*

TESSA

Mother!

FRANCOIS

Excuse me. Please.
I don't think I'll be taking off my trousers.

TESSA

Mother!

MARIA

I'm only thinking what's practical!

FRANK

Let's all take off our trousers, then,
so you don't feel embarrassed.

FRANCOIS

Frank, you are the perfect host, but...

TESSA

Are you going to do this?

*He takes off his trousers
as Maria helps to remove Francois's;*

ACT II, SCENE 4B

*meanwhile,
Gunter and Natalie enter;*

*they stand, their clothes dishevelled,
obviously having been in bed together,
looking at what's going on*

I don't think this is necessary,
a little tea can't hurt.

FRANCOIS

Natalie, where have you been?
And who is this?

MIMI

This is Gunter.

NATALIE

Hello, Gunter.

MARIA

Hello, Gunter.

FRANK

How do you do?

GUNTER

Is this your idea of getting even with me?

MIMI

I don't know what you mean.

NATALIE

Oh, yes, you do.

MIMI

GUNTER

I'm not taking off my trousers.

MIMI

Oh,

I have an idea.

*

All the men take off their trousers
and I will take photos of all of you.

*

I've always thought:

what would it be

to do a whole series of modern torsos?

*

GUNTER

Is this what people do here?

Everyone takes off his trousers?

JAMES

I'm not taking off my trousers I can tell you that.

EDMUND

I'm taking off my trousers.

NATALIE

Here.

I'll help you with your trousers, Gunter.

Natalie goes for Gunter's pants.

GUNTER

No, no.

I don't remove my trousers.

NATALIE

Come on, Gunter.

What's the difference?

NATALIE (CONT'D)

You could be wearing a swimming suit.
Lift your foot, Gunter.

GUNTER

(seeing all the other men taking off their trousers)
Well, I don't know if this is right.

MARIA

Come along, James.
Is it James?

JAMES

Yes.

MARIA

Don't be shy.
We're among friends here.
Let me help you get your pants off.

JAMES

I don't think so.
I'm not a stripper.

MARIA

Of course you're not.
Taking off your trousers doesn't make you a stripper
or all men would be strippers.

TESSA

How can I have a relationship with a man
when my mother takes the pants off of everyone
who comes into the house.

Maria starts to take off his trousers

ACT II, SCENE 5

MIMI

Shirts off guys.

*

Now, if you will all lie down,
come,

lie down here in a row

act natural

*

not too close together....

*Tessa has ended up sitting in a corner,
like a Schiele doll,
her knees pulled up under her chin,
her dress pulled up to her waist,
and she is naked under her dress
and looking forlorn,
like a broken doll,
her head tilted over to one side.*

NATALIE

Come, Francois.

FRANCOIS

(as he cooperates, led by Natalie)

You never think

I may have feelings, too.

I want just as much as you

*

to have a deep and meaningful relationship

but in my own way

*

*

MIMI

that's good
I'll show you what I'm going to do
I'm going to take
polaroids of your torsos
five male torsos I will call them.

*
*

Here, Francois,
I'll take you first.

*She starts to mix water and plaster of Paris
in a bucket;*

*Natalie gets Francois settled,
his head in her lap;*

*in fact,
though all the men have their pants off,
Mimi will never get beyond the cast of Francois;*

*suddenly, now, there is a tableau:
The men all lying down, propped up on their
elbows,
the women arrayed around them
as though at a picnic;
we are at a salon
where there will be a philosophical conversation*

ACT II, SCENE 6A

MARIA

I love art
and artists
I love a person who makes something.

*

Sentimental Italian music comes up

*under the dialogue,
a violin or mandolin*

Because art
art is where we discover
in the freedom of our imaginations
what it is to be a human being

NATALIE

Or else, we discover it in love.
we discover truly who we are
in our relationships
that's where we can see the full complexity
and wonder of a person

*

*

*

MARIA

Of course, you're talking here
not just about sensual love
what the Greeks called *erotike*
but also about love as friendship,
what they called *philia*.

*

Because the Greeks thought
love is not just a sentiment
but is actually the physical principle of the universe itself
the very stuff that binds the universe together.
And without it the whole world just falls apart.

NATALIE

*

This is fine for you to say
but it's not so clear you can know what it is to love
and so what it is to be a human being
unless you live the life of a bourgeois person in a bourgeois country
because
under Stalin
the Russians only made love an average of 1.2 times a month
and then not very happily
and mostly in the doggie position

*

*

TESSA

You look around the world,
and you think:
should there be love in a world like this?
Or should there only be politics?

*

MIMI

*

Still, we carry on.

TESSA

We shouldn't.

MARIA

No matter what,
you can't stop living.

GUNTER

And yet, it can seem strange
to live in a world where, just to get a lipstick,
you have to choose between
Red
or Hot Red
or Classic Red
or Real Red
or Radiant Red
or Russian Red
Reggae Red
Love that Red
Uptown Red
Drop Dead Red
Red Red Red
Crimson Splendour
Guerlain no 102 Rouge Boléro KissKiss Hydro-soft
Guerlain no 103 Rouge Satin Tango KissKiss Hydro-soft
Guerlain no 104 Rouge Passsion KissKiss Hydro-soft
Cherry
Crushed Cherry
Cherry Blossom
Very Very Cherry
Cherries Jubilee
Hard Candy Tramp....

(silence;

bewilderment and awe at Gunter's

knowledge of lipstick)

FRANCOIS

The world can be so confusing,
and we live in constant anguish.

*

FRANCOIS (CONT'D)

You have to reinvent your relationships every day
discover all over every day what it might be
what a woman wants
what you yourself might want.

MARIA

And then, sometimes
you might have love affairs
or you even agree to have love affairs
even while,
you remain faithful to one another in your love for one another
and yet,
even at the moment you are going to bed with another person,
it makes you feel even more alone and betrayed

*
*
*

FRANCOIS

And then
when you say, for example, do you love me?
then she replies I don't know you
because in fact she never will, she never will.

JAMES

Why not?

FRANCOIS

Because I rediscover who I am every day,
These days,
it's not easy for a man and a woman to fall in love.

*

MARIA

It never was.

FRANK

One needs courage.

*

EDMUND

Human beings.

ACT II, SCENE 6B

MARIA

It turns out life is nothing but loose ends.
It's not that, just because one has many love affairs
or love affairs with people one shouldn't
that that makes you a person incapable of love
or a person who has no feelings

I myself

I pray for a better world where there will be no such thing
as unrequited love and pain and suffering
and women can return the love of any man
where people live in peace
where the whole world will be like Tuscany
the evening sunset on the vines
and olive trees
a golden glow
roses growing up the sides of farm houses
a glass of wine in the lingering twilight
grandchildren playing down by the arbor
reading by the pool

the circus performers from the village
coming out to the house for lunch
entertaining the children with their clowning
and juggling
the family in the kitchen
making dinner together
the children picking fresh vegetables
the neighboring farmer holding forth
reciting Dante by heart
stanza after stanza
and bursting into song
arias from Verdi
the mother sitting at the hearth
giving her breast to her baby

MARIA (CONT'D).

fresh herbs
the fennel and the basil
the roasted garlic and the fish stew
we'll have our own wine
from the vines nearby the house
our own olive oil
from the trees on the nearby hillside
we will laugh and cry and tell stories
we will have love affairs
and no one will be hurt

oh Tuscany Tuscany
how I long for you and love you.

*

ACT II, SCENE 6C

*

*

EDMUND

*

What I long for is a moment
and nothing more
an intense moment
a moment even of pain
or especially of pain
never mind the falling in love
the consummation
the lifelong pleasure
let us cut right to the end of it
the searing pain
that lets us know
we did once long and love
we are alive
and this awful pain proves it
over and over again.

*

GUNTER

Or it may be
rather than feeling the pain ourselves
we like to inflict it on others
to enable them to feel what we ourselves cannot
and this can be a form of generosity
giving the sensation of life to another
life at its most intense and intimate

*

ACT II, SCENE 7

*Natalie now launches into an aria
whose sole purpose is to get Mimi's attention
and seduce her.*

NATALIE

Sometimes you might like to say to someone
hey! go ahead
do your worst
stick it in me,
up my ass,
piss on me,
double up your belt,
make it sting
make me lie still
make me whimper
make me beg

Because I like to feel some leather
up between my legs from time to time
with a little silk
a knee up in my crotch
nails down my sides
bone against my clit
a little bit of rubbing
The old double dildo
and you've got to like an animal from time to time.

Or you might say to your partner
make it hurt
spank me, pinch me,
give me an enema
bite me, burn me,
but watch out for the joints, the nerves,
watch out for the blood vessels, you know
I'm taking this for granted,
this will be safe
think about the front of the thigh,
the shoulder, the upper arm,
use a little soap and water,
alcohol, Betadine,

NATALIE (CONT'D).

keep it perpendicular to the skin
make a gentle cut
wait a minute before the blood begins to flow
ad then another cut or prick
like lightning going through the body

and when it's done
rub it with wine
stain it
leave a mark there
because these marks are here for life
these are commitments being made
we're never going back

MIMI

never.

NATALIE

And what do you need in life finally but
some bandaids
smelling salts
sterile cotton

MIMI

bandage scissors

NATALIE

bolt cutters

MIMI

aspirin

NATALIE

spare keys

MIMI

a marlinspike

ice pack NATALIE

hydrogen peroxide MIMI

rectal thermometer NATALIE

KY jelly MIMI

tweezers. NATALIE

*Someone starts playing "Flying without wings"
by Westlife on the piano while Mimi and Natalie
continue.*

MIMI
And then you can feel free to say to your mate
you could tie me down
so I can't jump when you cut me
you know
Do it slow
then work me over
this is what I like
and tell me bedtime stories

NATALIE
You could powder me.
You could oil me.
You could dress me up.
You could take me out.

ACT II, SCENE 8

Maria then starts singing

MARIA

EVERYBODY'S LOOKING FOR THAT SOMETHING
ONE THING THAT MAKES IT ALL COMPLETE
YOU'LL FIND IT IN THE STRANGEST PLACES
PLACES YOU NEVER KNEW IT COULD BE

SOME FIND IT IN THE FACE OF THEIR CHILDREN
SOME FIND IT IN THEIR LOVER'S EYES
WHO CAN DENY THE JOY IT BRINGS
WHEN YOU'VE FOUND THAT SPECIAL THING
YOU'RE FLYING WITHOUT WINGS

FRANCOIS

SOME FIND IT SHARING EVERY MORNING
SOME IN THEIR SOLITARY NIGHTS
YOU'LL FIND IT IN THE WORDS OF OTHERS
A SIMPLE LINE CAN MAKE YOU LAUGH OR CRY

FRANCOIS AND JAMES

YOU'LL FIND IT IN THE DEEPEST FRIENDSHIP
THE KIND YOU CHERISH ALL YOUR LIFE
AND WHEN YOU KNOW HOW MUCH THAT MEANS
YOU'VE FOUND THAT SPECIAL THING
YOU'RE FLYING WITHOUT WINGS

MARIA AND TESSA AND EDMUND

SO IMPOSSIBLE AS THEY MAY SEEM
YOU'VE GOT TO FIGHT FOR EVERY DREAM
'CAUSE WHO'S TO KNOW WHICH ONE YOU LET GO
WOULD HAVE MADE YOU COMPLETE

*They start dancing.
Maybe it's a slow dance with different couples,
Francois and Maria,
Edmund and Frank,
Barbara and James,
Tessa and Gunter,
and in the middle Mimi and Natalie*

MIMI AND NATALIE

WELL, FOR ME IT'S WAKING UP BESIDE YOU
TO WATCH THE SUNRISE ON YOUR FACE
TO KNOW THAT I CAN SAY I LOVE YOU
AT ANY GIVEN TIME OR PLACE

MARIA

IT'S LITTLE THINGS THAT ONLY I KNOW

ALL (EXCEPT TESSA AND JAMES)

THOSE ARE THE THINGS THAT MAKE YOU MINE

*As the couples keep dancing and singing
Mimi and Natalie start kissing.
Then thousand lightning bugs fly
through the forest
and the flowers on the couch start glowing.
The birch trees bend toward
Mimi and Natalie, and they start floating
mid air, rose petals falling from the sky*

MARIA AND FRANCOIS

AND IT'S LIKE FLYING WITHOUT WINGS
'CAUSE YOU'RE MY SPECIAL THING
I'M FLYING WITHOUT WINGS

FRANK AND EDMUND

AND YOU'RE THE PLACE MY LIFE BEGINS
AND YOU'LL BE WHERE IT ENDS

MARIA AND TESSA

I'M FLYING WITHOUT WINGS

TESSA

AND THAT'S THE JOY YOU BRING

MARIA AND TESSA AND MIMI

I'M FLYING WITHOUT WINGS

*At the end there is silence,
and the sound of the surf.
After a moment,
Mimi and Natalie disappear into
the forest,
hand in hand*

ACT II, SCENE 9A

GUNTER

Dear God,
did you hear these women singing together?

MARIA

Thank you, Gunter.

GUNTER

But, no,
could you hear yourself?

The two of you
mother and daughter
your voices flowing in and out of one another
like quicksilver
like a mountain brook
like satin sheets

MARIA

Oh, Gunter, really.

GUNTER

Like the spring breeze in the branches
like the silk camisole
beneath the summer dress

MARIA

Gunter, please.

GUNTER

Like the summer light
falling on the pillow
in the late afternoon
and the ocean waves are quiet
as the tide goes out once more

FRANK

Gunter.

ACT II, SCENE 9B

GUNTER

My mother sang to me every night
when she put me to bed
and sometimes my grandmother would join her
the two of them singing to me
their duets and solos
from the operas we had attended all together
and I have often thought
one never knows
what one seeks in life

GUNTER (CONT'D).

why this man loves a woman with fair hair
 or this woman needs a man who seems substantial
 while that woman needs a man who is tender
 or even weak
 a man may love a woman
 or a man may love a man
 but why will he love this woman or that man
 these things that make us long for another human being
 or need another
 that make us unable to sleep
 or make us tremble
 make us perspire with a passion we don't understand
 it is so specific and so sickening and so potent
 it frightens us

we run from it
 we choose instead some more peaceful seeming love
 some love we can bear from day to day
 even though eventually it may come to bore us
 and we forget what it is that makes our knees buckle
 until, by accident,
 we come across it again in the most unexpected place
 as I have just done this moment

with you, Maria, and with you, Tessa
 hearing the two of you sing
 I recognize: I love you
 I love the two of you together, singing
 and I need you
 I want you
 I need to marry you
 please, Maria, please
 (he is on his knees and weeping now)
 I beg you
 I can't help myself
 I can only plead that I can't help myself
 or else I would
 I only thank god in this moment
 that the passion I can't resist is this one
 instead of, as it could have been –
 who knows?

GUNTER (CONT'D).

we seem to have no control of these things –
a passion to whip someone or shoot them
I beg you, Maria
I beg you, Tessa

ACT II, SCENE 9C

MARIA

Gunter.

GUNTER

come with me
sing to me
I'll take care of you as you've never been cared for before.

FRANK

Gunter.

GUNTER

What do you say, Tessa?
I pray to God
I'll give you anything you want.

EDMUND

This is too bizarre.

GUNTER

The Mormons love two women all the time
or three or four

EDMUND

Because of the way they sing?

GUNTER

Perhaps!
I don't know.
And why not?

JAMES

This is insane!

GUNTER

I don't say it's not insane.
I apologize for it.
But I can't control the way I feel.

MARIA

You should!

GUNTER

I can't.
I won't.
I love you, Maria.

MARIA

You are a creep, Gunter!
No one likes this sort of weird
kinky kind of thing.
I am a normal person, Gunter,
with normal sorts of normal feelings.

GUNTER

What I feel feels normal to me.

FRANK

I've never heard of such a thing.

GUNTER

This happens all the time
someone becomes transported by another person
this is what is called love.

MARIA

This is sick.

JAMES

Sick.

MARIA

Sick.

FRANCOIS

Do you think you can just come in and take another man's love
right from under his nose
and this is an acceptable thing to do.

GUNTER

I tell you, I can't be blamed.

FRANCOIS

Who would you ever blame then
if not you yourself?
Would you blame a man
who likes to be tickled with pheasant feathers?

GUNTER

No. No, I wouldn't.

FRANCOIS

That was a bad example.
Would you blame....

GUNTER

You can't blame anyone for love.
You can weep for them
but you can't blame them.

I could be so happy with the two of you
so filled with joy
it would overflow and fill your whole world
so that finally
you would be happy too,
I know it
just as my mother and grandmother were
taking care of me when I was a little boy
chastising me when I had done wrong
spanking me if I needed it
and sometimes I must admit
I did need it.
And we could be just this happy together
if you would just give me a chance.
I beg you, Maria.
I beg you.

*He has Maria's foot, which he is trying to kiss;
and she is trying to get away from him;*

*Francois comes and gently pries Gunter loose,
and takes him to one side,
putting an arm around his shoulder*

FRANCOIS

Here, here, Gunter, come with me.

GUNTER

(weeping)
I love her.
I'm afraid I can't get over it.

FRANCOIS

Many people have had to get over it, Gunter.
She is a wonderful woman,
with a big heart,
but she can't love everyone.

*Francois helps Gunter to a place to sit down,
where Gunter sits in absolute desolation
and then gradually rolls under the desk in a fetal
position.*

MARIA

I wish I could love you, Gunter,
I would if I could,
but it is the nature of women
they are able to love only one man

or two

or so
but there comes a limit
or not
but with me this is how it is.

ACT II, SCENE 10

Bertha, an elderly woman, enters.

BERTHA

I'm terribly sorry
we've been having a party next door
and suddenly I looked around and my little boy was gone.
I suppose he just ran out.
Have you seen my son?

MARIA

Oh. No.
I'm sorry.
Let's look for him.

EDMUND

Could he have come in through the kitchen?

FRANK

Or he might have come in through the terrace.

MARIA

Oh, how unsettling.

I remember I lost Tessa when she was a tiny little thing
and we didn't find her for hours

do you remember Frank

and she was down by the ocean playing in the surf

and just as I spotted her

she tipped upside down in the water like a little cork

and of course she couldn't swim

and so she couldn't get herself right side up

I got to her just in time

and I thought

thank God

if we'd found her a moment later

it would have been too late.

*An awkward silence at this story she shouldn't
have told Bertha at this moment*

FRANK

I'm sure he's fine.

Children these days are tough little creatures.

MARIA

We should branch out

so we cover all directions.

JAMES

How old is your little boy?

BERTHA

He will be thirty-two on his next birthday.

Silence.

*Everyone – on the verge of scattering in
different directions – stops.*

*They all slowly turn their heads toward Gunter,
under the desk.*

BERTHA (CONT'D)

Gunter!
Whatever are you doing there?
I was worried sick!
Where have you been?

GUNTER

I don't know.
I was taken outdoors by – someone –
I don't see her here.

*Hilda, an even more elderly woman enters.
She shouts everything she says.*

HILDA

Have you found him, Bertha?

BERTHA

It seems he has been here all the time.

HILDA

What have you been doing, Gunter?

GUNTER

I'm sorry.

MARIA

And this must be your grandmother?

HILDA

I beg your pardon?

MARIA

Would you be Gunter's grandmother
he was talking so much about.

HILDA

Not at all.
I am his mother's lover.
We have been together thirty-seven years this September
and never had an unhappy day.

*

MARIA

Oh,
well,
I'm so glad to hear it.

FRANK

Relationships can be so complicated these days.

HILDA

Relationships have always been complicated.
Why is it people these days think they have invented complications?
Bertha and I had a hell of a time getting together
it was never easy
all the people who thought they had a corner
on the true way of living on earth
and they ought to bury anyone else who had hold of a different stick

BERTHA

Hilda...

HILDA

but we did it
because what the hell is the point of life
if it's not to live it?

FRANK

Yes, well, no doubt.

HILDA

What?

FRANK

(shouting)

I say, no doubt.

HILDA

What the hell,
do you think I'm hard of hearing?
It's a timid age we live in.

BERTHA

Hilda...

HILDA

The landscape of love has always been a rocky one,
filled with swamps and pitfalls
brambles and sticky bushes
and slippery slopes and precipices
what the hell has ever been the point
except to slash your way through the underbrush to score?

BERTHA

Of course, without hurting anyone.

HILDA

Of course. I'm not a Visigoth.
Although sometimes, let's face it,
shit happens.
You give it your best effort.
I try to be very, very careful –
but you can't hold back just because there's no such thing as life insurance.

HILDA (CONT'D)

Sometimes we don't find anyone.
Sometimes we hurt someone.
Sometimes it doesn't last.

BERTHA

Hilda...

HILDA

Sometimes a love has the lifespan of a butterfly.
So does life itself.
We make the best of it.
Because time is running out.
Time is running out!
This is the only shot you've got!

BERTHA

Hilda...

HILDA

You've got to set a course and damn the torpedoes.
And what do they mean you can pursue happiness
but you can never find it.
Why do they tell you such a thing,
just to keep you from doing it?
Bertha and me: we've found happiness.
We are happy people.
I recommend it!

BERTHA

Hilda: sometimes she gets a little carried away

HILDA

On a rant...

BERTHA

But she's really a very nice person.

MARIA

Will you stay for tea?

HILDA

No, thank you, it's naptime for Bertha and me.
And for you, too, Gunter.

GUNTER

I was having a little nap.

HILDA

You're going to be much more comfortable in your own bed.
Come along, Gunter.

BERTHA

Thank you so much for looking after Gunter.

MARIA

Not at all.

BERTHA

Come, Gunter.

GUNTER

Goodbye.

Bertha exits, followed by Gunter.

HILDA

Nice chatting.
You'll have to come and visit us sometime
if you like to get naked in a hot tub.

HILDA (CONT'D)

Bertha likes things a little kinky
but I'm always telling her:
not with the guests, Bertha,
not with the guests!
People don't like things out of the ordinary.
Well, they're young.
Once you get to be my age,
you like to make sure you haven't missed anything.
Do come and visit us.
You're lovely people.
And don't forget,
for us it's open house every day.

She leaves.

ACT II, SCENE 11

Barbara enters, carrying the pizza box.

BARBARA

Have you decided about supper?
The pizza's getting cold.

MARIA

Oh, Barbara, we forgot all about it.
Come, people, what would we like?

TESSA

Whatever.

JAMES

Do you have any peanut butter?

FRANK

Salmon would be nice.

Just some raspberries for me. EDMUND

ACT II, SCENE 12

Bob enters

Raspberries? MARIA

Some pale yellow raspberries. EDMUND

This is the same place. BOB

Oh, it's the pizza man. MARIA

Did you phone for another pizza? BOB

EVERYONE
I didn't phone.
Did you phone?
No.
No, I didn't phone.
Etc.

We didn't phone. EDMUND

MARIA
I'm terribly sorry if there has been some confusion....

BOB

You know, pizza is not returnable.

MARIA

I don't think anyone here is going to pay for a pizza we didn't order.

BOB

I am not taking this pizza back to the pizza parlor.
Who is going to pay me for the pizza?

TESSA

What is this, some form of extortion?

EDMUND

I'll pay for the pizza.
Here.

BOB

Last time, if I'm not mistaken
you gave me a good tip as well.

EDMUND

Here's a tip.

BOB

What's happened?
You've lost your job since we last saw one another?

EDMUND

OK. Here.

ACT II, SCENE 13

TESSA

This is enough.
I, for one, I have to get back to work.
Maybe no one else has to work,
but I have to work.
And work is good.
This is another way to spend your life.

MARIA

Work?
What are you working on, Tessa?

TESSA

I am doing a translation for James.

MARIA

A translation.

JAMES

About love.
And women.

MARIA

Love, of course. Love.
Well, we know.

TESSA

What do you know?

FRANK

What is it you have?
It's not as though none of us have ever worked.

Or loved. MARIA

Or loved. FRANCOIS
All of us have worked.
It may be we can work with you.

Let me see.

TESSA
Please don't get mixed up in this
and make everything all topsy turvy.

MARIA
Well, I don't think anyone would make it topsy turvy.

FRANCOIS
What is this?

JAMES
It's for a book.
It has some photographs and some text.

FRANCOIS
(looking at the pages on the desk)
Right. Right. Right.
I think we can help with this.
I think, you know,
what you have is good
but it doesn't go quite far enough.

JAMES
Far enough?

FRANCOIS

I think love is more intense, clearly, than what you have here....

JAMES

I don't think you ought to get...

FRANCOIS

You know, tragedies
and people fighting
slamming car doors,
driving off and leaving a woman by the side of the road at night.
At least,
this is what I hear.
Probably I could help you.
Let me have a pen.

MARIA

Here.

TESSA

Pardon me saying so
but I don't think any of you knows anything about love
and now you think you're going to write the book!?

FRANCOIS

We're not going to write anything
or even change what has been written.
But, well....
for instance, this, with this photograph:
"a slender, lovely, graceful girl,
just budding into supple line" –
who would say such a thing?
it would be pretentious
of course I'm not a writer,
still, nonetheless....

MARIA

Who could speak of love
if not you?

FRANCOIS

That's kind of you to say.
Not that I know so much
but perhaps I can help a little bit.

handing the paper to Maria

Now this is just a suggestion, but,
you might try, for example –
here....

*As she reads it and passes it to Frank
who passes it to Edmund who passes it to James
while Francois continues*

JAMES

Everyone seems to be an expert....

FRANCOIS

And then, too....

he begins to edit another bit of paper

you might say.... just as an example....

TESSA

What is this?

FRANCOIS

What is what?

TESSA

“in copulating
one discovers
That.”

What is “That?”

FRANCOIS

That’s what Roberto wrote.

MARIA

Or Francesco.

FRANCOIS

Or Francesco.

TESSA

I know that.
But what is “That.”

JAMES

(sitting, head in hands)
God.

FRANCOIS

That’s what I have translated from his Italian.

TESSA

I thought it was already in English and you were translating into Italian.

FRANCOIS

Oh.

TESSA

So now you are translating from English into English. Okay.
But the "That." that you have in that.
(pointing to the piece of paper)
What is "That"?

FRANCOIS

That's what he says.
It's his idea, it's his sentiment.
What do you mean, what is that?
I'm not going to change it.

TESSA

Look here at the phrase:
"In copulating
one discovers
That."
What is the "That" that one discovers.

FRANCOIS

Oh, "That."
Well,
I don't know.

TESSA

You don't know?
You are translating this
whatever you are doing to it
and you don't know what it means?

FRANCOIS

It's a mystery.
It's an unknown.
It is the great, wonderful unknowable deep knowledge
one discovers that is different for everyone.
Possibly.
I don't know.

FRANCOIS (CONT'D).

I'm just trying to bring a little depth and sophistication and complexity to the text because, let's face it, our young friend James here, well, it may be that he doesn't know a great deal about love.

TESSA

Who doesn't know anything about love?

FRANCOIS

I don't say he doesn't know anything about it, possibly just not so much in its details and subtleties.

TESSA

Are you crazy?
You know nothing about love, nothing!
I've never known a man
who had so much tenderness as James

so much caring
a man so solicitous
who had so much regard for another person
and so much respect
and loyalty
and steadfastness
and dependability and sweetness.
Someone you could count on
when you're feeling vulnerable
to take care of you
even when you yourself are maybe not so friendly
in a bad mood
to have the strength and goodness
not to be put off by that
but to stay right with you
until you could accept his caring
and his kindness
and his carefulness
and his thoughtfulness
and his gentleness
and his honor

During Tessa's outburst "What would I do without you" by Drew Holcomb has started playing. Perhaps Gunter is heard singing it through the trees.

Everyone is stunned by her output of affection for James;

*no one is more stunned than James;
then she realizes what she has done
and turns away*

MARIA

That's lovely, Tessa,
and yet, to be fair,
it's not as though Francois knows nothing about love.
In fact, he knows a great deal about love, about passion
and excitement
about what it is to thrill to life
and to be thrilling to a woman
to make a woman laugh
to make her quiver and cry with happiness
to make her weep with sorrow that her life will ever end
to hold a moment in her heart as though it were forever
and you would never let it go
and you long for it and pine for it to return
you carry it with you in your heart your entire life
you cherish it
you never forget it
because it was the moment that made your entire life worth living

*Silence;
everyone is stunned by this confession of love for
Francois*

FRANCOIS

Maria

*
*

MARIA

Francois

*
*

FRANK

Indeed,
I think I know something about love myself,
about patience and forbearance and generosity
about wishing for happiness for another person,
Maria:
whatever might bring that to her
wishing that for her
even if it means not having such happiness oneself
but taking real joy in the happy life of one another.

*Silence;
Francois takes Maria's hand
and they leave together.*

*Frank starts to follow them out, stops, looks
after them.*

ACT II, SCENE 14

JAMES

Will you go away with me?

TESSA

Live with you, you mean?

JAMES

Yes.

TESSA

How could anyone do that
when you see how hard and painful it is?

JAMES

Not for everyone it seems to me.

TESSA

For everyone. Yes. For everyone.

Edmund is watching Frank from the other side.

JAMES

And yet, at the same time,
maybe love is something that will grow,
these things
you never can tell
not every love begins like in the movies
where a person is swept off her feet

sometimes it grows and deepens over the years
you grow together
until in old age
you are so close
so intimate
you are like the home you live in
indivisible
and so deeply happy in the place you live
you can't even understand it.

Maybe this is not your only choice
but this could still be one of your options, Tessa.

How about just going out to dinner with me?
There's no food in the house, right?

Silence.
The music has stopped as well.

There's food in the house, but you don't feel like cooking.
Am I right?

TESSA

Right.

JAMES

You throw on a little something,
we go to Tre Scalini,
what's to lose?

TESSA

Well....

*Frank continues to look in the direction in which
Maria left.*

JAMES

How many times have you eaten at Tre Scalini?

TESSA

My parents took me there when I was a kid.

JAMES

Now you go back as a grownup.
Tessa, time is passing,
you've been to Tre Scalini only once in your life
already you're a grownup
you could get to be sixty years old
still sitting home
waiting for the right person to call,
hoping to go to Tre Scalini one more time before you die.

Let me take you out.
Let's go somewhere.
Maybe go on from dinner to a party
maybe stay up all night
go for a walk on the beach in the early morning
maybe not
this is how it is to be alive
it's no big deal.

Edmund turns and leaves.

TESSA

I don't know.
Nowadays it seems to me
you have to be so brave
even to accept a dinner invitation –
and to fall in love
that seems like a calamity,
even life or death,
and at the least a swamp.

Frank turns around – sees Edmund has gone

And, anyway,
I'm not dressed.

JAMES

I have something for you.

*He hands her a red satin slip. "Kiss me" by
Sixpence None The Richer starts playing.
Perhaps it's Natalie serenading Mimi in the
bushes.*

TESSA

This is a slip.

JAMES

Everyone's wearing slips these days

TESSA

As a dress?

JAMES

Yes.

TESSA

To go out?

Sure. JAMES

*She steps into the slip;
Frank, looking lost,
sits on the couch.*

I like it. TESSA

I thought it would be good on you. JAMES

they laugh

Do you believe in love at first sight?

(a long pause)

Yes. TESSA

James and Tessa kiss – a long, long kiss.

Do you dance? JAMES

Of course I dance. TESSA

*They dance.
Frank puts his head slowly into his hands.
The lights fade to twilight and darkness.*