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## Three plays : The other woman, Banana split, Awa' the crow road ; and an essay, Writing the end

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THREE PLAYS: *THE OTHER WOMAN*,  
*BANANA SPLIT*, *AWA' THE CROW ROAD*; AND  
AN ESSAY, *WRITING THE END*.

Heather Nimmo

Doctor of Philosophy (Writing)

Community Services, Education and Social Science

January 2005

Abstract: *The Other Woman* is an eighty-minute stage play which asks the question: Do women really play the political game differently? A high-flying politician can't admit to a small mistake. A woman kills herself. Does her mother want justice or revenge? *Banana Split* is a ninety-minute comedy for two actors which investigates life after divorce, the connections between risk and reward, and the implications of doubling (or coupling). The play asks a number of questions: Is it riskier to stay or to go? Which is the more damaging to a relationship—nostalgia for a golden age or the fantasy of a perfect future? *Awa' the Crow Road* is a half-hour play for radio. Two brothers are brought to Australia from Scotland, as children. Their father tells them, 'We're here. We're Australian. We're not going back.' One brother goes back to Scotland, never to return. The other stays in Australia, never to leave. Thirty years pass. They meet again when their father is 'awa' the crow road'. The essay, *Writing the end*, examines selected literary and performance theory on endings from the perspective of the playwright who must write the end but avoid 'a strangulation'. Later sections of the essay use the endings of the three plays that make up the creative project, to illustrate more specific aspects of writing the end.

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

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Signed: .....  .....

Date: ..... 23 - 1 - 05 .....

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of principal supervisor, Dr Jill Durey and associate supervisor, Tony Nicholls. Pansy Bell and Nick Langsford helped with proof-reading.

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## THE OTHER WOMAN

It helps, at times, to suffer into truth.  
—Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*

THE OTHER WOMAN was first performed by Black Swan Theatre Company and Steamworks Arts Productions at the Rechabites Hall, Perth, on 10 July 2002. The cast was as follows:

ALEX	Laura Black
PAT	Pippa Williamson
HILS	Sophia Hall
LIV	Amy McDowell
ED	Jay Walsh
PAULSON	Humphrey Bower

<i>Directed by</i>	Sally Richardson
<i>Designed by</i>	Andrew Lake
<i>Sound by</i>	Cat Hope

*Characters:*

ALEX (SANDRA), *late forties, Minister for Defence*

DR PAT WILKINSON, *sixty-five*

HILS (HILARY), *Pat's daughter, early forties*

LIV (OLIVIA), *Alex's staffer, early thirties*

ED, *Deputy Leader, early fifties*

PAULSON, *Senator, late twenties*

Canberra, Australia: an imaginary present.

In the Perth production, newspaper headlines, projected across the top of the set, were used to mark the beginning of each scene.

## PROLOGUE

*Headline: 'The Other Woman.'*

*Music.*

*The actors walk onstage and, with their backs to the audience, look at the headline.*

*We hear ALEX's voice on tape, as she speaks during what seems to be a rowdy session of Question Time. We don't hear the interruptions or the heckling.*

ALEX (V.O.)           As Minister for Defence I am very concerned about coastal surveillance and border protection but—but, Madame Speaker, it is not—not appropriate for the armed forces—and as Minister, I am responsible for those forces—to become some kind of political football to be kicked around this House. I am answering the question. As Minister for Defence, I have a responsibility to the nation—to the nation to—to ensure that in matters of national security—security—security we do not make ourselves vul—vulnerable to—to the forces of terror. For that reason, and for that reason alone—alone, it is necessary to increase spen—spending on defence but this will not—

*All the actors but ALEX, exit. Spotlight on ALEX as she turns to face the audience.*

ALEX (V.O.)           I am trying to answer—What? What are you—I have nothing to hide. I have nothing—The question, Madame speaker—the question—Yes I do remember—if the honourable member for—for—if you would refrain from grandstanding, yes grand—stop waving your—waving your—I have nothing to hide! Nothing. I may not be Miss World—but you aren't exactly Mr Universe.

*ALEX exits.*

## SCENE 1

*Headline: 'He got to me.'*

ALEX's Ministerial office in Parliament House, Canberra.

PAULSON *enters. He looks around then reads some files and letters on the desk. His mobile phone rings.*

PAULSON                    *(Answering.)* Paulson. *(He listens.)* Absolutely.

LIV *enters, carrying a stack of files. He doesn't see her and she watches him as he strolls around the office, talking on the phone.*

PAULSON                    Absolutely. *(He listens.)* Absolutely. *(He listens.)* Ciao.

*He takes out his electronic personal organiser. And sees LIV. He enters a note into the organiser.*

PAULSON                    That was quite a performance.

LIV                            I'll say.

PAULSON                    In there. *(He points offstage.)*

LIV                            You were in the chamber?

PAULSON                    Passing through.

LIV                            The other place not exciting enough?

PAULSON                    The Senate has its moments, but generally it's a game requiring patience and strategy.

LIV                            More like pass the parcel. Everyone gets to have a feel before you pass it back to us.

PAULSON                    It got pretty rowdy.

LIV                            She handled it.

PAULSON                    It's not her we're worried about. What about the PM?

LIV                            Some one should tell him to stand down.

PAULSON                    We're going to get kicked out.

*Pause.*

PAULSON            You think he's got something on her.

LIV                    Who?

PAULSON            'Mr Universe.'

LIV                    (*Firmly.*) No.

PAULSON            It sounds like he does. 'Something to hide.'

LIV                    Like what?

PAULSON            I don't know.

LIV                    No.

PAULSON            It could be ... some stuff up.

LIV                    Alex doesn't stuff up.

PAULSON            She's a politician. Dare I say, she's human.

LIV                    She doesn't stuff-up. She makes mistakes. Which she admits. And regrets.

PAULSON            Always?

LIV                    Yes.

PAULSON            But you would say that, wouldn't you? Being her loyal staffer.

LIV                    It's not just me who says it. It's everyone out there. (*She points to the window.*)

PAULSON            'The people.'

LIV                    She admits her mistakes. She tells the truth. There are limits on what she can say. But she's brought a new standard of accountability into politics and they love her for it. Look how she gets mobbed by the visitors' gallery.

PAULSON's phone rings. LIV dives for her phone.

PAULSON            (*To Liv.*) Sorry about this. (*On the phone.*) Paulson. (*He looks at LIV.*) Absolutely. (*Listening.*) Absolutely. (*He opens his mouth to speak.*)

LIV                    Absolutely.

PAULSON *turns away.*

PAULSON            Ciao.

*He takes out the personal organiser and punches in a number. He looks up to see that LIV is watching him.*

PAULSON            Yes?

LIV                    Are you up to something?

PAULSON            You mean—(*Holding up the organiser.*)—this?

LIV                    Yes.

*He pretends to hesitate.*

PAULSON            There are limits on what I can say.

*He puts away the organiser.*

PAULSON            What about—(*He looks at the open door.*) (*Lowering his voice.*)—something personal?

LIV                    (*Normal volume.*) You mean, Alex?

PAULSON            Yes.

LIV                    Something personal about Alex?

PAULSON *waits.*

LIV                    Like she's had sex with underage boys?

PAULSON            Keep your voice down.

LIV                    Tell me, Senator Paulson, did you sleep your way to third place on the ticket?

PAULSON            (*Horrified.*) You mean me and Alex?

LIV                    (*Teasing.*) Why not? Isn't power a powerful aphrodisiac? Doesn't a powerful woman draw men to her like bees to a honeypot? They can't help themselves. They go weak at the knees.

PAULSON            She's not a nun. She must have a past.

LIV                    Yes. Like when she's a kid her father dies.

PAULSON            We all know about Changi.

LIV                    And then she gets married, and he goes to Vietnam—

PAULSON            Yes, yes, the head blown off. What about ... boyfriends?



LIV                    (*Scathing.*) Boyfriends?

PAULSON            O.k. Lovers.

LIV                    Who's got time for lovers?

PAULSON            Then what about ... (*Softly.*) fucks?

LIV                    Go away, Paulson.

*Paulson doesn't move. Liv busies herself with the files on the desk.*

PAULSON            So you've got pre-selection.

LIV                    Have you heard?

PAULSON            Nothing.

LIV                    Have I got it?

PAULSON            Have you?

LIV                    You said—

PAULSON            You said 'us.'

LIV                    Us?

PAULSON            Yes. 'Pass the parcel back to us.'

LIV                    So?

PAULSON            So—

LIV                    What's that got to do with—

PAULSON            —I thought 'us' as in 'I have a seat in the chamber.'

LIV                    No. 'Us' as in 'I work for the Minister.'

PAULSON            I thought you'd heard something.

LIV                    No. I haven't.

PAULSON            My mistake.

*Silence.*

LIV                    Have you?

PAULSON            Nothing.

*She turns away from him.*

PAULSON Officially.

*She spins around.*

PAULSON But unofficially ...

LIV Tell me!

PAULSON There's a few Neanderthals on the committee ...

LIV What have you heard?

PAULSON ... who are not so keen on a young woman ...

LIV I'm not that young.

PAULSON An attractive young woman.

LIV *(Laughing.)* Stop it.

PAULSON A most attractive young woman.

LIV Stop it.

PAULSON They'd like to see you come a cropper—

LIV I bet they would.

PAULSON —so they could put up their own man.

LIV But?

PAULSON But ... and I've only heard this unofficially—

LIV Paulson.

PAULSON —it looks like they're going to give it to you.

LIV Yes! Yes!

PAULSON Congratulations.

LIV Thank you.

*She hugs him. He hugs her back.*

PAULSON Unless you screw up in the next few days.

LIV *extricates herself from his embrace.*

PAULSON You're not going to, are you?

LIV moves to the desk and removes a file from one pile and places it on another. She looks up to see Paulson watching her.

LIV                                 What?

*A mobile phone rings. They both dive for their phones.*

LIV                                 *(On the phone.)* Yes? ... Pat, how are you? ... We're not too busy to take your call, but I'm afraid she's not—she's not—she's not—Can I take a message?

*She sees PAULSON at the desk, reading a file which she closes.*

LIV                                 Yes. Yes. Of course we haven't forgotten ... Yes Pat ... Yes ... Yes ... Now I'm afraid I really have to—Yes, I'll pass on the—Good ... *(The other party has rung off.)*

PAULSON                         Was that Pat?

LIV                                 Reminding us about her party.

PAULSON                         Everyone's going to be there.

LIV                                 All too scared to stay away.

PAULSON                         Fifty years working for the Party.

LIV                                 She never actually worked for the Party.

PAULSON                         You mean she never got paid. But she worked. A quiet word here. A gentle pressure there.

LIV                                 I don't call that work.

PAULSON                         She must have raised thousands in Party donations.

*LIV reacts at the word 'donations.'*

PAULSON                         What?

*LIV moves the files around on the desk.*

PAULSON                         As you would know ...

LIV                                 What do you know?

*Pause.*

PAULSON                         ... there's nothing like one of Pat's little dinners for bringing out the cheque books.

*LIV reacts to the words 'cheque books.'*

PAULSON            Yes?

*She indicates the files.*

LIV                    I haven't got time to chat about—

PAULSON            You've never been to one of Pat's little dinners?

LIV                    I like to spend my free nights at home. With my family.

PAULSON            She's a superb cook. And a great friend of my mother.

LIV                    All those Prime Ministers served up on toast.

PAULSON            You know Alex wouldn't be here without Pat.

LIV                    Is that so?

PAULSON            Pat practically had to shame them into letting her stand. And they couldn't believe it when she actually won. They didn't give her a safe seat.

LIV                    No seat is that safe.

PAULSON            Of course Pat has her own agenda.

LIV                    (*Ironically.*) Tell me about it.

PAULSON            I thought you'd be all in favour.

LIV                    Alex is the Minister for Defence. She can't support Australia hosting an international summit on refugees when the world's obsessed with terrorism. It would be political suicide.

PAULSON            Where is she?

LIV                    She was right behind me.

PAULSON            (*Patting the folder he's carrying.*) I've got something to run past her.

LIV                    You can leave it with me.

PAULSON            I'll wait.

LIV                    She won't have much time.

PAULSON            Just go ahead with what you're doing. Don't mind me.

PAULSON *goes to the window.*

PAULSON            It's a lovely day for it.

LIV For what?

PAULSON The cricket match. I made the team.

LIV David says the press are going to thrash the pollies.

PAULSON It must be handy your husband being a reporter ...

LIV David is the sports editor.

PAULSON It'll be a help.

LIV How?

PAULSON To get noticed.

LIV I'm quite capable of getting myself noticed.

PAULSON To get your name mentioned.

LIV The only way David will be mentioning my name is if I score a century at the MCG.

PAULSON But you must hear what's about to break. (*Pause.*) Has he heard anything?

LIV India's all out for two hundred and fifty. There is nothing to hear. Nothing is about to break.

PAULSON It must be a help. To make a splash.

LIV *moves towards him. She points to the folder he is clutching.*

LIV Is that what this is about? You want to make a splash?

PAULSON It's what we all want.

LIV I want to make a difference.

PAULSON That too. But we're not here *not* to be noticed. I give myself five years to make it to Cabinet. If not, I'm out of here.

LIV You don't want to be PM?

PAULSON You do.

LIV Yes. (*Teasing.*) Absolutely.

PAULSON Yeah. Why can't a young attractive woman be PM?

LIV And you can be my Deputy.

PAULSON                    Treasurer. (*He holds up his personal organiser.*) I'm good with numbers.

ALEX *hurries into the office.*

ALEX                        (*To LIV.*) I know, I was right behind you—Hi, Paulson—but there were some school children, and they wanted to talk, and I didn't want them to think that all we do is yell and scream at each other.

LIV *hands her some papers. ALEX quickly scans them.*

PAULSON                    I was in the chamber—

ALEX                        Just then?

PAULSON                    Yes. You were terrific. 'Not exactly Mr Universe.' (*To LIV.*) Did you see him lolling about in his seat? Legs apart. Gut straining at the belt. (*To ALEX.*) He has the nerve to say *you're* overweight. (*ALEX and LIV look at him.*) Not that you are. (*ALEX returns to her reading.*) And that sneering face with that 'Go on, hit me' look.

LIV                            Look's like someone did.

ALEX                        (*To LIV.*) Pen?

PAULSON *quickly produces a pen, which ALEX absent-mindedly takes. LIV is left holding the pen that she produced.*

PAULSON                    He can't quite believe that he's left the force.

LIV                            (*Putting the pen on the desk.*) Got kicked out, more likely.

PAULSON                    I can see him beating up a few defenceless drunks.

ALEX                        He got to me.

PAULSON                    No wonder.

LIV                            He's a pig.

ALEX                        I shouldn't have called him Mr Universe.

PAULSON                    It cracked up the chamber.

ALEX                        The PM wasn't laughing.

LIV                            He's just jealous.

PAULSON                    You should be PM.

LIV Paulson, what do you want?

ALEX He wants me for PM. (*To LIV.*) What was the ‘something to hide’ business?

LIV *looks at PAULSON. He smiles his encouragement.*

LIV He’s just having a go.

ALEX You think so?

LIV (*A little desperately.*) What could it be?

ALEX (*Looking at her.*) He knows something we don’t?

*Pause.*

LIV *shrugs.* ALEX *looks at PAULSON.*

ALEX No, he’s just digging. (*To LIV.*) So, what are we doing?

PAULSON *holds up the folder he is carrying.* ALEX *doesn’t notice.*

LIV Lunch.

ALEX Good. I’m starving. Where?

LIV The RSL. (*ALEX grimaces.*) I know. But you do have to get them onside. And they do turn on a good lunch.

ALEX So long as I’m not the first course. So let’s go. Lamb—better make that mutton—to the slaughter.

LIV I’ve got to ring the driver.

ALEX So ring him.

LIV *holds up the velvet box.*

LIV And you’re not dressed.

ALEX I want my lunch.

LIV *picks up the phone then hands ALEX some papers.*

ALEX What’s this?

LIV Your speech.

LIV *punches a number into the phone as ALEX flips through her speech.* PAULSON *holds out the folder to ALEX.*

PAULSON Read this.

ALEX One thing at a time.

LIV (To PAULSON.) Leave it with us. (On the phone.) We'll be five minutes. Yes, do that.

*She hangs up and then opens the velvet box and takes out some World War Two medals. PAULSON takes a sheet of paper out of the folder he is holding.*

PAULSON (To ALEX.) Read it.

ALEX What is it?

PAULSON Read it.

LIV, *holding the military medals, approaches ALEX.*

ALEX (To PAULSON.) I'll take it with me.

PAULSON (Holding the page away.) You have to read it here.

LIV (Standing very close to ALEX.) Didn't you hear—

PAULSON (To ALEX.) Read it.

*ALEX takes the page. LIV moves away. ALEX begins to read.*

ALEX Where did you get this?

PAULSON It arrived in the mail.

LIV What is it?

ALEX And you don't know who sent it?

PAULSON No.

LIV Can I?

ALEX It could be bait.

PAULSON It's legit. I checked.

LIV Can —?

*LIV grabs the page.*

PAULSON I thought I could work it into a debate ... He's always complaining about funding women's refuges: 'Encouraging women to walk away from their responsibilities' ... and when people find out that—

LIV Mr Universe hits his wife!



*Silence, as LIV and PAULSON wait.*

ALEX I suppose you could show it to the PM or Ed.

PAULSON Not Ed.

ALEX He's the Deputy.

PAULSON He's a clown.

ALEX I'm sure he's smarter than you think.

PAULSON He'd have to be. (*Pause.*) I thought you might run it past the PM. He'll listen to you.

*He takes some typed pages out of the folder.*

LIV What's that?

PAULSON My speech.

*He hands the speech to ALEX.*

LIV Make a splash?

ALEX No.

PAULSON Forget about the speech.

ALEX The speech. The restraining order. Running it past the PM.  
No.

*LIV hands back the restraining order to PAULSON.*

PAULSON Why not?

ALEX It's bad politics. I accuse him of beating his wife—

PAULSON You don't have to—

ALEX —and he accuses me of ... what?

PAULSON But that's the point. He can't get back at you. You're squeaky clean.

ALEX It's personal.

PAULSON He was getting pretty personal.

ALEX The day I start using things like this, is the day I walk out of here. And, frankly, I'm surprised that you wouldn't know that.

*Pause.*

PAULSON He's not going to let up on you.

ALEX Then I'll just have to bear it.

PAULSON You need something on him.

ALEX Not this.

PAULSON I'm trying to help you.

PAULSON *taps his personal organiser. There is something he would like to tell*  
ALEX.

ALEX Paulson, I need my lunch.

LIV *(To PAULSON.)* Haven't you got some oranges to cut up?

PAULSON *exits. LIV picks up the medals.*

ALEX Oranges?

LIV The cricket match. He's twelfth man.

ALEX They didn't ask me.

LIV You think they would?

ALEX I'm pretty handy with the bat. *(LIV is trying to pin the medals to ALEX'S jacket.)* Other side. I guess we should turn up and cheer them on.

LIV If I want to save my marriage. David is opening bat.

ALEX Can't I just wear my legacy badge?

LIV You think they're going to *see* a legacy badge? These people are old.

ALEX I chink whenever I move.

LIV Don't worry, they won't hear a thing.

ALEX So why am I delivering a speech?

LIV It's a photo opportunity.

LIV *straightens the medals.*

ALEX You can only wear them over the heart if you've won them yourself. Not that Dad ever wore them. He hated war.

LIV Pat rang.

ALEX They tortured him—I have told you that, haven't I?—when he was in the camp. Pat?

LIV A few minutes ago.

ALEX Not the summit?

LIV 'Don't forget the party.'

ALEX As if. What did we decide I was going to wear?

LIV You are going to tell her?

ALEX I'll tell her.

LIV 'You've done all you can to promote the summit but it's impossible ....' Everything's changed. She must see that.

ALEX I'll tell her.

LIV Tonight.

ALEX Not tonight.

LIV Soon.

ALEX I'll tell her. It won't be easy ... Now we should be—

LIV Do people really get out their cheque books at her little dinners? (*She sees that ALEX is puzzled.*) Paulson was talking about Party donations. Before you came in.

ALEX Yes?

LIV You don't think he's heard -

ALEX Paulson hears everything. And what he doesn't hear he —

LIV Not Paulson (*Pointing off.*) In the chamber. Him. Mr Universe. Has he heard about the cheque?

ALEX What cheque?

LIV The Party donation I put into your account.

*Silence.*

ALEX You think that's it?

LIV I didn't want to say anything in front of—

ALEX That happened months ago.

LIV Did you tell anyone?

ALEX There was nothing to tell.

LIV I just thought you might have told—

ALEX It was a mistake.

LIV Yes.

ALEX Anyone could have done it.

LIV Did you tell—?

ALEX No.

*Silence.*

LIV So how did ...?

ALEX Someone in this office. Someone at the bank. We all make mistakes.

LIV Not young women who've just got preselection.

ALEX You've got it?

LIV Paulson told me ...

ALEX That's fantastic.

LIV ... unofficially.

ALEX Then I'll have to give you an unofficial hug.

*She hugs LIV.*

ALEX Well done.

LIV I haven't got it yet.

ALEX If they've made a decision.

LIV And then I can really do something. Sorry. I didn't mean—you know what I mean.

ALEX You know what it's going to be like. Meetings. More meetings. Motions. Amendments. Resolutions. Never revolutions. Revolution would be easy. It's the resolutions that wear you down. (*Pause.*) Pace yourself. Practice saying no. And when you do say yes, make sure the cameras are around to catch the smile.

*Silence.*

LIV                    Say it is the cheque.

ALEX                  We don't know that.

LIV                    Say it is. And the word gets around. (*Pause.*) It'd just so unfair. I make one small mistake.

ALEX                  Forget about it.

LIV                    I can't. Sascha was vomiting. Her temperature was up. They couldn't contact David. I had to get there.

ALEX                  I know.

LIV                    But you don't. You don't have kids. And so I put a cheque in the wrong pile. Big deal. As soon as I read the bank statements—just a few weeks later—I fixed it all up. (*Pause.*) To lose, when I'm so close.

*Silence. The mobile phone.*

LIV                    (*Answering.*) We're on our way.

*LIV hangs up and begins to exit. ALEX hasn't moved.*

ALEX                  It was my mistake.

LIV                    You can't do that.

ALEX                  Why not?

LIV                    Because it wasn't your mistake. It was mine. (*Pause.*) You're a Minister.

ALEX                  Yes, I'm a Minister. I'm allowed to be incompetent. No, I'm expected to be incompetent.

*Silence.*

LIV                    I shouldn't let you do this.

ALEX                  We've got to take a few risks. Embrace a bit of chaos. I didn't come here to play it safe. I came here to stir things up. To throw a few grenades. To ask some of the hard questions. Why is one of the most prosperous countries in the world obsessed with making things more difficult for the poor? Why are the inhabitants of one of the most under-populated land masses, terrified of a few thousand boatpeople? Why don't we say sorry? (*Pause.*) Because the polls are saying .... And we can't ignore the polls. (*She goes to the window.*) Out there people—

not polls—are falling in love, having children, moving house, changing jobs. They're taking risks. They're not playing it safe. (*She looks at her watch.*) And they're not always busy. (*Pause.*) When was the last time you did nothing?

LIV

I think it was when I was three.

ALEX

Yeah. (*Pause.*) Let's go.

*They exit.*

*Blackout.*

## SCENE 2

*Headline: 'Not this way.'*

*A lake-side restaurant taken over for the night. There are two 'spaces': inside the restaurant, a corner near a large window; outside, on the balcony overlooking the lake.*

*Inside, an elegantly-dressed PAT enters the restaurant on PAULSON's arm, to loud clapping and applause, which she acknowledges regally. They disappear from view.*

*A few moments later PAULSON enters from the restaurant onto the balcony. He looks out towards the lake.*

*Inside, PAT appears at the window. After a moment she joins PAULSON on the balcony.*

PAT                      Beautiful, isn't it?

PAULSON *looks back towards the restaurant.*

PAULSON              Doesn't it look a bit obvious?

PAT                      What does?

PAULSON              You and me. Out here.

PAT                      They can't see us. You can't see anything through that window. I checked.

PAULSON              What if someone comes out here?

PAT                      'The full moon shining on the lake ...and the House ... where it all happens. Doesn't it look ... grand.' (*Pause.*) I'm enjoying the view.

PAULSON              And me? Am I enjoying the view?

PAT                      You're having a cigarette.

PAULSON              I don't smoke.

PAT                      Good boy. So ... Alex has got the numbers ... but only if Ed supports her.

PAULSON              He won't support her.

PAT                      If it was put to him in the right way ...

PAULSON              I'd like to see someone try.

*Silence.*

*A horrified PAULSON looks at PAT who contemplates the view.*

PAULSON            He won't want to talk to me.

PAT                    He will if I ask him.

PAULSON            Ed doesn't like me.

PAT                    Ed doesn't like anyone.

PAULSON            He likes the PM.

PAT                    He's loyal to the PM

PAULSON            The PM should stand down.

PAT                    Of course he should. People have tried. They even asked me to talk to him about his health.

PAULSON            What's wrong with his health?

PAT                    Nothing. (*Pause.*) But he is getting on, and it would be no loss of face to stand down for health reasons ... or to spend more time with his family. He could still contribute from behind the scenes. Elder statesman. That sort of thing.

*Silence.*

PAULSON            But how will I bring it up? I can't just come out and say, 'Will you support her?' He'll go straight to the PM. And if he thinks I'm being disloyal—

PAT                    You're not being disloyal.

PAULSON            So why have I spent all yesterday collecting numbers for a leadership challenge?

PAT *remains silent.*

PAULSON            All I was doing was collecting numbers. I didn't ask people to ring me and say, yes. You did that. I just took down the numbers.

PAT                    You said you enjoyed it.

PAULSON            I did. It was kind of exciting. (*Pleading.*) I can't speak to Ed. When he finds out I've been collecting numbers ... I'm the new kid on the block. I can't afford to make enemies.

*Silence.*



PAT Your decision.

PAULSON So there's no hard feelings.

PAT None at all.

PAULSON (*Turning to go back inside.*) Then, if you'll excuse me ...

PAT It's just that now that Ed knows you've been collecting numbers ...

PAULSON *swings around.*

PAULSON Ed knows?

PAT Yes, I'm afraid he does.

PAULSON You said no one would tell him.

PAT I said no one who rang you would tell him. But the ones who didn't ring you ... You really should have worked that out for yourself.

*Silence as PAULSON works it out.*

PAULSON But if Ed knows ... then the PM knows.

PAT Ed hasn't said anything to the PM.

PAULSON How do you know that?

PAT You think the PM would have come to my party if he'd known we were plotting against him?

*Silence.*

PAULSON So why hasn't Ed told him?

PAT Maybe Ed wants to be persuaded.

*Another silence.*

PAULSON Why does it have to be tonight? It's a party. Your party.

PAT At a party, guards are let down ... tongues are loosened ... and, most importantly ... hope is rekindled.

*Silence.*

PAULSON Mother would never forgive me if I spoiled your party.

PAT Get him talking about the past.

- PAULSON                    (*Scornfully.*) ‘The grand days.’
- PAT                            Yes. (*Ironically.*) The ‘grand days.’ Make him believe those days can return ... that Alex can make them return. (*Pause.*) And when you’ve softened him up ... I’ll send her over.
- PAULSON                    I thought you said she knows nothing about this.
- PAT                            She doesn’t.
- PAULSON                    (*Working it out.*) So if Ed wants to accuse her of disloyalty, she can deny all knowledge.
- PAT                            Well done. We can’t have the future PM be seen to have blood on her hands.
- PAULSON                    You should be the one running for PM.
- PAT                            You flatter me. (*Pause.*) Don’t look so worried.
- PAULSON                    What if all blows up in my face?
- PAT                            Nothing will happen to you. You’re just the messenger, that’s all. I’ll send him over.
- PAT *leaves the balcony.*
- PAULSON                    Shit. Shit!
- PAULSON *practises being a man’s man.*
- PAULSON                    Mate. Maaaate. Mate.
- He turns to see PAT and ED inside. PAT is pointing towards the balcony. ED looks reluctant. PAT insists. ED moves away, towards the balcony.*
- PAULSON *readies himself.*
- ED, *limping a little, appears on the balcony.*
- ED                            (*Approaching.*) The great Paulson. Out for a duck.
- PAULSON                    (*Under his breath.*) At least I’m not walking like one. (*Loudly.*) That was a heroic catch in slips.
- ED *stops limping.*
- ED                            You did get rid of the tail for us.
- Silence, as ED waits.*

PAULSON That's not mineral water you're drinking? We beat the gallery. Mate, we should be celebrating.

ED You see that woman over there? The one in red.

*They turn to look towards the party.*

PAULSON *(Continuing the joke.)* That's no woman. That's your wife.

ED That woman sees everything.

PAULSON She's got her back to us.

ED Makes no difference.

PAULSON *(Working up to it.)* She seems to be enjoying talking to our leader.

ED She won't get him on the wagon.

PAULSON *(Meaningfully.)* He has been hitting it a bit.

ED *(Letting it go by.)* Not out on twenty.

PAULSON I think the press were bowling him easy ones.

ED That makes a change.

PAULSON Maybe they feel sorry for him.

ED *says nothing.*

PAULSON What was it like?

ED What was what like?

PAULSON When he was hitting sixes? When you won the unwinnable election. I voted you in. I was eighteen. It was my first election.

*Pause.*

ED What was it like? It was ... terrifying. We didn't think we had a rat's arse chance of winning. And then we did. And we suddenly had to run the country. We were meeting captains of industry and heads of state and having to make it up as we went along. What was it like? It was fun. So much fucking fun.

PAULSON Not much fun now.

ED Is that so?

PAULSON                    Everyone says we're going to lose the election.

ED                            Are we?

PAULSON                    Even I can see that. And I've only been here two minutes.

*Silence.*

ED                            The PM's got his eye on you.

*PAULSON swings guiltily around to look back at the party, then recovering, turns back to ED.*

ED                            He thinks you've got a future.

PAULSON                    He does.?

ED                            A bright future. He thinks you're a bright young man.

PAULSON *relaxes. He smirks.*

ED                            That's what the PM thinks. But I *know* you're a scumbag. I should go to the PM and tell him exactly what this bright young man has been getting up to. Collecting numbers for a leadership challenge. You need to learn something. If you want to be here longer than two minutes. It's called loyalty.

PAULSON                    What about loyalty to the Party?

ED                            He won office for us.

PAULSON                    And he's going to lose it.

ED                            He's the best chance we've got.

*Inside, ALEX and PAT appear at the window.*

PAULSON                    She could do it.

ED                            Says who?

PAULSON                    She's got the numbers.

ED                            Only if I support her.

PAULSON                    What have you got against her? She's intelligent. She's disciplined. You don't hear her mouthing off to the press.

*PAT steers ALEX away from the window. They can no longer be seen.*

PAULSON                    And the public love her.

ED                                I don't know why. She's got about as much charisma as a plate of Iced Vo-vos. I'm not supporting her.

PAULSON                        Because she's a woman.

ALEX *appears on the balcony. She is carrying a drink in each hand.*

ALEX                                (*Holding out a drink to ED.*) Pat thought you needed a proper drink.

ED *hesitates, then takes the drink from her.*

ALEX                                (*To PAULSON.*) You miss out, I'm afraid.

ED *gives PAULSON the glass of mineral water.*

PAULSON                        You're looking very lovely.

ALEX                                (*To ED.*) Why does every man in politics feel the need to comment on my appearance?

ED                                        It's what you say to women at these things.

ALEX                                I don't make comments about your suit.

ED                                        Go ahead.

ALEX                                You actually look very dashing.

ED                                        The same pressure to lie.

ALEX                                No. I mean it. You look great. (*To PAULSON.*) Doesn't he?

PAULSON                        Great.

ED                                        Who gives a shit about their appearance?

ALEX                                The new suit is in honour of Pat?

ED                                        Sue gets excited about these things. You know what it's like. Lets cut the crap. I know what's going on.

ALEX                                Then perhaps you can tell me.

ED                                        (*To PAULSON.*) Tell her.

PAULSON *says nothing.*

ALEX                                Paulson?

ED                                        Go on, message boy. Tell her.

PAULSON *says nothing.*

ED Oh, fuck off then.

PAULSON *turns to leave.*

ED And you can tell Pat to fuck off, too.

PAULSON *returns to the party.*

ALEX You want me to fuck off?

ED I want you to come clean.

ALEX I don't know what you're talking about.

ED Don't you? When the Party wants to get rid of the PM, they get some arse-licker like Paulson to collect the numbers—

ALEX Someone's challenging the PM?

ED —everyone knows but the PM,

ALEX I didn't know.

ED —and the person they want to put in his place.

*Silence.*

ALEX They want me to be PM?

ED Yeah. *(Pause.)* If I support you.

ALEX *says nothing. She waits for him to speak.*

ED Pat sent me out here to be worked over by Paulson and then she sent you out here to finish me off.

ALEX She sent me out here with a drink.

ALEX *turns to leave.*

ED Where are you going?

ALEX To enjoy the party. *(She turns back.)* I don't know about you, but I came here to have a good time.

ED Sorry.

ALEX You don't have to be sorry, because I don't need your support.

ED Oh, yes you do.

ALEX I don't.

- ED                   If you want to be PM.
- ALEX                But I don't. Not this way.
- ED                   Easy to say now.
- ALEX                Knives in the back? Paulson collecting numbers? Plotting at Pat's party? I'm not going to challenge him. (*Pause.*) But if he were to stand down, then yes, I would put my hand up.
- ED                   I'm not going to ask the PM to stand down.
- ALEX                Then we shall lose the election.
- She *waits*.
- ED                   You're a star. No mistake about it. You can bat and you can bowl, you're solid in the slips, you can hit the stumps side-on. But politics is no place for stars. Maybe for one or two games—the crowd loves them, yes. But what's important is the team. You've got to trust the team.
- ALEX                So why do I feel that my team is praying for me to drop the ball? (*Pause.*) Iced Vo-vos? It's what you say, isn't it? All of you. Here comes the Iced Vo-vo.
- ED                   You should be pleased. They were a treat in our house. Put out to impress visitors. Amazing how a bit of coconut on some pink icing, can turn a plate of bickies into afternoon tea.
- ALEX                I wouldn't know. There wasn't too much pink icing in our house. It was a boarding house and we got to live there because my mother scrubbed floors. She wasn't interested in impressing anyone. She just got on with it.
- Silence.*
- ED                   You're always padding up. You're always looking for the one that's going to get past you. Have a bit of fun. (*Pause.*) I know you want it.
- ALEX                You don't approve of ambition in a woman?
- ED                   No. I don't.
- ALEX                At least you're honest.
- ED                   I don't approve of ambition in a man.
- ALEX                You're the Deputy.
- ED                   My wife does.

*Silence.*

ALEX I can't play the game the same way as you.

ED Says who?

ALEX I can't stand up there and sneer and heckle and thump the table.

ED I don't thump the table.

ALEX And that makes you a nice bloke.

ED And what does it make you?

ALEX A good communicator?

ED Men are supposed to thump the table?

ALEX If they don't want to be seen as nice blokes.

ED And nice blokes don't win elections.

ALEX But good communicators do.

ED If I was a woman I'd win the election.

ALEX If you were a woman you wouldn't be Deputy PM.

ED What would happen if you thumped the table?

ALEX I'd be a strident woman. And strident women don't win elections.

ED You said you didn't want to be PM.

*They see LIV pass by the window, inside. She's looking for someone.*

ED There goes Barbie.

ALEX Barbie?

ED She makes them nervous.

ALEX Only the ones who want to put their hands up her skirt.

ED They all want to put their hands up her skirt. Look at her.

ALEX You can't blame Liv for being gorgeous.

ED *(Looking at her.)* You do.

ALEX No.



- ED Yes, you do.
- ALEX I don't.
- ED You think I don't want to look like Paulson? Go on. Admit it. You do.
- ALEX Yes, I do.
- ED Yeah.
- ALEX Those legs.
- ED Yeah.
- ALEX That perfect bum.
- ED Yeah
- ALEX And that face. (*Pause.*) She's got it all. Great job. Wonderful husband. The most beautiful daughter.
- ED So there is a heart under that armour-plating?
- ALEX If you haven't got a heart, you don't need armour-plating. (*Pause.*) The team is going to lose. Is that what you want? To let down the team?
- Silence.*
- ED It was fun. So much fucking fun. We'd get together in his office at the end of the day for some plot and scheme. We'd rip the top off a couple of tinnies and plant our feet up on the desks. We couldn't believe it. We were in charge. Us? We were running the country. Us. You could hear us laughing all over the House.
- Silence.*
- ED What's it going to be? Rip the top off a few tinnies? A last bit of plot and scheme? (*Pause.*) He's the best Prime Minister this country's ever had. He'll never forgive me.
- PAT *appears on the balcony.*
- PAT Edward.
- ED Patricia.
- PAT I think Paulson may have given you the wrong impression.
- ED *says nothing.*

PAT He's a dear boy but he doesn't always get things right.

*Silence.*

PAT (*Turning to ALEX.*) Does he.

*ALEX remains silent.*

PAT (*To ED.*) I wouldn't like you to get the wrong impression.

ED What impression would you like me to get?

PAT The right one. That Alex knew nothing about this.

ED That's the impression I got.

PAT Then there's no harm done. Pat's been a bit silly. She's spoken out of turn but there's no need to say anything to anyone.

ED You don't want me to speak to the PM?

PAT I don't think he need know.

ED But I thought—

PAT You wouldn't want to spoil my party?

ED Fifty years working for the Party.

PAT Some of that was helping my parents.

ALEX She was handing out how-to-vote cards in the womb.

PAT It's nice to be appreciated. But I never expected such a turnout. All these people. And what a lovely place to hold it.

ED I think I will have a quick word with the PM.

PAT Very well.

ALEX Thank you.

*ED exits, pretending to hit a six.*

PAT Why are you thanking him? You want to be kicked out of Cabinet?

ALEX He's going to speak to him.

PAT I know. He just told me.

ALEX You might have told me.

- PAT                    (*Thinking.*) But he knows you're not involved. That's one thing. There will be other times.
- ALEX                   He's going to ask him to step down.
- PAT *looks at her.*
- ALEX                   Yes.
- PAT                    But Paulson said—
- ALEX                   He's going to support me.
- PAT                    Yes!
- ALEX                   ‘Take poor Ed out a proper drink.’
- PAT                    It worked, didn't it?
- ALEX                   You're incredible. You know that, don't you? I don't know how to thank you.
- PAT                    I've done nothing.
- ALEX                   How many girls called Sandy get to be Prime Minister?
- PAT                    (*Looking through the window, towards the party.*) Where is he?
- ALEX                   No, let me finish. You gave me a name. You gave me a chance. If you hadn't taken me in after mum died. You've been like a mother to—
- LIV and HILS *appear, inside.*
- PAT                    She's here.
- ALEX                   Who?
- PAT                    She's here.
- ALEX *turns to look.*
- HILARY and LIV *move away from the window.*
- PAT                    Did you—?
- ALEX                   No.
- HILS and LIV *appear on the balcony.*
- PAT                    You came. (*To ALEX.*) She came.

- HILS                   They weren't going to let me in.
- PAT                    I sent you a—
- HILS                   I wanted to surprise you. I told them I was your daughter—
- PAT                    They have to be very—
- HILS                   ‘Her only daughter.’
- PAT                    They couldn't just let you—
- HILS                   ‘We don't have you on the list, madam.’ (To ALEX.) Don't you love it when they call you that? ‘Madam.’
- ALEX                   Was it the young good-looking one?
- HILS                   Isn't he gorgeous? But he wasn't going to let me in. Until the lovely Olivia—
- LIV                    Liv.
- HILS                   Liv appeared like a vision
- LIV                    I'd just been for a pee.
- HILS                   (To LIV.) I saw you looking at him.
- LIV                    He is pretty gorgeous.
- ALEX                   And he's got hair.
- HILS                   And she said, ‘Yes, Pat does have a daughter called Hilary. And this is she.’ And he said ‘So very sorry, madam, but we can't be too careful.’
- HILS *bows deeply to PAT. ALEX claps softly.*
- HILS                   I thought you'd be PM by now.
- A short pause.*
- ALEX                   Not quite yet.
- PAT                    (To LIV.) Hilary's been working overseas. In America. She's wonderful with the deranged.
- ALEX *tries not to laugh.*
- PAT                    She is.
- HILARY                (Irritated.) Please.

PAT                    You are. (*To LIV.*) She works with violent men. In psychiatric hospitals, in prisons, in community centres.

ALEX                 In Cabinet?

PAT                    (*Ignoring ALEX.*) She was head-hunted for a new position here.

HILS                 (*Violently, to PAT.*) Why don't you take me seriously!  
(*Pause.*) I wasn't head-hunted. (*To LIV.*) I was asked.

*An awkward silence.*

HILS                 It's good to be back.

PAT *says nothing.*

LIV                    I should ...

*But she doesn't move.*

HILS                 (*To Liv.*) Now you've delivered your parcel.

ALEX                 You don't have to go.

HILS                 No, stay.

*Silence.*

PAT                    And how is that beautiful baby?

LIV                    Hardly a baby.

PAT                    (*To HILS.*) Liv is one of those Superwomen.

LIV                    Hardly. My little girl is thriving.

PAT                    And the gorgeous husband?

LIV                    Also thriving.

PAT                    It's so hard being a working mother. Of course they didn't have child care in my day.

HILS                 *You* were one of those Superwomen.

PAT                    Liv is Alex's staffer—

HILS                 I worked that out.

PAT                    —and hoping to get preselection.

HILS                 (*To LIV.*) Don't do it.

PAT (To LIV.) Hilary despises politics.

HILS No, I don't.

PAT You've said so often enough.

HILS I just think it can make you heartless.

PAT What scene are you playing?

HILS I am not playing a scene.

PAT No?

HILS I'm just telling you what I think about politics.

PAT (Theatrically.) 'It can make you heartless.'

HILS Yes. It can.

*Silence.*

LIV Actually, I've got it.

PAT Got what?

ALEX You haven't?

LIV They just told me.

ALEX Congratulations.

LIV Thank you.

PAT (Recovering.) Yes. Well done. I hope you'll support us.

LIV looks at ALEX.

ALEX (To PAT.) We've got to give her a little time.

PAT All I said was, 'I hope.'

ALEX Liv will have her own priorities.

LIV And the Minister ...

PAT (To ALEX.) Yes?

ALEX Look, now is not the time ...

LIV Minister ...

ALEX It's a party.

- PAT I only said, 'I hope you'll support us.'
- HILS (To PAT.) When are you going to support me?
- Silence.*
- PAT I think I'll just check on how things are going.
- HILS Don't run away.
- PAT I'm not running away. You can talk to Alex.
- HILS I don't want to talk to Alex.
- ALEX Thanks very much.
- HILS I came here to talk to you.
- PAT Darling, you can't talk at parties.
- HILS I've hardly seen you.
- PAT And whose fault is that?
- HILS *abruptly moves away from PAT.*
- PAT Where are you going?
- HILS This was a mistake.
- PAT Now who's running away?
- HILS *struggles with her emotions.*
- HILS (Calmly.) I'll come to lunch. Maybe we can celebrate then. Sunday?
- PAT Fine. I'll cook your favourite lasagne.
- HILS (To ALEX.) Bye. (To LIV.) Nice to meet you.
- LIV Yes.
- HILS *leaves the balcony.*
- ALEX She's fine.
- PAT (Anxiously.) You think she'll come?
- ALEX Maybe.
- PAT Why does she ... ?

*Silence.*

ALEX                    Let's go inside.

PAT                     (*Recovering.*) Yes.

*ALEX and PAT move along the balcony, towards the party.*

LIV                     Oh yeah, Ed asked me to tell you—

PAT                     What?

LIV                     (*To ALEX.*) Nothing very important.

PAT                     What did he say?

LIV                     (*To ALEX.*) Just him being funny.

PAT                     What did he say?

LIV                     (*To PAT.*) He was talking about biscuits.

PAT                     Biscuits?

LIV                     'Tell your boss that she can break out the Iced Vo-vos.'

PAT                     (*To ALEX.*) What's that supposed to mean?

*LIV is wondering the same thing.*

ALEX                    (*To LIV.*) Could you give us a few minutes?

LIV                     Of course. You don't want to be too long. (*To PAT.*) There are people the Minister needs to meet.

*LIV goes inside.*

PAT                     She should do something about her mouth.

ALEX                    She'll make an excellent politician.

PAT                     Perhaps that's why I dislike her so much.

ALEX                    Aren't I an excellent politician?

PAT                     You're an excellent person who just happens to be a politician.

ALEX                    Prime Minister.

PAT                     What?

ALEX                    —happens to be Prime Minister.



PAT *understands.*

ALEX Yes.

PAT (*Enjoying the words.*) Prime Minister.

ALEX A woman in the Lodge. And not behind the teapot.

PAT Only when I come to stay.

ALEX You can move in with me.

PAT Imagine what they might say ...

ALEX They have their wives. I want Pat. We'll invite all our friends. No more minding our Ps and Qs.

PAT You'll have to look suitably grateful. 'A privilege and an honour.'

ALEX 'Not able to fill the PM's shoes.'

PAT Size twelves. I've felt them often enough. He's so convinced he's Fred Astaire.

ALEX There's something I want to say.

PAT You don't need—

ALEX Yes. I do. (*Pause.*) If you hadn't taken me in—when mum died—and got me into a good school.

PAT You won a scholarship.

ALEX And university.

PAT You were a brilliant—

ALEX I never would have—

PAT Yes, you would.

ALEX No. No!

*Silence.*

PAT It was nothing.

ALEX It was everything.

*Silence.*

PAT                    If there was anything I did for you, what you have now done  
for me ...

ALEX                  Remember this moment.

PAT                    Always.

*Blackout.*

## SCENE 3

*Headline: 'You jumped the gun'.*

*The back verandah of PAT's rambling old house. A wicker armchair. A battered wooden stool.*

*HILS enters by the driveway. She is clutching a gift-wrapped package. She sits on the stool.*

*PAT enters from the house without seeing HILS. She carefully holds the corners of a white linen tablecloth, which she then shakes. She turns and sees HILS, who has stood up.*

*Silence.*

PAT                      How long have you been here?

HILS                     I brought you a present.

*HILS holds out the package. PAT carefully folds the tablecloth. She is about to return into the house.*

HILS                     Where are you going?

PAT                     I'm helping Alex with the dishes.

HILS                     I didn't know ...

PAT                     She got here on time.

*She turns away.*

HILS                     Forget about the dishes.

PAT                     *(Turning back.)* We waited. I cooked your favourite lasagne. I thought something terrible had happened. I didn't know how to contact you.

*HILS says nothing.*

PAT                     *(Relenting.)* But you're here now. *(Calling.)* Alex! You were right! She's turned up! We'll have it on the back verandah! *(To HILS.)* Alex is making the coffee.

HILS                     I don't drink coffee.

PAT                     *(Patiently.)* Since when?

HILS                     Since ... I don't know ... months?

PAT I can't be expected to know that you don't drink coffee—

HILS I don't expect you to know.

PAT —if you don't come to see me.

HILS Let's not make a big deal about this.

PAT You've been back for weeks.

HILS Not weeks. I don't know why you worry.

PAT My daughter, my only child—

HILS (*Mockingly.*) What scene are *you* playing?

PAT —I don't know where she is? When she'll be back? Whether she's alive or dead.

HILS I've brought you a present.

*Again she holds out the package. After a moment, PAT puts down the tablecloth and takes it from her.*

PAT Thank you.

HILS Open it.

*PAT has been through this before. She examines the package as if it were a grenade.*

HILS Open it.

*PAT begins to open the package.*

HILS I saw the mothers wearing them on fiesta day.

*PAT hesitates, then continues to open the package, to reveal a beautiful but very colourful shawl.*

HILS You don't like it.

*PAT opens out the shawl.*

PAT It's beautiful.

HILS You think it's too bright.

*Still PAT says nothing, but she drapes the shawl around her shoulders. It looks a little absurd.*

HILS You'll never wear it.

PAT I am wearing it.

HILS *removes it from PAT's shoulders.*

PAT                    You can't take it back.

*PAT takes hold of it.*

HILS                    If you're going to stick it in the back of the cupboard with all the other things I've given you ....

*There is almost a tug-of-war.*

PAT                    Would you like me to throw them out?

HILS                    If you're not going to appreciate them.

PAT                    I do appreciate them. That's why I keep them.

*HILS relinquishes the shawl. PAT drapes it around her shoulders. HILS straightens it.*

PAT                    *(Not able to stop herself.)* Have you seen the girls?

HILS                    *(Recoiling.)* You know I haven't. I will. Just as soon as I get—

PAT                    Claire's having a wonderful time now she's started high school. She's a brilliant student. Straight As. And Alice's dancing! And her sense of humour. She never misses a trick. They're wonderful girls. Never a moment's worry or bother. Wonderful.

HILS                    I'm glad.

PAT                    They miss you.

HILS                    I miss them.

PAT                    They need you. You're their mother. *(Pause.)* Peter's very good about keeping in touch.

*ALEX appears with the coffee.*

ALEX                    Gorgeous shawl.

PAT                    *(To ALEX.)* I'll take that. *(PAT takes the tray from her.)* Hilary, can you get Alex a chair?

HILS                    Alex can get her own chair.

PAT                    She made the coffee.

ALEX                    I'll get it.

ALEX *brings on another chair.*

PAT *pours the coffee. She hands a cup to ALEX.*

ALEX Thanks.

HILS Don't I get one?

PAT I thought you didn't drink coffee.

HILS I'll have a small one.

PAT *pours a coffee, which she hands to HILS, who takes it.*

*Silence.*

ALEX Sunday. A bit of white space in my life. *(She closes her eyes.)*  
Only another forty-eight hours.

HILS To what?

*Silence. HILS is aware that PAT and ALEX are keeping something from her.*

HILS I thought you were doing nothing.

ALEX I am doing nothing.

HILS You're thinking.

ALEX Yes, I'm thinking.

HILS So you're doing something.

ALEX Thinking isn't doing. Thinking is thinking.

HILS Thinking is doing.

ALEX Doing is doing.

PAT Girls.

ALEX Thinking is not doing.

HILS Not doing is not doing.

PAT Girls.

HILS And not doing is not thinking.

PAT Girls! Please! You're giving me a—

ALEX and HILS Headache.

*Pause.*

ALEX                   What if *he* wakes up with a headache?

HILS                   Who?

ALEX                   I wish it was Tuesday. (*To HILS.*) Sorry.

HILS                   I don't want to know. You need to relax.

ALEX                   Yes.

HILS                   I'll massage your feet.

ALEX                   You don't want to—

HILS                   Yes, I do. Remember how I used to—

ALEX                   No.

*HILS puts down her untouched coffee.*

HILS                   —when you were studying. I'll be right back.

*HILS goes into the house.*

ALEX                   No!

PAT                    Why can't she stay in one place?

*There is no answer to this.*

*PAT takes off the shawl.*

PAT                    'Gorgeous shawl.'

ALEX                   Why can't you pretend?

PAT                    Why can't you let her massage your feet?

*Pause.*

ALEX                   You think they'll change their mind?

PAT                    No. Tomorrow he will stand down. And on Tuesday morning they will—

*HILS comes out of the house. She is carrying a glass of water. She sits near ALEX.*

HILS                   Give me your foot.

*Silence as HILS massages ALEX's foot.*

ALEX Oooh. That tickles.

HILS Relax.

ALEX That hurts.

HILS It's very tight.

PAT Was that the phone?

ALEX *stiffens.*

HILS Relax.

PAT I'll check.

PAT *goes inside the house.*

*Silence.*

HILS It's very tight.

ALEX What is?

HILS Your Achilles. That's what they call themselves. One of the groups I'm working with.

ALEX Achilles?

HILS Achilles Heel.

ALEX Angry men who know the classics?

HILS You'd be surprised who has problems with their emotions.

ALEX You don't happen to have a client who's fat and fifty and who never shuts up? And has a broken nose? We call him Mr Universe.

HILS I work with the younger ones.

ALEX Good-looking?

PAT *comes out of the house. ALEX looks at her. She shakes her head.*

PAT No one.

HILS Good-looking men do have difficulties with their emotions.

ALEX You couldn't line me up with the least angry one?

PAT Alex, these men hit their wives.



ALEX I don't want to marry them. I just want to .... (To HILS.) He's got to have hair.

PAT I think we should change the subject.

HILS When did you last spend a night in the arms of a man?

PAT That's the answer, is it?

ALEX I think it was the question.

*ALEX gets to her feet.*

ALEX Can I pour anyone more coffee?

HILS Has there been anyone since dad?

PAT I happen to believe that my involvement in the Party has been the most exciting, most fulfilling part of my life. I've enjoyed being a GP, but I've loved the Party.

HILS Have you been in love with anyone?

PAT I love you. And I love Alex.

HILS Have you been *in* love with anyone.

PAT I was in love with your father.

HILS Were you?

PAT Of course I was. But after he walked out —

HILS He didn't walk out.

PAT Yes, he did.

HILS (To ALEX.) She asked him to leave.

PAT (To ALEX.) He was involved with another woman.

*ALEX has heard this many times before.*

ALEX The 'other woman.'

PAT Yes. She knew she was endangering the happiness of a child, a wife ... a husband, by her carelessness but she didn't ... care. She wanted power without responsibility. She didn't want to get her hands dirty.

HILS He loved her.

PAT Did he?

HILS Yes.

PAT He told you that?

HILS Yes.

PAT On one of his visits?

HILS He saw me as much as you let him.

PAT It upset you. (*To ALEX.*) Is that what love is? Walking out on your wife and daughter?

HILS He didn't want to hurt us.

PAT That's what he did.

HILS He fell in love with someone else. (*To ALEX.*) You can't control these things.

PAT You'd know all about that.

HILS You wanted him to stay? Pretend that everything was fine?

PAT You don't just throw in the towel. You don't give up. You don't put your family through ... After he left ... You think I didn't want to ... ?

HILS Howl and shriek?

PAT Can you see me ...?

HILS Why didn't you?

PAT I had a job to do. I wasn't going to be ...

HILS Broken?

PAT You always have to ...

HILS That's what love does.

PAT Not to me.

HILS Just once, I'd like to see you lose your temper. Yell at someone. Stamp your foot.

PAT That's the solution, is it?

ALEX That's the phone.

PAT *gets to her feet.*

ALEX I'll get it.

PAT No, I will.

PAT *goes into the house.*

HILS Do you miss your mother?

ALEX I miss my father. I was wearing his medals the other day and—

HILS She doesn't love me.

ALEX (*Wearily.*) Yes, she does. You rub each other up the wrong way. You always have done. If something happened to you .... She'd be devastated.

HILS Would she?

ALEX You know she would.

*Pause.*

HILS And how would you feel?

ALEX *doesn't reply.*

PAT *enters from the house.*

PAT That was Liv.

*Silence.*

ALEX What did she want?

PAT She wouldn't say.

ALEX *gets to her feet.*

PAT She's on her way over.

HILS *stands.*

PAT You don't have to go.

ALEX (*To HILS.*) I'll talk to her inside.

PAT Sit down. Both of you. Finish your coffee.

ALEX *and HILS sit.*

PAT Tell me more about your job.

- HILS I let them talk.
- PAT Yes. We need to create a society which will not rush off to war at the slightest provocation, but which will sit down and talk things over.
- HILS I listen to them.
- PAT Even when times are fearful—especially when times are fearful—we need mechanisms for dialogue.
- ALEX I can't promise anything.
- PAT I'm not going to say anything more.
- HILS I listen to them.
- ALEX People are scared. They don't want to have dialogue with terrorists.
- HILS I listen—
- PAT We need a high-profile chair. Someone who's not aligned.
- ALEX I can't—
- PAT A woman.
- HILS (*Very loudly.*)—listen to them!
- Silence.*
- PAT You listen to them.
- HILS They acknowledge their anger and let it go.
- PAT And they lay down their arms?
- ALEX And take up Morris dancing. (*Getting to her feet.*) Or a bit of rumba? (*She demonstrates.*) Or do they just beat drums—and their chests? (*She beats her chest.*)
- PAT (*To ALEX.*) This is a serious discussion.
- HILS It's not a discussion.
- PAT Yes, it is.
- HILS It's a debate.
- ALEX And one I've heard many many times before.

PAT                    There's nothing wrong with a debate.

HILS                    Someone has to win a debate.

PAT                    Without debate we can't make informed decisions.

HILS                    I don't want informed decisions.

PAT                    What do you want?

HILS                    I want—*(She places her hand on her heart.)*—this.

*LIV enters by the driveway.*

PAT                    What's so important?

LIV                    I need to talk to Alex. *(PAT waits.)* About the election.

PAT                    The election is weeks away.

LIV                    I need some advice.

ALEX                    *(To LIV.)* We can go inside.

HILS                    Remember the flasks of hot cocoa?

*They all turn to look her.*

HILS                    On polling day. And your lemon sponge cake. *(To LIV.)* She used to hand it around to the opposition.

PAT                    They were just as cold and hungry. I think we should treat people well. Be hospitable.

ALEX                    I can't promise—

HILS                    Why was it so important?

*Once again, they all look at her.*

HILS                    The day? The vote? Why does it matter so much?

PAT                    We walk into a school hall, tick a few boxes, fold up the scrap of paper. And change a government.

ALEX                    Sometimes.

PAT                    But to know we can.

HILS                    When I walk into that school hall—

ALEX                    I thought you didn't vote.

HILS                   When I did vote. I didn't feel I could change anything. All I could feel was despair.

PAT                    You didn't feel despair. You couldn't have.

HILS                   You're right. I was pissed off. Pissed off that you spent so much time with the Party. And with—(*Pointing to ALEX.*)—her. I was jealous. Still am. But I'm not going to let it fuck me up any more.

*She exits by the driveway.*

PAT                    I'll see you to the car.

PAT *follows* HILS.

*A short silence.*

LIV                    It's probably nothing.

ALEX                  You couldn't tell me over the phone.

LIV                    It's the cheque.

ALEX                  I thought we'd sorted the cheque.

LIV                    The police are thinking about running an investigation.

ALEX                  What police?

LIV                    The Feds.

ALEX                  Into what? A cheque in the wrong pile?

LIV                    They're only thinking about it.

ALEX                  How do you know what the police are only thinking about?

LIV                    One of David's footie mates—

ALEX                  A footie mate?

LIV                    —is a Federal cop.

ALEX                  I see. (*Getting angry.*) And he told David what the police are only thinking about?

LIV                    In confidence.

ALEX                  Of course. And David told his wife—who just happens to be my staffer—in confidence.

- LIV                               He thought I should know.
- ALEX                             And she told me. In confidence. And who's put them up to it? Mr Universe. He's got mates in the Federal police. And what are they going to accuse me of?
- LIV                               Fraud.
- ALEX                             I am not a thief. *(Pause.)* Get Paulson. Tell him to go ahead with the speech. Tomorrow. First thing.
- Silence..*
- LIV                               If that's your decision.
- ALEX                             No. Not my decision. Your decision.
- Silence.*
- ALEX                             You want me to tell them it was your mistake?
- LIV *says nothing.*
- ALEX                             You heard the rumour. You were keen. You jumped the gun. This conversation never happened.
- LIV *doesn't move.*
- ALEX                             To lose when it's this close.
- LIV *turns to go. PAT enters from the driveway. LIV walks past her and exits.*
- PAT                               Trouble?
- ALEX                             Not for me.
- PAT                               You want to tell me about it?
- ALEX *considers telling her.*
- ALEX                             I should be going.
- PAT                               The coffee.
- ALEX                             It's getting late.
- PAT *picks up the shawl.*
- PAT                               It's not too bright. *(Pause.)* I think she's going to be fine.
- Silence.*
- ALEX                             She's tougher than we think. I'll see myself out.

ALEX *exits*.

PAT *folds the scarf and returns it to the wrapping-paper. She'll never wear it.*

*Blackout.*



## SCENE 4

*A loud crash (as Hil's car swerves to hit a tree).*

*One by one the actors enter: PAULSON, ED, LIV, ALEX and PAT.*

*What follows is a series of slides of mock-ups of a week's newspaper front pages accompanied by the sound of an ABC newsreader, where only snatches of the news item can be heard.*

*The actors stand with their backs to the audience. Like the audience, they are watching the slides.*

NEWS READER      ... on the funding of women's ... revealed by Senator Paulson  
... restraining order ... against the Member for ...

*Newspaper photo of PAULSON trying to control a smirk, below the headline: 'Mr Universe hits his wife'.*

NEWS READER      ... Australia's first female Prime ... voted in by her... the  
current PM ... health reasons.

*Newspaper photo of ALEX looking quietly confident over the headline: 'Bloodless coup delivers good communicator'.*

NEWS READER      Outside Parliament ... told reporters ... he was undergoing ...  
the men's group, Achilles ...

*Newspaper photo of Mr Universe under the headline: 'Angry men that know the classics?'*

NEWS READER      ... Information has ... Ms Hilary Wilkinson, close friend ...  
works for the men's group ... Reporters ... unable to confirm  
... in the leaking of the restraining order ...

*Newspaper photo of a terrified HILARY backed into a corner of her garage, over the headline: 'Guilty or not-guilty?'*

NEWS READER      ... the body of Ms Hilary ... found in the wreckage ... to have  
swerved into a tree ...

*Newspaper photo of Hilary's car crashed into a tree. The headline: 'Tragic suicide of PM's "sister"'.*

ALEX                      Turn it off!

NEWS READER      Today during a rowdy session of Question Time, the Prime  
Minister confirmed that she had ...

*Newspaper photo of a defiant ALEX under the headline: 'PM says she had "no knowledge"'.*

*The actors exit.*

NEWSREADER

It has been rumoured that a fraud investigation into the new Prime Minister was dropped due to insufficient evidence.

## SCENE 5

*The Prime Minister's office, Parliament House, Canberra.*

*The office is empty. A cardboard box sits on a corner of the desk. PAULSON enters hesitantly. He's lost his bounce. He looks around the room for a moment then moves towards the desk. He looks inside the cardboard box. He looks around and then takes out the velvet box. He hears a noise off-stage, replaces the velvet box, and moves to the window.*

LIV enters.

PAULSON turns, almost guiltily. When he sees that it's LIV he turns back to look out of the window.

LIV looks at him. Then goes to the cardboard box which she begins to unpack. Bookends. A few reference books which she arranges on the desk. Desk ornaments.

PAULSON            All I wanted to do was to help Alex.

LIV                    We both did.

PAULSON            If I'd known she was going to—

LIV                    Stop it.

PAULSON            I can't sleep!

LIV                    Stop now.

PAULSON            How do I live with myself? Tell me that?

LIV                    It will be all right. You will survive this. You will.

PAULSON            It's just ... I spend one, maybe two, hours at the gym every night, but then I get back to the flat and turn off the light and close my eyes and I see *her* eyes. To thrust the camera in her face like that! She was like an animal caught in the headlights. She had no chance. If I'd known she was going to ...

*Pause.*

LIV                    You didn't kill her.

PAULSON            Of course I didn't kill her. (*He turns on her.*) You told me to go ahead with the speech.

LIV                    O.k., then, I didn't kill her.

PAULSON            I had no idea she worked for that organisation.

LIV                    So you've said.

PAULSON            I didn't! How could I know? I'd never met the woman. I didn't know where she worked.

LIV                    I believe you. And can we change the subject before the PM gets here?

*Pause.*

PAULSON            Convenient.

LIV                    What is?

PAULSON            Cabinet meeting. Today. The day of the funeral.

LIV                    It's the way things worked out.

*Pause.*

PAULSON            Did you?

LIV                    Did I what?

PAULSON            Know?

LIV                    Know?

PAULSON            (*Spelling it out.*) That Pat's daughter worked for the same organisation that he was going to for counselling.

LIV                    No. I didn't.

PAULSON            If I'd known she worked there ....

LIV                    You didn't kill her.

PAULSON            But if I hadn't made that speech. If I hadn't brought attention to the restraining order ....

LIV                    He was accusing Alex of fraud!

PAULSON            Was he?

LIV                    He went to the police.

PAULSON            They dropped the case, didn't they?

LIV                    We didn't know they were going to do that. If we'd known that, then we'd never had got you to deliver that speech.

PAULSON            So she did know.

LIV She?

PAULSON Alex.

LIV *says nothing.*

PAULSON You said 'we.'

LIV Did I?

PAULSON This isn't a game. Some kind of 'Knock-knock. Who's there.' You said, 'If we'd known, we'd never have got you to deliver that speech.'

*Again LIV says nothing.*

PAULSON She did know.

LIV She'll be here any minute. You can ask her yourself.

PAULSON It's just that people are saying I acted on my own initiative.

LIV And you'd never do that. People are saying that because that's what you did.

PAULSON You told me to go ahead. You rang me that Sunday and told me—

LIV You were keen. You didn't know the rules. You jumped the gun. Right, Junior Minister Paulson?

*Long pause.*

PAULSON It's just that they look at me as if I'd shot Bambi.

LIV I don't know what you're complaining about. You got your face on the front page. 'We're not here *not* to be noticed.' You got to make a splash.

PAULSON That's not funny.

LIV No. It's not. She had children. Two girls. (*Pause.*) How could she do that to her children?

PAULSON She was a deeply private person.

LIV I thought you never met her.

PAULSON I've been asking around. Hilary hated politics. She spent her whole life running away from it. Alex grew up with her. Alex would have known the effect such a public exposure—she was on the evening news for Christ's sake—would have on her.

LIV                                But Alex didn't know you were going to go ahead with your speech.

PAULSON                        Didn't she?

LIV                                She'd already knocked you back on it. Bad politics, she said. Remember. *(Pause.)* I told you to give that speech. I was keen. I didn't know the rules. I jumped the gun.

*A smiling and relaxed ALEX enters. She looks ... thinner? But really she's just better groomed. A definite air du power.*

ALEX                                Look what they gave me.

*She holds out a packet of Iced Vo-vo biscuits.*

ALEX                                *(To LIV.)* From the Cabinet. *(Including PAULSON.)* A token of their admiration. It's a joke. I thought it was pretty funny. Get yourselves a drink. *(To PAULSON, but addressed to the room at large.)* Ed's on his way over.

*PAULSON heads for the door, then stops, undecided.*

ALEX                                *(To LIV.)* I'll have a Scotch.

*LIV busies herself with the drinks.*

ALEX                                Not at the gym?

PAULSON                        I'm on my way.

LIV                                 You want a drink?

PAULSON                        No, thanks. *(Pause.)* Today's the funeral.

LIV                                 *(Quietly.)* Paulson.

ALEX                                It's o.k. *(To PAULSON.)* Yes. Today was the funeral. Two o'clock.

*She takes her drink from LIV.*

ALEX                                *(Raising her glass.)* To Hils.

PAULSON                        Have you spoken to her? *(ALEX is not making it easy for him.)* To Pat?

ALEX                                Not today.

PAULSON                        How's she taking it?

ALEX                                Hard, I'd say.

- PAULSON            You don't know?
- ALEX                I've only spoken to her once since they found— *(Pause.)*  
Have you ever contemplated suicide?
- PAULSON            No.
- ALEX                *(To LIV.)* Have you?
- LIV                  No.
- ALEX                Exactly. You don't just throw in the towel. You don't give up.  
Can you imagine what it must be like to lose your daughter  
like that? To know that she killed herself? That she didn't  
come to you? How could she do that?
- PAULSON            She must have been depressed.
- ALEX                So get some help. She was a counsellor, for God's sake. She  
must have been able to recognise the signs.
- PAULSON            Did you know ...?
- ALEX                *(Snaps back.)* Know what?
- PAULSON            *(Losing courage.)* ... that she worked for that organisation?
- LIV *also wants to know.*
- ALEX                No, I didn't. I knew she worked for some organisation. I didn't  
think for a moment ... I made a joke about it.
- PAULSON            Would it have made any difference?
- A silence, broken only by Ed entering. He carries a few cans of beer.*
- ALEX                I see you came prepared.
- ED                  I thought you might not run to beer.
- He is ignoring PAULSON.*
- ALEX                How did you think it went?
- ED                  You were brilliant.
- ALEX                I wasn't fishing for compliments.
- ED                  You were o.k.
- ALEX                Yes, I was.

ED                                You were great. (*To LIV.*) She was reasonable. Gracious. Inspirational.

ALEX                              I appreciate the way you took me through it.

ED                                That's what the Deputy's for.

*A buzzer sounds, off-stage.*

ALEX                              (*To LIV.*) Can you see to that?

*LIV exits into the outer office.*

ALEX                              (*To PAULSON.*) It was so much fun. (*To ED.*) I'm going to hit a few sixes. (*Including PAULSON.*) We all are.

ED                                Not me.

ALEX                              Of course you will.

ED                                I'm getting out of politics.

*Silence.*

ED                                I'll wait until after the election.

ALEX                              Can I ask why?

ED                                Sue's on at me to spend more time with the family.

*Silence.*

ED                                You know what it's like.

*Silence.*

ALEX                              I'll be sorry to see you go.

PAULSON                        We all will.

ED                                No. That's not it.

*Silence.*

ALEX                              Go on.

ED                                Maybe I don't trust the team any more. (*Not looking at PAULSON.*) It was a mistake to make him a Minister.

*LIV enters.*

LIV                                It's Pat.



ALEX                    Tell her I'll ring her back.

LIV                     She's here.

PAULSON             Here?

LIV                     (To ALEX.) I told her you were in a meeting but she insists on seeing you.

PAULSON             You can't see her.

LIV                     (*Lowering her voice.*) She's in a bit of a state.

ALEX                   (To ED.) Would you excuse me?

ED                      Sure.

*ALEX is about the exit into the outer office, when PAT enters. She is wearing the scarf that HILS gave her, tucked under her jacket. She seems quite calm. For a moment, no one speaks.*

ALEX                   I think you know everyone.

ED                      Pat.

*PAT inclines her head.*

PAULSON             Pat.

*She ignores him.*

LIV                     Would you like a drink?

ALEX                   Yes. Get Pat a drink. A brandy. With soda. Just a splash.

*LIV busies herself with preparing the drink.*

PAULSON             I didn't kill her.

*Silence.*

PAULSON             (To PAT.) I'm very sorry. But it was like you said. I was just the messenger.

*PAULSON exits.*

ED                      (To PAT.) We haven't always seen eye to eye on things but I'm very sorry about what happened, and if I'd known what Paulson was planning, I'd have tried to stop him. (*Turning to ALEX.*) We both would have.

*ED exits.*

LIV I hope it's not too strong.

LIV *hands PAT her drink.*

LIV I'm very sorry. Really, I am. I couldn't imagine losing Sascha. (To ALEX.) I'll be in the other room.

LIV *exits.*

PAT I hope you're not going to say you're very sorry and then make a bolt for the door. And I know why you didn't come to the funeral.

ALEX I didn't want to turn it into a media circus.

PAT I did hope. (*Pause.*) There was quite a good turnout ... for such a wet day. Peter and the girls. Some colleagues. A few school-friends. An alarming number of violent men. I was really quite worried when I saw them stamping into the church—all that glaring and cracking of knuckles. But they were sweet. Really very sweet. One of them broke down and wept. Sobbed. (*Pause.*) Wild flowers were a lovely idea. Thank you. Very Ophelia. Hilary would have approved. (*Pause.*) I knew you wouldn't come but I did hope. (*Longer pause.*) I know why you haven't been to see me. Or rung. (*She sees that ALEX is about to speak.*) Yes, you did ring. Once. After they found ... (*Pause.*) I got the message. Thank you. Can you believe all this has happened in just over a week? You're made Prime Minister. Hilary dies. She was on the evening news. Did you see her? She shouldn't have run. It made her look guilty. At first I thought she was guilty. That for some reason known only to Hilary, she'd decided to get involved in politics and leaked that document ...

*She has been watching ALEX.*

PAT No, I didn't think so. And when she rang me that night—the night they chased her into the house—I knew she couldn't possibly be guilty. She was too surprised. Then I wondered if you knew? About Paulson's speech? (*She watches ALEX.*) I wasn't sure. But when this morning's paper mentioned the fraud investigation ...

*Silence.*

ALEX There was no investigation.

PAT But you thought there might be. That was why Olivia interrupted our Sunday lunch. To tell you that she'd heard a rumour. Why didn't you tell me?

ALEX                   It was just a rumour.

PAT                    Just a rumour.

ALEX                   It was a minor matter. A small mistake. *(Pause.)* Made by Liv, as a matter of fact. There was no question of fraud.

PAT                    It worried you enough to let Paulson off the leash.

*ALEX says nothing. PAT takes this as confirmation.*

PAT                    Yes, I thought you must've known.

*PAT waits.*

ALEX                   Would you like another drink?

*For the first time since entering the room, PAT really looks at ALEX. She takes in the difference in her appearance.*

PAT                    It suits you.

ALEX                   What?

PAT                    *(Pointing at her clothes.)* This. *(Gesturing to the room.)* This. You look like a Prime Minister.

ALEX                   Thank you. *(Pause.)* I've got a dinner engagement in ... *(She looks at her watch.)* ... but we've got a few minutes.

PAT                    You didn't kill her. Hilary killed Hilary. It was her choice. She was depressed. She's been depressed for years. I thought she was getting better but of course that's when suicide is more likely—when you're feeling better. When you've got the energy to carry it through. Paulson's speech didn't help. I'll never forgive him for that. She was teetering, and the public exposure tipped her over the edge.

*Silence.*

ALEX                   I do know how you're feeling.

PAT                    You must tell the truth.

ALEX                   *(Decisively.)* I'm going to have to go. Can I ring you a taxi?

PAT                    You've lied to Parliament.

ALEX                   Liv!

PAT                    You said you knew nothing about Paulson's speech.

LIV *enters.*

ALEX Pat is just leaving.

PAT No, I'm not.

ALEX Then I'm afraid I must. (*To LIV.*) Can you deal with this?

LIV Yes, of course.

ALEX Pat needs a taxi.

PAT O.k. I'll go. But please. Give me a few minutes. Just a few more minutes.

ALEX *nods to LIV.*

LIV I'll organise the taxi.

LIV *exits.*

PAT I didn't come here to blame you.

ALEX How could you blame me?

PAT I came here to help you.

ALEX I'm doing fine. Better than fine.

*Silence.*

PAT Who knows? Paulson. Olivia? Of course. Maybe she suggested it. Ed? (*Thinking.*) Ed suspects. 'I would have tried to stop him. We both would.' If Ed suspects, then others do and what *is* certain is that someone will talk, some day. It could be Paulson. You saw what he was like just then. Olivia? She won't go down with the ship. And Ed? If Ed starts to believe... (*Pause.*) The rumours will start

ALEX I don't care about rumours.

PAT Questions will be asked. Judgements will be made. They might think you knew more. They might think you knew that Hilary worked for that organisation.

ALEX I didn't know—

PAT Of course you didn't.

ALEX You think I would knowingly have implicated Hilary?

PAT It was a mistake.

- ALEX                   Of course it was a mistake.
- PAT                    That's why you have to get in first. You made an error of judgement. You deeply regret it. You've learned from it. You will never do it again.
- ALEX                   I thought you wanted to grieve. A few more minutes for us to grieve ...together ...because, believe me, I am grieving. It's very hard for me to believe that she's dead.
- PAT                    That's the point. She's dead.
- ALEX looks at her.*
- PAT                    I can't help her. But I can help you. I can save you.
- Short pause.*
- PAT                    You must tell the truth.
- Pause.*
- ALEX                   Just say I was to do this.
- PAT                    It's the only way.
- ALEX                   Just say I was—although I'm admitting to nothing. You know what will happen?
- PAT                    Cabinet will stand by you.
- ALEX                   They will fall upon me like the Furies.
- PAT                    They need you.
- ALEX                   To win them the election.
- PAT                    And you will. The people will support you.
- ALEX                   After I admit I lied to Parliament?
- PAT                    You were under enormous pressure. You were being threatened with a police investigation. A trumped-up politically-motivated investigation. You were about to be made Prime Minister. You were having meetings, taking calls, making statements—all day. You simply made a mistake.
- ALEX                   They'll say I played dirty.
- PAT                    They will forgive you.
- ALEX                   The press won't let them.

- PAT They won't listen to the press.
- ALEX Women aren't allowed to play dirty.
- PAT It was a small mistake.
- ALEX A woman killed herself!
- Pause.*
- PAT You gave them back hope.
- ALEX No one can live up to those expectations.
- PAT Trust them. Trust me.
- ALEX And if I'm forced to resign?
- PAT You won't have to resign. You can stand down. And after a spell on the back bench—
- ALEX I've just got here. I'm doing fine. I'm doing better than fine. I could feel it today in the Cabinet meeting. I can make things happen. Good things. I can.
- PAT Not if you feel compromised. You'll always be waiting for that tap on the shoulder.
- ALEX And what about the Party? What if we get kicked out?
- PAT I don't think it will come to that, but if it should ...
- ALEX And what about the summit? Are you prepared to lose that?
- PAT I thought you were losing interest in the summit. 'People are scared. They don't want to have a dialogue with—'
- ALEX I think I could push it through. Yes, I can. We must have dialogue with those we fear. Otherwise, what's left to us? Guns and tanks? (*The briefest of pauses.*) Maybe I could get you the Chair.
- PAT Could you?
- ALEX I might be able to.
- PAT Only 'might'?
- ALEX Yes, I could.
- PAT The Chair of an international summit?

ALEX Yes. Why not? You deserve to have it. After all your hard work. And don't forget those fifty years working for the Party. I'll be accused of giving jobs to the boys—girls. Let them talk.

*Pause.*

PAT You want to buy me off.

ALEX Buying-off implies something to sell.

PAT My silence.

ALEX About what?

*Silence.*

PAT What I'm asking myself is ... did you just think of this ... bribe?

ALEX I don't need to—

PAT Just now. Under pressure. Or was this always your ... plan?

*Silence.*

ALEX You were the one who taught me to ... plan.

*Silence.*

PAT This isn't about the summit.

ALEX So why are you here?

PAT It's about a principle.

ALEX What principle?

PAT A fundamental truth. We, the people—

ALEX 'The people', no less.

PAT Let me speak.

*Silence.*

PAT You asked why I'm here.

ALEX I'm listening.

PAT We, the people, elect you to protect us from the forces of chaos and disorder. You make laws and enact legislation that makes our lives more secure. Safer. Free from arbitrary acts of

violence by the powerful. Or the disaffected. But when you make use of private individuals for your political power games .... That is wrong.

- ALEX I didn't make use of Hilary.
- PAT But you allowed Paulson to reveal personal details about the life of—
- ALEX A politician. A public figure.
- PAT And his wife? And their children? (*Pause.*) That is unjust.
- ALEX You want justice?
- PAT What else could be so important?
- ALEX Revenge.
- PAT I don't want revenge.
- ALEX If Hilary hadn't killed herself would you be here telling me these fundamental truths?
- PAT I would hope so. But certainly Hilary's actions have made me—made a lot of people—more aware of the responsibilities that go with political power.
- ALEX I'm not going to stand down.
- PAT I've lost one daughter. Don't make me lose the other.
- ALEX I was never your daughter. I was a project. Alex-sandra. Some one you could mould. Someone you could send in with guns blazing. Why didn't you run? They were electing women in your day. Not many, but some did get in. You would have got in. But you didn't want to get your hands dirty. 'Alex can get me what I want.'
- PAT I wanted a better world.
- ALEX You wanted power without responsibility. A voice in the Parliament. In the Cabinet. Prime Minister. (*Pause.*) I can get you the summit, but that's it.
- Silence.*
- ALEX Did you hope for more?
- PAT I will speak out.
- ALEX Who'll listen to you?



- PAT                    There's a lot of sympathy out there.
- ALEX                  For a week or so. Then you'll be old news.
- PAT                    I won't give up.
- ALEX                  They'll say you're bitter. A mad, bitter, old woman.
- PAT begins to exit.*
- PAT                    I'll wait outside for the taxi.
- ALEX gets between her and the door.*
- ALEX                  Why didn't you go over to see her? The night she rang?
- PAT                    For the same reason you didn't come to her funeral.
- ALEX                  Guilt.
- PAT                    Not guilt.
- ALEX                  Isn't that what I'm supposed to feel? Guilt?
- PAT                    Concern.
- ALEX                  You were concerned about Hils?
- PAT                    Of course I was. Can you imagine the reaction of the press if I turned up? A leading Party supporter? It would have confirmed her guilt.
- ALEX                  You were her mother. They knew that. She needed you. And you didn't go.
- PAT                    I told her to stay inside and stick it out. But what does she do? She jumps into her car and roars off down the street and— Why did she turn everything into such a drama?
- ALEX                  She killed herself!
- Silence.*
- PAT                    I loved her. I've always loved her.
- ALEX                  No.
- PAT                    I loved her! (*She almost stamps her foot.*) How could she do that to me? To her mother? (*She fights for composure.*) How shall I live without her? (*She breaks.*) Is that why she did it? Do you think? So that I would know—(*She touches her heart. A small gesture.*)—this?

*She composes herself, wraps the scarf—the scarf Hilary gave her—around her neck and shoulders, and exits.*

ALEX surveys the room. *Has it been worth it? She moves towards the door, as if she might follow PAT. She stops, undecided. Once again she surveys the room. She walks over to the desk and rearranges the desk ornaments. She picks up the velvet box containing her father's medals. She takes them out and holds them.*

LIV enters.

ALEX (Holding up the medals.) He was tortured. They pushed bamboo under his fingernails. They beat him with sticks. (Pause.) She's going to tell them I lied to Parliament.

LIV You didn't tell her?

ALEX Tell her what?

LIV That you knew.

*Pause. ALEX regards the medals.*

ALEX He wouldn't speak. (To LIV.) She's upset. Angry. She won't go through with it. And if she does ...

*She holds up the medals, then returns them to their velvet box.*

ALEX I'm the Prime Minister. I'm here. It's my turn and I'm not going to waste it.

*She puts the box away in her desk drawer.*

ALEX So what's the schedule for tomorrow?

LIV puts down on the desk the papers she is carrying.

ALEX What are we doing tomorrow?

LIV I should start knocking on doors.

ALEX Tomorrow?

LIV Next week. I need to start moving about the electorate.

ALEX But you're my adviser.

LIV I was never your adviser.

*Silence.*

ALEX The election is weeks away. I thought you'd stay until we announce the date.

LIV I also should spend some time with Sascha ... before she goes to school ... and David.

ALEX You want to distance yourself from me.

LIV No.

ALEX I'm a liability.

LIV You're the Prime Minister.

ALEX I want the truth.

LIV That is the truth.

ALEX *says nothing.*

LIV I want to win that seat. I've spent a lot of time getting to this point. I've made sacrifices. Enormous sacrifices. I've been at meetings when I should have been with my daughter. I spend more time with you than I do with my husband. If you go down—and I'm not saying that's going to happen. Why should they believe her?—but if you do ... Is there any point in me going down with you? I know how this sounds. But you can't let sentiment get in the way. That's the mistake women always make.

ALEX Like when I said that I put the cheque in the wrong account?

*Silence.*

ALEX I thought you were my friend. Almost my daughter.

LIV I was never your daughter. You took it personally. You forgot it was just politics. The personal is not the political, it never was. Your generation of women just saw it that way, that was your struggle, but mine is different. And now, if you'll excuse me ...

LIV *exits.*

*A moment, then ALEX moves forward into the spotlight. It is, as it was in the beginning. The sound of heckling—distorted and growing louder. And louder. She stands there, her head held high. She will not speak.*

*Blackout.*

THE END.

BANANA SPLIT

What's gone and what's past help  
Should be past grief  
—Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*

BANANA SPLIT was read at the Australian National Playwrights Conference, at  
The Theatre, Australian National University Arts Centre, Canberra, on 2 May, 2002.  
The cast was as follows:

ROBERT and JAMIE            Luciano Martucci

MARNIE and RUTH            Jenny Vuletic

*Directed by*    Tom Healey

*Dramaturgy*    Tony Nicholls

*Characters:*

RUTH, *mid-thirties*

ROBERT, *her partner, late forties*

MARNIE, *Robert's ex-wife, forties*

JAMIE, *Ruth's ex-partner, late thirties*

*The action of the play alternates between the restaurant, Chez Bert (pronounced Chezz Bert) and Marnie and Robert's once family home. There are a few other locations: Jamie's shed, the crematorium and Ruth's apartment.*

*Act One: The night of Robert and Marnie's wedding anniversary.*

*Act Two: Exactly one year later.*

*A metal café table and two metal chairs. At the back, an empty plinth, on which stands the Balinese housegod in Act Two. On a small side-table, a large bowl of fruit, including a bunch of bananas.*

*There should be no blackouts between scenes. Transformations between character should happen quickly and where specified, in full view of the audience. The scenes need to be 'choreographed' to give a sense of great physicality. This is not a play where actors stand around and talk.*

## ACT ONE

Scene One

*Chez Bert. RUTH sits at a table, checking the answers in a multi-page questionnaire. She writes down a score.*

RUTH                    *(To the audience.)* Making money is about understanding the relationship between risk and reward. Most sensible people – and I’m sure most of you are sensible people – will only put their money into risky ventures if they stand a chance of ending up with a huge return. Otherwise, why take the risk? I’m a financial adviser. I give people advice about what they should do with their money. Capital stable, capital growth. Liquidity, volatile swings. Leverage on the upside. High yield. It’s really quite sexy. *(Holding up the questionnaire.)* Risk analysis profile questionnaire. I give it to all my clients. People might think they’re risk-takers, but they fill out this, and the real picture emerges. How much risk can you take and still sleep at night? *(She reads from the questionnaire.)* ‘You are a contestant on a TV game show and have to choose one of the following: A. One thousand dollars in cash. B. A fifty percent chance of winning two thousand dollars.’ That’s an even chance. ‘C. A twenty percent chance of winning five thousand dollars. And D.’

ROBERT, *wearing a new chef’s cap, walks on.*

RUTH                    ‘D’.

ROBERT                A five percent chance of winning one hundred thousand dollars.

RUTH                    *(To the audience.)* Which would you choose?

ROBERT                *(To the audience.)* I went for the big one.

RUTH                    Only a very few people choose D. But you did. *(She strokes his arm.)* Very few people have it in them to take the big risks in life.

ROBERT                How do I look?

RUTH                    Very professional. *(He looks around, critically.)* It looks fantastic.

ROBERT                You don’t think it’s a bit cold?

RUTH                    It looks classy.



ROBERT                   Clinical?

RUTH                     Minimalist. (*She watches ROBERT walk over to the empty  
plinth.*) We can buy another one.

ROBERT                  You can't buy a Balinese house god. It has to be ... bestowed.

RUTH                     We can buy something else.

ROBERT                  I don't want something else.

RUTH                     What about a man with his chin on his hand?

ROBERT                  I planned the whole look of the place around the housegod.

RUTH                     Something enormous in painted steel?

ROBERT                  Weathered ... wooden ... wise.

RUTH                     Or a Japanese water feature that goes tap, tap, tap?

ROBERT                  It was supposed to bring us good luck.

RUTH                     We don't need good luck.

ROBERT                  Restaurants go out of business every day.

RUTH                     Not this one.

*She picks up the menu from the table.*

ROBERT                  Nothing too difficult.

RUTH                     It was your idea to have a rehearsal.

ROBERT                  I want to try out the kitchen.

RUTH                     You've tried out the kitchen.

ROBERT                  We open tomorrow night. I need to get my bearings. To make  
sure I've got everything to hand.

RUTH                     You chose D.

ROBERT                  That doesn't count.

RUTH                     Of course, it counts.

ROBERT                  You fill in the answers in some quiz—

RUTH                     This isn't some quiz. This is a risk analysis profile  
questionnaire.

- ROBERT            You fill in some answers in a risk analysis profile questionnaire—
- RUTH              All ten pages of it.
- ROBERT            All ten pages of it, and it tells you—
- RUTH              —that you can handle risk.
- ROBERT            On paper.
- RUTH              That's all I need to know.
- ROBERT            'On paper', is not the same as 'in life'.
- RUTH              It is for me, and for the team of research psychologists who put this risk analysis profile questionnaire together.
- ROBERT            What would they know about running a restaurant?
- RUTH              Probably very little—
- ROBERT            You see.
- RUTH              —but they know a great deal about a person's ability to handle with risk.
- ROBERT            I've given up my job. I've sunk all my savings—
- RUTH              My savings.
- ROBERT            —our savings in this place.
- RUTH              It's natural that'll you'll feel nervous.
- ROBERT            I feel more than nervous.
- RUTH              You can't.
- ROBERT            I feel shit-scared.
- RUTH              You can't.
- ROBERT            What do you mean, I can't?
- RUTH              ( *Holding up the questionnaire.* ) You were one hundred percent D. A bit too risk-positive, but hey that's exciting. I've never had one that prepared to go for it.
- Silence.*
- ROBERT            Madam, allow me to recommend the omelette.

- RUTH                   And I've been through the figures. Just because you were so risk-positive, it didn't mean that I was going to jeopardise my savings. It's a good little business with plenty of upside. You're a terrific cook. I knew that from the start. Everything's covered. We're going to be a success.
- ROBERT                You don't think the name ...?
- RUTH                   We had to have a new name.
- ROBERT                Nobody calls me Bert.
- RUTH                   You can't call it *Chez Robert*.
- ROBERT                Do we have to call it *Chez* anything?
- RUTH                   *Chez Robert* would be pretentious. *Bert's Caff* would be trying too hard. But *Chez Bert* says it all. I'll have the omelette d'oeuf.
- ROBERT                And that's another thing.
- She looks at him.*
- ROBERT                Omelette d'oeuf?
- RUTH                   Yes?
- ROBERT                I didn't like to say anything before.
- RUTH                   So why say it now?
- ROBERT                It looked all right written down. But now that I've heard someone order it.
- RUTH                   I'll order something else.
- ROBERT                Won't they think I don't know that oeuf means eggs?
- RUTH                   We've been through this.
- ROBERT                I'm being ironic.
- RUTH                   Yes.
- ROBERT                I never really understood that.
- RUTH                   Why wait until the night before we open?
- ROBERT                That's why I wanted a rehearsal.
- RUTH                   We can't change these.

- ROBERT I'm just not sure of my motivation. The 'being ironic' bit.
- RUTH When you put a dish like omelette d'oeuf on the menu you're saying to your customers: 'I'm not taking this food business seriously. I am taking it seriously. Of course I'm taking it seriously. Food has to be taken seriously. That's the trouble with most restaurants. They don't take it seriously enough. I'm taking it very seriously. That's my job. I'm taking it seriously seriously. But not ... seriously.'
- ROBERT *is trying to follow this.*
- RUTH You're giving people permission to be playful.
- ROBERT Don't people just want to eat?
- RUTH They can do that at home. When they eat out they want ... theatre. They want magic. Illusion. Dream. They want omelette d'oeuf. (*She returns to her work.*)
- ROBERT Omelette with eggs it is.
- She looks at him.*
- ROBERT I'm being playful.
- ROBERT *picks up the knife and fork from the table and polishes them with the tail of his shirt.*
- ROBERT What did he score?
- RUTH She. A classic A. Won't cross the road without a guarantee in writing that the sky won't fall on them. Completely risk—aversive. And she wants to put all her money into equities?
- ROBERT What will you tell her?
- RUTH Fixed deposits. That's about as much risk as she can handle.
- ROBERT What if she doesn't take your advice?
- RUTH I'm her financial adviser.
- ROBERT Just say she doesn't.
- RUTH She'll sit up in bed at 3 a.m. with her heart racing and her head pounding and her throat —
- She hurriedly takes her hands away from her throat.*
- RUTH She'll be making a big mistake.

ROBERT            You do love me?  
RUTH              Of course I do.  
ROBERT            Say it.  
RUTH              You know I do.  
ROBERT            I want to hear you say it.  
RUTH              I love you.  
ROBERT            Why?  
RUTH              I don't have to tell you—  
ROBERT            You might be being ironic.  
RUTH              I love you.  
ROBERT            Why?  
RUTH              It's obvious why I love you.  
ROBERT            I want you to tell me.  
RUTH              You're a perfect D.

*This is not the answer ROBERT wants.*

ROBERT            You love me because of that. (*He taps the questionnaire.*)  
RUTH              Because you're a perfect D, and because you're a terrific cook, and you're kind, and you make me laugh, and I can depend on you to be there, and because you're everything that he ... I need to eat. You think you could ...  
ROBERT            You think he's arrived?  
RUTH              I don't know.  
ROBERT            What time is it?  
RUTH              (*Looking at her watch.*) Five to eight.  
ROBERT            She doesn't like me to be late.  
RUTH              You're not going to be there.  
ROBERT            Yeah.

*He doesn't move.*

RUTH Darling. I'm starving.

ROBERT Maybe I should ring her.

RUTH We agreed.

ROBERT I know but ...It is our wedding anniversary.

RUTH Not any more.

ROBERT That's not strictly true.

RUTH You agree that you are no longer married to her ...

ROBERT Yes, but ...

RUTH ... therefore you are no longer obliged to celebrate the matrimonial state ...

ROBERT Yes, but ...

RUTH ... with a woman who is no longer your wife.

ROBERT It's still our wedding anniversary.

RUTH We're opening tomorrow night. We're in the middle of the dress rehearsal. You can't drop everything to go over there to eat *Banana Split*.

ROBERT (*To the audience.*) It's a family joke. The only thing Marnie could cook when we got married was *Banana Split*.

RUTH You don't cook *Banana Split*.

ROBERT That's the joke.

RUTH The joke is that she expects you to spend the night of your wedding anniversary with her.

ROBERT I went last year.

RUTH The twins were there last year. (*To the audience.*) She's even driven them away.

ROBERT They're on an overseas exchange.

RUTH They wouldn't have gone if she wasn't so much of a—I would like to eat.

ROBERT I think I should ring her.

RUTH You know what will happen?

ROBERT I'm not going over there.

RUTH You will if you ring her.

ROBERT I just think I should warn her.

RUTH It's eight o'clock.

ROBERT He'll be late.

*He's edging towards the phone.*

RUTH You won't be able to say no.

ROBERT Yes, I will.

RUTH You won't.

ROBERT What sort of a man lets another man—

RUTH A man who's too kind for his own good.

ROBERT I should never have agreed.

RUTH But you did.

ROBERT I'm just going to—

*He makes a grab for the phone. She gets there first.*

ROBERT I'm not going over there.

RUTH That's what you always say. And you always go.

*Pause.*

RUTH Remember when she rang and told you the twins were being abducted by aliens?

ROBERT They weren't aliens.

RUTH They weren't abducted.

ROBERT Some men were hanging around the house.

RUTH *You weren't hanging around the house. You won't be able to say no. And what about the time she rang on her mobile and said she was on a cliff and was going to jump into the sea?*

ROBERT *(To the audience.)* I could hear the waves striking the rocks below.

- RUTH                    (*To the audience.*) She gave him detailed instructions where to find her and the police took him there by a helicopter.
- ROBERT                 She didn't know I'd ring the police.
- RUTH                    Why did you?
- ROBERT                 I thought she might ...
- RUTH                    She wouldn't.
- ROBERT                 I still think she might ...
- RUTH                    She wouldn't. (*To the audience.*) She wasn't on any cliff. There weren't any waves striking the rocks below. She was in the spa. Drinking Scotch. On the rocks. (*To ROBERT.*) But if you want to phone. (*She holds out the phone.*) Go right ahead.
- He moves towards the phone. She goes back to her work. An uneasy silence.*
- ROBERT                 I won't be able to say no.
- RUTH                    She's making our life a misery.
- ROBERT                 I try ... I do try ... for her sake as much as mine ...
- RUTH                    She won't let you alone. (*To the audience.*) She's always on the phone. Any time of the day or night. Won't speak to me. Hangs up if I answer. Then rings back immediately. And hangs up again. It's got so I won't answer the phone. If you'd let me get us a silent number.
- ROBERT                 What if there's an emergency with the twins?
- RUTH                    She won't ring him on his mobile. Just wants to leaves monologues on the answering machine. Insisting he 'drop everything' and go around there. Fix this. Fix that.
- ROBERT                 (*To the audience.*) I don't know how many times I've been on that roof.
- RUTH                    If Hermione wants you on the roof ...
- ROBERT                 No one calls her that.
- RUTH                    Some one must have.
- ROBERT                 Her mother does ...
- RUTH                    You see.



- ROBERT                    But Marnie's mother is a prize bitch. Not that I'm saying you're a ...
- RUTH                      I know who's the prize bitch. You gave her everything. The house. The furniture. The car. You took nothing. Nothing!
- ROBERT                    I had to.
- Silence.*
- ROBERT                    And it is our wedding anniversary.
- He picks up the phone.*
- RUTH                      She wouldn't even give you that. (*She points to the empty plinth.*) That. The statue.
- ROBERT                    It isn't a—
- RUTH                      The house god. She wouldn't give you the house god.
- ROBERT                    I was happy to leave it in the house.
- RUTH                      But then, when you were opening the restaurant.
- ROBERT                    I thought if I told her how much it meant to me ... How important it was ... How I'd planned the whole look of the place around it ...
- RUTH                      Wooden,
- ROBERT                    weathered,
- RUTH                      wise,
- ROBERT                    welcoming.
- ROBERT *examines the empty plinth.*
- RUTH                      You'd even bought the plinth.
- ROBERT                    Yes. I'd even bought the plinth.
- RUTH                      And she wouldn't give it to you.
- ROBERT                    She told me she didn't give a stuff about the plinth.
- RUTH                      (*She hasn't heard this.*) Did she?
- ROBERT                    Yes, she did.
- RUTH                      What else did she say?

ROBERT           The plinth was my problem. As far as she was concerned I could stick the plinth up my arthe—arse. And if I got really desperate, then I could always stick 'the Princess' on the plinth, but that really would drive the customers away.

RUTH             She calls me 'the Princess'?

ROBERT           From time to time.

RUTH             Why?

ROBERT           I don't know.

RUTH             You must know.

ROBERT           I don't.

RUTH             You didn't tell me.

ROBERT           There's nothing to tell.

RUTH             She calls me 'the Princess' and there's nothing to tell?

ROBERT           It's not such a bad thing to be called. If you're going to be called anything.

RUTH             Why should I be called anything? Why can't she call me by my name?

ROBERT           (*Wheedling.*) Ruth. Darling.

RUTH             Does she think I'm spoilt? Or too demanding?

ROBERT           I don't know what she thinks.

RUTH             You know she calls me, 'the Princess.'

ROBERT           If I'd known it was going to upset you ...

RUTH             It hasn't upset me.

ROBERT           Good.

*Pause.*

RUTH             What else does she say about me?

ROBERT           Nothing.

RUTH             Nothing?

- ROBERT                    We don't discuss you. 'I won't have that woman's name mentioned in this house.'
- RUTH                      She says that?
- ROBERT                    From time to time.
- RUTH                      And what do you say?
- ROBERT                    I don't say anything. I just want to get the job done—remove the rotting board, replace the loose tile, and get the hell out of there. Believe me, I want to spend as little time as possible with Marnie?
- RUTH                      Are you sure about that?
- ROBERT                    Of course I'm sure about it.
- RUTH                      Then why do you spend so much time with Marnie?
- Silence.*
- ROBERT                    I'm not there now. And it's—it was our wedding anniversary. I'm here. With you. With the woman I love. With the woman who gave me the courage to follow my dream.
- Finally, she relents.*
- RUTH                      Wouldn't you like to see the look on her face when he turns up?
- ROBERT                    ...when he turns up.
- RUTH                      She was so certain that Robert was going to be there.
- ROBERT                    ... going to be there.
- RUTH                      She won't believe it.
- ROBERT                    ... won't believe it.
- They fall about laughing. Everything is all right between them.*
- RUTH                      She'll take one look at Jamie—
- ROBERT                    (*Scornfully.*) Jamie.
- RUTH                      Yes?
- ROBERT                    Jamie.
- RUTH                      You said, 'Jamie'.

ROBERT Did I?

RUTH Yes, you did.

ROBERT Well, maybe I did.

RUTH You did.

ROBERT Men don't call themselves Jamie.

RUTH What do men call themselves?

ROBERT Jim. James. Jimbo. Jazza. Jamie's not a name. It's ...

RUTH What?

ROBERT Having tickets on yourself. Laying it on with a trowel. Dipping shit in icing sugar and singing, Happy Birthday. They might do in the U, S of A. 'Howdy, Ma'am, my name is Jamie.'

RUTH He doesn't talk like that.

ROBERT He's a Yank.

RUTH He was born here.

ROBERT He spends all his time there.

RUTH He works there.

ROBERT 'I'd be mighty happy to park my rhinestones under your table.'

RUTH He doesn't wear cowboy boots.

ROBERT He wears a baseball cap.

RUTH You saw him once. At a distance.

ROBERT Close enough to see that he was wearing the brim at the back. (*He reverses his brimless chef's cap.*) Scratching his head. (*He scratches his head as if he were a simpleton.*) Aw, shucks.

RUTH He's not stupid. He reads philosophy. 'Travel is the way to avoid despair.' Soren Kierkegaard.

RUTH And he was doing this. (*He flicks his tongue.*)

RUTH He was not.

ROBERT He was flicking his tongue. (*He flicks his tongue.*) While he was speaking to you. The man's a lounge lizard. The fact that he offered to go in my place—

- RUTH                   He didn't offer. We asked.
- ROBERT               —to turn up for dinner uninvited
- RUTH                   He's doing us a favour. (*She looks at her watch.*) Jamie will be getting out of his car—
- ROBERT               Yes, the car.
- RUTH                   —and Marnie will be ... trudging around the house—
- ROBERT               She isn't fat.
- RUTH                   I didn't say she was.
- ROBERT               You said, 'trudging'.
- RUTH                   She's a size sixteen.
- ROBERT               How do you know? You've never met her.
- RUTH                   And whose fault is that? The twins told me.
- ROBERT               Why would the twins tell you—
- RUTH                   Can I help it I'm a size eight?
- Pause.*
- ROBERT               Are you?
- RUTH                   O.k. She'll be ...moving ... (*She begins to move around the stage.*) slowly around the house in one of her floral sacks ...
- She looks challengingly at him.*
- ROBERT               The twins told you.
- RUTH                   —doing things (*She picks up the bunch of bananas.*) with bananas. (*She waits. He says nothing.*) Jamie will knock on the door.
- ROBERT               He'll have slithered ... (*He slithers across the stage.*) ...up the path.
- RUTH                   He'll knock on the door.
- ROBERT               Rat-a-tat. Marnie will have left it open. I tell her to keep it locked but will she listen to me.
- RUTH                   He'll knock on the open door—

- ROBERT                   Rat-a-tat-tat.
- RUTH                     —and call out—
- ROBERT                   (*Exaggerated Texan accent.*) Is there anyone home! You all hear me in there?
- RUTH                     ‘Come in, darling?’
- ROBERT                   No.
- RUTH                     ‘The door’s open, sweetheart.’
- ROBERT *shakes his head.*
- RUTH                     Honey?
- ROBERT                   She wouldn’t say that.
- RUTH                     He wouldn’t say, ‘You all hear me in there.
- ROBERT                   You be him and I’ll be her.
- They change places. Now ROBERT starts trudging around the stage.*
- RUTH                     I told you she was a size sixteen.
- ROBERT                   Start slithering.
- RUTH *starts slithering. She gets to the table and raps on it.*
- RUTH                     Hello?
- ROBERT                   ‘Entre, mon ami.’ ‘Avante, mio bello’. (*He sees RUTH looking at him.*) Or it might be something in Spanish. Or Indonesian. Or Swahili.
- RUTH                     She speaks all those languages?
- ROBERT                   Only enough to say, ‘Come in, darling’. But she’d never say ‘darling’. She can count to ten. Order meals. Arrange hotel accommodation.
- RUTH                     I thought you said you never travelled.
- ROBERT                   We haven’t. Only once. (*He turns to look at the plinth.*)
- RUTH                     Forget about the statue.
- ROBERT                   It’s not a statue. And if she’d just given it to me. If she’d just ... if she could accept that ... that we ... that we ... That we could be ... (*Pause.*) I would never have agreed ... I would

never ... never ... but she just won't ... (*He stops himself and picking up the menu, exits. He looks away from the phone as he passes.*)

RUTH                    You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs.

*The lights are changing.*

*A knock at the door.*

JAMIE                    (*Off-stage, mid-Atlantic accent.*) Anyone home?

RUTH *gets to her feet.*

RUTH                    (*Becoming MARNIE.*) Entrare per favore! Entrare Roberto!  
(*She puts the files in the briefcase which she puts under the side table, takes off her glasses and picks up the bunch of bananas.*) Entrare!

## Scene Two

MARNIE's house *The same evening. A few minutes earlier.*

JAMIE, *wearing a baseball cap with the brim to the back, enters.*

MARNIE                    I just hope it doesn't rain. (*She is turning around.*) I think there must be another loose— (*She sees him.*) What are you doing in my house?

*She begins to back away.*

JAMIE                    You asked me to come in.

*She looks around for an escape route.*

MARNIE                    I thought you were my husband.

*She decides to make for the front door. He gets in her way. They do some kind of elaborate 'tarantella' during the following dialogue.*

JAMIE                    You don't have a husband.

MARNIE                    Oh, yes I do.

JAMIE                    Oh, no you don't.

MARNIE                    (*Humouring the 'madman'.*) Oh, yes I do.

JAMIE                    Oh, no you don't.

MARNIE                    (*Stamping her foot.*) I do.

*She has lost her fear, momentarily.*

JAMIE                    You don't.

MARNIE                I certainly do.

JAMIE                (*Very close.*) You don't.

MARNIE                (*Backing away.*) —and he's due here any minute.

JAMIE *doesn't follow her. The music stops. A pause.*

JAMIE                He's not coming.

MARNIE                Oh, yes he is.

*The music picks up again and they continue their dance.*

JAMIE                Oh, no he's not.

MARNIE                He is.

JAMIE                He's not.

MARNIE                Is.

JAMIE                Not.

MARNIE                Is. Is. Is.

JAMIE                Not. Not. Not.

*Silence. They don't move.*

MARNIE                My husband—

JAMIE                Robert is not your husband.

MARNIE                Robert?

JAMIE                —*was* your husband.

MARNIE                You know —

JAMIE                Robert is living with—

MARNIE                No!

JAMIE *almost drops the bottle of wine.*

MARNIE                I will not have that name mentioned in this house!

*Silence.*



MARNIE Do you know ...?

JAMIE Robert? Yes.

MARNIE And you know ...

JAMIE *isn't going to make it easy for her.*

MARNIE You know ... her.

JAMIE Yes, I know ...

MARNIE *gathers herself to react.*

MARNIE I will not have that name—

JAMIE (*Forcefully.*)—her very well.

MARNIE Are you ...? Are you ...?

JAMIE You don't want my name mentioned in this house?

MARNIE Jamie.

JAMIE Please to meet you.

*He holds out the bottle of wine. She takes it automatically.*

MARNIE Thank you. (*She realises what she is holding, and tries to give it back to him.*)

JAMIE My pleasure.

MARNIE I can't accept ...

JAMIE It's nothing.

MARNIE I really can't ...

*He backs away. She chases him around the room, trying to get him to take the wine. Finally she plonks it down on the sideboard and turns to look at him.*

MARNIE Why are you here?

JAMIE Robert can't—

*She's not listening.*

MARNIE She left you for Robert?

JAMIE Kind of surprising. He can't—

MARNIE Do you mind?

*She takes hold of his face and turns it to see the other profile.*

MARNIE            Amazing.

JAMIE             Robert can't make it.

*She drops her hand.*

MARNIE            What did you say?

JAMIE             He can't make it.

MARNIE            Tonight?

JAMIE             'Fraid not.

MARNIE            He's not coming?

JAMIE             (*Shaking his head.*) Uh-uh.

MARNIE            It's our wedding anniversary.

JAMIE             Not any more.

MARNIE            It is.

JAMIE             You and Robert are no longer married.

MARNIE            What's that got to do with it? We were married ... (*He opens his mouth to agree.*) ... on this day (*He subsides.*) ... eighteen years ago ... in front of witnesses. No one stood up to oppose the wedding. We signed the certificate. We stood in front of the church for the photographs. Confetti was thrown. It was possible in those days. I threw the bridal bouquet. It was caught by ... it doesn't matter who it was caught by. It was caught. This day is, therefore, our wedding anniversary.

*Pause.*

JAMIE             He's not coming.

MARNIE            Is he sick?

JAMIE             He's not sick.

MARNIE            What's wrong with him? Is it his back? Or his sinus? Is it his sinus? He has terrible troubles with his sinus. Especially when he's been overworking. She makes him overwork. She won't let him have a day off. Not one. He looked exhausted on Sunday when he was here fixing the roof. It's all work, work, work. Worry, worry, worry. He's years older than she is. Years older. Compared to her he's almost an old man. But does she

take that into consideration? Just because she acts like a stick-insect on speed.

*Silence.*

JAMIE Are you always like this?

MARNIE Like what?

JAMIE Hamlet.

MARNIE Am I always complaining?

JAMIE The monologue.

*Pause.*

MARNIE No.

*Silence.*

JAMIE He's not sick.

MARNIE Then he'll be here.

*Silence. They watch each other.*

MARNIE She left you for ...?

JAMIE He told me to tell you that he's sorry but he can't make it, and he didn't want you to be on your own on such a special occasion, especially when he knows how much trouble you go to prepare such a special ... such a special ...and so he asked me to come along in his place and that would be, for me, very ... special.

*Silence.*

JAMIE He's not coming.

*She shakes her head and moves to the phone.*

JAMIE Where are you going?

MARNIE To find out what's going on.

MARNIE *picks up the phone.*

JAMIE They're not there.

MARNIE *punches in the number. She listens. Then puts down the phone.*

MARNIE                    They're at the restaurant.

*He says nothing.*

MARNIE                    It opens tomorrow night.

*He says nothing.*

MARNIE                    He'll be down there having a rehearsal. Did you get an invitation?

JAMIE                      I'm flying out tomorrow. Did you?

MARNIE                    If that woman thinks I'm going to set foot in that ...

JAMIE                      You didn't.

MARNIE                    What's the number?

JAMIE                      How do you know they're there.

MARNIE                    Where else are they going to be? They don't have any friends. You've got to have a life to have friends. You've got to do more than work all day, to have friends. You've got to go out at night, once in a while, to have friends.

JAMIE                      Maybe they've gone away. For a break. Because they've been working so hard.

MARNIE                    He didn't say anything on Sunday.

JAMIE                      Why would he tell you?

MARNIE                    In case I had to contact him. (JAMIE *looks sceptical*.) In case something happened to the twins. We do have children. Two children. And children create bonds. Unbreakable bonds. Not that you'd know anything about that. He wouldn't go away without letting me know.

JAMIE                      Maybe it was one of those spur-of-the-moment things.

MARNIE                    Have you met Robert?

JAMIE                      Once or ... Once. From a distance.

MARNIE                    Robert does not do spur-of-the-moment things.

JAMIE                      Maybe it was Ruth's idea.

MARNIE                    I will not have that— So, it was her idea.

JAMIE                      To go away.

MARNIE To send you.

JAMIE She didn't send me.

MARNIE She sent you here to drive a wedge between me and my husband.

JAMIE A wedge?

MARNIE Yes, a wedge.

JAMIE That's not a wedge between you and your husband. That's a piece of two-by-four. It's a whole fucking tree. It's a whole fucking forest of fucking trees. Excuse me.

MARNIE Go right ahead.

JAMIE You and Robert are divorced.

MARNIE He came last year.

JAMIE He came to keep the peace.

MARNIE He can come to keep the peace this year.

JAMIE He's not coming.

MARNIE He likes coming. He does. It's familiar. It's comfortable. I've kept all our things. The sofa that we keep getting re-covered—it's just made to lie out on. The dining table that we found in a junk shop when the twins were toddlers. You can still see their teeth marks. I've changed nothing. That's the way he likes it. What's the number? (JAMIE says *nothing*.) I can get it from directory enquires.

JAMIE I'll ring. (*He takes out his mobile phone.*)

MARNIE How do I know you're ringing the right number?

JAMIE *holds out the mobile phone.*

JAMIE Listen.

MARNIE *listens.*

MARNIE *Chez Bert!* Have you ever heard anything so pretentious? And her voice? You think that voice is going to persuade some one to make a booking? They may as well book into an ice-chest. Brrr. (*Into the phone.*) Robert? Robert. Pick up the phone, Robert. Robert! (*She hangs up and hands him back the phone.*) Where are they?

JAMIE Ruth didn't—

MARNIE I will not have that name—

JAMIE You think if you don't mention her name, she doesn't exist ...?

MARNIE She can do all the existing she likes —

JAMIE Because she does.

MARNIE — but not in my house.

*Silence.*

JAMIE Robert isn't allowed to mention her name?

MARNIE Not to me.

JAMIE Pretty rough on him. Can't talk about the woman he loves.

MARNIE He doesn't love her.

JAMIE She loves him. Let him go. *(She opens her mouth to protest. He puts his finger on her mouth.)* Shhh.

*She is so surprised by his action that when he takes his hand away she says nothing. She puts her fingers to her lips. He walks over to the fruit bowl and tosses an apple up and down. One to him.*

JAMIE She didn't tell me where they were going. *(He replaces the apple.)* She didn't tell me ... *(He picks up a banana.)* In case you tried to beat it out of me with a banana.

*There is a charged silence.*

MARNIE So it was her idea.

JAMIE I got the impression it was their idea.

MARNIE He told you he's not coming?

JAMIE It was his decision.

MARNIE You didn't speak to him. You've never spoken to him.

JAMIE I've nodded to him.

MARNIE From a distance.

JAMIE I don't need to meet Bob.

MARNIE No one calls him that.

JAMIE Ruth handles my affairs. It makes sense to see her at her office.

MARNIE I know all about your affairs.

JAMIE I see her at her office.

MARNIE I've heard you're loaded.

JAMIE I'm comfortable.

MARNIE And she left you for ...

JAMIE She did not leave me.

MARNIE But Robert said —

JAMIE She did not leave me. I did not leave her. We came to a parting of the ways. It happens. I do not blame her. She does not blame me. There is no animosity. We have moved on.

*Pause.*

MARNIE Robert said you were a Yank.

JAMIE Something smells good.

MARNIE Shit!

*She exits into the kitchen. JAMIE peels himself a banana and eats it as he looks around the room. She returns.*

JAMIE Where is it?

MARNIE Where is what?

JAMIE The statue. The house god thing.

MARNIE It's in the bedroom. *(She gestures upstairs.)*

JAMIE I'd like to see it. *(Pause.)* Maybe later. Why didn't you give it to him?

MARNIE It's a house god. It watches over a house. Not a café. Called *Chez Bert*. It stands guard over a family. Not a lot of foodies feeding their faces. I think you'd better go.

*She walks towards the door. He doesn't move.*

JAMIE                    Seems a shame to waste dinner. (*He picks up the bottle of wine.*) Ruth said you like red. Actually she said you drink like a fish. (*He sees her face.*) Just joshing.

MARNIE                I'd like you to josh somewhere else. (*She realises something.*) You brought wine.

JAMIE                    Cab Sav. 1997. And if you point me to the corkscrew I'll screw the cork ... and pour us both a drink. I sure could use one.

MARNIE                You didn't come here to tell me that Robert isn't coming—although I don't believe for a moment that he isn't. You came here planning to stay for dinner.

JAMIE                    Or we could go out. Would you like me to take you out?

MARNIE                No, I would not.

JAMIE                    Then I'll just have to smoke that danged corkscrew out of its hole.

MARNIE                You thought you could ...

JAMIE                    In here?

*He goes into the kitchen.*

MARNIE                They thought I would ... They wanted me to ...

*JAMIE appears from the kitchen.*

JAMIE                    It's like those WMDs. Nowhere to be found. We need a regime change.

MARNIE                And after dinner?

JAMIE                    That depends on you. I know what I'd like to do.

*He flicks his tongue.*

MARNIE                What was that?

JAMIE                    What?

MARNIE                You did something. Just then.

JAMIE                    You're a very attractive woman.

*He flicks his tongue.*

MARNIE                You did it again.

LEITH COVATTA



JAMIE                   Very attractive. Hell, you could lose a few pounds and a smile would sure help but ...

MARNIE                She sent you here to seduce me.

*He flicks his tongue.*

MARNIE                To flick your tongue at me. She thinks I'm going to throw myself at you. She thinks that it's been so long since I—that I'll jump into bed with you. After dinner. Here. Tonight. Just like that.

*Pause.*

JAMIE                   Do you like to be stroked?

MARNIE                I'd like you to ...

*He reaches out his hand. Almost touches her cheek.*

JAMIE                   Or rubbed?

*He touches her cheek.*

JAMIE                   You don't know?

*He touches her neck.*

JAMIE                   Or have you forgotten?

MARNIE                *(Weakly.)* Get out.

JAMIE                   Marnie.

*She leans into him.*

MARNIE                *(Even more weakly.)* Go.

*She runs her hands over his back.*

MARNIE                Go.

*She caresses his face.*

MARNIE                I want you to ...

*He puts his arms around her. She pushes him away.*

MARNIE                Get out! Get out!

*JAMIE backs away, hands held out.*

JAMIE                   I'll settle for dinner.

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MARNIE                    Go! Now! Before I ring the police.

JAMIE                     I'm going.

MARNIE                   And you can take your Cab. Sav.

*She picks up the bottle of wine and thrusts it into his hands. She bustles him out of the house.*

MARNIE                   And stick it up your arth—arse.

*He exits. There is a crashing sound outside and a loud yell. Then silence.*

MARNIE                   What's going on out there? Are you all right? You haven't —  
Oh shit!

*She exits after him.*

*Sound of phone ringing as lights change.*

### Scene Three

*Chez Bert. A few minutes earlier. The phone is ringing.*

*RUTH enters and sits at the table. She goes on with her work. The answering machine message can be heard. She listens critically.*

RUTH'S VOICE        Hi, this is *Chez Bert*. Serious food for seriously unserious people. Seriously. We'd love to take your booking but we're slaving over a hot stove. Please leave a message after the tone.

*MARNIE's voice now comes on. Ruth goes back to her work.*

MARNIE'S VOICE    Robert? Robert.

ROBERT *enters with the plate of omelette.*

MARNIE'S VOICE    Pick up the phone, Robert. Robert!

*She hangs up.*

*RUTH takes the omelette from him and eats a mouthful*

RUTH                     This is delicious. It resists the teeth but only to tease.

ROBERT                  You think he's told her?

RUTH                     Sounds like it. Is there a hint of chives?

ROBERT                  Then why is she ringing?

RUTH                     She doesn't believe him. Or do I detect shallot?

ROBERT                    Shallot. She sounds upset.

RUTH                      You sound surprised. This is so good. Jamie will help her get over it.

ROBERT                   She's never met him.

RUTH                      She has now.

ROBERT                   Why doesn't he want to meet me?

RUTH                      He's never said that.

ROBERT                   He always sees you at your office. I'd be quite happy for him to come to the apartment.

RUTH                      He knows that.

ROBERT                   I can understand him being jealous.

RUTH                      Jamie isn't jealous.

ROBERT                   Isn't he?

RUTH                      No.

ROBERT                   I run off with his girlfriend. If it happened to me, I'd want to kill him.

RUTH                      You didn't run off with me. And I wasn't Jamie's girlfriend.

ROBERT                   Lover.

RUTH                      And his best friend. I still am.

ROBERT                   Aren't I your best friend?

RUTH                      You're my best friend that I sleep with. He's my best friend that I don't sleep with. This is so good.

ROBERT                   Glad you like it.

*She goes on eating.*

ROBERT                   This is like old times. You working at the corner table. Me in the kitchen, coming out to see how you enjoyed your meal. And later, when everyone else has gone home. Phil left me to lock up. The lights turned down. Just the two of us. I'd sit down next to you and we'd talk all night.

RUTH                      I wonder if she'll sleep with him.

ROBERT Marnie? Sleep with ... (*He can hardly control his mirth.*)  
Sleep with ... (*He bursts out laughing.*) That's good. That's  
very ...

*He falls about laughing. She doesn't join in.*

RUTH I bet she does.

ROBERT You're serious.

RUTH Seriously.

*He gets to his feet.*

ROBERT She won't sleep with Jamie.

RUTH I think she will.

ROBERT She won't.

*She gets to her feet.*

RUTH Twenty dollars she does.

ROBERT Fifty dollars she doesn't.

RUTH A hundred she does.

ROBERT Five hundred she doesn't.

RUTH A thousand she does.

ROBERT You're on.

*She sits down and finishes off the omelette.*

ROBERT He won't want to sleep with her.

RUTH You want to know why I'm so confident?

ROBERT Why would he want to sleep with Marnie? If he can get any  
woman he wants? Why Marnie? Not that I'm being rude about  
Marnie. But she's ...

RUTH Fat?

ROBERT Did you plan this with him?

RUTH I planned it with you.

ROBERT That he'd turn up there and tell her I wasn't coming. And she  
might ... she might ... invite him to stay for dinner. I wouldn't

want her to waste all that food. They might have dinner together. That was what we planned.

- RUTH I grant you that Marnie may be a hard nut to crack. Even for someone as experienced as Jamie but consider this. (*She begins counting on her fingers.*) One: he's there. Two: he's a very attractive man.
- ROBERT If you say so.
- RUTH You don't think he's attractive?
- ROBERT He's not attractive to me.
- RUTH But to Marnie?
- ROBERT She might ask him to stay for dinner.
- RUTH Three—
- ROBERT She will not sleep with him.
- RUTH Three—
- ROBERT He's not her type.
- RUTH What's her type?
- ROBERT (*Pause, as he thinks.*) Me.
- RUTH Three: she's desperate.
- ROBERT Thanks very much.
- RUTH I didn't mean it like that.
- ROBERT How did you mean it?
- RUTH It's been nearly three years since you left. There hasn't been anyone else.
- ROBERT We don't know that.
- RUTH Has there?
- ROBERT You think she'd tell me? That?
- RUTH I thought she told you everything.
- ROBERT We don't talk about that.
- RUTH What do you talk about?

ROBERT           The twins. The state of the house. The loose tiles on the roof.  
We do not talk about our sex lives.

RUTH             If there had been someone else, she'd have told you.

ROBERT          Why?

RUTH             To make you feel jealous.

ROBERT          I wouldn't feel jealous. I'd feel ... relieved. I don't want  
Marnie hanging about, waiting for me to go back to her. I want  
her to forget me. I want her to meet someone else.

RUTH             Like Jamie.

ROBERT          Not like Jamie. Some one nice. Some one reliable. Some one  
who's going to look after her.

RUTH             Someone like you? (*He doesn't know what to say.*) That's who  
she wants.

ROBERT          It's just so cold-blooded. Sending him around there to flick his  
tongue at her.

RUTH             We know what her problem is.

ROBERT          Do we?

RUTH             It's very simple. Marnie needs a good fuck.

ROBERT          She wouldn't go to bed with a man she just met. A complete  
stranger.

RUTH             He's not a stranger. He's her ex-husband's new partner's ex-  
partner.

ROBERT *works this out.*

ROBERT          She wouldn't go to bed with a man she just met.

RUTH             You don't know that.

ROBERT          I was married to the woman for eighteen years. I know what  
she would and wouldn't do.

RUTH             Was she ever unfaithful?

ROBERT          No.

RUTH             You're sure of that?

ROBERT          As sure as you can be about such things.

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RUTH But you got married so young?

ROBERT And neither was I. You don't go to bed with other people when you love each other. We loved each other. I know that Jamie was doing the dirty on you all the time—

RUTH He was not 'doing the dirty!'

ROBERT But you said ...

*Pause.*

RUTH And Four:

ROBERT Four.

RUTH She's had a profound emotional shock.

ROBERT What profound emotional shock?

RUTH For the first time in eighteen years she's spending the night of her wedding anniversary without her husband.

ROBERT I thought she might be upset.

RUTH She will be distraught. Beside herself. She may contemplate suicide.

ROBERT You said she wouldn't kill herself.

*He is heading for the door.*

RUTH Where are you going?

ROBERT To see if she's all right.

RUTH *gets between him and the door.*

RUTH Jamie will take care of her.

ROBERT That's what I'm worried about.

RUTH He will comfort her. He will help her to deal with her pain and anger. He will help her to let go. 'I do not blame him. He does not blame me. There is no animosity. We have moved on.'

ROBERT She won't buy that crap.

RUTH You can't hang on to a non-performing stock!

ROBERT A what?

RUTH                   A non-performing stock.

ROBERT                I am a non-performing stock.

RUTH                   You are for Marnie. For Marnie, your market value has slumped.

ROBERT                Thanks very much.

RUTH                   You're not paying dividends. She's not getting any dividends. She hasn't been getting any dividends for nearly three years. *(She hands him the dirty plate.)* That was yummy. Now what about getting my pudding. Relax. Relax. You're a classic D.

ROBERT *is about to speak, but then changes his mind.*

ROBERT                Pudding for the Princess.

*He exits. Then re-enters.*

ROBERT                What if he's attacking her?

RUTH                   Did she sound like she was being attacked?

ROBERT *exits.*

RUTH                   *(Shouting.)* Jamie doesn't attack women. He doesn't have to. *(To the audience.)* I'm more worried about her attacking him. You've seen what she's like. She was trudging, wasn't she? And she was wearing a floral sack. Jamie wouldn't hurt a fly. He's sweet, isn't he? And he doesn't slither. *(She looks at the menu.)* Robert! *(Exiting.)* I've changed my mind!

*She exits.*

#### Scene Four

*Marnie's house. The same evening. A few minutes later.*

MARNIE *enters, supporting a limping and reluctant JAMIE, who is still holding the bottle of wine.*

MARNIE                Be careful.

JAMIE                   I'm o.k.

MARNIE                Don't put your weight in it.

JAMIE                   This is not necessary.

MARNIE                You've hurt yourself.



JAMIE It's nothing, believe me.

MARNIE You're limping.

JAMIE I can drive.

MARNIE What if you have an accident?

JAMIE I've had the accident. And now I would like to go home.

*He limps towards the door. She gets in his way.*

MARNIE What if you hurt someone else?

JAMIE Like you?

MARNIE Not me.

MARNIE Like some poor woman who's doing nothing more than minding her own business. Some poor woman trying to get from one side of the road to the other until you come along in your mid-life crisis.

JAMIE I'm not having a mid-life crisis.

MARNIE What's that parked in the driveway?

JAMIE An example of outstanding European engineering.

MARNIE It's red, isn't it? You didn't think of that. People like you never do. (*She sees him grimaces with pain.*) Sit down. Go on. Sit.

*He sits. She watches him rub his ankle.*

MARNIE This isn't some kind of trick?

JAMIE Trick?

MARNIE Yes, trick.

JAMIE I deliberately put my foot through your rotting verandah?

MARNIE Did you?

JAMIE Listen, lady ...

MARNIE I'm listening.

JAMIE ... you may think me a seducer ...

MARNIE I don't think ...

JAMIE ... but I do not, I repeat, do not ...

MARNIE ... I know.

JAMIE ... put my life in danger ...

MARNIE All that ...*(She flicks her tongue.)*

JAMIE ... in the pursuit of women.

MARNIE You admit that you pursue women.

JAMIE More importantly ...

MARNIE Do you?

JAMIE I do not put my living in jeopardy. Tomorrow I have to fly to Houston. I may sue you for loss of earnings.

*Pause.*

MARNIE It's your own fault.

JAMIE I should have known that the verandah was rotten?

MARNIE It wouldn't be rotten, if you hadn't wrecked my marriage.

JAMIE I didn't wreck your marriage.

MARNIE Yes, you did.

JAMIE Your husband went off with my girlfriend. I wasn't even in the country—

MARNIE Exactly.

JAMIE What, exactly?

MARNIE If you'd been in the country, if you'd been at home, then she would've been at home, cooking your dinner—

JAMIE She does not cook my dinner.

MARNIE —and not eating alone every night in a restaurant. The restaurant where my husband was helping out a friend.

JAMIE *(Shaking his head.)* Lady ...

MARNIE If you'd been a proper husband—

JAMIE I wasn't married to—

MARNIE Exactly.

JAMIE                   What, exactly?

MARNIE                If you'd asked her to marry you, then she would have been a married woman, happy to be at home cooking her own dinner, and not eating alone every night at the restaurant where my husband was helping a friend.

JAMIE                   I'm not going to listen to any more of this.

*He jumps to his feet. And just as suddenly sits down again.*

MARNIE                Why don't I open that?

*She takes the bottle of wine from him and disappears into the kitchen.*

MARNIE                Don't go away.

*JAMIE waits for her to leave and then tries to get up. He can't. He sinks to his knees and begins crawling towards the door.*

*MARNIE enters.*

JAMIE                   Dropped my keys. (*He crawls around 'looking' for his keys. She gets down on her knees to help.*) It's o.k.

MARNIE                I don't mind.

JAMIE                   No, really.

MARNIE                It's no problem.

*They crawl about getting in each other's way. They are finding this rather enjoyable.*

JAMIE                   Sorry.

MARNIE                Sorry.

JAMIE                   Sorry.

MARNIE                Sorry.

*A kind of 'Twister situation' is developing. Or is it the Karma Sutra?*

*MARNIE has heard something rattle. She pats his trouser pocket. He puts his hand in and produces the keys. He strikes himself on the head.*

MARNIE                Do you mind?

JAMIE                   Go right ahead.

*She puts her hand in his pocket.*

MARNIE                   It's not there.

JAMIE                    Isn't it?

MARNIE                   The corkscrew.

JAMIE                    Ruth didn't want to get married.

MARNIE                   Did you ask her?

JAMIE                    Not every woman has to get married.

*She jumps to her feet. He doesn't notice that he's hit a nerve.*

JAMIE                    Ruth was my best friend.

MARNIE                   You make her sound like a dog.

JAMIE                    Robert wasn't your best friend?

MARNIE                   No. He was my husband! Didn't you love her?

JAMIE                    We had something better than love. We had respect.

MARNIE                   You've never been in love.

JAMIE                    Never. And I never want to. You fall in love with someone and what happens? (*Indicating Marnie and the room at large.*) This happens.

MARNIE                   Get up. Get up!

*JAMIE gets to his feet.*

MARNIE                   Now sit down over there. Sit!

*JAMIE sits. She kneels before him.*

JAMIE                    (*Nervously.*) What are you doing?

MARNIE                   I want to look at your foot.

JAMIE                    No.

MARNIE                   It might be broken.

JAMIE                    No.

*He jumps to his feet. She grabs hold of his leg. He tries to walk away. She hangs on. He drags her along the floor. She clings on. This is a battle of wills. But JAMIE is weakening. Finally he collapses back in the chair. They take some time to recover. MARNIE recovers first and starts feeling his ankle.*

JAMIE Do you know what you're doing?

MARNIE Does any woman know what she's doing when she comes within spitting distance of a man's groin? I know what I'm doing.

JAMIE Ow!

MARNIE I got a hundred percent in human biology. And what about your women?

JAMIE Ow! My what?

MARNIE Your women.

JAMIE Ow!

MARNIE Don't be such a sook. I know all about your exploits.

JAMIE What exploits? Ow!

MARNIE I know what happened on those trips.

JAMIE You do?

MARNIE She told Robert and Robert told me.

JAMIE They weren't exploits.

MARNIE Sounded like exploits to me. (*She yanks his foot but he refuses to cry out. She yanks it again, but again he remains silent.*)

JAMIE They were adventures.

MARNIE Is that what you call them? (*She is about to yank his foot but then remembers. One to Jamie.*)

JAMIE Yes. Adventures. And you can can the moral outrage.

MARNIE I can, can I? (*She pushes his foot away.*) Adventures?

JAMIE Yes. You never had any?

MARNIE I don't need adventures.

JAMIE We all need adventures.

*She gets to her feet.*

MARNIE Why didn't you ask ... to go with you?

JAMIE I did.

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- MARNIE                    She turned you down.
- JAMIE                     She did.
- MARNIE                    I bet you that doesn't happen often?
- JAMIE                     It happens. It happened here tonight.
- MARNIE                    You expect me to sleep with someone I just met?
- JAMIE                     For someone you've just met, you seem to know a hell of a lot about me.
- Pause.*
- MARNIE                    So the Princess didn't want to get dirty.
- JAMIE                     She doesn't like to sleep rough.
- MARNIE                    The Princess and the Pea.
- JAMIE                     Yeah, but in Ruth's case she could feel a grain of sand in the next apartment.
- They share the joke.*
- JAMIE                     You wouldn't mind getting dirty.
- Pause.*
- MARNIE                    We were talking about your ... adventures.
- JAMIE                     I thought, 'she told Robert who told you'.
- MARNIE                    Not the details.
- JAMIE                     If you want the details ... I'd finish a stretch on a rig—a long stretch—and to chill out I'd take off for a few days on a trip. Trekking the High Sierras. Or white water rafting. And I'd meet these women. Gorgeous women. Beautiful women. With these long, long legs. Right up to here. And up here ... (*He mimes 'big tits'.*)
- MARNIE                    You don't have to say any more —
- He holds up his hand.*
- MARNIE                    —and you can stop the Marcel Marceau.
- JAMIE                     You wanted the details.
- MARNIE                    I can imagine the rest. You'd meet these women.

JAMIE                    There would be women on those trips. And I would ... We would ... One wood ...

MARNIE *is hanging on his every word.*

JAMIE                    No, that's golf.

MARNIE                    You'd what?

JAMIE                    You know what it's like. (*But she doesn't.*) Wilderness does things to people.

MARNIE                    They go wild?

JAMIE                    Yeah. You're out there in the elements. Miles from anywhere. Reliant on your wits and each other. You get wet and cold and uncomfortable and scared. You have to stick together—very close together.

MARNIE                    You took advantage of those women.

JAMIE                    I did not.

MARNIE                    You just said, 'You get wet and cold and uncomfortable and scared.' Those women were wet, cold, uncomfortable and scared.

JAMIE                    I wasn't talking about them. I was talking about me. Those women don't get scared. They're running corporations. They're hiring and firing before breakfast. And they know that when you get back to civilisation, you'll have a drink together and never see each other again. Ruth knew those women meant nothing.

MARNIE                    That's not what she told Robert.

JAMIE                    I had my adventures. She had hers.

MARNIE                    She had adventures?

JAMIE                    You don't think Robert was the first?

MARNIE                    Robert was an adventure?

JAMIE                    Yeah. And if you hadn't thrown him out—

MARNIE                    He told me he was in love with another woman.

JAMIE                    He would have got over it.

MARNIE                    She was going to help him 'live his dream'.

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- JAMIE                    That's her job. It means nothing.
- MARNIE                 It does to him.
- JAMIE                    He was a school teacher—
- MARNIE                 School principal.
- JAMIE                    —playing at being a chef.
- MARNIE                 He's a terrific cook.
- JAMIE                    It takes more than that to open a restaurant. Ruth says he's a classic D, but he doesn't strike me as much of a risk-taker.
- MARNIE                 You've never met him.
- JAMIE                    I don't have to meet him. I listen to what Ruth tells me.
- MARNIE                 She complains to you about Robert?
- JAMIE                    Doesn't he complain to you about Ruth?
- MARNIE                 Never.
- JAMIE                    Then he must be happy. Why don't you let him go? You can find someone else. Some one better. It's not too late. There's still time. Believe me.
- She rips off his shoe.*
- JAMIE                    Ow.
- MARNIE                 Can you wiggle your toes? (JAMIE wiggles his toes.)  
Nothing broken. (*She gets to her feet.*) You can go.
- JAMIE                    We could open that bottle?
- MARNIE                 No.
- JAMIE                    I'll be seeing you. (*He limps towards the door.*)
- MARNIE                 What is it you do, exactly?
- He stops.*
- JAMIE                    You mean, my job?
- MARNIE                 Flying out to Houston.
- JAMIE                    They have a problem on the rig, like a blow-out in the hole—a problem they can't deal with—, they call me.



MARNIE Is that why they called on you? I'm a problem they can't deal with. I should go down there to *Chez Bert* and tell them exactly what I think of their plan. Yes, I should.

*She walks towards the door.*

MARNIE They think they can get rid of me that easily.

JAMIE She'll be there.

MARNIE Maybe it's time I met Ruth.

JAMIE You'll have to accept that she exists. (MARNIE *hesitates*.) She's no push-over.

MARNIE This was her idea.

JAMIE Yes.

MARNIE Robert knew nothing about the after dinner plans?

JAMIE No.

JAMIE Why didn't you go on to university? You were brilliant at human biology.

MARNIE I fell pregnant.

JAMIE Brilliant.

MARNIE A bit like falling through the verandah. One minute you're going somewhere, the next minute, bang.

JAMIE So get yourself a job.

MARNIE I had a job. And I did it, willingly. I loved doing it. And maybe I shouldn't have thrown him out, but he made me feel that I was a fool to be so willing ... I thought he'd come back. You don't just walk out. You have bad seasons. The drought's crippling. The bank's foreclosing. But you don't walk off the farm. Why couldn't he ring me and tell me he wasn't coming?

JAMIE Lady, you need to climb a mountain.

MARNIE I just want to go to bed. Alone.

JAMIE You get up somewhere high ...

MARNIE (*Thinking*.) Somewhere high?

JAMIE ... and you'll see things differently, standing on the edge.

MARNIE                    On the edge?

JAMIE                    You should try it.

*Pause.*

MARNIE                    Can I ask you a favour?

JAMIE *goes to the fruit bowl and becomes* ROBERT. MARNIE *exits.*

Scene Five

*Chez Bert.*

ROBERT *picks up the bunch of bananas, breaks one off.*

ROBERT                    *(To the audience.)* Do you remember when bananas were exotic? Some of you must. You do? Almost erotic? It was like our mothers had discovered sex. Bananas with a dash of Bundy and a slug of cream. Dad wouldn't touch it. 'What's wrong with Bread and Butter Pudding?', he'd say. But mum would wink at me and we'd get together in the kitchen. Plotting. It felt almost ...Oedipal. Bananas Caribbean. Banana Daiquiri Souffle. Banana Fluff Sauce.

RUTH *enters.*

ROBERT                    *Banana Split.*

RUTH                    You're not putting bananas on the menu.

ROBERT                    Why not?

RUTH                    Because bananas are daggy.

ROBERT                    Those glasses are daggy.

RUTH                    These glasses are retro.

ROBERT                    Retro?

RUTH                    Yes, retro.

ROBERT                    They look like the ones our mothers wore in the fifties.

RUTH                    My mother was five years old in the fifties. *(Pause.)* When I wear these glasses—as you so rightly point out, this remnant of the past—I might look daggy but I am being ironic.

ROBERT                    Looking versus being?

RUTH                    Yes.

ROBERT                   It doesn't matter what you look like ...

RUTH                     It's what you are being that counts.

ROBERT                   The glasses *look* daggy but because you're *being* ironic ...

RUTH                     ... they *become* retro.

ROBERT                   So retro is dag with irony? Can't bananas be ironic?

RUTH                     Bananas are boring.

*She takes them out of his hand and puts them back in the bowl.*

ROBERT                   Why did you sleep with me?

RUTH                     Because I fancied you.

ROBERT                   Why did you fancy me?

RUTH                     I don't know.

ROBERT                   Could you think about it?

RUTH                     Now?

ROBERT                   Yes, now. Did you sleep with me because you thought I was a dag?

RUTH                     You're not a dag.

ROBERT                   What am I?

RUTH                     You're ... funny.

ROBERT                   Funny?

RUTH                     You're always saying funny things.

ROBERT                   I want you to marry me.

*She begins to laugh.*

ROBERT                   What's funny about that?

RUTH                     You want me to ...

*She laughs even louder.*

ROBERT *goes down on one knee.*

*She almost falls over from laughter.*

ROBERT *looks at the audience. Eventually RUTH realises that he's not joining in the laughter.*

RUTH *(To the audience.)* He's not ...?

*She turns to see ROBERT, still down on one knee, nodding his head.*

RUTH I thought you were being ironic.

ROBERT You thought I was being retro.

RUTH Don't you want to get up?

ROBERT Dags fall in love. Dags want to get married, have children together—I know you don't want to have kids, and that's fine by me, dags are adaptable—grow old together, bury one another. You know what I mean. Dags are not retro. We are not ironic. We wear our hearts on our sleeves and those sleeves are always polyester. Will you marry me?

RUTH I have to think about this.

ROBERT You've got ten minutes.

*Still down on one knee, he slides over to one side of the room. She moves over to the plinth and stands on it.*

### Scene Six

*On the roof of Marnie's house. A few minutes earlier.*

*JAMIE is on his knees in the middle of the stage. MARNIE stands to the side. (These are the positions in which ROBERT and RUTH found themselves at the end of the previous scene.)*

JAMIE *very carefully gets to his feet.*

JAMIE All fixed.

*He brushes his hands and almost loses his balance. He steadies himself.*

MARNIE Was it a cracked tile?

JAMIE No. Just a bit loose. Shouldn't be any more leaks. *(He walks down towards the edge of the roof.)* Great view.

*MARNIE climbs out of the window and makes her way across the roof towards him.*

MARNIE Fantastic view.

*A startled JAMIE staggers. She steadies him.*

MARNIE Careful.

JAMIE I don't think this is a great idea.

MARNIE You're saying that the roof can't bear my weight?

JAMIE Just keep away from the edge.

MARNIE You said I needed to stand on the edge.

JAMIE I wasn't talking about a roof.

MARNIE A mountain. A roof. What's the difference?

*She goes closer to the edge.*

JAMIE Not so close.

MARNIE I'm not going to fall.

JAMIE You will if you go any closer.

MARNIE Would I kill myself? If I fell?

JAMIE You would if you went headfirst.

*She goes closer.*

MARNIE Like this? (*She looks at if she is going to dive off the roof.*)

JAMIE You'd have to make sure you hit the cement path.

*She adjusts her aim.*

JAMIE More to the right. Why did you paint it green?

*She moves to the right.*

MARNIE Robert thought it was eco-friendly.

JAMIE Better to get rid of the lawn.

MARNIE That's what I said. Would this do it?

JAMIE Yeah. That would do it.

MARNIE Thanks.

JAMIE My pleasure. Now we should be going back inside.

*JAMIE moves towards the window.*

JAMIE It's getting cold. (*He shivers.*) You want a hand?

*He turns to see her poised over the edge of the roof.*

MARNIE Ring him.

JAMIE Oh, no.

MARNIE Ring him and tell him I'm going to jump off the roof onto his eco-friendly path, unless he gets himself around here, toute de suite.

JAMIE You never give up.

MARNIE I mean it.

JAMIE No, you don't.

MARNIE I do.

JAMIE You don't. You can't.

*She goes closer to the edge. She really is balancing there, her arms outstretched.*

MARNIE You want to scrape me off the eco-friendly path?

JAMIE You're not going to jump but you might fall.

MARNIE Jump or fall. I don't care what you tell him. Just ring him.

JAMIE Only if you step back a from the edge of the roof.

*A stand-off. Finally MARNIE takes half a step back.*

JAMIE More.

MARNIE Don't think you're going to rush me.

JAMIE As I said, I have no intention of putting my living in jeopardy in the pursuit of a woman. there's no point in falling ... I mean jumping ... before he gets here.

*He takes out his mobile phone. And waits.*

*She takes another half-step back. She lowers her arms.*

MARNIE I'm watching you.

*He punches a number.*

JAMIE I'm getting the answering machine.

MARNIE Tell him.

JAMIE He's probably gone home.

MARNIE *turns back towards the edge of the roof, and moves closer to the edge.*

JAMIE                    (*Watching her.*) Ruth. Are you there? Ruth, it's Jamie. I know we agreed that if I rang you wouldn't pick up the phone, but can you pick up the phone. (*To MARNIE.*) They're not there.

MARNIE                They're there.

JAMIE                You don't know—

MARNIE                (*Pointing.*) The lights are still on.

JAMIE                How do you—

MARNIE                And you can see the sign. *Chez Bert.*

JAMIE *comes down the roof towards her.*

MARNIE                Not any closer. You want me to fall?

*He stops.*

MARNIE                (*Pointing.*) There. the pink and yellow neon.

JAMIE                Hez Bert.

MARNIE *looks again.*

MARNIE                Robert, the C's gone out.

JAMIE                The tape's going to run out.

MARNIE                Tell them I'm going to jump.

JAMIE                Did you hear that? We're on the roof. Don't ask me why. But that's where we— (*He hangs up.*) Marnie, you've made your point. You've let him know that you're angry because he didn't come over tonight and also because he sent me— because he knew that I was coming in his place. Now. Come away from there.

MARNIE *doesn't move.*

JAMIE *waits for a moment.*

MARNIE                Ask me a question. While we're waiting for Robert to get here.

JAMIE *turns and climbs back through the window.*

MARNIE                Where are you going?

JAMIE                Home. Bye.

MARNIE Wait!

JAMIE *turns.*

MARNIE You can't do that! You can't leave me here, alone, on the roof.  
What if I fall?

JAMIE 'Bye.

MARNIE *starts gasping for breath.*

JAMIE I'm not taking any notice. (*But he is.*)

*She staggers a little.*

JAMIE I'm out of here.

*She is gasping for breath and holding her throat.*

JAMIE Are you all right?

MARNIE *is shaking her head.*

JAMIE What's wrong?

MARNIE *is trying to speak.*

JAMIE What?

*She tries again.*

JAMIE What did you say?

*She staggers very close to the edge.*

JAMIE Be careful.

*He gets back onto the roof.*

MARNIE *backs away from him. She is still trying to speak.*

JAMIE O.k. O.k. I won't come any closer. I just want to know what you're trying ...

MARNIE (*Croaking.*) Give me ten minutes.

JAMIE Give you what?

MARNIE (*Still very indistinct.*) Give me ten minutes.

JAMIE Give you ten minutes?

MARNIE (*Normal voice.*) Until he gets here.



*Pause.*

JAMIE                   And if he doesn't come?

MARNIE                I'll get off the roof.

JAMIE                   Promise.

MARNIE                I promise.

*Silence.*

MARNIE                Ask me a question.

JAMIE                   What's the capital of Botswana?

MARNIE                *(No hesitation.)* Gaborone.

JAMIE                   Idaho?

MARNIE                Boise. Something difficult.

### Scene Seven

*Chez Bert A few minutes earlier.*

ROBERT, *still down on one knee, and RUTH are looking at the phone*

JAMIE'S VOICE       *(On the answering machine.)* We're on the roof. Don't ask me why. But that's where we—

*Pause. ROBERT begins getting to his feet.*

RUTH                   Marriage is a very serious decision. It's not something you can walk away from.

*She walks away from him. He follows her, pushing himself along on one knee.*

RUTH                   It's not that I don't love you. I do. And I like living with you. I have no problems with that. *(Again she walks away, and he follows.)* And the thought of us growing old together—that's so sweet—even though I know that your growing old is going to be a lot sooner than mine. *(She walks away. He follows. This is very hard on his knees.)*

ROBERT                Especially in the knees.

*She moves away again. He thinks about following, then stops where he is.*

RUTH                   It's a question of liquidity.

ROBERT                Liquidity? What's ...

RUTH                   The current assets of a company divided by the current liabilities gives the 'working capital ratio,' also called the 'current ratio.' The 'quick ratio' is the current assets which can be converted into cash, divided by the current liabilities. This is a measure of liquidity. Too high a 'quick ratio' means there are idle funds which could be better employed. This is the state of being single. Too low a 'quick ratio' is a warning sign of a potentially dangerous situation. This is the state of marriage. Marriage is a long-term investment. It doesn't pay in the short-term. There's too much tied up and it's impossible to get out of it without suffering heavy losses. However way you look at it, it's a terrible risk.

ROBERT                I'm asking you to become my wife, not rearrange my investment portfolio. Will you marry me?

RUTH                   When you get rid of the first wife.

*Robert suddenly remembers Marnie and jumps to his feet.*

ROBERT                She said she was going to jump!

*He runs for the door.*

RUTH                   She's a fat cow in a floral sack.

*This stops him.*

RUTH                   Leave now and it's over.

### Scene Eight

*MARNIE and JAMIE stand on the roof.*

MARNIE                D.

JAMIE                  Think about it.

MARNIE                I have.

JAMIE                  It's only a five percent chance. One in twenty.

MARNIE                D.

JAMIE                  Why?

MARNIE                I need one hundred thousand dollars.

JAMIE                  For what?

*MARNIE says nothing.*

JAMIE                    You don't have to tell me.

MARNIE                 I haven't told anyone.

JAMIE                    No one? Not even Robert? How long have you had this ...

MARNIE                 Since I was ten.

JAMIE                    A hundred thousand dollars is a lot of money for a little girl.

MARNIE                 You're forgetting inflation. Every year I add on the rate of inflation. He's not coming.

*Pause. She turns to look at the neon sign in the far distance.*

MARNIE                 He's going to have to get that fixed.

*She turns.*

MARNIE                 Could you help me?

*He comes towards her. She takes his arm.*

MARNIE                 I'm not very good with heights.

JAMIE                    And you've been standing here ...

MARNIE                 You were right. You do get a different perspective. He doesn't love me. He never loved me. He married me because I was pregnant, and he made the best of it. The thing is, I loved him. I still do.

JAMIE                    Look, I'll ring him.

MARNIE                 No.

JAMIE                    I'll ask him if he'll come over.

MARNIE                 He won't come.

JAMIE                    I'll ask both of them to come.

*Pause.*

MARNIE                 He won't come.

JAMIE                    It's your wedding anniversary. (*He punches a number in the phone.*) We'll celebrate it together. All four of us.

Scene Nine

*Chez Bert. the phone rings again. For a moment neither ROBERT nor RUTH moves, then ROBERT picks it up.*

ROBERT                   Hello.

JAMIE'S VOICE        *(Over the phone.)* Robert? Is that you? *(Pause.)* Marnie and I have been—

ROBERT                   Tell her to jump.

JAMIE'S VOICE        *(Over the phone.)* What did you say?

ROBERT                   You heard me. Tell her to jump.

*He puts down the phone. Then turns to look at RUTH.*

Scene Ten

*On the roof, JAMIE is putting away his mobile phone.*

MARNIE                   What did he say?

JAMIE                    Why don't we wait for him downstairs.

MARNIE                   Did he say he was coming?

JAMIE                    Not exactly.

MARNIE                   What did he say?

JAMIE                    I think we should we get off the roof.

MARNIE                   What did he say?

JAMIE                    He said ... He said ... 'Tell her to jump.'

*MARNIE runs towards the edge of the roof. JAMIE brings her down with a rugby tackle. They lie together on the roof.*

MARNIE                   I've remembered.

JAMIE                    What?

MARNIE                   I like to be rubbed.

*They both begin to laugh. They roll about with laughter. They roll into each other's arms. JAMIE helps her to her feet. They embrace. Then JAMIE takes her by the hand and they climb through the window and exit, to the sound of the gamelan.*

*End of Act One. There is no interval.*

## ACT TWO

Scene One

*It is exactly one year later. In some magical way, the empty plinth is no longer empty. It now supports a shrouded figure, presumably the Balinese housegod, although we can't be sure of this.*

MARNIE enters, holding an envelope which she props against the base of the housegod. She exits into the house and returns, pulling a medium-sized suitcase on wheels. She practises putting the handle up and down. She is about to pull the suitcase over to the door, when she stops.

MARNIE (To the audience.) I know what you're thinking. You're thinking Twin Towers, Bali bombings, homeland security, men fiddling with their shoes, gas in the underground, tanks at Heathrow, Aids in Africa, SARS. That's just the start of what I'm thinking. Along with all the usual things you're thinking—missing your flight, losing your passport, getting the middle seat between two Sumo wrestlers. Then there's being mugged, raped, shot, knifed, strangled, hit by a car, hit by a bus, by a bicycle in a strange country, and let's face it, every country is going to be strange to some one who's never been anywhere but Bali. (Pause.) Yes, it's Marnie, minus the floral sack—I know what she was saying about me. The twins told me. And I'm down to a size ... I've lost a lot of weight. (Pause.) But I've been wanting to do this since I was ten years old, and nothing—I repeat, nothing—is going to stop me.

*She yanks her suitcase towards the door. It overturns. She struggles and fails to right it.*

*There is a knock at the door.*

MARNIE Come in!

JAMIE enters. He's not wearing his baseball cap.

*He takes hold of the suitcase for her.*

MARNIE I can manage. (Pushing him away.) I can manage.

*He lets go the suitcase and watches her struggle to right it.*

MARNIE I can.

JAMIE points to the housegod.

JAMIE They forget this?

MARNIE I'm giving it to Robert.

JAMIE Good girl.

*She is still struggling with the suitcase.*

MARNIE Could you see that he gets it?

JAMIE *picks up the envelope propped against the house god.*

JAMIE You haven't told him?

MARNIE I thought it would be a ... surprise.

JAMIE Not about—(*Pointing to the house god.*)—that. About—(*Taking hold of the suitcase.*)—this. (*Staggering.*) What have you got in here?

MARNIE Nothing.

*She quickly takes hold of the suitcase and wheels it away from him.*

JAMIE You said you were going to tell him.

MARNIE You said I was going to tell him. (*Guiltily.*) I haven't seen him for weeks.

JAMIE You could have rung.

MARNIE I didn't want to ring. (*Pause.*) Have you seen her?

JAMIE Nope.

*There is an awkward silence on both sides.*

MARNIE (*Lightly.*) I haven't seen Robert since the day of the funeral.

JAMIE I haven't seen Ruth since ... (*Easing his shoulder.*) That didn't feel like nothing.

MARNIE There's nothing I can take out.

JAMIE Are you sure?

*He makes for the suitcase. She stands in front of it.*

MARNIE There's nothing I want to take out.

JAMIE What did I tell you?

MARNIE 'Want is not need.'

JAMIE So ... (*He reaches for the suitcase. She blocks him.*)

MARNIE I need everything in this suitcase.

JAMIE No, you don't.

MARNIE I do.

JAMIE You can't.

MARNIE I'm going for a year.

JAMIE You can only wear one pair of shoes at a time.

MARNIE I need at least three pairs of shoes.

JAMIE How many have you got in there? You don't need everything in here.

*He has his arms around her.*

MARNIE I do.

JAMIE You don't. You just think you do.

MARNIE I don't.

*They have other thoughts on their minds.*

JAMIE You do.

MARNIE I don't.

JAMIE You do or you don't? What's it going to be? Just let me have a look. I just want to take a look.

MARNIE No.

JAMIE Just a look.

MARNIE No!

*She pulls the suitcase away. He makes a grab for the suitcase. She pulls it away. They continue this 'game' for a while. Until JAMIE trips over the suitcase. He lies on the floor groaning.*

MARNIE Get up.

JAMIE I can't.

MARNIE Of course you can.

JAMIE I can't. I can't believe you've actually—

*He clutches his ankle.*

JAMIE Exactly one year later. Exactly the same ankle. (*Pause.*) Aren't you going to take a look?

MARNIE We haven't got time.

JAMIE Then you better call a taxi.

MARNIE Aren't you going to drive me?

JAMIE With this ankle?

MARNIE Oh, let me have a look.

JAMIE Be careful. Careful.

*He grabs hold of her and pulls her down onto the floor.*

MARNIE Let me go.

*They roll about laughing on the floor. They lie there for a moment. He turns on his side. He's going to tell her something.*

JAMIE You know the day of your mother's funeral ...?

*Marnie jumps to her feet.*

MARNIE I don't want to be late.

JAMIE The plane doesn't leave for hours.

MARNIE Three hours, sixteen minutes and forty-two seconds.

*JAMIE looks sceptical. She looks quickly at her watch.*

MARNIE Thirty-six seconds.

JAMIE I want to tell you—

MARNIE There's some food out of the fridge, in an esky, in the kitchen.

JAMIE (*Getting to his feet.*) Forget about the food.

MARNIE You can't waste food. And there's a box of stuff from the pantry ... and some bowls and cutlery and things on the sink. I've rinsed them out. (*She sees him examining the envelope.*) Are you listening? And ... the key needs to go to the agent.

*He picks up the envelope from the base of the house god.*

MARNIE (*She takes the envelope from him.*) I'll post it from the airport.

JAMIE What's so hard about telling him?



MARNIE                    *(She holds up the letter.)* I am telling him. And I'm giving him that. As you suggested. *(She points to the house god.)*

*He takes the envelope from her.*

MARNIE                    Thank you.

JAMIE *grabs the suitcase and opens it up.*

MARNIE                    No.

*He takes out a photograph in a frame.*

MARNIE                    No.

*He looks at it. Silence.*

JAMIE                    *(To the audience.)* 'Travel is the way to avoid despair.' You know who said that. Soren Kierkegaard. He was a philosopher. Living in Denmark. If you lived in Denmark you'd want to travel. As far away as you could, and for a long, long time. 'We are all alone before God.' His books—*Fear and Trembling, The Concept of Anxiety, The Sickness unto Death*. Remember, he was living in Denmark. He also had trouble with women.

MARNIE                    What sort of trouble?

JAMIE                    Making a commitment.

MARNIE                    What happened in the end?

JAMIE                    He collapsed in the street and died six weeks later. He wished he'd got married.

*She takes the photograph from him, returns it to her suitcase and zips it up.*

MARNIE                    You want to know why I haven't told Robert?

JAMIE                    If you don't want to return his calls ...

MARNIE                    If I don't tell him then maybe I don't have to go. I can get the furniture out of storage, tell the agent I've changed my mind, and life will go on.

JAMIE                    You can do it.

MARNIE                    I can't even lift my suitcase.

JAMIE                    You've wanted to do this since you were ten years old.

- MARNIE                   What do you know about life when you're ten? Men weren't fiddling with their shoes when I was ten. They didn't take your fingerprints at check-in when I was ten.
- JAMIE                    They were hijacking planes.
- MARNIE                   Not after a couple of lessons and a quick read of *Flying for Dummies*. They wanted those planes to come down on the ground. Not half-way up a building.
- JAMIE                    Break it down into steps. First step. Walk out the house.
- MARNIE                   Yes.
- JAMIE                    Second step. Get to the airport.
- MARNIE                   Shouldn't we be going?
- JAMIE                    Third step. Walk onto the plane. Is that so hard?
- MARNIE                   It is, if it's not there. Let's go.
- JAMIE                    And when the plane lands at Heathrow?
- MARNIE                   Meeting the twins.
- JAMIE                    And then?
- MARNIE                   Getting this—(*She indicates the suitcase.*)—on the underground.
- JAMIE                    And then?
- MARNIE                   Getting this off the underground.
- JAMIE                    So what's the problem?
- MARNIE                   The next step. The exploring-the-world-on-your-own-step. I've never done anything on my own before.

*He opens his mouth to speak.*

- MARNIE                   No, let me say this. The last twelve months have been the most exciting, most exhilarating, most enjoyable year of my life. No that's not fair. Perhaps not of my life, but for a long time. A very long time. I was going to say this at the airport, just before I went through Customs. When you turned up, instead of Robert, I was a mess. I was angry and bitter and resentful and full of self-pity. I was a fat cow in a floral sack. Yes, I was. But in twelve months— and particularly in the last few weeks—I have let all that go. 'There is no animosity. We have moved on'. Tonight is my wedding anniversary—was my

wedding anniversary—and I'm not thinking about Robert. I'm not thinking about the past, or the future. I'm experiencing the present, even if it is very scary. And for this I want to say thank you. Thank you for helping me get on with my life. And for the great sex.

*Jamie takes a map from his pocket.*

MARNIE                    One more thing. And please don't take it the wrong way. I'm not going to see you for twelve months, perhaps never. I'm glad I'm leaving tonight because if I kept seeing you any longer I think I might start to fall in love with you. (*He says nothing.*) I should have said this at the airport.

JAMIE                     I've marked the spot with an X.

MARNIE                    I tell you I love you and you produce a map? We better go.

JAMIE                     It's not the easiest place to get to ...

MARNIE                    The only place I want to get to ...

JAMIE                     ...but you can fly to within thirty kilometres.

MARNIE                    I'll call a taxi.

JAMIE                     Not a taxi. You need a car and driver.

MARNIE                    I have a car and a driver.

JAMIE                     There's a reasonable hotel.

MARNIE                    I'm glad to hear of it.

JAMIE                     I'll be waiting in the bar.

*Silence.*

MARNIE                    What did you say?

JAMIE                     I'll be waiting in the bar.

*Pause.*

MARNIE                    You're going to meet me at X?

JAMIE                     In the bar. In say—three weeks? Does that give you enough time with the twins?

MARNIE *says nothing.*

JAMIE                     And then I thought we might go on to Y and Z.

MARNIE This would be a holiday? A few weeks holiday?

JAMIE Or longer. There's always A, B and C.

MARNIE What about your job?

JAMIE I could take a year off. We could explore the alphabet together.

MARNIE No.

JAMIE Think about it.

MARNIE I have.

JAMIE Think about it on the plane.

MARNIE No.

JAMIE Think about it in London.

MARNIE No.

JAMIE I'll be waiting.

MARNIE No.

JAMIE In the bar.

MARNIE No!

*Silence.*

MARNIE (*Calmly.*) I am not meeting you in the bar.

JAMIE Then in our room. There's a view of the falls you could die for.

MARNIE Stop this. Stop this, now.

JAMIE Think about it.

*Pause.*

MARNIE I have to do this by myself.

JAMIE Even if it makes you miserable?

MARNIE I won't be miserable. I'm going to enjoy myself. I'm going to have the time of my life.

JAMIE You love me.

MARNIE I didn't say that.

JAMIE You did.

MARNIE I said I was in danger of falling in love with you.

JAMIE So let yourself fall. I'll catch you.

MARNIE No.

JAMIE Just meet me at X. Forget about the rest of the alphabet.

MARNIE No.

JAMIE A few weeks together.

MARNIE No.

JAMIE You're taking my photograph.

MARNIE *says nothing.*

JAMIE You're taking a photo, when you can have the original? Think of the weight you'll be taking out of there? Come on, let's get rid of it. Right now.

*He goes to the suitcase and takes out the photograph. She takes it from him.*

MARNIE Say I agree to spend three weeks with you at X. Say we do go on to Y and Z.

JAMIE And A, B, C and D.

MARNIE What happens at E? Or F?

JAMIE I'm no good at this.

MARNIE At what?

*Pause.*

MARNIE At what?

*JAMIE lifts up his hand for silence.*

*MARNIE is silent but she looks pointedly at her watch. Then she paces back and forth.*

JAMIE I feel the same way.

*MARNIE stops her pacing.*

MARNIE What same way?

JAMIE *doesn't speak.* MARNIE *goes back to pacing, now pulling the suitcase.*

MARNIE This better be good.

JAMIE The I'm-not-going-to-see-you-for-twelve-months-perhaps-never-again way.

MARNIE *stops mid-stride.*

MARNIE You're falling in love with me?

JAMIE No.

MARNIE Let's go.

JAMIE I've fallen in love with you. (MARNIE *says nothing.*) I'm in love with you. (MARNIE *is struck dumb.*) I love you. (*He holds out the map.*) I'll be waiting in the bar. (*She won't take it.*) I know I'm not one of your reliable types. I'm not like Robert. I don't know if I can make that kind of commitment. But I'm willing to give it a go. If you are. (*She says nothing.*) You chose D.

MARNIE You don't believe that rubbish. Financial risk profile analysis.

JAMIE Ruth says that it never lies.

MARNIE It's just a justification for losing other people's money. You love me?

JAMIE Yes. And you're only falling in love with me. I'm the one taking the risk.

MARNIE What happens when you stop loving me?

JAMIE We can't think about that.

MARNIE I've been in love before. I know what it's like when it stops. You've never been in love. You said so yourself. In this room.

JAMIE I was wrong.

MARNIE You told me—

JAMIE I was wrong. I have been in love. I just didn't know it. Ruth came to see me. The day of the funeral.

MARNIE You slept with her.

JAMIE I didn't—

MARNIE It doesn't matter.

- JAMIE But I didn't—
- MARNIE It doesn't matter that you slept with her.
- JAMIE I didn't—
- MARNIE You talked.
- JAMIE Yes, we talked.
- MARNIE It felt good.
- JAMIE Yes, it felt—
- MARNIE You talked some more. You shared a little wine. Maybe too much wine. A few laughs about old times. You found yourself in h—her arms and ...you slept with her. It wasn't the smartest thing to do. It was kind of ... embarrassing. You feel a little ashamed. But you weren't hurting anyone. It's not as though *you* were married, even if h—she was. You know it's finished. You know it's over. You know that you're free.
- JAMIE Did you sleep with Robert?
- MARNIE Yes.
- JAMIE On the day of the funeral?
- MARNIE Yes.

Scene Two

*At the Crematorium.*

- ROBERT So she's actually dead.
- MARNIE Is that why you came? To make sure?
- ROBERT Don't think you're going to kick me out. You can't stop people coming to funerals. This is a public place. Paid for by my taxes. I have every right to be here. She may have been a prize bitch but she was the grandmother of my children, and I want to see her go up in smoke. So you can tell the brothers Grimm—*(He waves.)* Geoff. Rodney.—to unroll their sleeves and back off.
- MARNIE Are you drunk?
- ROBERT Occupational hazard. You know what it's like trying to get four steaks to the table at the same time? 'Well-done, medium-well-done, medium-rare, rare—make that very rare. Make it

unique. Very unique. You can't qualify unique. Didn't they teach you grammar at school? Why haven't you rung me?

MARNIE I didn't think you'd want to—

ROBERT Not about this. You'd think someone would have a good word to say about her. 'She was a founder member of the Shakespeare Appreciation Society.' You think Shakespeare would have appreciated that? It's like asking George Bush to flog the Koran. Or Osama Bin Laden to join the Liberal Party. Why didn't you ring about the house?

MARNIE The house is fine.

ROBERT Or the twins? I've rung you—hundreds of times. You don't pick up the phone.

MARNIE Maybe I'm out.

ROBERT At three o'clock in the morning?

MARNIE Maybe I'm doing other things.

ROBERT You changed the locks.

MARNIE Yes.

ROBERT All you had to do was ask for the key. It was you who insisted that I keep it. Lover boy not here?

MARNIE He hardly knew mum.

ROBERT Lucky him. Has he moved in?

MARNIE Is that any business of yours?

ROBERT I see his 'mid-life crisis' in the drive way.

MARNIE I'm not allowed to have visitors?

ROBERT At three o'clock in the morning?

MARNIE Why are you here?

ROBERT She never believed that we would make a go of it. O.k, so the she was right. (*Pause.*) I didn't think you should have to do this on your own. You look terrific.

MARNIE You look terrible.

ROBERT Can I come back to the house?



Scene Three

*Back in the house.*

JAMIE                    You slept with Robert?

MARNIE                It was a funeral thing. It could have been you. It happened to be him. He said he wanted to see the house god. You slept with Ruth. We're quits.

JAMIE                    I didn't sleep with Ruth.

Scene Four

*At Jamie's shed.*

RUTH *is down on her knees examining the floor.*

RUTH                    It must be somewhere. I had both of them in when I left the doctor's. Help me.

JAMIE *gets down on his knees and starts looking.*

JAMIE                    Why did you get rid of the glasses?

RUTH                    They look daggy. I wouldn't have put them in if I'd know I was going to be doing so much ...

*She begins to retch loudly. Recovers.*

RUTH                    ... so much ...

*She retches loudly, again. Recovers.*

RUTH                    ... so much ...

*She almost retches.*

RUTH                    ... crying. I'm having a baby.

JAMIE                    (*Jumping to his feet.*) No.

RUTH                    Yes.

JAMIE                    You can't be.

RUTH                    I am. (*She starts weeping noisily.*)

JAMIE                    Congratulations.

Ruth weeps even more noisily.

JAMIE                    There's nothing to cry about.

RUTH                    I've lost the other one.

*She starts scrabbling around on the floor for the other contact lens.*

JAMIE                    If you'd just stop crying. Stop it. You know how I feel about women crying.

RUTH *stops crying.*

JAMIE                    That's better.

*She begins retching.*

JAMIE                    Get up off the floor.

*She begins crying and retching. He helps her to her feet.*

JAMIE                    Sit over there.

RUTH                    Where?

JAMIE                    There.

*She 'feels' her way towards the chair. JAMIE points her in the right direction. She 'feels' her way onto the chair.*

JAMIE                    Robert should be with you.

RUTH                    He's at the funeral. I knew you wouldn't be there. You don't go to funerals. Too depressing. (*She squints at the room.*) Are you having a clean out?

JAMIE                    Yes. Got any use for a one-man tent? Or a rubber duckie?

*She begins to wail.*

RUTH                    What am I going to tell Robert?

JAMIE                    He doesn't know?

RUTH                    No.

JAMIE                    It is his baby?

RUTH                    (*Dropping the wailing.*) Of course it's his baby. Whose baby is it going to be, if not Robert's?

JAMIE                    Sorry.

- RUTH                    So you should be.
- JAMIE                    I wasn't the only one having adventures.
- RUTH                    Your adventures ...
- JAMIE                    Not any more. As you can see. (*He sees her squinting.*) I'm getting rid of all this stuff. I'm going to sell the shed. A guy my age can't still be living in a shed.
- RUTH                    I suppose she told you to stop.
- JAMIE                    Nope.
- RUTH                    You just decided to stop of your own accord?
- JAMIE                    Yep.
- RUTH                    'A guy your age' can't still be having adventures?
- JAMIE                    Nope. It's just not something I want to do any more.
- Pause.*
- RUTH                    You think I should have it?
- JAMIE                    You're not thinking of ...
- RUTH                    You don't like babies.
- JAMIE                    I'm not having one.
- RUTH                    You think I should have it.
- JAMIE                    What I think is ... not important.
- RUTH                    I'd like your opinion.
- JAMIE                    It's what you ...and Robert ...think.
- RUTH                    I know what Robert will think. He'll want to have it. Even though we can't afford it. Even though we've got nowhere to put it. What's going to happen if I can't help out in the restaurant every night? And what about my job? Robert can handle all that—that's the only reason I'm even thinking about having it. (*She makes as if to weep, changes her mind, makes as if to retch, changes her mind.*) Say it was our baby.
- JAMIE                    Our baby?

*She gets to her feet.*

RUTH                    We could have had a baby.

JAMIE                    I'm over here.

*She swings around to face him.*

RUTH                    What if I'd fallen pregnant when we were together? Would you have wanted me to have it?

JAMIE                    I thought you hated babies.

RUTH                    I hate going to the dentist but I go. Would you want me to have it?

*Pause.*

JAMIE                    If you wanted to have it—

RUTH                    I want to have it

JAMIE                    —I'd want you to have it.

RUTH                    I wish I'd known that when we were together.

JAMIE                    You didn't want to have a baby when we were together. You didn't want to get married. (*Pause.*) Then you married Robert, and now you're having his baby.

*Pause.*

RUTH                    I didn't have any adventures. Apart from Robert, and he wasn't an adventure.

JAMIE                    You told me ...

RUTH                    You were having adventures.

JAMIE                    Because I thought you ... Why didn't you ...

RUTH                    Every time I dropped you at the airport ...

JAMIE                    You gave me a kiss on the cheek and a high five. You said, 'Have fun. I sure as hell, will.'

RUTH                    ... I had to sit there in the car until I was fit to drive.

### Scene Five

*Marnie's house.*

JAMIE                    She didn't expect enough.

MARNIE                    You haven't had any adventures?

JAMIE                    Not a one. She should have expected more. But, hell what could she expect of a man like me? Someone who lives in a shed—when he's around? (*He's getting very Texan.*) Who uses her apartment like a hotel—flies in and flies out? Who's happy with a peck on the cheek and a high five? 'Have fun. I sure as hell, will.' Who slithers across the floor and flicks his tongue at a woman? I loved that woman and I never told her. Hell, I didn't know it myself until she told me about the baby. I loved her and lost her and I'm not making that mistake again.

MARNIE                    No adventures?

JAMIE                    Not a one.

*Pause.*

MARNIE                    Give me that.

*He gives the map to her.*

MARNIE                    X marks the spot?

JAMIE                    I'll be waiting in the bar.

MARNIE                    Order me a Scotch. On the rocks.

*They embrace. A long kiss.*

MARNIE                    What's wrong?

JAMIE                    I was just thinking.

MARNIE                    What?

JAMIE                    How could he do that to her? Sleep with you, when she's having his baby.

MARNIE                    He didn't know that. She hadn't told him.

JAMIE                    He should have known. I would've known.

### Scene Six

*Ruth's apartment.*

ROBERT                    I put a hand on you and you start to gag. And when I try to talk to you—find out what's wrong—you run out of the room and lock yourself in the bathroom and won't come out. Stop looking at your watch. There's plenty of time

RUTH                    Three hours, sixteen minutes and forty-two seconds.

ROBERT *looks sceptical. She looks quickly at her watch.*

RUTH                    Thirty-six seconds. Sorry. I just don't want us to be late opening up.

ROBERT                Let them wait for their omelette d'oeuf. I thought we could use this afternoon—my first afternoon off in weeks—to get to know each other again.

*He puts his arm around her. She retches.*

ROBERT                You see. What's going on?

RUTH                    Don't you know?

ROBERT                No. Tell me.

*Pause.*

RUTH                    Why don't we sit down? Make ourselves comfortable?

ROBERT                On that?

RUTH                    What's wrong with the sofa?

ROBERT                It makes me feels like we're watching the in-flight movie.

RUTH                    I don't want the place to look cluttered. I like it to look—

ROBERT                Minimalist. It's minimalist. It's so minimalist that I feel like the next thing to go will be me. I spoil the lines. I clutter up the pure space. I'm not monochrome. And the kitchen?

RUTH                    The stove is state-of-the-art.

ROBERT                When did we last use it to cook a meal? We have a state-of-the-art fridge filled with kalamata olives and roll-mops ...

RUTH *starts gagging.*

ROBERT                ... and you have to smell the milk before you pour it into your coffee. Will you stop that? I'm nowhere near you.

*She controls herself.*

ROBERT                Coffee that you've heated up in the state-of-the-art microwave. How long since we've spent a night together?

RUTH                    We spend every night together.

ROBERT                   Not feeding the faces of fucking foodies. Since we've sat down together and ... shared a pizza?

*She struggles not to retch.*

ROBERT                   Watched a video? Read a book? Made love?

*She retches loudly.*

RUTH                     You wanted to open a restaurant.

ROBERT                  I wanted to marry you.

RUTH                     This was your dream and you made it happen.

ROBERT                  It means nothing if you don't love me.

RUTH                     Who says I don't love you?

ROBERT                  Why do you flinch every time I touch you?

RUTH                     I ... I ...

ROBERT                  We've been working too hard. That's what's the problem. I don't know if I can deal with success.

RUTH                     Of course you can.

ROBERT                  When you're a success, there's so much more to lose.

RUTH                     When have you ever been frightened of failure? You're a risk taker.

ROBERT                  I'm a school principal who wanted to live a little.

RUTH                     You hated being school principal.

ROBERT                  Did I?

RUTH                     Yes, you did.

ROBERT                  Maybe. You know what I felt like doing last night. I felt like marching out there and yelling, 'Table Four, get those silly smirks off your faces, and you—you there in the corner— if I hear one more stupid remark about the wine, I'm going to send a note home to your parents.'

*Pause.*

RUTH                     Say I was pregnant.

ROBERT                  (*Shocked.*) You're not, are you?

RUTH No.

ROBERT Thank God for that. Mind you, it would explain the ... and the locking yourself in the ... Are you sure you're not—

RUTH I'm not pregnant.

ROBERT That's o.k. then.

RUTH Say I wanted to be.

ROBERT You couldn't.

RUTH Just say I wanted to. Soon.

ROBERT You couldn't possibly stop working. Without your pay check ... If we had to rely on *Chez Bert* ...

RUTH I thought you liked children.

ROBERT I do.

RUTH So?

ROBERT I've got two already. Do you know much it's costing me to keep them overseas?

RUTH I could keep working.

ROBERT You've got to keep working.

RUTH (*Thinking.*) I'd lose a few clients ... but ...

ROBERT What about *Chez Bert*?

RUTH You could take on some more staff.

ROBERT I don't want to take on more staff. That's why I stopped being a school principal. I hated the staff. I couldn't stand the way they complained all the time. They were always having nervous breakdowns. Or taking indefinite stress-leave. Or going on maternity leave. You can't have a baby.

RUTH It'll be all right.

ROBERT It won't.

RUTH It will.

ROBERT I'm not sleeping, as it is. What's it going to be like when we've got a baby screaming every night. Where are we going



to put it? Have you thought about that? It'll make the place look very cluttered.

RUTH We have to take the risk.

ROBERT I can't.

RUTH Yes, you can.

ROBERT I can't.

RUTH According to the questionnaire—

ROBERT Forget the fucking questionnaire. (RUTH is shocked into silence.) I am not a risk taker.

RUTH But the—

ROBERT Forget it! (Pause.) I wanted you to believe in me. In my dream. No one had ever taken me seriously. And you did. And I wanted to sleep with you. I was in love with you. of course I wanted to sleep with you. So I ... I pretended to be a risk-taker.

RUTH You're saying you falsified the form?

ROBERT I'm an A man who chose D.

*Pause.*

RUTH I'm pregnant.

*Pause.*

ROBERT Why did you let me say all that? That's wonderful, wonderful news. Who cares if he's screaming all night. I'll be awake anyway. And we can find somewhere to put him. We can get rid of the sofa for a start. We'll have to, if we want to eat. How many jars of kalamata olives can you get for a state-of-the-art airline seat?

RUTH I can't have this baby with you.

ROBERT I'm sorry about what I—

RUTH I'm risk-aversive. I'm an A.

ROBERT So am I. Where's the problem?

RUTH One of us has to be able to handle risk.

ROBERT So we'll both be up at 3 am.

RUTH                    You deceived me.

*Pause.*

ROBERT                Just once. And it was with Marnie so it doesn't count.

RUTH                    I've made a terrible mistake.

Scene Seven

*Marnie's house.*

MARNIE *takes hold of the suitcase.*

JAMIE'S *phone rings.*

MARNIE                Answer it in the car.

*She goes out pulling the suitcase behind her.*

JAMIE *takes out his mobile phone.*

JAMIE                (*On the phone.*) Hello! Ruth? Is that you? What's wrong?

MARNIE *re-enters pulling the suitcase.*

JAMIE                Ruth? Where are you?

MARNIE                She's in our drive-way.

JAMIE                What?

MARNIE                She's having hysterics in our drive-way.

JAMIE                (*On the phone.*) I'm on my way.

*He begins to exit. MARNIE follows him.*

JAMIE                You wait here. I'll speak to her. (*On the phone.*) I'm on my way.

MARNIE                Don't let her hold us up.

JAMIE *exits.*

MARNIE *takes the photo out of her suitcase, looks at it, and then goes into the kitchen.*

ROBERT *enters by the front door. He looks around at the empty house. He goes to the house god. Sees the letter. Picks it up. Sees it's addressed to him. Opens and reads it.*

MARNIE *enters from the kitchen. ROBERT has his back to her.*

MARNIE I've put your photo in with the box of groceries, seeing I won't be needing it.

ROBERT *turns around.*

ROBERT (*Indicating the housegod.*) Thanks. You're going away?

MARNIE Yes. Did you see ...? (*She points towards the open front door.*)

ROBERT Yeah. The old bitch came through in the end?

MARNIE Yes. Was she ...? (*She points to the open door.*)

ROBERT Yeah. She didn't leave all her money to the Shakespeare Appreciation Society?

MARNIE No. Shouldn't you be ...? (*Once again, she points to the open door.*)

ROBERT He seems to be handling it.

*Pause.*

MARNIE If she makes me miss my plane.

ROBERT Was this—(*He points to the suitcase.*)—his idea?

MARNIE Why should it be his idea?

ROBERT You never expressed any interest in travelling.

MARNIE You never thought to ask why was I learning Spanish in Southern Cross? French in Useless Loop? Advanced Italian in Fitzroy Crossing?

ROBERT This was your dream? To travel?

MARNIE Yes.

ROBERT I couldn't even get you to Rottnest.

MARNIE It's *my* idea.

ROBERT Was he going with you?

MARNIE (*Picking up the map.*) He's meeting me at X. In three weeks.

ROBERT And if he doesn't turn up?

MARNIE He'll turn up.

*She makes a bolt for the door. He gets in her way.*

ROBERT            Don't go out there.

MARNIE            Why not?

ROBERT            Because ...

MARNIE            You find it impossible to believe that a man might love me?

ROBERT            I find it impossible to believe that *that* man loves you—loves anyone.

MARNIE            Get out of my way.

ROBERT *doesn't move.*

MARNIE            Now.

ROBERT *moves away.*

MARNIE *goes outside. ROBERT waits, then picking up the bananas from the side-table, he goes into the kitchen.*

MARNIE *returns. She pushes over her suitcase, kicks it a few times, then sits on it..*

*After a moment, JAMIE enters from outside.*

*Silence.*

JAMIE            (*Looking around.*) Was that Robert ..? I thought I saw ...?

MARNIE *says nothing.*

JAMIE            She's gone. (*Pause.*) Marnie, I'm—(*She holds up her hand.*) At least, let me take you to the airport.

*Silence.*

JAMIE            Please.

*Silence.*

JAMIE            I thought I was in love with you. I really did.

*Silence.*

JAMIE            Let me call you a cab. You'll get over this. Once you step on the plane you'll forget all—(about me).

MARNIE *jumps to her feet.*

MARNIE            Go! Go!

*He begins to back out of the door.*

MARNIE                    Wait!

*She holds out her hand. He doesn't understand. She waits.*

*JAMIE gets the key out of his pocket. She takes it from him.*

*JAMIE exits. MARNIE holds herself for a moment, then sinks to the floor.*

*ROBERT enters from the kitchen carrying a bowl of Banana Split and two spoons.*

ROBERT                    It was a bit rushed.

*He hands her a spoon. She takes a mouthful, realises what she is eating and stops chewing.*

ROBERT                    Eat.

*She eats. He sits next to her. They eat.*

ROBERT                    You've had a terrible shock.

MARNIE                    And you think eating this will make me feel better?

ROBERT                    It used to.

MARNIE                    I am not taking you back.

ROBERT                    Who says I want to come back?

*She eats another mouthful.*

MARNIE                    Not bad.

ROBERT                    The nuts are stale.

MARNIE                    A bit.

ROBERT                    You didn't throw them out. After last year?

MARNIE                    You can't waste food. Can you chuck out all that stuff in the kitchen?

ROBERT                    Including the photograph?

MARNIE                    Why did you let her go off with him?

ROBERT                    What was I supposed to do?

MARNIE                    Fight.

ROBERT                    He's bigger than me.

*They eat some more.*

ROBERT She loves him. He loves her.

MARNIE What about the baby?

ROBERT Yeah.

*Pause.*

ROBERT It's not such a disaster. You're going on your trip.

MARNIE *Chez Bert's* a success.

ROBERT Yeah. (*Pause.*) The day of the funeral ...?

MARNIE What about it?

ROBERT It wasn't so bad.

MARNIE You couldn't get out of here fast enough.

ROBERT I was ... I couldn't believe what I'd done.

MARNIE We'd done.

ROBERT I think it was being here. In this house. After so many months of not being here. It was realising what I was missing. The house. The twins. The roof. You. I missed you.

MARNIE I'm not going to miss my flight.

*She leaps to her feet.*

ROBERT We had something special.

MARNIE (*Taking hold of her suitcase.*) No, we didn't.

ROBERT Yes, we did. Other people could see it. Not every young couple gets given one of these on their honeymoon.

*He rips the blanket off the statue. It is indeed something special.*

ROBERT Not every young couple gets given a Balinese house god. 'You are a beautiful young couple with a glorious future. This will bring you good fortune.' What do you say to that?

*Pause.*

MARNIE (*Rummaging in her handbag for her phone.*) I'm going to ring a taxi.

ROBERT *takes the bag away from her.*

ROBERT                   What do you say to that?

MARNIE                   I told them to say that. They didn't give us this. I bought it.

ROBERT                   Why?

MARNIE                   You didn't want to get married.

ROBERT                   I never said ...

MARNIE                   I watched you touch this every time we went in and out of the room. And I thought that if you could touch this every day of our lives then you might stay. We were never a beautiful young couple with a glorious future ...

*Silence.*

ROBERT                   I'll take you to the airport.

MARNIE                   I can call—

ROBERT                   I'd like to.

MARNIE *gets to her feet and confronts her over-turned suitcase.*

MARNIE                   Everywhere I go, I'll be a middle-aged woman eating alone with a book.

ROBERT                   You might get lucky. You might get to sleep with the cook.

*She takes hold of her suitcase. And lifts it up. Her spirits lift. She exits, dragging it behind her.*

*ROBERT is about to follow. He stops in front of the house god.*

MARNIE                   *(Off.)* Are you coming!

ROBERT                   Coming.

*He considers it.*

MARNIE                   *(Off.)* I want to lock up.

*He reaches out and touches it.*

MARNIE                   *(Off.)* Robert!

*He exits.*

THE END.

AWA' THE CROW ROAD



Loved accents are soon forgot  
—Shelley, *Lines: When the Lamp is shattered*

*Voices:*

DAD (45), *speaks English with a pleasant 'educated' Scottish accent*

YOUNG JOHN (10), *speaks English with a Scottish accent*

JOHN (22, 27, 50), *speaks English with an Australian accent, which becomes more assertive when he speaks to his brother, Craig. In the last few scenes of the play, his accent is, at times, a little Scottish*

CRAIG (53), *speaks a mixture of Scots and English with a Scottish accent which can become aggressively self-assertive. He uses Scots as a weapon. In the last few scenes of the play, his accent becomes more Australian.*

CHRISSIE (46), *speaks English with an Australian accent*

JANE (28), *speaks English with a 'private-school' Australian accent*

SOPHIE(20), *speaks English with an Australian accent with a hint of Polish*

DEPUTY HEAD, *speaks English with a broad Australian accent*

CROW, *speaks English with an American accent*

*The Boy in the Train* was written by Mrs M.C.Smith (1869-?1949) and was recited by Scottish school children in the 1960s.

*Steam train, Scotland, 1963.*

YOUNG JOHN *(To the rhythm of the steam train, and getting faster as the poem progresses.)*  
 'The Boy in the Train.'  
*(Reciting.)* 'Whit wey does the engine say toot-toot?'

*Steam train's whistle.*

YOUNG JOHN 'Is it feart to gang in the tunnel?  
 Whit wey is the furnace no pit oot  
 When the rain gangs doon the funnel?  
 What'll I hae for my tea the nicht?  
 A herrin', or maybe a haddie?  
 Has Gran'ma gotten electric licht?  
 Is the next stop—*(Less Scottish.)*—is the next stop—

JOHN *(Australian.)*—is the next stop—

*Silence, broken by a crow, mocking.*

JOHN *(Title.)* 'Awa the Crow Road.'

*Jumbo jet, taking off.*

### Scene One

*Hot Australian suburban backyard, 1963.*  
*Crow, harsh and mocking.*

DAD *(Educated, Scottish.)* We're here. We're Australian.  
 We're not going back.

YOUNG JOHN *(Scottish.)* What if we don't like it?

DAD We're going to like it.

YOUNG JOHN Are we never going back?

DAD Never.

*Pause.*

DAD You're going to like it so much—

YOUNG JOHN Never?

DAD —you'll never want to go (back.)

Scene Two

*Inside Dad's bedroom. A window is open to same Australian suburban backyard, late afternoon, 2003.*

*Quiet, but laboured, breathing.*

JOHN *(Entering the bedroom.)* I found these letters, Dad, when I was looking for that last hospital bill. The one they said we hadn't paid. I'll have to... I'm sure I ... But listen ...

*Rustle of aerogramme letters.*

JOHN *(Reading.)* 'Dear Craig ...' It's from Grandad to Craig. Just after we left. *(Reading, with difficulty.)* February 7<sup>th</sup>.

*Dad groans quietly.*

JOHN You want a drink? Let me put these down on the bed—

*Rustle as letters are put down.*

JOHN —and find a cotton bud. And the water. *(Closer to the breathing.)* Here we go. Whoops. Didn't mean to dribble it down your chin. I'll get the flannel. *(Pause.)* That's better. *(Moving away.)* I can't believe you kept them. *(Pause.)* Or was it Mum?

*Pause. Then rustle as he picks up the small bundle of letters. .*

JOHN *(Reading)* '—how I envy you, enjoying the sunshine, we are still having falls of snow. It is bitterly cold, it has upset all the football now for weeks.' *(To his father.)* It was the coldest winter in Britain since 1740. It was on one of those history programs. Old people fell asleep sitting in their armchairs—*(Sitting.)* I think I will sit down. —and never woke up. They froze to death in front of their coal fires. No wonder you wanted to leave. *(Short silence.)* Craig and I had the flu. D'you remember? We were both off school, in bed together—probably to keep warm—and he taught me how to play chess. King's rook to ... *(Pause.)* They say that chess is the ultimate sublimation of aggression. *(Sigh.)(Reading.)* 'None of you had any effects with the heat. Your mother and father will not have any complaints, the electric fires will all be forgotten about—you will now be excused to bringing up pails of coal'.

*The phone rings, in another room.*

JOHN That'll be him. (*Leaving the room.*) I won't be long.

*Dad's breathing.*

JOHN (*In the other room, answering the phone. His voice takes on a more assertive Australian accent.*) Craig. (*Listening.*) Because you always ring at—He can't come to the— He can't. He hasn't been out of—I *am* telling you. (*Lowering his voice*) He doesn't want to fight it any more. No, he hasn't said that, but—but—If you think you can do— I know. I know. (*Pause.*) No, the drugs see to—No, I (*Mocking.*) 'dinnae ken how lang he's got'. I know it's a language, Craig. I just don't believe it's your language. It certainly isn't mine. Or Dad's. It never was. We never spoke like that. I have to go. I have to—What? He's what?

*In the other room, the phone is carefully put down.*

*Dad's breathing.*

JOHN (*Entering the bedroom.*) (*Lightly.*) Once a week. On a Sunday. Cheap rates. (*Sitting down.*) Now where was I? (*Picking up the letters.*) (*Reading.*) 'Was Mammy telling you of our experiences after leaving you. I had visions of our names in the *Sunday Mail*. "Mother and Three Sons in Breach of Peace."' (*Pause.*) He says you're 'awa' the crow road.'

*Dad's breathing.*

JOHN Is that where you are? *Pause.* Dad?

*Dad's breathing.*

*Outside the window, the crow mocks.*

JOHN Shall I shut the window? (*He gets to his feet.*) Don't want you getting a ... (*He struggles with the window, which shuts with a bang, drowning out the sound of the crow. Pause.*) (*Firmly.*) We never said 'awa'.

### Scene Three

*Glasgow Railway Station, 1963*

DAD You're too close to the edge.

YOUNG JOHN I'm looking for the train.

DAD                    You'll topple onto the tracks.

YOUNG JOHN        No, I won't.

DAD                    You're too close. Now come *away!* John, come—

Scene Four

*Inside Dad's bedroom.*

*Dad's breathing.*

JOHN                    —away. (*Remembering.*) And then we were on the train and I was sitting on your lap and Craig was lying on the other ... bed?

YOUNG JOHN        Bunk.

JOHN                    Bunk. Where were Mum and Chrissie?

YOUNG JOHN        They were in the other compartment.

JOHN                    Were they?

YOUNG JOHN        You remember. Craig had his face turned to the wall.

JOHN                    Yes?

YOUNG JOHN        He was crying.

JOHN                    Was he?

YOUNG JOHN        You remember. And Daddy was speaking to him.

JOHN                    What did he say?

YOUNG JOHN        I don't remember.

JOHN                    What did you say?

*Dad's breathing.*

YOUNG JOHN        But you said ...

JOHN                    What did I say?

YOUNG JOHN        ... Don't cry, Craig. It's going to be an adventure.

JOHN                   And the train's moving and I'm looking out of the window. At the uncles. They're running along the platform. Next to the window. Running. And waving. And crying. And one by one—

YOUNG JOHN        Uncle Iain, Uncle Bert, Uncle Stuart.

JOHN                   —they're gone. (*Pause.*) (*He picks up the letter.*) (*Reading.*) 'What I laughed at most was your Uncle Bert swinging an empty golf bag.' Was that yours? Did he give it to him?

YOUNG JOHN        I don't remember.

JOHN                   (*Reading.*) 'Then in the confusion, the coat was left in the station'. What coat?

YOUNG JOHN        I don't know. I was too young.

JOHN                   (*Reading.*) 'Stuart said it was away in the London train and Iain said, no, however we got it all right and when we arrived at the home station, Iain got a taxi. The two other brothers joined up but would not share in the fare. Just a couple of sharks...Have you seen any of the animals and birds that live in your area?'

### Scene Five

*Australian country area school concert. Applause*

DEPUTY HEAD        (*Very Australian.*) Thank you Grade Four for that stirring rendition of 'Click go the Shears'. And now, for our Anzac Day combined school concert, we have a poem all the way from Bonny Scotland read by our most recent arrival, who after only six weeks in Grade Six, has been promoted to Grade Seven. Well done, John.

*Muttered jeers from some older boys in the audience.*

DEPUTY HEAD        (*Sharply.*) That's enough. I want you to give a warm welcome to John Fowlie.

*Loud clapping, some of it ironic.*

DEPUTY HEAD        Those boys in the back row. I'll see you after.

*Audience settles down into silence.*

YOUNG JOHN        (*Confident.*) (*Reciting.*) 'The Boy in the Train.'

Whit wey does the engine say Toot-toot?  
Is it feart to gang in the tunnel?  
Whit wey is the furnace no pit oot.

- BOY                   (*Up the back.*) Pit oot?
- Boys laughing and a few shhhhs.*
- JOHN                 ‘When the rain gangs doon the funnel?’
- BOYS                (*Up the back.*) Doon?
- YOUNG JOHN        (*Getting rattled.*) ‘What’ll I hae for my tea the nicht?’
- BOY                 (*Up the back.*) It’s a braw, moonlicht, nicht
- More general laughter.*
- YOUNG JOHN        (*Desperate.*) ‘A herrin’, or maybe a haddie?’
- BOY                 A haddie!
- Louder laughter*
- YOUNG JOHN        (*Close to tears.*) ‘Has Gran’ma gotten ... electric licht?’
- BOYS                Licked? Yuk!
- Very loud laughter as the entire audience joins in.*
- YOUNG JOHN        Is the next stop ... is the next stop ... is the next—

### Scene Six

*Dad’s bedroom, the breathing is more laboured.*

- JOHN                Stop! (*Recovering.*) (*To his father.*) I better get you ready for the nurse. She doesn’t like to see sun on the stubble.
- Electric razor.*
- JOHN                There we go. Remember how you used to pretend to shave me?
- YOUNG JOHN        I didn’t like it.
- JOHN                (*Pause.*) It was funny. All that ‘electric licht’ and rain ‘gang doon’. I wanted them to laugh.



YOUNG JOHN            But with me. Not at me. We didn't speak like that. We spoke English. Like them. Better than them. But they didn't see the joke. I was the joke.

*The razor is turned off.*

JOHN                    And then you were laughing at me for speaking Australian. (*Broad Australian.*) 'You beauty.' 'What are you going to do, today?' 'Cake.'

YOUNG JOHN            'We're here. We're Australian. We're *never* going back.'

JOHN                    What else could I do? I had to choose.

### Scene Seven

*Indoors party. Polish music.*

SOPHIE                (*Shouting to be heard.*) You're saying you don't think we should go out any more?

JOHN                    (*Shouting.*) You have to choose.

SOPHIE                (*Shouting*) I have. You.

JOHN                    You can't have your (*Very Australian.*) cake and eat it.

SOPHIE                John, I can't hear—

JOHN                    (*Shouting to be heard.*) Come outside.

### Scene Eight

*In the garden with the party now at a distance.*

JOHN                    Australia or Poland?

SOPHIE                (*Not understanding.*) Yes?

JOHN                    Which one?

SOPHIE                I was two years old when we left (Poland.)

JOHN                    So it's Australia?

SOPHIE                John, this is—

JOHN                    Is it Australia?

SOPHIE                   *(Brief Pause.)* Yes.

JOHN                    Why do you speak Polish to your parents?

SOPHIE                   They feel comfortable—

JOHN                    They should be speaking English.

SOPHIE                   They do.

JOHN                    But not tonight.

SOPHIE                   It's their wedding anniversary. All their friends—

JOHN                    You'll want to go back. And once you go back ...

*Pause.*

SOPHIE                   Craig's not coming back.

JOHN                    No. His wife's having another baby. Craig couldn't forget. He had to go back. And now he's stuck there. And I'm stuck here.

SOPHIE                   You're not stuck.

### Scene Nine

*Dad's breathing, laboured.*

JOHN                    Time for your next jab. Here we go.

*Relieved groan from dad.*

JOHN                    Yeah, that feels good. You couldn't understand why I broke off with Sophie. And then married Jane.

JANE                    *(Slightly distorted.) (Australian.)* Australian? Going back six generations. Would have been First Fleeters if my great-great-great-great-great grandmother hadn't got drunk the night before the fleet sailed, and so missed the boat. *(She laughs.)*

JOHN                    Of course I married Jane. I would've married an Aborigine, if I'd known any. But tell me this, Dad, why does every Australian want to go os.?

Scene Ten

*An Australian airport. 1980. Overseas flights are being called.*

JANE (Counting.) One... two ... three pieces of hand luggage—

JOHN (As if reading from a conference paper.) I've never understood the enthusiasm for being some where else.

JANE —including the duty-free.

JOHN What's wrong with 'here'?

JANE 'Dinnae ferget the Glenfiddich.'

JOHN 'Here' is where we live, work, interact with the people we love.

JANE Bit like taking coals to—Don't drop it!

JOHN Jane—

JANE You nearly dropped the Glenfiddich.

JOHN Jane.

JANE And we've each got a coat.

JOHN (Returning to the conference paper.) Whereas 'there' ...

JANE Craig said there was snow on the Ochil Hills. Ochil Hills.

JOHN ... is a state of mind ...

JANE Campsie Fells

JOHN ... a manufacture desire ...

JANE Blaeberry Muirs

JOHN ... that will always disappoint—

JANE I just love the way he talks.

JOHN ... because it can never live up ...

JANE Can't wait to meet him.

YOUNG JOHN Are we never going back?

DAD Never!

JANE Where's the camera?

JOHN (*Returning to the conference paper.*) Whereas 'here' is real.

JANE I thought I put it—

JOHN I can't.

JANE You can't back out now.

JOHN You go.

JANE What about the conference?

JOHN I'll send them my paper. Craig will look after you.

YOUNG JOHN Never!

### Scene Eleven

*Steam train. Whistle screaming.*

YOUNG JOHN There's a hoodie-craw on yon turnip-raw!  
An' sea-gulls!—sax or seeven  
I'll no fa' oot' o' the windae, Maw,  
It's sneckit, as sure as I'm leevin'.  
We're into the tunnel! We're a' in the dark!  
But dinna be frichtit, Daddy,  
We'll sune be comin' to Beveridge Park,  
And the next stop's—

YOUNG JOHN (*Less Scottish.*)—the next stop's—

JOHN —the next stop's—

*Jumbo jet taking off.*

### Scene Twelve

*Dad's bedroom. His breathing is now very laboured.*

JOHN (*Waking.*) ... the next stop's ...

*Dad's breathing.*

JOHN                    You're still here. (*Getting to his feet.*) She did go. But not then. The plane sat on the tarmac for two hours while they found our luggage and took it off. We had all sorts of troubles getting back through Customs. Jane went. Later. And since then ...

*Front doorbell.*

JOHN                    Bit early for the nurse.

*Doorbell rings again.*

JOHN                    (*Leaving the room.*) I'm coming.

*Knocking on the front door.*

JOHN                    (*At a distance.*) I'm coming!

*The door opens in the distance.*

*Distorted bagpipes.*

### Scene Thirteen

*Dad's bedroom. Breathing is laboured*

CRAIG                    (*Very Scottish.*) You should a' seen the look on tha' yin's face.

JOHN                    You don't have to shout at him.

CRAIG                    He was right frichted.

JOHN                    Dad, this is Craig.

CRAIG                    He kens wha I am. (*Closer to the breathing.*) He kens ma voice.

*Dad groans.*

CRAIG                    You see.

JOHN                    He's thirsty. Can you pass me—

CRAIG                    I'll dae tha'.

JOHN                    You have to—

- CRAIG I ken whit t a dae. (*Dropping the Scots.*) Don't forget I was there when they died. Grandad. Granny. And the rest. God, doesn't he look like him?
- JOHN That's what he said. I look like my father.
- CRAIG (*Reverting.*) Och but ye wouldnae know.
- JOHN I've seen the photos.
- CRAIG Whit wid they tell you? (*To Dad.*) There you go.
- JOHN You look nothing like yours.
- CRAIG You do. The same sour dook. No wonder he's turned *his* face to the wall. But Daddy, I didnae ferget the Glenfiddich.
- JOHN You're not going to—
- CRAIG If you can dab water on a cotton bud ... You can gies some glasses.
- JOHN Don't you think it's a bit—(early)
- CRAIG Och, I'll get them mesel'
- JOHN You won't know where to—
- CRAIG D'ye think I don't remember?
- JOHN I'll get them (*Leaving.*) But call me if—

Scene Fourteen

*The kitchen. John gets the glasses out of the cupboard, banging them onto the table.*

- YOUNG JOHN 'We're into the tunnel! We're a' in the dark! But dinna be frichtit, Daddy.'
- JOHN Turns up on the doorstep. As though he's been down to the corner bloody shop.
- YOUNG JOHN 'We'll soon be coming to—'
- JOHN 'right frichtit'
- YOUNG JOHN 'And the next—'

JOHN 'Gies some glasses.'

YOUNG JOHN 'And the next—'

JOHN 'Sour dook.' We didn't speak like that.

Scene Fifteen

*Dad's bedroom. Laboured breathing*

CRAIG (*Reading*) 'The uncles had a slight disagreement – Good man.

JOHN What are you doing?

CRAIG Listen, it's from Auntie Betty.

JOHN I know who it's—

CRAIG The bottle's over there. (*Reading.*) 'a slight disagreement with the Station master at St Enoch's.'

*John pours whisky for both of them.*

CRAIG Make mine a big one. (*Reading.*) 'and Bert told him to go for a Dr Buching.' (*Taking the glass.*) Champion.

JOHN I've been reading—

CRAIG I bet you don't know who Dr Beeching was? No. But we do. Don't we, Daddy? To your good health.

JOHN I hardly think—

CRAIG *He's* not the one looking like death warmed up. Dr Beeching was the *English* Minister for Railways, who closed down most of the Scottish railway network just before we left—

JOHN No doubt, because it was losing money—

CRAIG —and Uncle Bert being a Scottish Nationalist ...

JOHN How much over budget is the new Scottish parliament?

CRAIG About as much as the Sydney Opera House.

JOHN It's just another crowd of politicians at the trough.

CRAIG But they're our crowd. At our trough.





JOHN                    Are you ... ? Look, have another ... I'll get you a ...

CRAIG                    (*Recovering.*) A hoodie craw. (*Pause.*) On yon turnip raw

Scene Sixteen

*School concert. Laughing and jeering.*

YOUNG JOHN            (*Struggling on*)  
 An' sea-gulls! – sax or seeven  
 I'll no fa' oot' o' the windae, Maw,  
 It's sneckit, as sure as I'm leevin'.

Scene Seventeen

*Dad's bedroom. Dad is quietly groaning. Outside in the garden, the crow mocks.*

CRAIG                    That's the difference between Scots and English. English shuts the window. English describes the action. Scots snecks the window. Scots *is* the action.

JOHN                    It was you. Up the back. Getting them to laugh.

CRAIG                    Yes.

JOHN                    Why?

CRAIG                    You wouldnae fit in.

JOHN                    Me?

CRAIG                    Yes, you.

JOHN                    You're the one didn't fit.

CRAIG                    I wasnae sitting in the library every lunch time. I was out there playing fitba'. Australian rules? Nae rules, mair likely. I wasnae girning to Mum about how easy the work was.

JOHN                    I was just telling the truth.

CRAIG                    D'ye think I didnae find the work easy? I ken whit wid happen if you got put up a grade. And it did. They hated your guts.

JOHN                    I had the guts to stay.

CRAIG                    It doesn't take guts to stay. It takes guts to leave.

JOHN                    You were the one who was crying.

CRAIG                   I wisnea crying.

JOHN                    We were on the train. In the sleeping compartment.

CRAIG                   Aye.

YOUNG JOHN           He was lying on the right hand bunk

JOHN                    And I was sitting on Dad's lap—

CRAIG                   That'd be right. Ya big sook.

YOUNG JOHN           Dad was speaking to Craig.

JOHN                    Dad was speaking to you

CRAIG                   Aye. So what did Daddy say?

YOUNG JOHN           I don't remember.

JOHN                    I don't remember.

CRAIG                   (*To Dad.*) He doesnae ken, Daddy.

JOHN                    But I said—

CRAIG                   Oh, he ken's that. What did you say?

JOHN                    'Don't cry—

*They don't notice that Dad has stopped breathing.*

CRAIG                   I wisnae crying.

YOUNG JOHN           He was.

JOHN                    You were!

CRAIG                   I didnae want to come here, that's true.

JOHN                    You were crying—

CRAIG                   He made me come and I wasnae happy about it.

JOHN                    —and I said, Don't cry, it's—

CRAIG                   He could bring me here

- JOHN —Don't cry, it's —
- CRAIG —but he couldnae make me stay.  
JOHN (*Quietly.*) Dad?
- CRAIG All that shite about, 'We're here. We're Australian. We're not going back.'
- JOHN Dad?
- Silence.*
- CRAIG Daddy?
- YOUNG JOHN 'Is yon the mune I see in the sky?  
It's awfu' wee an curly.  
See! There's the coo and the cauf ootbye,  
An' a lassie pu'in a hurly!  
He's checkit the tickets and gien then back,  
Sae gie me my ain yin, Daddy.'
- CRAIG (*Piercing, like a train whistle.*) Daddy!
- YOUNG JOHN Lift doon the bag fra the luggage rack ...
- A lone piper plays a lament.*

### Scene Eighteen

*Dad's backyard. The wake. In the background, the crow. Both brothers have dropped their aggressively-assertive accents. Craig is speaking mainly English. He is a little drunk.*

- CRAIG He hated the bagpipes.
- JOHN Chrissie wanted something Scottish.
- CRAIG I'm surprised she didn't want us to wear kilts.
- JOHN Have you got one?
- CRAIG Of course I've got one. Why does she get to decide?
- JOHN Because every time we asked you, you poured yourself another *dram*.
- CRAIG That's what he would've wanted.

- JOHN I'm not going to argue with you.
- CRAIG Not in front of a' these folk. Who are a' these folk?
- JOHN They had a lot of friends.
- CRAIG Friends can't make up for family. You want to know why there was that commotion at the railway station, when we left? Because *he* was leaning out of the window of the train shaking hands with Uncle Stuart and when the train started to move, Stuart wouldn't let go. He was running along the platform holding onto his hand until he ran out of platform. He was off doon the ramp. He could've been killed.
- A lone piper plays a lament.*
- CRAIG I was at all their funerals. Grandad. Uncle Stuart. Granny. The aunts. The rest of the uncles. And they never had bagpipes.
- The lament is abruptly terminated.*
- CRAIG They had the cousins in the corner. Doon for the day from Aberdeen. Couldnae ken a word they said.
- JOHN He wanted to give us a better life.
- CRAIG But did he ask us first?
- JOHN You can't ask children.
- CRAIG I wasnae a child. When you come against your will, then someday you've got to decide for yoursel' if you want to be there. Which I did. And the answer was no. Hello! Who was that waving at me? The wifey over there. Chrissie's giving her sandwich.
- JOHN She had the deli.
- CRAIG Sixpence worth of mixed lollies.
- JOHN You can't keep blaming him for bringing us here.
- CRAIG You do.
- JOHN No, I don't.
- CRAIG All that stuff about me crying ...
- JOHN I remember ...

- CRAIG                    You got it wrong. I wasn't crying. I was sick. I was lying on the bunk—the right hand bunk—with my face to the wall because I was sick. I still had the flu.
- JOHN                    But I said to you—
- CRAIG                    You said nothing.
- JOHN                    I was sitting on —
- CRAIG                    Yes, and you were talking to Daddy—
- JOHN                    What did I say?
- CRAIG                    I don't know. I wasn't listening. I was sick..
- JOHN                    Didn't I say to you ...?
- CRAIG                    You said nothing to me.
- The sounds of the party.*
- JOHN                    I should speak to some of the ...
- CRAIG                    I planted that lemon tree. And the ... What happened to the peach?
- JOHN                    We had to cut it down.
- CRAIG                    That figures. And I put up that trellis.
- JOHN                    No.
- CRAIG                    I did. Daddy and I—
- JOHN                    The one you put up—
- CRAIG                    We did.
- JOHN                    —fell down years ago. I put up that one. You went back. You broke their hearts. You broke up this family. And then you never came back. Not once. In thirty years. Not even for a visit.
- CRAIG                    They came to see me. Which is more than you did.
- JOHN                    You know the trouble with the children of immigrants?

- CRAIG                    You're going to tell me.
- JOHN                    They repay the optimism and courage of their parents with complaints and an obsession with belonging. They find it impossible to do what their parents did simply by an act of will. They find it impossible to make a choice. And stick to it. It's not that I blame them. Children shouldn't have to see their parents vulnerable, struggling with a new life, outsiders. It takes away their confidence. They know that nothing is solid. Everything is provisional. The house is sold. The furniture sold off or given away. They're told they can bring two toys. Nothing more. They arrive to an empty house with brand new beds and not much else, and the charity of strangers. There's no clutter. There's no stratum. There's no magazines to cut up for a school project. They're here and they want to be there. They go there and they want to be back here. They come and they go. They never settle.
- CRAIG                    Is that why you never go anywhere?
- JOHN                    Craig, I'm happy here.
- CRAIG                    You don't look happy.
- JOHN                    We've just buried our father.
- CRAIG                    He was cremated.
- JOHN                    You know what I mean.
- CRAIG                    Not even to see your brother?
- JOHN                    You're the one who left. You're the one who got yourself tied up with a girl—
- CRAIG                    No.
- JOHN                    —got the girl pregnant
- CRAIG                    It wasnae like—
- JOHN                    —got yourself stuck—
- CRAIG                    You're wrang. All wrang.
- CHRISSIE                (*Arriving.*) Stop it.
- CRAIG                    We're not fighting.

CHRISSIE                   That's what it looked like.

JOHN                        I was asking Craig why he went back.

CHRISSIE                  Can't you leave all that?

CRAIG                     Just what I was saying.

CHRISSIE                  So why are you always asking me why he won't come to see you?

*The crow swoops.*

*A woman's cry of alarm*

CRAIG                     Did ye see that?

JOHN                        Snatched it right out of her hand.

CRAIG                     And now he's sitting on my trellis.

CHRISSIE                  Crows are very smart birds.

JOHN                        My trellis.

CRAIG                     Tucking into that wifey's sandwich.

CHRISSIE                  They've done studies—

JOHN                        Sounds like a lecture coming on.

CHRISSIE                  —in America—

CRAIG                     Our wee sister, the Professor.

CHRISSIE                  —which demonstrate that crows are on the cutting edge of avian evolution.

CRAIG                     No, he's on my trellis.

JOHN                        My trellis.

CHRISSIE                  They learn from experience. Crows are capable...

*The crow, mocking.*

CROW                      ...of learning new things. We can adapt to new circumstances. For example, a crow that feeds on walnuts will learn to vary the height from which it drops them. It knows that it will need

to drop the walnut from a greater height onto a ploughed field than onto a bitumen road. And of course, crows have had to learn about bitumen roads. Furthermore, the crow may have to drop the walnut up to fifty times to crack the shell. He or she knows that each drop weakens the outer shell. Therefore, as the shell weakens, the crow drops the walnut from lesser and lesser heights.

*The crow, mocking.*

- JOHN                   What's your point?
- CHRISSIE             Crows are intelligent. Crows are flexible. Crows are adaptable. Wherever they live.
- JOHN                   It was easy for you.
- CRAIG                 You were too young.
- JOHN                   You don't remember what it was like to leave.
- CRAIG                 You didn't have to choose.
- JOHN                   You can flit all around the world and belong nowhere.
- CHRISSIE             Or belong everywhere.
- JOHN                   You can't.
- CRAIG                 You cannae.
- CHRISSIE             I'm glad you agree on one thing. I'll leave you with another thought about crows.
- CROW                  If there are other crows in the vicinity, then the crow with the walnut must drop the nut from a lower height, so it can be retrieved before it is stolen by the other crows. (*Pause.*) Unless those other crows are family.
- CHRISSIE             Crows trust family. Now, have a sandwich. Both of you. (*Moving away.*) And don't let any crows snatch it away.

### Scene Nineteen

*Dad's bedroom. Drawers being opened and closed. The rustle of garbages.*

*On the radio in another room, an Australian rules football match. The Crows are playing.*



*During this scene Craig's accent gets more Australian, and John's has a hint of Scots.*

- CRAIG                    This must be the worst game in the world.
- JOHN                     Turn it off then.
- CRAIG                    We need something to take our minds off ...
- JOHN                     I told you I was quite happy to ...
- CRAIG                    When do you think he last wore this suit?
- JOHN                     At mum's funeral.
- CRAIG                    She'd just been to see us. She told me not to bother coming back.
- JOHN                     Did I say anything?
- CRAIG                    Did he mind?
- JOHN                     Yes. Do you want these?
- CRAIG                    What am I going to do with them? You dinnae wear ties to drive a truck. I'll have that jumper. No, the green one. *(Pause.)* You think I don't wonder if I made the right choice?
- JOHN                     Have you?
- CRAIG                    You're doing well. Chrissie's doing very well. I'm the only one still busting my guts. And will you look at those guts?
- JOHN                     I'd rather not.
- CRAIG                    Daddy always said to get a job where you could sit down. And look, the sun's shining. Perhaps, I should've stayed?
- JOHN                     You met Laura. You got married. You had kids.
- CRAIG                    I didn't meet Laura. I found Laura. She didn't fall pregnant. I pushed her into it. She didn't want to get married. I did.
- The football match. We hear the scores. The Adelaide Crows are ahead.*
- CRAIG                    Why? So I'd have a reason not to come back. Come back with me. Just for a few weeks. *(Pause.)* He's no here to stop you.

JOHN He didn't stop me.

CRAIG So, what did?

YOUNG JOHN We're never going back.

CRAIG What stopped you?

YOUNG JOHN Never!

JOHN Nothing. Can you do the drawers?

*A drawer opens.*

CRAIG He didnae throw anything oot, that's fer sure. String. More String. Rubber bands in a jar. More string. String again. What was he going to do with a' this ...

JOHN Granny was the same with her silver milkbottle tops.

CRAIG I had to chuck those out too.

*Some one scores a goal.*

You beauty! You know what I miss? There's no one to share that. It might be the worst game in the world but I played it for five years. There's no one there who knows what it's like to be here. To eat a mandarin straight from the tree. To lie out on the lawn on a hot night and wake up to the smell of damp grass.

JOHN And with him gone, there's no one here who knows how to get a coal fire going.

CRAIG A half a cup of sugar.

JOHN The sound of your boot on the morning puddles.

CRAIG Crack.

JOHN How we used to slide up and down the pavement outside the close—

CRAIG —until the Misses Matheson—

JOHN —Ella, Bella and Bessie—

CRAIG They paid me a penny to do their messages.

JOHN 'Don't spend it all at once.'

CRAIG —dumped a half a pound of salt on our fun. He used to ring me, late at night. After Mammy died. After he'd had a few drams. And he'd ask me, Have the Juniors won their match? Who was in the Roman Bar, the night? Have I seen so-and-so down the street? And he'd slip into Scots. Making a joke of it. D'ye ken the noo? Dinna fash, laddie. And he'd cry. And I still didn't come. Have you ever seen so many hankies? And still in their boxes? There must be ten Christmases worth, at least.

JOHN He wanted you there. So there would be someone to remember.

CRAIG I don't know.

JOHN Will you be back?

CRAIG I don't know. This trip's on the plastic.

JOHN I could send you the money.

CRAIG No. Come yersel'.

JOHN I can't.

CRAIG Why not? Come and meet Laura. And the kids. And the grandkids. They all want to meet you. They're your family.

*The Crows are now a few points behind.*

JOHN I'll think about it.

CRAIG This I do know. I can't get on that plane tomorrow knowing I'll never see my brother again.

YOUNG JOHN There's a gey when boat at the harbour mou',  
And eh! dae ye see the cruisers

JOHN I can't let him go.

YOUNG JOHN The cinnamon drop I was sookin' the noo

JOHN I can't.

### Scene Twenty

*Airport atmosphere. In the bar.*

CRAIG (*Approaching.*) We better make this the last. There you go.

- JOHN                    You think getting me drunk is going to help?
- CRAIG                  God, I hate flying.
- JOHN                    You were sick every time we took off and landed.
- CRAIG                  London. Frankfurt.
- JOHN                    Zurich. Tel Aviv. Teheran.
- CRAIG                  Delhi. You remember the children sitting in the dirt at the side of the runway?
- JOHN                    And their teacher in front of the blackboard?
- JOHN                    Rangoon. Singapore. Remember Dad getting into a fight about the price of orange juice?
- CRAIG                  It cost more than his beer. Darwin. Sydney.
- JOHN                    And then the train to Melbourne. And the train to Adelaide.
- CRAIG                  We went straight from the train station to the test match.
- JOHN                    You did. That's your flight.
- CRAIG                  God, I hate goodbyes.
- JOHN                    Me, too.
- CRAIG                  Promise me you'll come.
- JOHN                    I'll ...
- YOUNG JOHN           'The cinnamon drop I was sookin' the noo'
- CRAIG                  Promise.
- YOUNG JOHN           'Has tummelt an' stuck tae ma troosers ... '
- Steam train hisses.*
- CRAIG                  I have to go.
- JOHN                    (*Close to mic.*) I used to dream of this moment. In the airport. About to get on the plane.
- YOUNG JOHN           'I'll soon be ringing my Gran'ma's bell,'

LIBRARY

JOHN *(Close to mic.)* Back to London. Back to Glasgow Central. Back to the beginning. And the uncles will be there. Running back along the platform. Waving. And laughing. Uncle Ian. Uncle Stuart. Uncle Bert. And Uncle Bert will be swinging an empty golf bag. And Uncle Stuart will be carrying the tweed coat over his arm.

YOUNG JOHN 'For I ken mysel' by the queer-like smell'

JOHN That the next stop's—

YOUNG JOHN 'That the next stop's—'

JOHN That the next stop's—

CRAIG John!

YOUNG JOHN 'That the next stop's—'

JOHN Stop!

*Steam train sound stops suddenly*

CRAIG John?

JOHN I'll never know where I belong. I'll be, alone, on the road. The crow road. Awa' the crow road. I can't. I can't. *(He breaks down and weeps.)*

CRAIG John, don't cry. Don't cry. *(Pause.)* It's going to be an adventure.

*John begins to laugh. Craig joins in.*

*Jumbo jet taking off.*

*The crow, no longer mocking*

THE END.

WRITING THE END

the strategy of ending is a legitimate subject for  
aesthetic discourse  
—Jagendorf, *The Happy End of Comedy*

Simply he feels that something is finished, and he is justified  
—Paul Goodman, *The Structure of Literature*

### Foreword

My creative project for the Doctor of Philosophy (Writing) has been the writing of three very different playscripts. I needed to find some common thread linking the playscripts, which I could develop into a theoretical/critical exegesis that would fulfil the requirements of the university. I resisted the idea of trying to connect the plays by theme, or topic, or theoretical perspective. It seemed dangerous to be doing this while I was writing the plays; it might interfere with the state of ‘willed blindness’ that I adopt when writing first or second drafts. Writing about the plays’ relationship with the plays of other writers also seemed dangerous. Might I be so conscious of those other voices that my own might be drowned out? Discussing genre in relation to three very different plays seemed impossible within the word limit. Perhaps it would be safer—and more useful—to write about some aspect of my ‘aims and method’ as a playwright?

*The Other Woman* was being prepared for a workshop which, it was hoped, would assist the play to get a production, and I was thinking very closely about the ending of the play. The director had her own ideas about the final image. The actors had their ideas. The set designer had his. Then, when the play was produced, the audience and the critics had their ideas. I found myself considering the following questions: What is it about the ending of a play (as compared with the beginning), that creates so much debate? Why do we talk only about an ending that ‘works’, or fails to satisfy? Surely the beginning is harder to write, as everything else must follow? Why do so many writers admit to having difficulties when writing the ending? Are some endings easier to write than others? How much is the ending changed during rehearsal, or after opening night? How much of a role does convention have in the creation of a satisfactory ending? Do radio dramas end differently from stage plays? I decided that I had found my topic.

Robert Baker-White (1999) suggests that contemporary theatre criticism is ‘largely a great debate centering around the notion of authority in theatrical representations’.<sup>1</sup> He connects this to ‘a [more] general debate on the issue of meaning’s closure’.<sup>2</sup> What is the end and who writes it? If this *is* the ‘great debate’ of contemporary criticism, then I have no hope of covering all that has been written about, or could be applied to, the endings of plays. Therefore I have decided to concentrate on a few commentators who have written specifically, and at length, on the topic of endings and whose insights I can apply to writing the endings of plays. Frank Kermode (1966), in the seminal *The Sense of an Ending*, writes about endings from a literary and metaphysical perspective. Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1968) examines, in great detail, the endings of poems. June Schlueter (1995) looks at how plays end. Her work, in particular, her focus on performance, has led me on to other, more recent, critical positions, including Baker-White’s discussion of authority in the rehearsal process. I have decided to exclude work on the endings of specific plays, which is a loss, to some extent made up for in the second half of the essay, where I examine the endings of my own plays.

Literary theory, in more recent times, has shifted the focus from the writer and his intentions, to the text and *its* intentions. My focus throughout this essay has been on what the play (text) reveals to the reader about how the ending might have been written. It is not on what I believe I intended when writing the ending. That can only be special pleading, and anyway, it is information often unavailable to the writer, and always unreliable.

Heather Nimmo  
March 2004.

*Note:* In this essay I am going to use the masculine pronoun as an inclusive pronoun.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Baker-White, *The Text in Play* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1999) p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.



Writing the Ending

A play must have a beginning, middle, and end  
 —Louis E. Catron, *The Elements of Playwriting*

I don't like endings and I have a hard time with them.  
 ... A resolution isn't an ending; it's a strangulation  
 —Sam Shepard, in *Playwrights in Rehearsal*

In 2002, I attended a performance of the latest Caryl Churchill play, *A Number*, at the Royal Court Theatre. The play seemed to be drawing to a close when an announcement came over the tannoy. This was so unexpected that I cannot remember exactly what was said but it was something like this: 'Would everyone immediately make their way out of the building'. I didn't hesitate. It was only a few days after the Bali bombings. It seemed unlikely, but perhaps Islamic extremists had now decided to target London theatres.<sup>1</sup> Out in the street I was joined by my husband who had left the theatre at a more leisurely pace. He was deep in thought. He was thinking about the ending:

ME What ending?

HIM The voice telling us to leave the theatre.

ME You thought that was the ending?

HIM Yes.

ME It couldn't be.

HIM Why not?

ME A writer wouldn't be allowed to write an ending like that.

HIM Why not?

ME What if someone got injured in the panic and decided to sue?

HIM You were the only one who was panicking.

*Pause.*

ME You have to clap the actors at the end.

HIM Always?

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<sup>1</sup> A week later, the siege of the Moscow theatre happened.

ME Sometimes in the 60s you didn't, but those were happenings rather than plays.<sup>2</sup>

HIM What's the difference between a happening and a play?

ME A play has an ending.

HIM A voice telling us to leave the theatre.

*Silence.*

ME The actors looked surprised.

HIM They're actors. They were acting surprised.

ME It couldn't be the end!

HIM Why not?

ME Because it didn't tie up the loose ends. It didn't finish the action of the play. Or comment ironically on the themes. It didn't resonate. It didn't make sense!

Out in Sloane Square, no one seemed to know what was happening. Was the play over? Perhaps the ending could make sense? *A Number* is set in the near future where, some years earlier, a man has allowed an unsatisfactory son, B1, to be cloned to create a new, much-loved one, B2. What the father didn't know was that the scientists had made another nineteen copies of the original. Perhaps the voice telling us to leave the theatre was some kind of final ironic comment by the playwright on science gone mad?

There were other reasons why the ending might have made sense. The play had lasted about seventy minutes, the published running-time. It had been written by Caryl Churchill, a playwright known for her fractured narratives and 'open' endings. The dialogue was truncated and somewhat poetic. The same actor was playing all the sons with no change of costume. The audience had to listen very carefully and think quickly. Perhaps I had missed something? Also, the performance was taking place at the Royal Court, the (one-time) home of the avant-garde and the 'difficult'. I was starting to think that my husband was right. Perhaps this was the end?

We were instructed to return to the theatre. There had been a problem with

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Hall writing about the play *US* directed by Peter Brook at the RSC in 1966: 'At the end, the cast covered their heads with brown paper bags and moved as if blinded, some descending from the stage to wander among the puzzled and irritated audience. The actors annoyed the audience still further by silencing any applause. On the first night, the long uneasy moment that followed was only broken when Peter Cook bawled from the circle, 'Are you waiting for us, or are we waiting for you?' P. Hall, *Making an Exhibition of Myself* (London, 1993), p. 197.

the fire alarm (a light had appeared on the electronic masterboard), which had by now been rectified. We resumed our seats, the actors came on stage, picked up the performance a few pages before the point where they had been interrupted, and finished *four minutes* later. They held a final pose. The stage lights went out. The actors left the stage. We clapped them. The stage lights went on. The actors returned to the stage and bowed. They left the stage. We continued clapping. The actors returned and bowed again, before the leaving the stage. We stopped clapping. The house lights came up. We picked up our coats, gloves, scarves, shopping bags etc and left the theatre. We left with a sense of an ending<sup>3</sup>.

In this essay I am going to examine what has been written about the endings of plays (and other literary and popular forms) and relate this to what I know about writing the ending of a play. I will connect theory and practice. Catron (1993) has asserted that a play must have an end (and a beginning and middle).<sup>4</sup> Sam Shepard (1984) doesn't like endings and worries that they might become 'a strangulation.'<sup>5</sup> Is there some essential tension here that must be negotiated by the playwright? Was this always so, or is this more of a problem for the contemporary playwright? Is there a particular difficulty for the playwright in writing the ending, given that his script (and this ending), must then be performed? How much of a problem do *I* have writing the ending? Were there particular challenges in writing the endings of *The Other Woman*, *Banana Split* and *Awa' the Crow Road*?

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No longer imminent, the End is immanent.

—Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*.

*The Sense of an Ending* is the title of Frank Kermode's seminal book on endings. The title makes it clear that an ending is something that is perceived or experienced by the reader (he is mainly writing about novels), or the audience. The writer writes what he considers is the ending—he, presumably, has a sense of an ending—but the reader or audience or listener (if it is a radio drama), must also have a sense of an ending for the literary artefact to end. Otherwise, it will be perceived as

<sup>3</sup> This phrase is taken from the title of F. Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*.

<sup>4</sup> L. E. Catron, *The Elements of Playwriting* (New York, 1993), p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in S. Letzler Cole, *Playwrights in Rehearsal* (New York, 2001), p. 25.

stopping, which is what happened (for me, if not for my husband), when the performance of *A Number* was interrupted by the faulty fire alarm.

According to Kermode (1966), it is the ending that makes sense of the beginning and the middle. He goes further. Without an ending we cannot *have* a beginning and a middle. It would all be middle; a mass of undifferentiated information.<sup>6</sup> When we read the ending we discern the pattern, or the shape, of what has gone before. This can also work the other way. Audiences will work very hard to create a sense of an ending where no ending exists. My husband 'read' the voice requesting us to leave the theatre, as the ending of *A Number*. He made sense of this 'ending' by relating it to the beginning and middle: the play began abruptly, why shouldn't it end that way? The play was set in a future where bodies are commodities to be copied at will. Why shouldn't it end with a disembodied voice telling us to leave the building? The form of the play, the style of the playwright, and running-time all supported this 'reading'. Audiences try to make sense of the ending because they expect the ending of a play to make sense of the play. Audiences will look for an ending, even if the writer has failed to provide one, or provided an inadequate one. They expect there to be an ending. Thus does convention help the writer create a sense of an ending in the audience.

Other conventions also help the writer. The ending of a play is often signalled by the actors holding a pose in a final tableaux. There might be music. There will usually be a moment of darkness on stage, created by the stage direction, *Blackout*. In earlier times, the curtain would fall. The actors leave the stage in darkness and return as actors—no longer characters in a play. As Jagendorf (1984) notes: 'It is this sequence that juxtaposes in time the make-believe of the spectacle and the spectator's return to himself and the everyday'.<sup>7</sup> It confirms our belief that the play is over.

These conventions will tell the audience that the play is over, but they cannot, by themselves, create the sense of an ending. The play must do that. When it doesn't, the audience waits, uncertain whether to clap. Is this the end? Or will there be more? It is often the playwright, or the director, who leads the applause. I have done this myself, and felt embarrassed doing so. I believe that I have written a satisfactory

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<sup>6</sup> F. Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue* (Oxford, 2000), p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Z. Jagendorf, *The Happy End of Comedy* (Newark, 1984), p. 12.

ending but the audience is not sure whether the play has ended. Is the fault mine, or is the audience just not paying attention? Do we need to bring back the curtain, and curtain lines, or, if the stage has no proscenium, such devices as the Greek chorus, or the arrival of a character who signifies the return of order, such as Fortinbras or the Duke of Albany? Or, is there something about contemporary life that makes both playwright and audience uneasy about endings?

Kermode (1966) suggests that because we no longer believe in the Christian idea of the final days and Divine Judgement, writers can no longer write, and audiences accept, endings that are unambiguously final or 'apocalyptic'.<sup>8</sup> Our culture has lost a sense of that kind of ending, in literature, at least.<sup>9</sup> In popular fiction the conventions of story-telling are still very powerful.<sup>10</sup> Readers of detective thrillers expect the killer to be unmasked. Readers of romantic fiction will be disappointed if the girl does not get her man. Part of the pleasure in reading popular fiction, and watching Hollywood movies, is knowing from the beginning how things will turn out and having that knowledge, eventually, confirmed. The ending conforms to expectations and by doing so, confirms those expectations. However, As Kermode points out, the ending, even in popular fiction, cannot be too far from reality.<sup>11</sup> The girl may get her man but he must not (now) turn out to be a Ruritanian prince. The killer will be unmasked but not because the detective had a dream in which he was told his identity. Neither can the ending be too neat; even popular fiction will leave a few threads untied.<sup>12</sup> We do not have to know everything, at the end.

It does not matter, even in more 'literary' forms, if we know everything at the beginning. Many classic plays rely for their power on a sense of inevitability or dramatic irony, where the audience can see what is coming but the characters cannot. Furthermore, we can see the same play many times and still enjoy the experience. We are surprised, not by the plot (which we know), but by what the actors do with the familiar story, and how they can make the words seem as if they were being heard for

<sup>8</sup> Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*, p. 30.

<sup>9</sup> Recent events, such as the emergence of the suicide bomber who believes he will be rewarded for his murderous activity in the afterlife, and political leaders who base their decision to go to war on religious grounds, seem to challenge this view.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> At the end of *Finding Nemo*, father (fish) is reunited with son but the son's doggedly-intrepid, fellow-prisoners in the dentist's fish tank, although managing to make it into the waters of Sydney Harbour, are left trapped in their plastic bags. The final line of dialogue: 'What now?'

the first time. We know the end but find ourselves surprised and moved by it. Knowing the end, we can pay more attention to the beginning and the middle; we know their significance, and can reflect more deeply on their meaning. The ending of a play (one that will 'last') draws its power, not from its ability to surprise, but from its inevitability. Powerful endings are not clever endings. The cleverness comes in the twists and turns along the way.

Theatre is a 'time art'<sup>13</sup> and this puts constraints on the playwright on how he presents his material. Whereas the reader of a novel reads at his own pace, an audience at a play must 'read' at the pace determined by the actors and the director, and the script. If this pace is too slow—if the audience is ahead of the action—it cannot skip a few pages. It must wait to have explained what it already knows, and it is likely to become bored. If the pace is too fast—if the audience cannot keep up—it cannot flip back a few pages and re-read. The audience cannot ask the actors to repeat their lines, and so it is likely to become confused. In both cases, the audience will withdraw from the experience. Some people will begin looking at their watches. Some will fall asleep. Some will grind their teeth. Some will leave. To avoid this, the playwright must release information in an orderly but interesting manner. The play requires more structure, the setting up of expectations which are then confirmed, than does a 'literary' novel.

There are other implications about the treatment of time for the playwright. I tell my playwriting students to remember that every audience member has given up 'a night of his life' to experience the performance of a play. Unlike the reader of the novel, he must transport himself to a venue, perhaps many kilometres away from his home. He must organise tickets, transport, parking, perhaps babysitters. He may spend two to three hours sitting on very uncomfortable seats in an inadequately heated or air-conditioned, theatre (or church hall, boatshed, disused warehouse). He wants the play to reward his effort and his time. He wants to experience something that will make sense of the preceding two or three hours. He wants to experience a sense of an ending. The reader of the novel is alerted to the presence of the end by the diminishing number of pages left to read. An audience will have a vague idea of time passing, but can only know a play is drawing to a close because the playwright has

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<sup>13</sup> S. Smiley, *Playwriting: The Structure of Action* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1971), p. 62.

written an ending that creates a sense of an ending in the audience. If the writer and his audience no longer believe in 'apocalyptic' endings, then, given that the audience expects an ending, what kind of ending can the playwright write, and his audience accept?

According to Kermode (1966), writers adopted endings which reflected cyclical rather than rectilinear views of the world.<sup>14</sup> These Sibylline endings reveal change within the unchanging.<sup>15</sup> An individual wave will crash onto the shore but the sea continues. These endings avoid neatness (the sea is not neat), but also avoid the sense of unfinished business, or all middle. That particular wave, when it crashes onto the shore, is finished; it can never *be* again. It is 'complete in itself', which Catron (1993) stipulates must be the minimum criterion for ending.<sup>16</sup>

Meaning now lies less in the final climax and denouement, than in moments of significance scattered throughout the narrative. 'No longer imminent, the End is immanent'.<sup>17</sup> The play is a necklace; there is no beginning and no end, rather a series of moments strung together.<sup>18</sup> These moments, experienced over the duration of the play, create the sense of an ending. However, just as a handful of pearls is not a necklace, then a handful of beautiful moments is not a play. The moments must be strung together on the narrative thread, so that they are not merely contingent but are related to the moment before and the moment after. We string pearls according to some criteria. It could be size, lustre, colour. It is never merely random, or if it is, then that 'randomness' becomes the 'pattern'. This 'choosing' is what makes each moment luminous with meaning. The writer of the Sibylline ending creates a series of smaller crises and resolutions throughout the play, and the ending will often loop back to join the beginning. The writer believes that the pearls are more important than the string. Or, to put it another way, he knows that the string is there to make the pearls look good—together. As Kermode (1966) notes, the satisfying fiction, like the

<sup>14</sup> Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Some feminist theory sees these endings as reflecting, more truthfully, the lives of women.

<sup>16</sup> Catron, *Elements of Playwrighting*, p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> In Henry James' short story *The Figure in the Carpet*, the novelist Vereker uses the same image to describe the meaning that readers look for in vain, in his novel. "It's the very string," he said, "that my pearls are strung on."!, quoted in W. Iser, *The Act of Reading* (London, 1978), p. 8.

satisfying life, comes down on the side of chaos and flux rather than the 'justice' of form.<sup>19</sup>

Time assists the playwright to write the ending, because 'we all share certain fictions about time'.<sup>20</sup> Just as the pearls only become discernible as a necklace when they are strung along a thread, so we 'can perceive a duration only when it is organized'.<sup>21</sup> Kermode (1966) discriminates between *chronos*, the 'passing time' and *kairos*, 'the season, a point in time filled with significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end'.<sup>22</sup> The *tick-tick* of a clock is *chronos*; the *tick-tock* — which is what 'we agree' that the clock 'says' — is *kairos*.<sup>23</sup> *Tick* is a beginning, *tock* an ending. *Tick-tock* is therefore a 'tiny model of all plots'.<sup>24</sup> A series of *tick-tocks* is a scene; a series of these series is an act. A series of acts (if there is more than one act), is the play. *Tick-tock* can be perceived as a duration but *tock-tick* has no meaning, because time is unidirectional.

Wolfgang Iser (1972) questions the simplicity of *tick-tock*. He believes that *tock* doesn't just complete a duration; it also changes *tick*:

Every sentence [Iser is writing about fiction] contains a preview of the next and forms a kind of viewfinder for what is to come; and this in turn changes the 'preview' and so becomes a 'viewfinder' for what has been read.<sup>25</sup>

According to Iser, *tick* is a preview of *tock*. It helps us to anticipate what *tock* will be. But *tock* is not exactly as we expected, and so changes how we now see *tick*. Thus reading becomes a process of 'anticipation and retrospection'.<sup>26</sup> Iser agrees with Kermode that time is the string which creates meaning, and therefore the play, from a series of moments.

Every moment in a play must be *kairos*. The audience expects nothing less. They know that if the playwright has included a moment, then that moment should be significant; there will be a *tock* to its *tick*. The final *tock* of the play, the play's ending, will resonate with all the previous *ticks*. Masha whistles a tune at the

<sup>19</sup> Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*, p. 106.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>25</sup> W. Iser, 'The reading process: a phenomenological approach', D. Lodge (ed.), *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (London, 1998), p. 215.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.



beginning of *Three Sisters*.<sup>27</sup> She and Vershinin communicate by snatches of song. At the end of the play, when she must lose him, she can no longer remember the words of the song. When I have written the ending—usually in a state of ‘willed blindness’—I then go back and check that everything in the play connects with that ending. Red herrings are a feature of mystery novels but not plays, unless the play is about red herrings.<sup>28</sup>

The playwright cannot ignore *chronos*—‘real time’—because his audience will not. There must be some moments in the play which are also just time passing, which are ‘ordinary’. All moments must also ‘make sense’ in relation to the normal functioning of the world of the play. If a character in a ‘realistic’ play goes off-stage to put the kettle on, he cannot return a few seconds later carrying cups of steaming tea. The extraordinary (*kairos*), is experienced as extraordinary because it comes out of the ordinary (*chronos*).<sup>29</sup> If too much is extraordinary then everything will be experienced as ordinary, and there will be no *kairos*, only *chronos*. This means that the ending—which must be perceived as *kairos*, to give a sense of an ending—will not be seen as anything very different from all the ‘different’ things that have been happening throughout the play. When the ending is experienced as *kairos* then we remember the middle and the beginning and understand *their* significance. Masha’s inconsequential whistling in the opening scene of *Three Sisters*, suspected then as an example of *kairos*, is now confirmed as such.

Kermode (1966) suggests that there are three kinds of memory that allow the audience to make these retrospective judgements. There is ‘immediate memory’, or ‘primary retention’. There is also ‘the registration of impressions we fail to ‘take in’, but can recover a little later by introspection’.<sup>30</sup> This kind of memory allows the writer to make use of the ‘double-take’<sup>31</sup>, what I refer to as the ‘Eh? Ah!’ response. Surprise is followed almost immediately by understanding: ‘So that’s why she ...’. Audiences enjoy ‘Eh? Ah!’ It confirms both their cleverness (‘Eh?’) and the cleverness of the playwright (‘Ah!’). They are not doing all the work, but there *is* work for them to do. Kermode calls the third kind of memory, ‘forward memory ...

<sup>27</sup> A. Chekhov, ‘Three Sisters’, R. Hingley (trans.), *Five Plays* (Oxford, 1980), p. 171.

<sup>28</sup> I can imagine Stoppard writing such a play.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Brook calls this ‘the Invisible-Made-Visible’. P. Brook, *The Empty Stage* (London, 1969), p. 42.

<sup>30</sup> Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*, p. 53.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

the mind working on an expected future'.<sup>32</sup> The audience knows what is coming. The writer has told it what to expect. He has put his cards on the table but he plays those cards in a way which was not expected. This 'falsification of expectation', also known as *peripeteia*,<sup>33</sup> is more often an element of tragedy.<sup>34</sup> If the audience's response at a comedy is 'Eh? Ah!', then during a tragedy it is more likely to react, 'Ah! Yes!' The surprise, for the audience, comes in how much it cares about what it knew to be inevitable. 'Tears before bedtime', the audience tells itself, and then finds *itself* weeping.

Does an audience in 2004 find itself weeping? Can a playwright in 2004 write an ending that will make the audience weep? Should he bother to try? If there is no longer 'The End', as Kermode argued in 1966, then can there be tears at the end? Does 'Ah! Yes!' now become 'Oh, well'—a kind of 'dying fall'? We do not expect there to be resolution and therefore we have no expectations to be falsified; 'everything tends towards a conclusion that does not occur ... the world goes forward in the hands of exhausted survivors'.<sup>35</sup> Kermode notes that such 'equivocating plot' has been compared to irony,<sup>36</sup> and this might explain why so much contemporary 'tragedy' is also so funny. Certainly, I am aware, when I am writing the ending, of the pressure to undercut the heightened emotion of the last moments of the play.<sup>37</sup> Where does this 'pressure' come from? Is it from a fear that the audience will laugh at what I have written, rather than weep? Would not it be safer to *plan* for them to laugh? Would not it be better to be 'too-cool-for-school' rather than be accused of being 'sentimental'.<sup>38</sup> Or does the pressure come from inside? Do I believe there is anything worth weeping over? What do I believe? Do beliefs get in the way of writing the end? Why do I believe that I need to write the end? Is the desire to avoid a 'strangulation' really just a desire to avoid confronting and affirming the playwright's own beliefs? Coetzee (2003) has his character Elizabeth Costello argue that she has

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 82. Kermode is talking about *King Lear*.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>37</sup> H. Nimmo, *One Small Step* (Sydney, 1995), p. 63. At the end of the play the back wall of the shoe factory opens and Regina, now dressed as if for a ball, dances with an imaginary prince. Her last line is: 'It's like a fucking fairy story'.

<sup>38</sup> I had explained to me (somewhere) that you call something 'sentimental' if you do not share the emotion, therefore the 'fault' may be in the audience member's hardness-of-heart rather than the playwright's softness-of-heart.

no beliefs—that writers ‘do imitations’—but I think this is not quite right.<sup>39</sup>

Playwriting can be described as an ‘objective’ art as the authorial voice is difficult to place. Just as the actor can free himself from himself with each new part he plays, so the playwright can, by writing, see the world through many eyes. If he is to do his job well, he *must*. But the ending he writes, just as it reveals the actor within the character—he says his last line and then returns to take a bow—will expose the authorial voice, even if that voice is merely a whisper. This has always been the case, but writers accepted (or embraced) this necessary return to ‘authority’ as the price to pay for the fun of playing hooky from themselves. If there is now no authority at the end, can there be as much fun at the beginning and in the middle? Or is there now, in contemporary theatre, an air of leaden ‘importance’ (rather than immanence) from beginning to end?

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Any kid who says ‘closure’ I flunk. They want closure;  
there’s their closure.

—Philip Roth, *The Human Stain*

Kermode’s sense of an ending has become, by 1968, Barbara Herrnstein Smith’s closure.<sup>40</sup> It is an ugly word but has the advantage, to some, of sounding scientific.<sup>41</sup> It comes from Gestalt psychology and refers to ‘the process by which incomplete forms, situations etc. are completed subjectively by the viewer or seem to complete themselves; the tendency to create ordered and satisfying wholes’.<sup>42</sup> Smith, in her thorough and practical exploration of how poems end,<sup>43</sup> defines closure as ‘the sense of finality, stability and integrity’.<sup>44</sup> What does this mean?

‘Finality’ refers to time, which is Kermode’s *tick-tock*, or my ‘Eh?Ah!’

<sup>39</sup> J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (Sydney, 2003), p. 194. It is interesting to note that a character says this in a book which has been marketed as a novel but which, according to its author (stated before his reading of this work at the 2004 Adelaide Writers’ Week), is *not* a novel.

<sup>40</sup> B. Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure* (Chicago, 1968).

<sup>41</sup> I should say *had* the advantage. Now it is simply ugly.

<sup>42</sup> *OED*, p. 51.

<sup>43</sup> Much of what she says can be applied to the ending of plays. Poetry and drama are oral forms that use rhythm and repetition to assist the audience to remember what went before. They are economical forms. The audience cannot absorb too much information, or follow too many digressions.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, *Poetic Closure*, p. viii.

Catron (1993) talks about a 'sense of finality' which is 'falling action or resolution, containing the denouement and catharsis, and restoring the play to an equilibrium'.<sup>45</sup> Most teachers of playwriting promote the Aristotelian principles of beginning, middle and end that underpin many 'well-wrought' plays.<sup>46</sup> They believe that rules need to be learned before they can be broken.<sup>47</sup> However, as Heath (1996) points out, Aristotle said that a *plot* (or a 'whole') must have a beginning, middle and end.<sup>48</sup> A play need not. The playwright might decide to show only the beginning and the middle of the plot and leave the audience to infer the ending:

I felt secretly that the characters were not going to get what they wanted and that the end result would be rather downbeat. On the other hand, I felt that the audience, because of what had gone before, would in this case really prefer a happy ending. Solution: to stop before the true ending is revealed, leaving everyone to supply their own.<sup>49</sup>

The playwright may, like Pinter (1978) in *Betrayal*, begin the play at the end and work forward to the beginning. Ayckbourn has experimented with overlapping plotting in his trilogy, *The Norman Conquests* (1975), and in *Sisterly Feelings* (1979) he allows the audience to choose, with the toss of a coin, between two versions of the middle.

'Stability' refers to lack of movement, or equilibrium.<sup>50</sup> An unstable structure will continue to move until it comes to a rest. It can then be described as 'stable'. It will move no further. The pose held by the actors at the end of the play, or the line of dialogue after which there is nothing more to be said, or the sound of a door slamming off-stage, are all examples of 'stability'. 'Integrity' is 'the property of a system of which the parts are more obviously related to each other than to anything outside that system'.<sup>51</sup> Smith (1968) suggests that it is the 'likeness' between the parts

<sup>45</sup> Catron, *Elements of Playwriting*, p. 117.

<sup>46</sup> Mamet's term has none of the negative associations of 'well-made' play. It also emphasises the requirement for careful *work*. D. Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife* (London, 2002), p. 69. I like the definition of the 'well-made play', used by a *Paris Review* interviewer, as 'one which runs the honest risk of melodrama for a purpose'. G. Plimpton (ed.), *Playwrights at Work* (London, 2000), p. 29.

<sup>47</sup> I encourage my students to write in the style of a writer whose work they admire and then work out the 'rules' that they (and the writer) have broken. 'Homage' is an acceptable activity in film and the visual arts.

<sup>48</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*. (trans.) M. Heath, (London, 1996), p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> A. Ayckbourn, *The Crafty Art of Playmaking* (London, 2002), p. 26. He is referring to his play, *GamePlan*. I have not been able to find any information on this play.

<sup>50</sup> There can be 'dynamic equilibrium' where a body moves within defined points.

<sup>51</sup> Smith, *Poetic Closure*, p. 23.

that allows the poem to be perceived as art.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps focusing on ‘integrity’ as a way of creating a sense of an ending, will help the writer avoid a ‘strangulation’.

‘Finality’ and ‘stability’ are words that cut off possibilities. ‘Integrity’ leaves the clock ticking and the possibility of future movement but makes sure that the audience has a good idea of what that future is likely to be.

Smith (1968) agrees with Kermode (1966) that it is the end that makes sense of, and gives point to, the beginning and the middle: ‘... the sense of conclusiveness in the last lines of the poem ... seems to confirm retrospectively ... the valued qualities of the entire experience we have just sustained’.<sup>53</sup> This sense of an ending is ‘usually distinctly gratifying’.<sup>54</sup> We like our expectations, once aroused, to be fulfilled. This doesn’t have to happen immediately—we like to be teased—but it must happen. If it does not, then we are likely to reject the whole experience. It is the ending that makes us feel that our determination to understand was worth the effort. All the way through the play, we have been testing hypotheses. As each one is proven wrong we put forward another. Each *tick* changes the preceding *tock*. We do not give up because we expect the ending to confirm the meaning which we have been creating, or, if not that, then to lead us to another, hopefully more satisfying, conclusion. If our hypotheses are always proved right then we are likely to grow bored; if always proved wrong then we shall become confused. Either way, we turn off, and this effects our sense of an ending. We cannot easily become re-engaged. The sense of an ending ‘is an effect that depends primarily upon the reader’s experience of the structure of the entire poem’.<sup>55</sup>

Smith (1968) defines a poem’s structure as what keeps the poem ‘going’.<sup>56</sup> This allows her to ask the equally important (for the writer), question: ‘What stops it from going?’<sup>57</sup> The obvious answer is that there are no more words (in a play there would be no more words *and* images) but just because there are no more words does not mean that the poem has ended. A poem ‘concludes ... not merely with the completion of a line and a sentence, but with the completion of that utterance: the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. viii.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

argument is clinched, the catalogue of praise is exhausted, the lament is brought to some point of acceptable conclusion'.<sup>58</sup> The fourteenth line of the sonnet will not close the poem if the subject matter of the poem has not been resolved.<sup>59</sup> If Hamlet, at the end of the play, makes peace with Claudius and his mother rather than killing them (and being killed), the audience is likely to leave the theatre thinking, 'What's the ghost of his father going to say about that?' This was the problem with the false ending of *A Number*. The actors stopped speaking and left the stage, but they had not completed the utterance.

So long as the utterance is completed, closure can occur, even when the forms are incomplete; the viewer fills in the gaps. Applying this to the writing of plays, we see that it is not necessary for the playwright to set down everything. In fact, it is better if he leaves gaps which can be filled by the imagination of the audience. Some critics say this is postmodernist thinking, and as such is a challenge to 'totalizing master narratives',<sup>60</sup> but much earlier writers had a word for these gaps. They called them lacunae. Iser (1970) called them *Leerstellen*.<sup>61</sup> I call this the 'Stilton cheese' theory of playwriting. Just as the cheesemaker allows 'space' for the bacteria to do its work, so the playwright leaves 'gaps' for the audience to do its work. Too few 'gaps' and the play is bland. Too many and it is likely to be 'on the nose'. Just enough and the audience's imagination can flourish and enhance the texture, colour and flavour of the play. Iser (1972) insists that these gaps or 'inevitable omissions' are essential for the text, or story:

...whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections.<sup>62</sup>

These 'gaps' also allow space for the other collaborators in the performance—the actors, director, designers—to make their own contribution. However, if gaps become chasms then there is too much for the audience to do, and the performance will fall into confusion.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5. The ending of a poem can happen within a line, or perhaps even within a word. The ending of a play will usually take a little longer.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> L. Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (New York, 1988), p. x. She is referring to the work of Lyotard.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Baker-White, *Text in Play*, p. 18. Baker-White is quoting Carlson (1989).

<sup>62</sup> Iser, 'The reading process', *Modern Criticism and Theory*, p. 216.

There needs to be order, in order that there can be ‘gaps’. It is now thought obligatory to criticize what is called ‘the well-made play’ but in fact, this kind of play has the potential to deliver a powerful effect through what it doesn’t state—through its potential to leave ‘gaps’. As Rebellato (1999), writing about Rattigan’s plays, suggests:

This structure of giving *and* withholding, revealing *and* concealing, of suggesting that beneath a normal surface, there may be *something else*, opens up a space between text and subtext and continually troubles the relation between what is said and what is unsaid.<sup>63</sup>

A highly polished surface can be just that, or it can be a mirror in which we see ourselves. A statement followed by a pause invites the question: What hasn’t been said? Tension, where there seems to be no visible reason for tension, points to the presence of *something else*. This must be done with care. All teachers of playwrighting know the student who, trying to out-Pinter Pinter, withholds so much that he gives us nothing (often because there is nothing to give). You cannot have subtext—‘below the text’—if there is no text to get below. Some contemporary ‘performance pieces’ are so fragmentary that the audience spends more time thinking than imagining. What works best is enough structure so that the audience can work on making connections, and enough ‘gaps’ so that these connections can be rich and imaginative.

Closure does not have to be temporal; in its initial use from Gestalt psychology it referred to a visual image where ‘no particular point is experienced as the *last* one’.<sup>64</sup> The ending of a play tends to focus on a final image. The actor speaks the last line of dialogue. He holds a pose. A final sound—perhaps music, perhaps not—is heard. The playwright, when writing the ending, needs to be very clear what that final image (and sound) will be, because that is what is likely to leave the theatre with the audience.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> D. Rebellato, *1956 And All That*. (London, 1999), p. 166. Rebellato is discussing how Rattigan treated homosexuality in his writing, but the comment can be applied more generally.

<sup>64</sup> Smith, *Poetic Closure*, p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> In a recent production of *Three Sisters*, the sisters walk briskly from the stage. This stage direction was not written by Chekhov and creates a more hopeful ending, perhaps more in tune with a West End production. *Three Sisters*, Playhouse Theatre, London, March 20, 2003.

Smith (1968) notes how the playwright uses 'the natural or traditional stopping places of life' when writing the ending.<sup>66</sup> These would include the death of the hero, or the marriage of the hero and heroine. There are situations which lend themselves to certain kinds of endings. A play about a couple's infertility may well end with a successful pregnancy or the break-up of the relationship. If a play begins with a woman being 'called' to the vocation of priest, then it could end with her performing her first duties as a priest, or leaving the church.<sup>67</sup> Endings turn around two choices: 'when either nothing could follow ... or everything that could follow is predictable'.<sup>68</sup> This does not mean that we stop thinking about the play after the curtain has fallen. We reflect on what has happened, and what must happen. What we should not have to speculate about is what has *not* happened. The playwright must give us everything we need to experience a sense of an ending. He must not leave out the 'obligatory' scene.<sup>69</sup>

There are plays that deliver such a strong sense of an ending that the audience leaves the theatre with no questions. These plays are often dismissed by critics as 'escapist', but that is their function—to allow an audience to escape for a few hours from life's cares. The strong closure helps deliver that escape. The audience has the time of its life for the duration of the performance, but when the ride stops (the analogy of the roller-coaster ride is an apt one), then that is it. David Williamson makes use of strong closure in his plays. They are carefully engineered to illustrate the differing responses to a question, for example: 'What would you do if you discovered that the Great Man had feet of clay?'<sup>70</sup> By the end of the play the characters (bar one or two) have revealed their own feet of clay. Future actions have been declared. There are no lingering doubts.

Other forms—usually called 'performance' rather than 'play'—eschew engineering (beginning, middle and end), and must create closure some other way. I

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<sup>66</sup> Smith, *Poetic Closure*, p. 118.

<sup>67</sup> My play, *Whispering Demons*, ends with Anne performing the funeral service for her former lover.

<sup>68</sup> Smith, *Poetic Closure*, p. 35.

<sup>69</sup> Many playwrights resist writing the 'obligatory' scene (the scene which the play 'must have'), often until very late in the process. A good dramaturge or director encourages the playwright to confront this 'absence'. However Lajos Egri argues that every scene in a play should be 'obligatory'. L. Egri, *The Art of Dramatic Writing* (New York, 1946), pp. 230-234.

<sup>70</sup> According to AusStage, *The Great Man*, directed by Robyn Nevin for The Sydney Theatre Company, opened at Glen Street Theatre, July 5, 2000. I saw it at the Drama Theatre, Sydney Opera House.



have already mentioned natural stopping points and thematic structure. A device often used, is where the ending is indicated simply by returning to the beginning, so reflecting the 'closural dynamics of the "frame"'.<sup>71</sup> This is what happens in *Waiting for Godot*. This kind of ending is often written in reaction to the contrivance and artfulness of the ending with strong closure, although it is hard to think of a playwright who is more 'artful' than Beckett and those he influenced. The artful plays of Beckett and Pinter can be seen as a reaction to the more 'natural' plays of Ibsen and Shaw; the 'kitchen sink' dramas of Osborne and other Royal Court writers as a reaction against the more 'artful' plays of Rattigan and Coward. But all plays are 'artful'; even the most 'naturalistic' play is the result of a great deal of contrivance — perhaps even more contrivance because it has to look as though it is not. Characters in a 'naturalistic' play need a reason to go on and off (rather than at the whim of the playwright.) The dialogue has to do all that stage dialogue must do, yet appear as if it could be spoken in the street. Whether the playwright is writing 'naturalistic' drama or 'non-naturalistic' drama, he has greater demands placed on him than on the so-called 'writer for the performance'.

Beckett's endings worked because they defeated the expectation of closure, and, by doing so, made their point: There is no End. We must go on. We must go on without hope. They worked because audiences were familiar with the Biblical concept of 'The End' even if they rejected it. Contemporary audiences no longer have such knowledge. There is nothing to reject because there is no authority to tear down. Can the playwright make a point about endings by writing an 'anti-closure' ending when no closure is expected? What is now the 'radical' or 'transgressive' thing to do? Perhaps returning to the 'well-made play' of beginning, middle and end, and strong closure? It seems that many younger playwrights are doing just that.<sup>72</sup> The forms they use are very conventional; it is their subject matter that might be considered shocking. As Sierz (2001) notes, 'some shocking emotional material may be made more acceptable by being placed within a theatrical frame that is traditional,

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<sup>71</sup> Smith, *Poetic Closure*, p. 101.

<sup>72</sup> In England, Martin McDonagh (*The Beauty Queen of Leenane*), in America Tracy Letts (*Killer Joe*), and in Australia, Reg Cribb (*The Return*) and Ian Wilding (*Below*).

either in its tone or form'.<sup>73</sup> These writers are very influenced by film and television<sup>74</sup> which focus on realism. Realistic forms almost always have strong closure.

They can also be exponents of anti-closure; there is still a conclusion but it is infinitely deferred, as in the 'To be continued' of soap-opera and situation comedy.<sup>75</sup> These popular forms give us incident but no change. The regular characters are types in the same way as commedia characters are types. They have obsessions rather than goals. They are incapable of self-knowledge, or if they are (and so many contemporary sit-coms are peopled by characters who endlessly discuss self) they are incapable of applying this knowledge to change their situation. We would be disappointed if they did.<sup>76</sup> The pleasure for the audience is in the repetition. There is no beginning and there is no end. All is middle. A play is not an episode of a soap-opera or situation-comedy. The playwright cannot look to these forms for help in writing the ending.

Smith (1968), in her chapter on 'anti-closure', notes 'a general preference for, and a deliberate cultivation of, the *expressive* qualities of weak closure'.<sup>77</sup> Poets no longer want to hear the 'click' of William Carlos Williams' box.<sup>78</sup> When I write the ending, I construct the 'box' and a neat-fitting lid—which I leave propped open so that things can still fly in and out of the box.<sup>79</sup> The playwright—or even the writer for performance—cannot abandon the box. About the lid, I am not so sure.

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<sup>73</sup> A. Sierz, *In-Yer-Face-Theatre* (London, 2001), p. 6.

<sup>74</sup> According to Wayne Harrison (who was the artistic director of The Sydney Theatre Company at the time), Martin McDonagh said he got his ideas for playwrighting from watching episodes of Australian soap-operas. Australian National Playwrights Conference, Canberra, May 3, 1997.

<sup>75</sup> How does one end a long-running series like *Friends*? With great difficulty, according to Martha Kaufman, lead writer and co-creator of the series: 'I'm not sure that I believe in closure—that everything can be neatly rounded off. Life doesn't work like that. ... sometimes you've got to go out kicking and screaming'. M. Levine, 'The end of a beautiful friendship', *The Observer: Review* (London, 2003), November 24, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup> If the situation is changed then there is likely to be no situation-comedy.

<sup>77</sup> Smith, *Poetic Closure*, p. 237.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* She is referring Karl Shapiro's comment on Williams' poetry.

<sup>79</sup> I am reminded of Blake's poem, *Eternity*. 'He who bind to himself a joy/Does the winged life destroy;/But he who kisses the joy as it flies/Lives in eternity's sun rise'.

There used to be a time, we believe, when we could say who we were. Now we are just performers speaking our parts.

—J.M.Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*

In 1995, June Schlueter wrote in her introduction to *Dramatic Closure*:

My assumption throughout is that all texts, whether stable or transgressive, necessarily engage the question of how, when, and where to end and that all readers, whether of literary or performance texts, are implicated in closure.<sup>80</sup>

Closure is now something in which an audience is 'implicated'. The 'text' (no longer the 'play'), and the audience are partners in crime. 'Texts' are either 'stable' or 'transgressive'. It all sounds satisfyingly disreputable.<sup>81</sup> Author, text, and reader now know that dramatic closure is an act of collaboration, or perhaps even, collusion. There is no meaning other than that which the reader sanctions.

Playwrights have always known this. We sit in the dark with our audience, and watch and listen to them, watching and listening to the actors, who move as instructed by our stage directions (mediated by the director), and speak our lines of dialogue (accurately, we hope). A novel or a film can exist independently of its audience. The book lies on the shelf. The film plays to an empty auditorium or on an unwatched television set. But a *performance* of a stage play can only happen in the presence of an audience. If there is no audience there is no performance.<sup>82</sup> What exactly is a performance of a play, how is it different from the script of the play, and what implications are there for the playwright and the writing of the ending?

In one sense, there appears to be no difference between the performance and the script, as we use the same word for both. We speak about 'going to a play' or 'going to see a play', or in the case of radio drama, 'listening to a play'. We also speak of 'reading a play', or 'studying a play'. The same describing word, 'play', is used for both the script and the performance. What changes, when we move from

<sup>80</sup> J. Schlueter, *Dramatic Closure* (Madison, 1995), p. 10.

<sup>81</sup> When I was studying for my Masters degree in English in 1989, a lecturer in a Department of Communications and Culture, informed me that the text cruises for the reader. I told him that some texts you have to marry.

<sup>82</sup> It is the practice in some theatre companies that if the audience is fewer in number than the size of the cast then there is no performance.

script to performance, are the 'doing words', or verbs, applied to 'play'. The differences, therefore, between script and performance lie in what we are *doing* in relation to the 'play'. When we read a play we are doing similar things to what we do when we read a novel. We are taking words and turning them into story (which we apprehend also by creating images in our heads), or to be more exact, we are decoding signs through reading, and turning them into signifiers which can then be understood as the things signified. At a performance of a play, a great deal of this is already done for us. The events in a novel are described or narrated for us (through what Aristotle called *diegesis*). During a performance of a play, the constructed world of the drama is 'apparently *shown* to the audience', through *mimesis*, or direct imitation.<sup>83</sup> Thus the play script is written in a way that allows this mimesis to occur during a performance of the play.

Because of this, reading a play script is much more difficult than reading a novel, and is rarely done, except by students and theatre practitioners. Readers must often be instructed *how* to read a play.<sup>84</sup> They are advised to take note of character descriptions (if there are any) and flesh out stage directions (and these can be minimal), and pauses (which can be maximal), and perhaps even read the dialogue aloud. The novelist is confident that his narration (and the use of the authorial voice) will be enough for his readers. The writer of the playscript sacrifices the pleasure of the reader for the pleasure of the audience. He sacrifices *diegesis* to *mimesis*. He makes the script difficult to read so that the performance will be easier to 'read'. For, of course, the audience does not read the script.<sup>85</sup> They 'read' the performance. The performance is their text. As Schlueter (1995) notes, a play can therefore be two texts—the script and the performance.<sup>86</sup> What are the differences between these two texts?

Iser (1978), when talking about literary works (in particular, novels), differentiates between the author's text and the 'realization accomplished by the

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<sup>83</sup> K. Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London, 1980), p. 111.

<sup>84</sup> R. Hayman, *How to Read a Play* (London, 1977).

<sup>85</sup> I have seen audience members following the script during a performance. I have never understood why, unless from some desire to test accuracy. These scripts are often sold in the theatre foyer, and if it is a new play, are usually not the final version, since, given printing deadlines, changes made during rehearsals cannot be included.

<sup>86</sup> Schlueter, *Dramatic Closure*, p. 9.

reader'.<sup>87</sup> Schlueter (1995) calls these two poles of the literary work, the 'writerly' text and 'readerly' text. The 'writerly text' will not change (unless the writer reworks the text) but the 'readerly text' changes, depending on who is reading, where they are reading, and when they are reading.<sup>88</sup> This means that novelists, in a sense, are writing for performance in the same way that playwrights write for performance: 'literary texts initiate 'performances' of meaning rather than actually formulating meanings themselves'.<sup>89</sup>

Barthes (1974) makes a different distinction. Literary texts can be either 'readerly' (*lisible*), where the writer tries to control meaning, or 'writerly' (*scriptible*), where control is given over by the writer to the reader.<sup>90</sup> Applying this to theatre, we might think that the 'well-wrought play', with its attention to precise stage directions and punctuation, would be an example of the 'readerly' text, and the more fluid, improvisational pieces of Howard Barker, such as the seven-hour *Ecstatic Bible*, are examples of the 'writerly' text.<sup>91</sup> I would argue that the very precision of writers like Beckett or Pinter, their clarity about what they are withholding (through pauses and ellipses), creates the 'gaps' that free the reader for further 'rewriting and recreating'.<sup>92</sup> Barker asserts that he never writes from 'clarity', nor does he ever know 'the structure or narrative form, let alone the content' of any play he is writing<sup>93</sup>. This makes, paradoxically, for a more 'writerly text' because there are no gaps, only yawning chasms of incomprehensibility, filled with Barker's ideology of 'exhaustion with forms and assumptions',<sup>94</sup> and his belief that, in performance, 'only emotion is trusted'.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>87</sup> W. Iser, *The Act of Reading* (London, 1978), p. 21.

<sup>88</sup> Schlueter suggests this is a false distinction because the 'writerly' text can only be made accessible—except to the writer—by reading, and therefore through that action becomes a 'readerly' text, and so something different. Furthermore, because the 'writerly' text is only accessible to the writer by the act of reading over what he has written, then he too only has access to a 'readerly' text. The 'writerly' text is therefore not accessible to anyone. *Dramatic Closure*, p. 27.

<sup>89</sup> Iser, *Act of Reading*, p. 27.

<sup>90</sup> R. Barthes, *S/Z* (trans.) R. Miller (New York, 1974), p. 4.

<sup>91</sup> *The Ecstatic Bible*, directed by Howard Baker, Scott Theatre, Adelaide Festival of Arts, 2000.

<sup>92</sup> Beckett describes the process of writing a play as 'a threefold process: first, putting himself inside the characters, then, as their creator, trying to keep a certain objective distance, while at the same time visualising every word and movement from the audience's viewpoint. He has to envision everything. He felt the need to hear the play and see it, and employing an overview of the total stage business forced him to simplify his writing in order to keep it all in mind, thus making it more dramatic and stageable'. In D. Bair, *Samuel Beckett* (London, 1978), p. 583.

<sup>93</sup> H. Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre* (Manchester, 1993), p. 208.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

What happens when there is both a literary text, which has a performative aspect to it—it is both ‘writerly’ and ‘readerly’—*and* a performance text? What happens when we introduce an audience (as opposed to a reader)? To simplify matters I am going to eschew any mention of ‘readerly’ and ‘writerly’ and use Schlueter’s designation of the script of the play, as the dramatic text, and the performance of the play, as the performance text.<sup>96</sup> She avoids the more common (among literary theorists) term, theatrical text, for the performance of the play, because the term ‘performance text’ draws attention to the non-verbal elements of performance and the limitations of language within performance. The playwright writes words on a page, which in performance become spoken words, yes, but also silence, gesture, facial expression, action, movement, light, colour, music, other sounds, variations in space. He knows that the actors have the ‘freedom to adopt a range of sign systems which are chosen without reference to an explicit intention on the part of the playwright, yet which are nonetheless governed to some extent by the nature of the text’.<sup>97</sup>

Some theatre practitioners (who should know better) believe that what playwrights write is dialogue; playwrights know that our primary task is to structure action.<sup>98</sup> That is why we are called, or continue to call ourselves, *playwrights*. We work at making a play as a shipwright works at building a ship, and a wheelwright works at making a wheel. We work at making a dramatic text that prefigures the performance text, in the way that a blueprint is a ‘detailed plan of work to be done’.<sup>99</sup> Like the dramatic text, the blueprint is a kind of pre-performance. Playwrights at their computers ask, ‘Will this work?’ We are not thinking of a reader who might sit down with the dramatic text,<sup>100</sup> but of the audience who will experience the performance text. The dramatic text is always written with the intention that there will be a performance text,<sup>101</sup> and the playwright is always trying to imagine that

<sup>96</sup> Schlueter, *Dramatic Closure*, p. 107.

<sup>97</sup> A. Page (ed.) *The Death of the Playwright* (New York, 1992), p. 9.

<sup>98</sup> The American playwright John Guare complains of this. ‘People think playwriting is just somebody supplying the words’. Plimpton, *Playwrights at Work*, p. 315.

<sup>99</sup> *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, p. 128.

<sup>100</sup> We are aware, of course, that if the play is to get a performance, it must first impress a reader or many readers eg. artistic directors of theatre companies (or whoever they employ to read scripts), actors we might want to be involved, funding bodies who might finance a performance.

<sup>101</sup> Writers have written scripts with no *immediate* hope of performance. In 1927, Katharine Susannah Prichard wrote *Brumby Innes* for a competition. It required a cast of Aboriginal actors and was first produced in 1972.

performance, perhaps only in a general sense, or perhaps quite specifically. That is why many (all?) playwrights speak the dialogue aloud as they write it. That is why they walk about the room as they 'imagine' the events happening on stage. That is why it helps to write for specific actors and specific theatre spaces. That is why we often have some (very definite) idea of the design and costumes and lighting and music. In all this activity, we are prefiguring a performance. Case (1988) is correct when she says that there is 'no aesthetic closure around the [dramatic] text'<sup>102</sup> but the playwright does not mourn this. He always looks towards the aesthetic closure of the performance text.

A dramatic text that reads well often results in a deathly night at the theatre. The very qualities that make for a satisfying reading experience—credible characters, careful plotting, climaxes neatly set up and resolved, clearly stated themes—may work against a successful performance. This could be because the dramatic text does not sufficiently anticipate the performance text: the dialogue may be prolix or too formal (not such a problem when read) or devoid of a sense of movement and action. If the dramatic text does not allow the possibility for *mimesis* then the performance text will seem lifeless or overexplained. There will be no space for the actors because the dialogue will have explained everything. The actors will become mouthpieces for the dramatic text rather than the embodiment of that text so that it can become the performance text. This 'suspicion of language'<sup>103</sup> turns writers like Beckett to pauses and ellipses, and some writers, perhaps predominantly female (who also have a suspicion of story<sup>104</sup>) to focus on plotting what happens to bodies.

All playwrights (even those writing for radio) know that they are writing for bodies and that those bodies will have more to do than speak their dialogue. As I have said, playwrights can have clear ideas of casting, costume and set. Beckett had to 'envision' everything. I often have an image that seems important to the 'core' of the play.<sup>105</sup> I have a sense of the 'choreography' of the scenes. I can usually 'hear' how the lines will be said, although I am often convinced by other (more nuanced) readings of those lines. There is a danger that these premonitions of performance can

<sup>102</sup> S. Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (Basingstoke, 1988), p. 116.

<sup>103</sup> Smith, *Poetic Closure*, p. 240. She is quoting Nathalie Sarraute (1956).

<sup>104</sup> Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, p. 124.

<sup>105</sup> With *Whispering Demons* it was a well-used, wooden kitchen table, with *The Hope*, 'rain in the pepper trees'.

become too prescriptive (although playwrights, like Beckett, would disagree). The dramatic text anticipates the performance text but should not (over)determine it. It must leave room for the text that negotiates between the script and the performance. I am going to call it the 'production text'.

The director reads the dramatic text and 'writes' the production text over the period of pre-production, rehearsal and previews. Some might think that the most important part of this 'writing' happens during the rehearsal period, but what *can* happen in rehearsal is dependent on what *has* happened during the auditioning process. Some directors say that if they cast the play correctly then ninety-percent of their work is done before rehearsals begin. The director's discussion with the designer during pre-production will also determine what can happen in rehearsal; on the first day, the production manager will tape the outline of the set to the rehearsal floor. The construction of the set will have already begun; the more elaborate the set, the more it pre-empts the rehearsal process. The 'writing' of the production text also takes in the previews, following the rehearsal process. The audience at a preview understands that it is contributing to the writing of the production text, and is not experiencing the performance text.<sup>106</sup> The audience expects there to be 'mistakes', and some stopping and starting of the production. They may witness instructions given by the director to the actors or the crew. They may also be used to 'test' the ending.<sup>107</sup>

The production text is 'written' in fits and starts, in much the same way as the dramatic text is written, except that the director manipulates actors whereas the writer manipulates words. The director also has a text on which to base his experimentation. He is not writing from scratch. He is 'rewriting', re-interpreting or translating the dramatic text. Some directors talk about 'being true' to the dramatic text; others believe that the important thing is to create a production text that has its own 'truth'. If the playwright is alive (and can object to changes to the dramatic

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<sup>106</sup> The compensation for all this is a cheaper ticket.

<sup>107</sup> For the second preview of *Whispering Demons*, we dropped the last section of the ending (to avoid what seemed like a 'strangulation'), but reinstated it for opening night because now the ending seemed too 'open'.



text)<sup>108</sup>, or if he is actually present at rehearsals, then the director is more likely to take the dramatic text as the blueprint. He will negotiate any changes he wants to make to the text with the playwright. Some playwrights, like Beckett, try to 'limit' the possible interpretations of the dramatic text, by writing explicit stage directions and concise punctuation (for example, what is the difference '...' and '—' and 'pause'),<sup>109</sup> or by directing their own work. The playwright not only writes the dramatic text but also the production text. I have never wanted to do this because I think that the 'mismatches' between the dramatic text and the production text leave their own gaps which add more 'bite' to the performance text. Or to return to the metaphor of the box and the lid, the 'mismatches' make certain that the lid remains propped open. Like many playwrights, I hate it when actors paraphrase the lines I have written. This is not about asserting the primacy of the 'dramatic text' (and my authority); it is about preserving the 'gaps' that can lead to a richer text. The awkwardness of the dialogue (which an actor may want to 'smooth out') can draw attention to what is not being said, or can indicate a certain style or attitude to what is happening on stage.<sup>110</sup>

The director, like the playwright when writing the dramatic text, is also asking himself, 'Does this work?', as he writes the production text. Directors sometimes say they hate it when the audience arrives, that what they enjoy most is the process of writing the production text (they use the term, 'directing'), but they must retain some sense of the audience (and unlike the playwright, the director *knows* there is going to be an audience), if only to make sure there are adequate sightlines and lighting levels and that someone sitting in the back of the hall can hear everything that is said on stage.<sup>111</sup> Most directors say that is always a shock when the audience arrives. Laughs happen when they are not expected. What seemed clear in the production text is now murky; the audience is too far behind. What seemed complex and rich, is now merely obvious; the audience is too far ahead. Nervous

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<sup>108</sup> Directors who wish to make a name for themselves (rather than making a name for the playwright), often choose to direct plays by dead writers. Under copyright law, no changes (or additions) can be made to the dramatic text without the permission of the writer (or his heirs). This expires fifty years after the playwright's death, but there are also 'moral rights' which protect the writer's work.

<sup>109</sup> Directors dislike over-precise stage directions (accusing the playwright of trying to direct), and actors dislike directions for line readings (accusing the playwright of trying to act).

<sup>110</sup> If the line becomes a stumbling block for the actor, then this is one of the battles worth losing.

<sup>111</sup> Some younger directors fail to take into account the failing eyesight and hearing of an older audience.

actors fluff their lines.<sup>112</sup> The audience shuffles its feet, coughs, rustles the program.<sup>113</sup> Sometimes the audience makes the actors aware of what they had missed.<sup>114</sup> After the play opens, after the performance text comes into being, the director joins the writer as 'outsider'. He has no further involvement, except perhaps to attend once a week and deliver notes to the actors. The stage manager calls the show. The performance text belongs to the actors and the audience.

How does the audience 'read' the production text and bring into being, the performance text? The director and actors had the dramatic text on which to base their production text, but the audience has only the production text (unless it is very familiar with the dramatic text), and perhaps some notes in the program and some exposure to pre-publicity. As a result, although language is still a very important component of the generation of meaning (a large proportion of the time will be spent listening to the dialogue), it is what the audience sees, as much as what it hears, that helps it to 'read' and then 'write' the performance text.

Throughout this essay I have been reminding myself that, grammatically speaking, an audience is singular. The phrase 'shuffles its feet' makes me think of this multi-bodied creature with multiple feet, all shuffling. But would all the feet be shuffling? And all the hands rustling programs? Surely some of the bodies in this many-bodied creature would be engaged? What is this thing called 'audience'? Is it community? Is it Public? Is it congregation? Is it Rattigan's Aunt Edna?<sup>115</sup> 'Is it mob? Is it the body corporate? What we should not expect, according to Blau (1990), is 'anything like coherence' in an audience. This is because advanced theory, including postmodernism, has given meaning a 'bad press'.<sup>116</sup> He then asserts that the audience 'does not exist before the play but is *initiated* or *precipitated* by it',<sup>117</sup> furthermore,

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<sup>112</sup> The audience can also be 'nervous'. Joan Plowright describes one such audience at the first night of *The Cherry Orchard*, where 'the stage was awash with unpainted walls, lopsided chandeliers and a tiled floor which erupted in unexpected places', and most worryingly, doors that refused to open and close. J. Plowright, *And That's Not All* (London, 2001), pp. 207-208.

<sup>113</sup> For this reason any essential bit of information must be mentioned three times.

<sup>114</sup> Franco Zeffirelli, driven to distraction by the English cast's obsession with lighting and placement of chairs, stormed out of a dress rehearsal of *Saturday, Sunday, Monday*, shouting, 'The audience will teach you about this play', quoted in J. Plowright, *And That's Not All*, p. 201.

<sup>115</sup> Rattigan unwisely described his audience as a 'nice respectable, middle-class maiden lady with time on her hands and the money to help her pass it ... Let us call her Aunt Edna'. G. Wansell, *Terence Rattigan* (London, 1997), p. 241. In 1997 the Australian playwright, Stephen Sewell, described the Playbox Theatre Company's audience as being 'older professional women at the end of a hard week'.

<sup>116</sup> H. Blau, *The Audience* (Baltimore, 1990), p. 22.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

the audience is aware of that process. The audience is not a multi-bodied creature with shuffling feet but a ‘consciousness constructed’, or perhaps we should say, a *self-consciousness* constructed, ‘when, performing the signs and passwords of a play, something postulates itself and unfolds in response’.<sup>118</sup> I have said that the audience writes the performance text but it seems, if you agree with Blau, that the performance text also ‘writes’ the audience. This is all great fun but what does it *mean* for the playwright trying to write the end?

Firstly, the playwright is not just writing the end of the dramatic text but of the two texts that follow it (three, if you include the audience as a text). Therefore he must choose the right director, confer with designers, sit in on auditions, attend rehearsals<sup>119</sup> and previews, be involved in publicity which includes such things as the design of the poster and the writing of flyers and program notes. If your play is advertised as a comedy then it must have a happy ending.<sup>120</sup> If changes need to be made, then it should be the writer making them. When Ibsen was forced, by the lack of copyright protection, to change the ending of *A Doll’s House*, he stated: ‘if any such outrage is threatened, I prefer ... to commit it myself’.<sup>121</sup>

Design is very important because of the influence it has on the sense of an ending. Just as an actor has to avoid ‘playing the ending’ all the way through the play, so the design should not flag the ending.<sup>122</sup> It should support the ending. At the end of *One Small Step*, when the Cinderella-like shoe machinist, Regina, decides to step into the supervisor’s shoes, the walls of the (very realistic) factory open to reveal a ‘golden stairway to the ball’. The audience’s surprise and pleasure is palpable. Here is an example of the design enlarging the ending.<sup>123</sup> Design helps the writer to bring the extraordinary out of the ordinary, especially in the final image of the play. In *Whispering Demons*, my play about a woman who is ‘called’ to become a priest,

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Some playwrights attend every day of rehearsal. I restrict myself to the first week (where more substantial changes may become obvious), and then I drop in from time to time, to see what lines of dialogue they would like to cut or ‘re-jig’. The natural place to stop attending seems to be when the actors put down their scripts—the dramatic text—and the focus now becomes the ‘writing’ of the production text.

<sup>120</sup> I deal with this in the section on comedy.

<sup>121</sup> M. Meyer. *Ibsen* (London, 1967), pp. 480–481. The actress playing Nora “refused to act the final scene as written, on the grounds that ‘I would never leave my children!’”.

<sup>122</sup> I once saw a production of *The Doll’s House* where the action took place within a golden birdcage.

<sup>123</sup> It is also a case of a director’s suggestion to the writer. *One Small Step*, directed by Leith Taylor, The State Theatre Company of Western Australia, Subiaco Theatre Centre, Perth, November 20, 1992. It was designed by Ian Jackson.

the designer Gaelle Mellis picked up on a reference in the dialogue to women 'arranging the flowers' and decided to have fresh flowers (arum lilies), scattered across the floor of the stage.<sup>124</sup> I was anxious that the audience might be too conscious of 'the Church trampling on her dreams'. The actors were anxious that their words would be punctuated by the crunch of foot on fresh flower. However, it seemed to work. The very 'ordinariness' of the characters and story, and the urbane wittiness of the dialogue provided an effective counterweight to the extraordinary visual image. This kind of design concept means that I do not have to write a potentially overstated ending. I write for a bare stage, with few props and simple costumes. I create the 'gaps' into which can flow magic, dream and mystery through the design concept.

Semiotics has been used to examine literary texts, but the trouble with applying semiotics to a performance, as Schlueter notes, quoting Esslin (1987), is that there are just too many signifiers competing for the audience's attention: the performance space 'transforms the most ordinary and everyday trivia of existence into carriers of significance'.<sup>125</sup> The audience is bombarded by signifiers. The actor speaks but also makes gestures. He moves about a particular space, in consort with other actors, who are also moving and making gestures. There are objects inhabiting that space, objects which 'assume theatrical, representational, and semiotic value'.<sup>126</sup> A scarf can just be scarf but it can also be used theatrically (to strangle one of the characters) and semiotically (by indicating a soccer hooligan, the time of year, a fashion victim). One cannot assume that the same thing is signified to every one in the audience.<sup>127</sup>

Writers often report disputes with directors. Baker-White (1999) suggests that in rehearsal there is a contest between authority and freedom, and that it is a 'particularly useful vantage point from which to view the processes of maintenance and subversion.'<sup>128</sup> I do not need to win every (or even many) battle(s), so long as I

<sup>124</sup> *Whispering Demons*, directed by Catherine Fitzgerald for Vitalstatistix National Women's Theatre, Space Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre, September 25, 1999.

<sup>125</sup> M. Esslin, *The Field of Drama* (London, 1987), p. 38.

<sup>126</sup> Schlueter, *Dramatic Closure*, p. 109.

<sup>127</sup> I suggested that a middle-aged woman in my play *Whispering Demons* should dress conservatively. I was therefore very surprised to see that the costume designer had decided to dress the actor in jeans. For this twenty-something costume designer wearing jeans was conservative; the radical act was to wear a skirt. (The actor wore jeans, in the end, because she looked more attractive in them.)

<sup>128</sup> Baker-White, *Text in Play*, p. 14.

win the war, and for me, the war is about the ending, because it is the ending that makes sense of the beginning and the middle. The playwright must be confident of the play's structure. If the end is to make sense of the middle and the beginning, then it is dangerous to go into rehearsals not knowing the broad outline of that end. Rehearsal comes to be about fine tuning that ending. Shepard adds a new final line to a play, *Curse of the Starving Class*, which he had written twenty years before. He does this, "in response," he says, "to live actors, not just their voices but their intentions too—the whole thing"<sup>129</sup> During rehearsals I am usually not sure about the final image of the ending until I have seen a full run-through of the play (and sometimes not until after a first production). During the rehearsal of *The American Clock*, which already existed in 'two quite different versions', Arthur Miller considers the ending:

"I'm not sure about this, either," he says, rereading a page of the script. "I'm not sure that we shouldn't lose all that (marking the director's script). It gets a little teachy."<sup>130</sup>

Miller is still feeling his way towards the ending. He uses what goes on during the 'writing' of the rehearsal text, to rewrite the dramatic text. 'Listening to actors is, for the playwright, both a return to the moment of composing, and a hearing of new soundings of the notes'.<sup>131</sup> But what 'goes on' in rehearsal is the embodiment of the dramatic text by the actors, therefore, for the playwright, it is not just a matter of *listening*. He must also watch to see where a gesture or a facial expression removes the need for verbal explanation. The ending he writes in the dramatic text might not change in essentials; it might be 'told' with fewer words. Words are more 'teachy' than gestures. Beckett was wise to resist making changes to the dramatic text during rehearsals—it can be a kind of slippery slope towards writing by committee—but even Beckett made some changes to the dramatic text; even his 'envisioning' was open to rewriting.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>129</sup> Letzler Cole, *Playwrights in Rehearsal*, p. 25.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 407. Bair notes that Beckett incorporated changes made by director Robert Blin into the published version of *Waiting for Godot*, recognising his 'acute sense of the theatrical'. Another biographer notes: 'Disagreements, or what Blin called 'impassioned discussions' took place throughout the rehearsals [of *Endgame*] and most of the time Beckett got his way', in A. Cronin, *Samuel Beckett, The Last Modernist* (London, 1996), p. 476.

The same holds true for the production text. A novelist doesn't rewrite a published novel in the light of comments by reviewers or letters from readers.<sup>133</sup> Neil Simon (1996) would attend each out-of-town performance, make notes on the reaction of the audience, rewrite that night. The actors rehearsed the rewrites the following afternoon, and then presented them to an audience that evening.<sup>134</sup> It is not only the writer making changes. The actors often 'rewrite' the production text on the basis of what happens in performance. If a mistake gets a laugh, then the mistake can become the new line. Bits of business creep in and never leave. Actors sometimes change their interpretation of a character to accommodate the criticisms of a reviewer.<sup>135</sup> The running time always shortens, sometime quite dramatically, over the period of a play's run. There is the opportunity to rewrite the dramatic text with every new production. Much of this rewriting seems to involve rewriting the ending.

The ending of a play is composed of a number of elements: words, movements, images, sounds, variation in lighting before the final *Blackout* or *Curtain*. How can we decide which one is dominant at any one moment? This is, in fact, what the director does in 'writing' the production text. He decides what the audience should be attending to at each moment of the performance and then determines how this can happen. This is not fail safe. Actors can move when others are speaking, and so 'shift the focus'. If the set falls down, then that is where the audience will focus. When a member of the audience suffers a heart attack and her neighbour throws her to the floor and administers first aid, then that is where the audience, or those in the immediate vicinity of the incident, will focus.<sup>136</sup> Audiences are not sheep that can be driven. That is why there is a difference between the production text and the performance text (and a difference in production text from night to night) and why the writer needs to be involved in 'writing' the production text.

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<sup>133</sup> This did happen in the nineteenth century where writers such as Dickens and Trollope had their novels serialized in journals.

<sup>134</sup> N. Simon *Rewrites* (New York, 1996), p. 65.

<sup>135</sup> The actor Laura Black told me that for this reason she never reads reviews during the run of a play in which she is appearing. She believes that once the rehearsal text is 'written' it should not be changed, except to accommodate the audience on the night.

<sup>136</sup> Fortunately it occurred when there was literally nothing happening on stage. Both characters in *The Owl and the Pussycat* were off-stage, having an off-stage conversation. The victim and her saviour were quietly removed from the auditorium.

There are often surprises for the writer. I have already noted the embarrassment of being the first to begin clapping at the end of the play. I find that audiences often confirm my own 'reading' of the play (one which I have had to defend in rehearsals), because, in general, I am more like my audience than the actors. Some playwrights profess to despise their audiences. Barker wants to unsettle his.<sup>137</sup> Aristotle believed that a play should allay the emotions it arouses (it should provide catharsis) so that, according to Catron (1999), the audience 'would not take home with them the anguish they felt at the drama'.<sup>138</sup> Howard Barker wants the audience to leave the theatre 'fully aroused', perhaps because there is so little anguish experienced in our film and television-dominated culture. It is the theatre's responsibility to its audience, and that is what the theatre audience expects, even in the West End. Barker describes his plays as 'the theatre of catastrophe', tragedies where there is 'transgression, but ... no punishment'. This, rather than the violence and brutality he depicts on stage, is, he says, what 'offends people most'.<sup>139</sup> He will not write an ending with a 'readily appreciable meaning'. He wants to 'unsettle rather than to please'.

Some playwrights attend very few performances of their plays. Some writers of comedy wear out the red carpet at the back of the theatre with their pacing. Some stand up in the middle of a performance and berate the actors. Some walk the streets during a first night. Some attend the performance of another play. Some leave town. Some read all the reviews. Some read none. Some get their wives or husbands or whoever to read them first. Some ring the box office every day to ask for the receipts. No playwright, even those who stay away, is unaware of the size of his audience. The playwright is paid a royalty which is a percentage (in Australia, usually ten percent) of the ticket price. The bigger the audience, the bigger the cheque. It is an honest relationship.

The playwright needs to write the ending but, according to Schlueter (1995) that ending can be 'provisional or unsettling'.<sup>140</sup> What exactly is a 'provisional' ending? One that will do until a better one can be thought up—by the audience? An

<sup>137</sup> I suspect that those choosing to go to a Howard Barker play are not going to be unsettled. They know what to expect.

<sup>138</sup> Catron, *Elements of Playwriting*, p. 119.

<sup>139</sup> D. Cavendish, 'We don't like him—he doesn't care', *The Daily Telegraph: Arts Section* (London), October 17, 2002, p. 24.

<sup>140</sup> Schlueter, *Dramatic Closure*, p. 10.

ending which can be 'reinterpreted' with every production? I think not. The idea of a 'provisional' ending comes from the desire to balance the need for an end against the desire not to strangle. Part of the desire not to strangle comes from an unwillingness on the part of the playwright to commit to a set of values. It can reveal a failure of nerve; a fear of being seen as 'conservative' or (more rarely, these days) 'bourgeois'. An 'unsettling' ending is a different matter. This kind of ending does make sense of the beginning and middle but leaves certain questions unanswered. This kind of ending reflects doubt within certainty. The 'provisional' ending does not want to engage even with doubt (because that implies that there are certainties *to* doubt). Schlueter asserts that, unlike beginnings, endings 'need not concern themselves with what follows'.<sup>141</sup> She believes that poststructuralism 'further extends the process, so that it [the play] has no end'.<sup>142</sup>

Can, then, the playwright (and the play) simply stop, rather than end? Once again, I think not. Audiences demand a sense of an ending. If the playwright does not provide one, then the audience will create its own. This sense of an ending might well include disappointment or disgust with the playwright. The audience can accept that there might be different interpretations of the ending. That is permissible. In fact, it is part of the pleasure of the experience. There are mathematical equations that have a unique solution but others which offer an infinite number of solutions. A play must create a sense of an ending in the audience (even if the actual ending to the plot has to be inferred) but that ending may be open to a number (an infinite number?) of interpretations. The playwright accepts this because the playwright has written the equation (perhaps unconsciously), so that it will generate a number of solutions. This is another way of looking at 'gaps'.

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.



in an age when beliefs are crumbling, militant fideism  
will be as characteristic as desperate scepticism.  
—Smith, *Poetic Closure*

All writing is garbage.  
—Artaud, *Selected Writings*

Where has this movement towards anti-closure, first described by Kermode, left the play and the playwright? Has ‘The End’ been replaced by ‘To be Continued’? Has the fear of ‘strangulation’ led to death by inches? Has Miller’s desire not to be ‘teachy’ become ‘all language is garbage’.<sup>143</sup> Is our only consolation as an audience, as Schlueter suggests, an ‘intellectual awareness of the project’?<sup>144</sup> Beckett (1959) said the task of the artist is ‘to find a form that accommodates the mess’.<sup>145</sup> How do you write an end to a ‘mess’? By stopping? In 1954, Goodman stated that ‘in the ending everything is necessary’.<sup>146</sup> Is it necessary, almost fifty years later, to write the ending? Can one make an assertion of meaning, where none—so it is said—can now be found? Is there a place for play and playwright?

What happens when the playwright calls himself, as some now do, a ‘writer for performance’? There is now no ‘play’ (‘well-made’ or other), only ‘performance’. These ‘performances’ are usually presented at festivals, in non-traditional theatre spaces such as quarries and sports stadiums, and are often much longer (or much shorter) than a play; some require breaks for meals, or being up all night.<sup>147</sup> They often seem to be trying to revive a tradition that owes its power to religious practices (but rarely to religious beliefs), and in doing so, restore to the theatre a sense of mystery, magic and dream, often at the expense of rationality, empathy and laughter. Often they are described as ‘dance-theatre’, ‘hybrid theatre’, ‘performance art’. These performances are ‘events’ rather than plays; the pleasure comes as much from the unusual setting and ‘festive’ atmosphere as from what happens on stage.<sup>148</sup> Less is

<sup>143</sup> A. Artaud, *Selected Writings* (Berkeley, 1988), p. 83. Quoted in M. Fortier, *Theory/Theatre* (London, 1997), p. 43.

<sup>144</sup> Schlueter, *Dramatic Closure*, p. 31.

<sup>145</sup> Quoted in Bair, *Samuel Beckett*, p. 555.

<sup>146</sup> P. Goodman, *The Structure of Literature* (Chicago, 1954), p. 14.

<sup>147</sup> ‘Although this was frankly over-taxing, it did mean the 4th (sic) wall between actor and spectator was annihilated, both having experienced a theatrical auto-da-fe of endurance,’ in J. Marshall, ‘Scan 2003,’ *Real Time*, 57, October - November, 2003, p. 10. (The theatre company, Forced Entertainment, refers to this kind of theatre-as-marathon as ‘durational theatre’).

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* ‘Often it felt as if we were at a light-hearted ‘event’ rather than a ‘play’ per se, or possibly a free-form (yet well-rehearsed) reading’.

expected.<sup>149</sup> The experience of this kind of performance is not the same as experiencing a play. Is there, indeed, an *audience* for this kind of work?

Blau (1990) argues that the ‘audience is what *happens* when, performing the signs and passwords of a play, something postulates itself and unfolds in response’.<sup>150</sup> The playwright does not only create the play, and prefigure the performance; the playwright also creates the audience. Compare this with what happens with a ‘performance piece’. Writers for performances prefer the term ‘spectators’ to ‘audience’, perhaps because these spectators remain individuals who watch a performance.<sup>151</sup> They do not become an audience who ‘writes’ the performance text. The performance text has been written for them, in the same way as a film is ‘written’. Nothing the spectators do can affect it. All that is left to them is to be a witness to what they cannot change. There is no necessity to form hypotheses; this is actively discouraged. There is so much that is (deliberately) unexplained. The actors are used as props rather than as actors. They are surface rather than substance. They ‘represent’ rather than ‘become’. We do not, as in a play, ‘enter’ the story through their actions. They move, or are moved around the space, to suit the needs of the spectacle, not the spectators.

There are some ‘performance pieces’ that take as their subject the relationship between actor and audience. The Sheffield-based theatre company, Forced Entertainment, create such work. Here the audience can effect what is happening on stage; they are invited to do so. The point of the ‘performance’ is that they do so. ‘As an audience member you are in the position of having the rug taken slightly from under you ... [says artistic director and writer, Tim Etchells]’.<sup>152</sup> This is nothing new. Every playwright wants to pull the rug from under his audience but not, perhaps, by ‘forcing’ them to be entertained.

In 2000, I attended a performance of Jenny Kemp’s *The Black Sequin Dress* at the Adelaide Festival.<sup>153</sup> I watched and listened to what happened on stage and

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<sup>149</sup> Some theatre-goers attend such ‘events’ with an attitude of ‘faith, hope and charity’: faith that it will mean something; hope that it does not go on too long; and charity—everyone tried very hard, and it looks and sounds, spectacular.

<sup>150</sup> Blau, *The Audience*, p. 25.

<sup>151</sup> And because (suggests Richard Murphett, writer and director) there is no word for a group of spectators—vidience?

<sup>152</sup> J. Litson, ‘Strangers in the night’, *The Australian*, March 6, 2004, p. 16.

<sup>153</sup> The Adelaide Festival/Playbox Theatre Centre production of *The Black Sequin Dress*, directed by Jenny Kemp, opened at Scott Theatre, Adelaide, March 5, 1996.

tried to make sense of what I was seeing and hearing. I could tell that every decision had been made carefully and intelligently, but for reasons which I could not fathom. I knew (perhaps through advance publicity?) that the performance would refer to paintings but I was not familiar with the artist and his work.<sup>154</sup> The young couple (perhaps art students?) sitting next to me were laughing at moments where I could discern no reason for laughter. I felt frustrated. I felt excluded. I felt what an audience feels when it has 'no access—or is ignored, rebuffed, barred, remote, or nonexistent'.<sup>155</sup> I did not know how I was to respond. I thought about leaving. I began to drift off. In the end, I did what I do when I attend a music concert. I let it 'wash over' me. I had little sense of closure. The performance just seemed to stop.<sup>156</sup> One or two images from the performance (the train crossing the stage, the naked woman falling over) have stayed with me, but no lines of dialogue. There seemed to be no 'point' to my being there.<sup>157</sup>

Blau (1990) asserts: 'the dramaturgy of dissent is so sustained that it is self-reflexive'.<sup>158</sup> This is a condition where narcissism replaces curiosity, bodies replace language, and feeling replaces thought. 'Letting it wash over you', replaces writing the performance text, and 'middle' expands to absorb 'beginning' and 'end'. 'Framing' takes the place of a coherent narrative structure. Schlueter (1995) described texts as being 'stable' or 'transgressive', but without laws or commandments there can be no transgression. I have already made clear that the 'play' is both script *and* performance. An audience does not speak about going to a 'performance'. It speaks about going to a play or the performance of a play. A playwright knows that he is writing for performance. He finds it unnecessary to describe himself as a 'writer for performance'. He wonders whether the 'writer for performance' call himself that, because he knows that he cannot craft a play; that he cannot take on the arduous task of writing the beginning, middle and the ending, and that he can only stop.

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<sup>154</sup> The artist was Paul Delvaux.

<sup>155</sup> Blau, *The Audience*, p. 35.

<sup>156</sup> On checking the script I see that the last lines of *The Black Sequin Dress* return to the lines spoken at the beginning.

<sup>157</sup> There is an argument that says that, like a complex piece of music, this kind of theatre requires a second or third exposure. There is another question to consider. Could anyone other than Jenny Kemp direct *The Black Sequin Dress*? The stage directions are very specific. Performance pieces are one-offs whereas plays are capable of multiple interpretations?

<sup>158</sup> Blau, *The Audience*, p. 14.

Kermode (1966) believes that it is our power to create endings—our ‘fictive powers’—that allow us to live with, and within, the chaos that is the human condition. We make sense of the world by creating an ending that brings into being a beginning and a middle, and so makes sense of what has gone before. We cannot get rid of plot altogether. Writers might want to avoid writing the ending because they don’t believe in ‘The End’, but we only understand a writer like Beckett because we understand the rules he is breaking.<sup>159</sup> No writer breaks all the rules and is understood. The same holds true in life. All of us are working with the ‘tension or dissonance between paradigmatic form and contingent reality’.<sup>160</sup> Writers will always prefer the necklace, however imperfectly it is strung, to the handful of pearls. We want to avoid a ‘strangulation’ but not by omitting to write the end.

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<sup>159</sup> Beckett, a product of Irish Protestantism, would have been brought up to fear ‘The End’.

<sup>160</sup> Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*, p. 133.

*The Other Woman: stamina in the dramatic space*

I sometimes think I have failed my readers because I  
 have not answered the important questions  
 —Anton Chekhov in *The Making of Modern Drama*

I am now going to examine the ending of my play, *The Other Woman*. I shall focus on my aims and method: Why and how have I written the ending? Does that ending ‘work’? Have I answered ‘the important questions?’<sup>1</sup> There is an inherent difficulty when a writer writes about his writing. How does he maintain the necessary critical distance to comment usefully on the work? My solution is to examine, firstly, how another playwright—Chekhov—creates the sense of an ending in *Three Sisters*, and apply this understanding to the ending of my own play.

Why Chekhov? Why *Three Sisters*? There are a number of possible reasons. It could be because I was reading Gilman’s (1995) illuminating book on Chekhov while I was writing the rehearsal draft of *The Other Woman*. Or because of two recent, very different, productions of *Three Sisters*.<sup>2</sup> Or because a long-standing aversion to Chekhov—too slow, too miserable—suddenly became, through the enthusiasm of an inspired teacher, a passionate regard for the play—so fast-moving, so mischievous. I certainly didn’t have Chekhov or *Three Sisters* in mind when I began writing *The Other Woman*.<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this analysis, the choice of play or playwright is not as important as the opportunity it gives me to reflect on my own aims and method when writing the ending.

I am going to focus on two aspects of *Three Sisters*: what Gilman (1995) has called the characters’ ‘stamina’,<sup>4</sup> and, the playwright’s ‘filling in of a dramatic space rather than the elaboration of a dramatic line’.<sup>5</sup> The first might be called an aspect of

<sup>1</sup> R. Gilman, *The Making of Modern Drama* (New York, 1987), p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Directed by Benedict Andrews for The Sydney Theatre Company at the Drama Theatre, May 7, 2001; a new version by Christopher Hampton, directed by Michael Blakemore, Playhouse Theatre, London, March 20, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> The story (taken from life) of a mother pursuing the politician whom she believed was responsible for her daughter’s suicide, seemed like something from Greek drama. *The Oresteia* was my starting-point.

<sup>4</sup> R. Gilman, *Chekhov’s Plays* (New Haven, 1995), p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215. Gilman is discussing *The Cherry Orchard* but believes Chekhov uses this method of construction in all his later plays.

'content', and the second, an aspect of 'form'. They work together in *Three Sisters* to create an ending which leaves many questions unanswered. This is a strength rather than a weakness.

Stamina is about 'getting through, going on'.<sup>6</sup> At the end of *Three Sisters*, Masha has lost her lover, Irina her husband-to-be, Olga any future other than the daily grind of running a school. All three women have lost their home. None will get to Moscow. But all will 'go on'. We know this because of what the women say in the last pages of the play.<sup>7</sup> Masha asserts, 'We must go on living, we must'. Irina asks why there is 'all this suffering?' She accepts that it is a mystery which one day may be solved. She will 'go off alone tomorrow to teach at a school' and there she shall 'work, work, work'. Olga has the longest speech. She sees their suffering as bringing 'happiness to those who come after us' and that perhaps they may one day themselves understand 'what our lives and suffering are for. If only we could know! If only we could know!'

The sisters will 'go on' but we note their struggle at the end to overcome their suffering. All three repeat their last lines: 'We must go on living, we must'.; 'work, work, work'.; 'If only we could know! If only we could know!' They are convincing themselves and each other, as they speak. The stage directions tell us that before their final speeches the women '*stand close together*'. Irina '*puts her head on Olga's breast*'. Olga's final speech is delivered as she '*embraces both her sisters*'. They draw strength from each other. They exhibit stamina.

The ending is more complex than this picture of sisterly solidarity. Even as Olga is telling herself, her sisters and the audience that the band of the departing regiment is playing 'such cheerful, happy music', that music, the stage direction informs us, is '*getting fainter and fainter*'. There are other, darker, elements. Masha's husband Kulygin, whom she doesn't love and who knows this, enters '*smiling cheerfully*', with her coat and hat. How will she 'go on living' with this compassionate but foolish man? Andrew enters, pushing a pram. His sisters have been banished from the house by his wife, Natasha; he has been banished to the garden. In the pram is the baby, fathered by another man. The future indeed looks bleak. Chebutykin, the doctor, singing a little nonsense ditty as he scans the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> A. Chekhov, 'Three Sisters', R. Hingley (trans.), *Five Plays* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 236-237.

newspaper, remarks to no one, 'None of it matters. Nothing matters'. The future looks meaningless. Olga repeats her lines 'If we could only know, oh if we could only know!' That 'oh' carries such a weight of longing. The curtain falls.<sup>8</sup>

*Three Sisters* is about stamina—about what Gilman (1995) calls 'living within time'.<sup>9</sup> Masha has an affair with Vershinin but it is the regiment that takes him away. Irina finally agrees to marry Tuzenbakh who is then killed in an off-stage duel. Olga is manoeuvred out of her house by Natasha. The sisters don't pursue goals; their goal simply is to keep going. They don't struggle to overcome obstacles; no one can defeat Time. Chekhov cannot structure his play by charting the usual 'progression from exposition through plot development to dénouement, the ushering in of some sort of change, a sense of resolution'.<sup>10</sup> This linear narrative structure does not suit his exploration of stasis. Without change there can be no resolution. Yet, there is the sense of an ending. The sisters do achieve a kind of victory. They are still *there*—together—at the end of the play and are determined to go on.

How does Chekhov keep us interested in this inherently undramatic action of 'going on'? As I have already noted, Gilman (1995) suggests that he does this by the 'filling in of a dramatic space',<sup>11</sup> but what exactly does this mean? Firstly, Chekhov delineates the dramatic space, rather like a cinematographer frames the shot. Then he fills that frame with action. He begins the play on the day of the youngest sister's twentieth birthday. They are together in their family home. A year has passed since their father's death, and the prospect of happiness once again lies before them. Olga reminds them that they've been in the provincial garrison town for eleven years and that morning, buoyed up by the prospect of spring, she felt she 'just had to go back home to Moscow'.<sup>12</sup> Masha whistles a tune. Their military friends - Chebutykin, Tuzenbakh and Solyony - chatter and laugh. A visitor arrives. Vershinin, the new battery commander, was an old friend of their father. He knew them in Moscow. These details—so seemingly inconsequential, so lightly sketched-in—are the outline for the sisters' suffering and loss at the end of the play.

The sisters are, as they were at the beginning of the play, together on stage but

<sup>8</sup> As I have already noted, Michael Blakemore's 2003 production of the play, in a 'new version' by Christopher Hampton, had the characters walk briskly off-stage before the curtain fell.

<sup>9</sup> Gilman, *Chekhov's Plays*, p. 148.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>12</sup> Chekhov, *Three Sisters*, p. 171.

not for much longer. Tuzenbakh is dead; Solyony, who in Act One joked about putting a bullet through the Baron's head, has done just that. Vershinin has gone with the regiment. Only Chebutykin remains and he will leave the following morning. Masha can no longer remember the words of the tune she once whistled: 'I've got it all mixed up'.<sup>13</sup> Together, the ending and the beginning create a kind of 'curving shore',<sup>14</sup> on which the sisters contemplate the wreckage of their lives.

Chekhov fills this circular dramatic frame with a great deal of movement: 'the continual traffic on and off the stage'.<sup>15</sup> In the space of four or five minutes, at the end of the play, Masha 'comes in', Vershinin 'quickly leaves', Kulygin 'comes in', Irina 'comes in', Natasha 'comes in', Kulygin goes indoors, and Chebutykin 'comes in'.<sup>16</sup> The characters may never get to Moscow but they are always going somewhere and returning with something. Even the last powerful image of the sisters standing together is interrupted by Kulygin entering with Masha's hat and coat (perhaps the hat she wore in Act One?), and Andrew pushing the pram. The play might be about the condition of 'stasis', but the characters are never still for very long.

They also talk a great deal, but almost as if they were strangers passing time in a railway waiting-room:

... all too often here we get disjunction, ellipse, gaps in dialogue or between dialogue and physicality, the sudden intrusion of the seemingly irrelevant, the arbitrary or inappropriate.<sup>17</sup>

Masha struggles to remember the words of a song: 'A green cat. A green oak',<sup>18</sup> as she deals with the departure of her lover. Vershinin fails to complete his sentences. Kulygin tells the grieving sisters about the false beard and moustache he took off 'a boy in the third form', Natasha rages over the fork left on the garden bench. There is a flurry of activity (a train is expected?), followed almost immediately by a sense of languor. After Chebutykin has informed the sisters of the Baron's death, he says, 'I'm worn out. (*Takes a newspaper out of his pocket.*) They may as well have a cry'.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Gilman, *Chekhov's Plays*, p. 214.

<sup>16</sup> Chekhov, *Three Sisters*, pp. 233-7.

<sup>17</sup> Gilman, *Chekhov's Plays*, p. 157.

<sup>18</sup> Chekhov, *Three Sisters*, p. 234.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.236.



The characters are intent on their own, largely interior, lives. They chat with each other but they don't *delve*. More importantly they don't pretend; they *are*. Chekhov shakes the kaleidoscope and first we see *this* one as he is, and then *that* one. Or, to change the metaphor, the dramatic space becomes a glass slide teeming with life, enlarged and largely unresolved. As Gilman (1995) notes, this is the 'dramaturgy of discontinuity and disruption'.<sup>20</sup> Recent productions of Chekhov's plays, according to Appleford (2002), 'emphasize the performative particle over the dramatic wave',<sup>21</sup> and so accentuate the sense of unconnectedness in the writing.

The play leaves a number of questions unanswered: Why must we go on living? Is work the answer to suffering? Why should our suffering bring happiness to those that follow? Is Chebutykin right when he says that nothing matters? Are the Natashas of the world the ones who survive and prosper? Gilman (1995) believes that plays are valued for 'the way they're suffused with thought, and that this 'weighing of experience' leads on to more thinking.<sup>22</sup> The 'important questions' must be left for the audience, if not to answer, then to consider. Both form and content support this kind of unresolved ending. Chekhov, the non-believer, believes that we shall never get to Moscow. We must make the best of where we are, now. He is the forerunner of Beckett: 'I can't go on, I'll go on'.<sup>23</sup>

This is not to say that Chekhov writes an unsatisfactory ending. All the questions to do with the plot are resolved. There are no scenes missing that we feel we need to see. We know that—somehow—the sisters will 'go on' and because we know this, we don't think about them, and their future plans, after the curtain falls. Recently I attended a performance of Brian Friel's *Afterplay*, where he imagines a meeting between Sonya from *Uncle Vanya* and Andreyev, from *Three Sisters*, twenty years after the action of the two plays.<sup>24</sup> Andreyev tells Sonya that Masha committed suicide. My first reaction was, 'I don't believe it'. My second, 'Who cares?' As Smith (1968) asserts: 'If the conclusion confirms the hypothesis suggested by the work's thematic structure, closure will be to that extent secure; what presumably

<sup>20</sup> Gilman, *Chekhov's Plays*, p. 165.

<sup>21</sup> R. Appleford, "'No, the Centre Should be Invisible": Radical Revisioning of Chekhov in Floyd Favel Starr's *House of Sonya*', *Modern Drama*, Vol XLV, 2: 249, Summer, 2002, p. 249.

<sup>22</sup> Gilman, *Chekhov's Plays*, p. 147.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>24</sup> *Afterplay*, directed by Robin Lefèvre for The Gate Theatre, Gielgud Theatre, London, September 10, 2002.

follows or could follow *in time* will not concern the reader—will not, to be precise, concern his experience of the work in question'.<sup>25</sup>

*The Other Woman* is also a study in stamina, but, instead of sisterly solidarity, we have, at the end of the play, the final break between three women connected, not by family ties, but by Party loyalties. Alex has just become Prime Minister, but her future has been compromised by her decision—made under pressure and out of a sense of her own innocence—to lie to Parliament. Pat, who has been her mentor, and who has enjoyed great influence in the Party, tries and fails to persuade Alex to tell the truth:

PAT	I won't give up.
ALEX	They'll say you're bitter. A mad, bitter, old woman. <sup>26</sup>

The third woman, Liv, has just got pre-selection for a safe seat. When she realises that Pat knows that Alex has lied, she tells Alex that she is not going to stay on as her staffer. 'If you go down .... Is there any point in me going down with you?'<sup>27</sup>

The women might have broken irrecoverably with each other, but they are determined to 'go on'. After Pat's exit, Alex takes her father's medals out of their velvet box. A horrified Liv asks, 'You didn't tell her?' 'Tell her what?' is Alex's reply. Then she adds, looking at the medals in her hand, 'He wouldn't speak'.<sup>28</sup> Like her prisoner-of-war father, she will resist the pressure to confess.

Pat is also undefeated. Alex accuses her of not loving Hilary, whose suicide has precipitated Alex's lie to Parliament and Pat's break with the Party. Pat reacts angrily, asserting her love for Hilary. She shouts at Alex. '*She almost stamps her foot*', the stage direction tell us.<sup>29</sup> She 'breaks', as Hilary said we all must, to be truly human, but Pat composes herself. She will 'go on'. She is stronger than her daughter.

When Liv realises that Alex's position has been compromised, and that Alex no longer trusts her ('Tell her what?' signals an end to their old intimacy), Liv looks to her own survival. She tries to be diplomatic. She uses the 'spend more time with my family' line but Alex wants the truth. Liv tells her that she's not prepared to

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<sup>25</sup> Smith, *Poetic Closure*, p. 120.

<sup>26</sup> H. Nimmo, 'The Other Woman' (Unpublished Edith Cowan University PhD Thesis, 2004), p. 69.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

sacrifice herself for Alex. When Alex points out that that is just what she has done for her staffer, Liv delivers a lecture on gender politics ('The personal is not the political') before exiting.<sup>30</sup> One woman stands alone on stage. She has attacked one 'sister', and been attacked by another. None of them is admitting defeat. All are 'going on'.

Do we rejoice in this stamina, as we do in *Three Sisters*, or are we critical of what these women are 'going on' to do? Pat, it seems, has learned love's painful lesson by the end of the play, but we note that her last speech is made up of questions—five of them. Is she *asking*, or does she *know*? We see her 'break' and feel through that '*small gesture*' of the hand to the heart,<sup>31</sup> that she will never be the same again, but doubts remain. Pat's speech is melodramatic; even when she is being genuine she sounds stagey. When Hilary was being her most dramatic Pat accused her: 'What scene are you playing?'<sup>32</sup> We might ask Pat the same question. Is she being sincere with that small gesture to the heart? She leaves the stage without retracting her threat to expose Alex. Can we believe that Pat has given up all thoughts of revenge?

Liv tells us that she is going to begin door-knocking for a seat that she is likely to win. Shouldn't we be applauding the fact that a young, intelligent, ambitious woman will be elected to Parliament? For Pat this was an impossibility; for Alex a long, hard slog. But what kind of politician will Liv become? In her last speech, she lectures Alex on the difference between the personal and the political, and criticises women for making the mistake of letting 'sentiment get in the way',<sup>33</sup> and yet it was Liv who benefited when Alex did just that—when she took the blame for Liv's mistake with the cheque. Liv seems oblivious to the irony. The play gives her the last words: 'And now, if you'll excuse me ...'.<sup>34</sup> Brisk, meaningless, untruthful (she is not asking to be excused), these are poor words to end a play. Perhaps that is the point. Alex, the 'good communicator', has fatally compromised her ability to speak, leaving the stage to Liv who can only offer platitudes.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

What are we to make of Alex decision not to speak? She has given Pat a number of reasons why she cannot tell the truth: a woman cannot make a mistake; the people will not forgive her; the press will not let them; she cannot live up to their expectations.<sup>35</sup> She then offers Pat the position of Chair of what has been Pat's ruling passion, the proposed international summit on refugees. Pat now realises that Alex is lost to her; she is prepared to try to bribe her way out of trouble. Pat has created a monster, a monster that she can no longer control. Their discussion now becomes deeply personal. Pat leaves. Alex turns towards the door. She begins to follow her. Then she sees her father's medals, and it seems to be these, and the story she tells Liv, that make up her mind: she will not speak. There is a telling irony for whereas her POW-father stayed silent to preserve the truth, she stays silent to protect a lie.

~~A~~The women in *The Other Woman* might be said to be living within politics, rather than 'within time' and, because of this, their staying-power smacks of self-interest. We all must live 'within time', but no one is forced into politics. We can all walk away. The audience is likely to hope that Pat has done this, and admire her for it. Hilary was not an easy character to like, or understand, but she is dead, and if the play makes it clear that Alex had no knowledge of how Hilary would be involved in the attack on Mr Universe, then it also makes it clear that Alex has lied to save her own skin. She may make a good Prime Minister but she has lost her integrity. She is now no different from the others. Liv has shown herself to be pragmatic and, perhaps, coldly calculating. Did she manoeuvre Alex into taking the blame for the cheque? The audience will surely hope that Liv will 'come a cropper'.<sup>36</sup> Stamina without compassion or fellow-feeling delivers the kind of world from which politics was supposed to deliver us: the world of 'arbitrary acts of violence by the powerful. Or the disaffected'.<sup>37</sup> We cannot applaud those who have supported such acts, even if they believe themselves, as Alex does, to have been attacked first.

As in *Three Sisters*, the play's ending connects with its opening scene. The play begins with Alex standing alone on stage. It is Question Time in the House of Representatives and Alex, as Minister for Defence, is justifying an increase in

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

defence spending. We know she is being heckled but we cannot hear what is being said. At the end of the play we hear the heckling (on tape), but Alex now says nothing. Both these sequences are non-realistic. In one, we must imagine the heckling voices from the breaks and repetitions in Alex's speech. In the other we hear an indistinct verbal assault on a lone woman. Together, these images create a circular frame which allows the extraordinary—and in particular, a character like Hilary—to enter the picture.

Hilary

Hilary is a deliberately difficult character to place. She can be read as the 'other woman', the one who disrupts family alliances and party loyalties in her struggle to live authentically. She works with violent men. She accepts the chaotic and the risky. She puts love before legislation. She knows there must be circuses, not just bread: the mothers will each put on a bright scarf during the fiesta and forget their poverty for a few hours.<sup>38</sup> However, she could also be read as someone who lives carelessly. She turns up uninvited. She turns up late. She has no contact with her daughters. She demands attention. She likes nothing better than to throw conversational grenades. What is not in doubt is that Hilary is 'living within time' not politics. She understands that life is not a series of stratagems. She understands pain and loss. She doesn't dissemble or flatter or scheme. She doesn't lie. She holds out another possibility to the life of politics. She accepts mystery. She could be a character from *Three Sisters*.

If *The Other Woman* creates a circular dramatic space, then what fills that space? As happens in *Three Sisters*, there is a great deal of movement on the stage. The political life can also be seen as a series of coming and goings (people to see, functions to attend, bills to vote on)—flurries of activity—followed by periods where nothing much seems to get done (long meetings, long sittings, long plane trips), what Gilman describes as 'the alterations of pace and intensity'.<sup>39</sup> Even the scene on Pat's verandah is full of interruptions. The domestic space is invaded by phone calls, speculation on how the vote for PM will go, and with plotting the attack on Alex's enemies. The last scene is a series of departures: Hilary, Paulson, Ed and then Pat and Liv. Is Alex going to stay?

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>39</sup> Gilman, *Chekhov's Plays*, p. 214.

*The Other Woman* could be said to employ a more conventional dramaturgy than *Three Sisters*. Alex, Pat and Liv have clear goals which they pursue strenuously. Pat instructs Paulson to collect the numbers of those who would support Alex as Prime Minister. Alex lets Paulson deliver the speech which reveals her enemy as a wife-beater, so as to ensure that promotion to Prime Minister is not compromised. Liv reveals to Alex that the police are ‘thinking about’ investigating Alex for fraud, so that *her* becoming a Member of Parliament is not compromised. These women make things happen—and yet, the Aristotelian equation of ‘Main character<sup>form</sup>(s) + Goal + Opposition = Conflict’ does not quite balance.<sup>40</sup> Alex fails to persuade Ed to support her. He has a change of heart only when he catches a glimpse of hers: ‘So there is a heart under that armour-plating?’<sup>41</sup>

Liv wants pre-selection. She has made enormous sacrifices to achieve this. She complains to Alex at the end of the play that ‘I’ve been at meetings when I should have been with my daughter’.<sup>42</sup> She has not let being a mother stop her achieving her goal. And yet, it is not that simple. Why does Liv puts the cheque in the wrong pile?

Sascha was vomiting. Her temperature was up. They couldn’t contact David. I had to get there.<sup>43</sup>

She was undone by love. It is the same maternal love which compels Alex to take the blame for Liv’s mistake.

The most obvious ‘blurring’ of a coherent dramatic line comes about because Hilary happens to work for same organisation, Achilles Heel, that Mr Universe attends for anger-management counselling. When Paulson gives his speech in the Senate revealing the restraining order taken out by Mr Universe’s wife, the media ferrets out both the name of the organisation and the fact that Hilary was working there. None of the other characters, and the audience, were aware of this connection—although the more alert members of the audience might have been able to work it out. It comes as a surprise and can be read—with the other instances of ‘not adding up’ cited above—as evidence of bad playwrighting. Things shouldn’t ‘just happen’ on stage. Yet this is almost exactly how Gilman (1995) describes

<sup>40</sup> R. Hill, *How to Write a Play* (Ohio, 1983), p. 76.

<sup>41</sup> Nimmo, ‘The Other Woman’, p. 29.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Chekhov's dramaturgy: 'one thing after another'.<sup>44</sup>

The dialogue in *The Other Woman* conforms, for much of the play, with the 'familiar pattern of statement and response, spoken instigation and rejoinder, exchange of information'.<sup>45</sup> It is short and snappy. There are very few speeches longer than three or four sentences. These characters are people going places, in a hurry. And yet, if we look closely at the dialogue we can see that it shares that 'railway station waiting-room' quality with *Three Sisters*. There are interruptions and gaps. Alex tells Liv how her father was tortured but it is not until a few lines later that she makes the statement: 'He wouldn't speak'. She is talking *past* Liv, not *to* her. Alex never says, 'I will not speak', but we know that that is her decision. The 'gap' is filled by the action of putting away the medals, and saying briskly, 'So what's the schedule for tomorrow?'<sup>46</sup>

Why does Liv deliver a lecture on gender politics in the dying moments of the play? Surely not to convince Alex, or the audience. This speech—'so seemingly 'irrelevant, ... arbitrary, or inappropriate',<sup>47</sup> is, I believe, critically important to a reading of the ending. I have suggested that the play might be described as showing characters 'living within politics'. The personal must be excluded from this world. Families must be neglected. The sexual life must be sacrificed. Death must be denied. But the play shows that 'living within politics' is ultimately impossible. One can only 'live within time'. One cannot avoid the loss and suffering that this brings. It is a failed attempt to avoid living 'within time'—to avoid loss (except the loss of a seat or an election) and suffering (other than defeat at the ballot box). These characters wear their masks, make their gestures, deliver their lines, but life still finds them out. The personal is *not* the political but not in the sense that Liv is arguing. The personal is what makes us human. The personal is a mystery richer than any ideology or creed. We suffer. We are broken. It makes us better people. 'It help, at times, to suffer into truth'.<sup>48</sup>

One review of *The Other Woman* caught a glimpse of the mystery that lies at the heart of the play. 'A most disappointing end to what had promised so much. Just

<sup>44</sup> Gilman, *Chekhov's Plays*, p. 152. Gilman is quoting from Georg Buchner's *Woyzeck*.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>46</sup> Nimmo, 'The Other Woman', p. 70.

<sup>47</sup> Gilman, *Chekhov's Plays*, p. 157.

<sup>48</sup> Aeschylus, *The Oresteia.*, trans. R. Fagles (Middlesex, 1966) p. 254.

like politics, eh?<sup>49</sup> The reviewer understands that the play wants to disappoint any hopes in the audience that it will answer such questions as:

If she [Alex] knows she was the manipulative Pat's "project", why did she play along? If she started out with a strong sense of injustice, why succumb to all the moral trade-offs? And—the big question—just why can't she admit to a mistake?<sup>50</sup>

One might ask the sisters why they don't pack their bags and catch the next train to Moscow.

Both plays offer neither 'solutions nor prescriptions'<sup>51</sup>, but rather a nagging sense of what it takes to 'go on'. *Three Sisters* is the more hopeful play. Stamina in the service of love and truth and compassion can only be a good thing. The desire to 'do good', which is what motivates many who enter politics, can become a mask for self-interest, and staying-power is put in the service of staying in power.

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<sup>49</sup> R. Banks, 'Pale Politics', *The West Australian*, Today, July 12, 2002, p. 7.

<sup>50</sup> V. Laurie, 'Politics writ raw', *The Australian*, July 12, 2002, p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> Gilman, *The Making of a Modern Drama*, p. 123.



Banana Split and the ending of comedy

Comedy usually moves towards a happy ending, and  
the normal response of the audience to a happy ending  
is “this should be”

—Northrop Frye, *The Mythos of Spring: Comedy*

It is often the continued presence of sex, gluttony,  
melancholy, and even the shadow of death that gives  
the happy end some resilience and authority

—Zvi Jagendorf, *The Happy End of Comedy*

If *The Other Woman* can be described in terms of ‘going on’, then *Banana Split* might be said to be about ‘letting go’: a woman finally relinquishes her ex-husband. This could be the subject of tragedy but *Banana Split* is described as a comedy. What makes a play a comedy is not straight-forward, as we can see from the number of variations on the theme: comedy of the absurd, black comedy, romantic comedy, tragi-comedy, comedy of manners, or, in the case of *Banana Split*, a ‘bitter-sweet comedy’. However, as Frye (1957) notes, ‘comedy usually moves towards a happy ending’.<sup>1</sup> In this section of the essay I shall explore the ending of comedy to see whether, and, if so, in what way, it is ‘happy’. I shall weave into this discussion an analysis of the ending of *Banana Split*.

There are two distinct kinds of happy endings: what Jagendorf (1984) calls the ‘divinely sanctioned riot’ of Old Comedy<sup>2</sup>, and what Nelson (1990) describes as the ‘movement towards harmony, reconciliation, happiness’ and Frye (1957), as the ‘joy, reconciliation, and new beginnings’, of New Comedy.<sup>3</sup> The first is authorized by the gods, the second, negotiated by society through the offices of fathers and brothers (and sometimes mothers and sisters). Old Comedy is characterised by ‘fantastic and farcical incidents, slanging matches, cheerful obscenities, and

<sup>1</sup> N. Frye, ‘The Mythos of Spring: Comedy’, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 167. Kermode has recently noted that ‘very few people pay much attention to Frye’ who ‘for a while ruled the world’. M. Payne and J. Schad (eds.), *life.after.theory* (London, 2003), p. 59. This is a warning to those who currently rule the world of literary theory.

<sup>2</sup> Z. Jagendorf, *The Happy End of Comedy* (Newark, 1984), p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> T.G.A.Nelson, *Comedy: An introduction to Comedy in Literature, Drama and Cinema* (Oxford, 1990), p. 2.

uninhibited political satire'.<sup>4</sup> New Comedy, in contrast, focuses on the family, is gentler in tone, and often involves courtship and marriage. Old Comedy ends in laughter; New Comedy in harmony. Old remains unfeeling, or antagonistic even, towards its characters; New is sympathetic and forgiving. Old is satirical and instructive; New is sentimental and, at the end of the play, wants only to give pleasure. These distinctions are rooted in a particular time and place,<sup>5</sup> and are more extreme in theory than in practice (there can be laughter *and* harmony at the end), but they do provide a useful, if crude, scale on which to plot the happy ending of *Banana Split*.

Does *Banana Split* end in laughter or harmony? To answer this question, I must first examine the play's beginning, because it is the beginning that signals how the ending will be experienced: whether the audience will laugh at the characters' continuing predicament or share in their experience of reconciliation and harmony. From the moment the play begins (and even earlier—when pre-publicity is read) the audience knows that the play will end happily—if not for the characters, then for the audience. Convention demands it. A comedy has a happy ending. But the same comic situation will be treated differently by different playwrights; it is in the play's beginning that we see what this treatment will be. What is the playwright's attitude to his material? Are we to laugh at Marnie, Robert, Ruth and Jamie, at the end of *Banana Split*? Or are we to hope that—somehow—everything will turn out well—for some of them? The beginning gives us the clues we need.

Nelson (1990) has said that Old Comedy is characterised by 'fantastic and farcical incidents'.<sup>6</sup> There is something 'fantastic and farcical' about Ruth's plan to send her ex-partner, Jamie, to try to seduce her new partner Robert's ex-wife, Marnie. The ex-wife who will not 'let go' is no longer to be admired for her constancy and pitied for her suffering; rather, she is to be laughed at for her pig-headedness and scorned for her unreasonableness. As Ruth, the financial adviser, explains to the audience, 'You can't hold on to a non-performing stock'.<sup>7</sup> Marnie must be helped to begin a new life—without Robert.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> The leading dramatist of Old Comedy was Aristophanes (c.448-c.380 B.C.), and New Comedy, Menander (c.343-292 B.C.).

<sup>6</sup> Nelson, *Comedy*, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> H. Nimmo, 'Banana Split' (Unpublished Edith Cowan PhD Thesis, 2004), p. 33.

The trouble is that Robert *is* performing for Marnie; he continues to dance to her tune. When she phones him, demanding his presence in the family home to fix the loose tiles on the roof, or replace the rotting boards in the verandah, he obliges. When she rings on her mobile to tell him that she is ‘on a cliff and ... [is] going to jump into the sea’, he immediately contacts the police: ‘I could hear the waves striking the rocks below’.<sup>8</sup> Ruth is less than impressed:

(*To the audience.*) She wasn’t on any cliff. There weren’t any waves striking the rocks below. She was in the spa. Drinking Scotch. On the rocks.<sup>9</sup>

Ruth’s lines of dialogue are sharp and witty and self-conscious, with their play on Robert’s words. They are addressed directly to the audience. She is doing what many second wives (or husbands or *partners*—the play mocks the language of the new orthodoxy), do. She is complaining about the ex-wife in the presence of a third party but in a way that is kept ‘light’ and ‘amusing’; she is performing for the audience. Robert also plays his part. This lowers the emotional temperature. We are not to feel sorry for these characters. Ruth asks us to laugh with her at Marnie (and Robert)—and we do. She makes Marnie sound like a monster, and how could Robert be so weak? But we also laugh *at* Ruth. How can she be so calculating about relationships? What brought her to such an absurd plan?<sup>10</sup>

New Comedy often ends in marriage but *Banana Split* begins with a marriage that will not end. The wedding anniversary—traditionally a time for the celebration and renewal of the marriage vows—is used by the plotters to bring about a final repudiation of those vows. The action of the play becomes a kind of erotic Pass-the-Parcel. Ruth passes Jamie to Marnie who has (reluctantly) passed Robert to Ruth. Ruth and Jamie are matter-of-fact about the planned seduction; Ruth is solving a problem and Jamie is doing a favour for his ‘best friend’. Robert is scandalised when he realises the full implications of the plot, but finds himself becoming sexually excited as he and Ruth act out what they imagine will happen when Jamie meets Marnie. We are not made to feel that marriage brings reconciliation and joy; it is an intolerable burden, which cannot be put down even when the bond has been legally

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Is the plan really so absurd, given the ubiquitous nature of exes in contemporary society? And is her attitude to marriage so very calculating? Jane Austen might have been more sympathetic.

dissolved.

The final straw for Ruth is that Robert is expected to spend the evening of the anniversary of his wedding to Marnie, *with* Marnie, even though he has been divorced *from* Marnie for over two years. This year, Ruth has decided that her ex-partner Jamie will go in Robert's place. Jamie is attractive to women—Robert accuses him of 'flicking his tongue' like a 'lounge lizard'.<sup>11</sup> Ruth believes that the unsuspecting Marnie will not be able to resist him. She will ask him to stay for dinner. And after the dessert—*Banana Split*, all that Marnie could 'cook' when she and Robert first married—is consumed, who knows what might happen?

The 'set up' of *Banana Split* seems to invite cynical laughter in the same way that the 'machinery' of the Old Comedy, *Lysistrata*—the decision of the women to deny their menfolk sex until they call off the war—invites laughter. Both plays treat essentially serious subjects as objects for laughter. Both plays are somewhat unforgiving, antagonistic even, to their characters, who display a mixture of weakness and self-interest. Both plays do have a central female character who is prepared to take a stand, but not in a noble or heroic manner. She is prepared to use trickery and deceit. These characters are not going to find happiness. The ending will not lead to joy and reconciliation, just a return to the status quo. At the beginning of *Banana Split* we do not believe that the ending will be happy for the characters. They will be largely unchanged; their conflicts will remain. There will be a truce rather than an end to hostilities.

Jamie is a kind of comic servant or rogue, a character often present in New Comedy.<sup>12</sup> He carries out Ruth's plan almost as a servant would, although he disputes Marnie's assertion that he was 'sent'. Marnie is neither beautiful nor young. She is quite possibly mad. She is extremely angry. Is Jamie meekly taking his bottle of Cab. Sav. 97 into the Gorgon's lair simply to please his best friend that he doesn't sleep with? Or does the servant, by performing this service, wish once more to become the master? Jamie is also something of a rogue. What he is doing is not the actions of a 'decent bloke'. He seems to be getting too much fun out of it. He is a trickster, and we like to see him get his come-uppance when Marnie succeeds in playing a trick on him.

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<sup>11</sup> Nimmo, 'Banana Split', p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Nelson, *Comedy*, p. 20.

Is it possible to argue for another interpretation of the beginning of the play? According to Nelson (1990), New Comedy often involves a 'plot in which a young man and a young woman succeed in overcoming obstacles to their marriage'.<sup>13</sup> It is true that Ruth and Robert are not young and that they are already living together, but they *do* want to marry and Marnie is an impediment to that joyful event—not in the legal sense, but as a malignant presence—with her insistent phone calls and her furious unhappiness. She refuses to accept Ruth's existence. She won't have her name mentioned. She won't meet her. She will continue to treat Robert as if he were her husband. They will continue to celebrate their wedding anniversary every year, with *Banana Split*.

Marnie is an obstacle, but one created as much by Robert's guilt-ridden policy of appeasement as by her tactics of guerrilla warfare. He will not say 'no' to his ex-wife, and Ruth is beginning to doubt him. Robert does have his breaking point and that comes when Marnie refuses to give him the Balinese housegod. This housegod had been by the door of the losman where Robert and Marnie had spent their honeymoon. Every time he passed through the door, he had run his hand over the '[w]ooden, weathered, wise, welcoming' house god.<sup>14</sup> Marnie was pregnant. He had married her to 'do the right thing'. He drew strength from his contact with a spirituality he didn't understand and didn't share. Now he has planned the whole look of the restaurant around the housegod but Marnie won't give it to him. Furthermore she has tricked him into thinking she was going to kill herself.

Marnie does eventually succumb. Jamie is very attractive. It *has* been a long time. And this is the man who made love to the woman who now makes love to her husband. He's almost *family*. Ruth doesn't want Jamie to fall in love with Marnie (How could he?). She wants him to sever the emotional ties that still bind Robert to his ex-wife. So long as Marnie remains faithful to Robert then Robert will feel guilty about leaving Marnie. He will not be able to say 'no' to her demands. She must be tricked into inconstancy.

There are other romantic complications. Jamie tells Marnie that Ruth is his 'best friend', but makes it obvious that he is hurt and bewildered by the breaking-off of their relationship as lovers. Similarly, Ruth explains to Robert that Jamie is 'my

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Nimmo, 'Banana Split', p. 11.

best friend that I don't sleep with',<sup>15</sup> but she also seems to carry scars. It is difficult to predict who is going to get whom at the end of the play. The audience's sympathy might well lie with Marnie, as she is the only one who is not part of the initial 'trick'. If this is so, then Marnie must achieve a measure of happiness at the end of the play. Should she end up with Robert, the man she professes to love, or Jamie, the man of the future—or neither?<sup>16</sup> Smith (1968) has noted that 'weddings ... [have] lost their familiar closural function'.<sup>17</sup> There is now no need for Marnie to marry anyone. It is almost as though we have Old Comedy, in the scenes involving Jamie and Marnie, and New Comedy in the scenes between Robert and Ruth. Will the comedy come from seeing Ruth and Robert free themselves from the 'blocking characters' of Marnie—the ex-wife who 'won't let go', and Jamie—the boyfriend who 'hangs around':

At the beginning of the play the obstructing characters are in charge of the play's society, and the audience recognizes that they are imposters.<sup>18</sup>

Will *Banana Split* end with the unmasking of the imposters?

*Banana Split* begins with an imposture, but the trick is not only played upon Marnie (Jamie goes in Robert's place), but also upon the audience. One actor plays both Jamie and Robert, another, Ruth and Marnie. The trick is played in front of the audience, signalled by a lighting change, perhaps a hint of gamelan, and minimal changes of costume—baseball cap on, glasses off. We see Robert become the actor who becomes Jamie who later becomes the actor who becomes Robert. Before this transformation happens, we see Robert pretending to be Jamie and Ruth pretending to be Marnie, as they act out what they think might be happening when Marnie meets Jamie. Robert 'plays' Jamie as a kind of Peter Pan on heat (thus revealing his own insecurity, Why did Ruth leave him for me?), and Ruth 'plays' Marnie as plodding around the house in a floral sack (thus revealing *her* insecurity, What does Robert see in her?). We laugh with Ruth and Robert *at* Marnie and Jamie. We approve of their trick. Robert and Ruth are people like us. Marnie and Jamie are not. But it is not so simple.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> A different play (and playwright, say Sarah Daniels) might have had her ending up with Ruth.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, *Poetic Closure*, p. 121.

<sup>18</sup> Frye, 'Mythos of Spring', p. 163.

Jagendorf (1984) notes that at the end of the play we see ‘live actors who are in their role one moment and out of it the next’.<sup>19</sup> In *Banana Split* we see live actors change from one character to another. What effect does this have on the comedy? Trickery is a feature of both Old and New Comedy. Volpone pretends to be dying to exploit the avarice of his neighbours.<sup>20</sup> Trickery is in the service of satire. Viola and Rosalind pretend to be boys at times of peril but the trick allows them the freedom to woo (and be wooed) by the men that they love.<sup>21</sup> Trickery is now in the service of romance. In *Banana Split* the trickery turns ‘the experience of theater [sic] into its subject’. It can thus, be described as ‘metatheatrical’.<sup>22</sup> It is for the intellectual pleasure of the audience, not in service of the story. The play could just as easily use four actors. The audience would find it less confusing. They are likely to empathise more with the characters if they are not so aware of the actors playing them. The doubling could become a ‘gimmick’ that will get in the way of the audience’s enjoyment of the comic situation. Actors often say they dislike playing more than one character, because it gets in the way of *their* commitment to the character. There are severe limitations. I cannot have together on stage Ruth *and* Marnie, or Jamie *and* Robert. I cannot have three people on stage, only a series of two, a series of *couples*. Why, then, might I have decided to use only two actors?<sup>23</sup>

One of the great pleasures of comedy is watching comic actors: Keaton, Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, Mae West, Groucho Marx. By using only two actors, *Banana Split* puts the focus on the acting, and requires it to be virtuoso, especially when, for example, we learn (from Marnie) that Ruth is an ‘stick-insect on speed’<sup>24</sup> and (from Ruth ) that Marnie is a ‘fat cow in a floral sack’.<sup>25</sup> There is an element of exaggeration in both these descriptions but it is fair to ask, how is one actor going to switch back and forth between two such different women? The dramatic text is likely to be ‘reworked’ on the basis of what the actors suggest as ways of differentiating between the characters. There will be great pleasure in watching what the actors can

<sup>19</sup> Jagendorf, *Happy End of Comedy*, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> B. Jonson, ‘Volpone’, J.M. Morrell (ed.) *English Comedies* (London, 1950) pp. 11-129.

<sup>21</sup> Rosalind in *As You like It*, and Viola in *Twelfth Night*.

<sup>22</sup> Schlueter, *Dramatic Closure*, p. 75.

<sup>23</sup> There is the obvious economic advantage. There is also the possibility of casting actors who are married to each other, and so bring another layer of ‘coupling’ to the play.

<sup>24</sup> Nimmo, ‘Banana Split’, p. 21.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

do with their parts and how they effect the transformation from one character to the other. This is how Brecht describes the desired attitude of the actor:

At no moment must he go so far as to be wholly transformed into the character played....He has just to show the character ...<sup>26</sup>

A few lines further on, he states his principle: 'that the actor appears on the stage in a double role'.<sup>27</sup> In *Banana Split* we have the actor on stage showing us the transformation from actor to, either Ruth or, Marnie. This is, as Esslin (1984) notes in reference to Brecht, 'acting in quotation marks'.<sup>28</sup>

There is a kind of unmasking of the impostors in Act Two. Jamie is played without the baseball cap (presumably he has stopped being so adolescent) and Ruth has taken to wearing contact lenses (and Marnie has lost weight). The unmasking makes the task of distinguishing between characters more difficult, because there are less visual cues. There continues to be what Jagendorf (1984) calls 'deadlock'.<sup>29</sup> Marnie can never meet Ruth. Jamie and Robert will never get closer than nodding to each other from a distance.<sup>30</sup> However, the trick implies an ultimate reconciliation. Each man—Robert and Jamie—will have both Ruth *and* Marnie. Each woman will have both men. Ruth might leave Robert to return to Jamie but because the same actor plays both characters, then she is also returning to Robert. Jamie abandons Marnie to reconcile with Ruth, but in taking up with Ruth he also takes up with Marnie.

Apart from Marnie's opening speech to the audience,<sup>31</sup> and Jamie's meditation on Kierkegaard,<sup>32</sup> there is no direct address to the audience in Act Two. The pace quickens; there are faster and more frequent, transformations between characters. There is the (impossible) possibility of characters confronting their double. Marnie goes outside, returning almost immediately to announce that Ruth is 'having hysterics in my driveway'.<sup>33</sup> Robert goes into the kitchen and re-enters the

<sup>26</sup> J. Willet (ed. & trans.). *Brecht on Theatre* (London, 1964) p. 193.

<sup>27</sup> He goes on, 'as Laughton and as Galileo; that the showman Laughton does not disappear in the Galileo whom he is showing ... that Laughton is actually there, standing on stage and showing us what he imagines Galileo to have been'. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>28</sup> M. Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils* (London, 1984), p. 120.

<sup>29</sup> Jagendorf, *Happy End of Comedy*, p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> Nimmo, 'Banana Split', p. 24.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.



house through the front door—as Jamie. The play is approaching farce. The rhythm of comedy demands an ever-increasing pace, and yet suddenly it must stop. But how? As Jagendorf (1984) notes, the comic ending is a ‘convention, an agreement between poet and spectator rather than a necessary outcome of the material’.<sup>34</sup> This is Frye’s ‘this should be’.<sup>35</sup> In Old Comedy, ‘[r]iot is an acceptable ending’ ...because exuberance and unrestrained vitality are appropriate to the unambiguous victories that Aristophanes’ endings celebrate’.<sup>36</sup> The ‘riot’ is sanctioned by the gods. Order and harmony will return. The world will return to normal; there will be no change in the rules. *Lysistrata* and the other women might have stopped the war but they return home to their husbands’ control.<sup>37</sup> In New Comedy there must be change, for without change there can be no reconciliation. In both New and Old Comedy, the ‘final sequence itself, so often a tour de force of quick changes, sudden revelations, surprising confrontations, not only unties all the knots, but draws the spectator’s attention to the artistry of both poet and performer’.<sup>38</sup>

If as Nelson says, ‘[c]omedy often takes the form of a contest in which some characters win while others lose’,<sup>39</sup> then it might be useful to see who wins and who loses at the end of *Banana Split*. In Old Comedy the status-quo is the biggest winner. The riot is over, the rule of the gods continues. In New Comedy there is often some change and it is usually those characters who have exemplified love and reconciliation who win; it is the abbess who instructs the legalistic Duke, ‘After so long grief, such nativity’, in *The Comedy of Errors*.<sup>40</sup> At the end of *Banana Split*, Jamie and Ruth would seem to be winners. They have each other, although for some members of the audience that might seem a mixed blessing. Ruth is a woman who allows a risk assessment profile to make the important decisions in her life, Jamie a man who has only just stopped wearing his baseball cap the wrong way round. We do not see their reconciliation; it is reported to us. It seems that it is not a cause for celebration but of betrayal. Jamie has only just declared his love for Marnie. Ruth is carrying Robert’s child. Jamie and Ruth are going to get married but this is surely not

<sup>34</sup> Jagendorf, *Happy End of Comedy*, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Frye, ‘Mythos of Spring’, p. 168.

<sup>36</sup> Jagendorf, *Happy End of Comedy*, p. 23.

<sup>37</sup> Aristophanes. *Lysistrata* (trans.) Douglass Parker (New York, 1970).

<sup>38</sup> Jagendorf, *Happy End of Comedy*, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> Nelson, *Comedy*, p. 181.

<sup>40</sup> W. Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors* (Middlesex, 1972), p. 117.

to be read as a happy ending.<sup>41</sup> The unborn child seems to be a loser. But I think we feel that Marnie is better off without Jamie, and Robert is better off without Ruth. There was something temporary about these relationships. Robert says about Ruth's minimalist apartment, 'the next thing to go will be me'.<sup>42</sup> Marnie feels there was a use-by-date on her affair with Jamie. By the end of the play Marnie is at ease with herself. Ruth, who began the play, cool and composed, is by the end, an emotional wreck. The end of Marnie's emotional journey is the beginning of Ruth's. Similarly, Robert ends the play in a state of confusion about his feelings for Marnie and Ruth, whereas Jamie is clear that he loves, and has always loved, Ruth.

Howard Barker has stated that the 'theatre of humanism, radical criticism and celebration seeks a single end, the reassurance of the audience, the satisfaction of the bargain struck at the box office between the purchasers of comfort and the suppliers of delight'.<sup>43</sup> A playwright who writes a comedy cannot avoid wanting to please an audience. We want to make them laugh—perhaps not a loud guffaw, perhaps only a quiet chuckle—but we do want them to laugh. We do not necessarily want to reassure or comfort the audience. People also laugh when they feel uncomfortable. They laugh when they appreciate the foolishness of their own prejudices, and the playwright's wit in reaching under their guard.<sup>44</sup> What is the happy ending of *Banana Split*? How does the play end and how does that ending confirm the beginning?

No one is getting married at the end of the play, although there is the off-stage reconciliation of Jamie and Ruth. This presumably means that Ruth and Robert will eventually be getting a divorce. Marnie has rejected Robert's offer of a reconciliation (made while they were sharing a bowl of Banana Split),<sup>45</sup> but Robert's last action—and the last action in the play—leaves the hope that a reconciliation may happen in the future. Marnie is going off to travel on her own, but she is not hoping to emulate

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<sup>41</sup> When *Banana Split* was workshopped at the ANPC conference, the actors, especially the actor playing the two women, were adamant that the baby should 'go', believing that the play would not have a happy ending if Ruth was pregnant to Robert, and not just thinking about it.

<sup>42</sup> Nimmo, 'Banana Split', p. 72.

<sup>43</sup> Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, p. 116.

<sup>44</sup> One of my husband's colleagues, after seeing my play, *One Small Step*, said to me: 'I was expecting a feminist rant but it was really quite funny'.

<sup>45</sup> Frye notes that food was a characteristic of Greek Middle Comedy with 'the cook' there 'to bustle and order about and make long speeches about the mysteries of cooking'. Frye, 'Mythos of Spring', p. 176.

Shirley Valentine.<sup>46</sup> She is going to return. Pregnancy or birth is often seen as a suitable ending for New Comedy with its promise of new hope and future life, but the child in *Banana Split* will bring further complications as well as joy, for it will be Ruth's child fathered by Robert, raised by Jamie, connected to Marnie through the twins. The child will bind them together, but perhaps not happily. How will the audience react to the presence of the child? We have had the off-stage presence of the twins but they have been a comedic device rather than real people. In a reading of an earlier draft of *Banana Split*, the actor playing Ruth and Marnie was adamant that I should remove the child. She suggested that Ruth should only *suggest* to Robert that they should have a child; she shouldn't actually be pregnant. If she were pregnant then, the actor believed, the audience would reject the ending. It would make the audience feel uncomfortable. It would not be a happy ending. It would not be funny. I disagree. I think that the play needs the baby, for, as Jagendorf (1984) notes '[i]t is often the continued presence of sex, gluttony, melancholy, and even the shadow of death that gives the happy end some resilience and authority'.<sup>47</sup> The baby is going to complicate matters, of course, but it does point to a future where the characters will learn to be less deluded and more responsible.<sup>48</sup> Or perhaps it is my way of smuggling a bit of 'reality' into the comic form.

Until the play has a production (and a rehearsal for that production), the ending of the dramatic text must remain provisional. This is not to say that it would be radically changed; I think that is highly unlikely. The conventions of this kind of comedy mean that the audience knows that the ending is going to involve some permutation of the four characters. No one is going to die. No new character will be introduced. It will be a question of who ends up with whom. We put great store on originality and subverting expectations, but both Old and New Comedy got their effect from following convention. At that time, as Zagagi (1994) notes in her study of Menander, '[v]ariations on a given theme were far more likely to stimulate the

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<sup>46</sup> W. Russell. *Shirley Valentine and One for the Road* (London, 1988). Shirley Valentine goes to a Greek island for a holiday (from her husband) but stays on. Like *Banana Split* the play ends with the hope of their eventual reconciliation.

<sup>47</sup> Jagendorf, *Happy End of Comedy*, p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> We also know that Marnie and Robert have managed to successfully raise children from a similarly unpromising start.

imagination [of the audience]'.<sup>49</sup> The audience is likely to know that there will only be two actors; pre-publicity for the play will exploit this 'trick'. Furthermore, the title, *Banana Split*, with its hint of 'slapstick' and pratfalls will alert the audience to both the likelihood of physical comedy, and the 'topic'—divorce. It also points to verbal dexterity. Most of all it signals that this will be a 'bitter-sweet' comedy.<sup>50</sup>

I did consider an 'uber-ending', where the glow of the housegod would bring back Jamie and Ruth, who would then inform the audience that they have made a mistake. Jamie does love Marnie. Ruth does love Robert. They are going to find them (at the airport) and tell them this. This would mean that that the child will be raised by both mother *and* father (and remove any concerns about the 'happy ending'), and that Marnie will *not* have to eat alone in restaurants, as Jamie will now be meeting her at X. This would be more of an Old Comedy ending, with its 'divinely-sanctioned riot'<sup>51</sup>, but because few in the audience will believe (or admit to believing), in divinely-sanctioned anything, then they will 'read' this ending as an ironic comment by the playwright on their desire for a happy ending. I decided to omit this ending because I wanted the audience to see the happy ending in the reconciliation of old foes, and in Robert's hope (divinely-sanctioned?) that, sometime in the future, he and Marnie might decide to 'give it another go'. Marnie reveals her 'trick' with the Balinese housegod, which finally releases Robert from his guilt over his reluctance to marry her. This 'New Comedy' ending is, no doubt, just as unbelievable as the 'Old Comedy' ending I decided against, but it will be, I suspect, more palatable to the audience, or perhaps I should say, *my* audience: Marnie needs to have her year away; she is better off without Jamie; Robert is a possibility. The ending reflects the contemporary preference for the certainty of an amicable divorce over the risk of a happy marriage. There is also the final question of whether Marnie is telling the truth about the housegod. Is this yet another 'trick'?<sup>52</sup>

I also considered having Robert use the audience's desire for a happy ending as part of his appeal to Marnie. Pointing to the audience, he would tell her, '*They*

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<sup>49</sup> N. Zagagi, *The Comedy of Menander* (London, 1994), p. 15. She also notes the link between the playwright's success and his giving the audience what it wants.

<sup>50</sup> The title of a play should 'imply something important about the play's meaning,' Catron, *Elements of Playwriting*, p. 162.

<sup>51</sup> Jagendorf, *Happy End of Comedy*, p. 23.

<sup>52</sup> Is there such a thing as a Balinese houegod?

want us to get back together'. Marnie disagrees. She believes the audience is beyond such conventions. And, anyway, a woman returning to her (ex-) husband, could only be considered as the ending of tragedy—or farce. I had some fun with this, but in the end, decided that at this point in the play I wanted the audience to 'feel' rather than 'think'. I want them to feel the anxiety and doubt of the younger Marnie and Robert, and the compassion the older Marnie and Robert feel for those younger selves. This 'sadness' is swiftly punctured by the knowledge of Marnie's perfidy, which reminds us (and Robert) of the 'trick' that Robert played on Ruth. Then we see Robert's final action. He touches the housegod. It may have been a trick, but he is determined to believe. He—perhaps like the playwright—is a 'dag': 'We are not ironic. We wear our hearts on our sleeves, and those sleeves are always polyester'.<sup>53</sup>

Is it a problem for the play that it cannot decide whether it is Old or New comedy? Nelson says, no: 'Few good comedies are homogenous in tone and content'.<sup>54</sup> His definition of comedy suggests 'two conflicting elements, one being laughter (often mocking, derisive, or discordant), and the other being the movement of a story towards an ending characterized by harmony, festivity, and celebration'.<sup>55</sup> *Banana Split* partakes of both these elements. At the end there is laughter but also a muted sense of festivity and celebration. The happy ending must be achieved and yet the machine of much comedy is difficult to 'tame'. 'Obsessions are obstinate, self-delusion is deeply-rooted, and ingrained folly is incurable'.<sup>56</sup> In comedy just about anything can happen, and yet it must end happily. This is why endings are more difficult in comedy than in tragedy where we see a fate played out from the beginning.

We can say that the ending of *Banana Split* embraces both a period of 'divinely inspired riot' followed by reconciliation of sorts. There is no joy but surely there is hope, if only in the form of the house god, even though it was bought and not given. There are 'new beginnings'; there will be a marriage and a birth. The death of her mother has given Marnie the opportunity to pursue her dream. Robert has achieved his, even if he now wonders whether it was really worth it. No one has emerged unscathed; all have been revealed as less than admirable. By the tricks they

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<sup>53</sup> Nimmo, 'Banana Split', p. 46.

<sup>54</sup> Nelson, *Comedy*, p. 22.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Jagendorf, *Happy End of Comedy*, p. 12.

have played on each other they have made fools of themselves but they are no longer the monsters they seemed to be at the beginning of the play. This is, perhaps, as Nelson (1990) suggests, the 'most honest ending' because it 'returns us to the inadequacies of the world ..., to the awareness that life is a struggle in which nobody can always be on the winning side, and where each of us will sometimes fill the role of victim, scapegoat, or fool'.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Nelson, *Comedy*, p. 186.

*Awa' the Crow Road: writing the end for the listener.*

The beginning is everything  
—Tim Crook, *Radio Drama*

We were Listeners; today's audience are Watchers  
—Barry Humphries, *My Life as Me*

According to Tim Crook (1999), radio drama 'is one of the most unappreciated and underrated literary forms of the twentieth century'.<sup>1</sup> Certainly this seems true when considering other forms of 'performance writing'. There is a great deal of critical writing on film, television and theatre; there is almost no discussion of radio drama in literary journals, even in those that focus on critiquing popular culture, for radio drama is no longer a popular form. The first play written specifically for radio — a scene from *Julius Caesar*—was broadcast as recently as 1922,<sup>2</sup> but the 'golden age' of radio drama was the twenty or so years before television took over as the mass medium of choice.<sup>3</sup> The 'golden age' of literary theory came too late to pay much attention to radio, although Marshall McLuhan (1967) did describe it as a 'hot' medium (as opposed to the 'cool' medium of television) because it has 'high definition' which is 'the state of being well filled with data'.<sup>4</sup> McLuhan goes on to say that 'hot' media, because they provide so much, create an audience of passive recipients. Radio, therefore, does not require much of its listeners.<sup>5</sup> Crook (1999) disagrees.<sup>6</sup> He believes, as I do, that the radio audience has a great deal to do, especially when it is listening to radio drama. How does the playwright writes the ending for the listener? Is it different from writing the ending of a stage play? How does radio drama treat time? What conventions are there to help the writer of radio drama? Are there three texts (dramatic, production and performance) when writing for radio, and if so, how are these created? Crook (1999) agrees with McLuhan that radio returned 'the spoken word and the human ear' to an

<sup>1</sup> T. Crook, *Radio Drama* (London, 1999), p. 3. This book has an excellent audio drama bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> I. Rodger, *Radio Drama* (London, 1982), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> A bit longer in Australia, where television did not arrive until the late 1950s.

<sup>4</sup> M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (London, 1964), p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. He confuses his argument by asserting that the telephone is a cool medium, 'because the ear is given a meager (sic) amount of information'. Surely radio also relies on the ear?

<sup>6</sup> Crook, *Radio Drama*, p. 9.

importance which had been lost since the invention of print, and so created ‘the retribalised electronic age’.<sup>7</sup> Yet, in spite of this—or perhaps because of this—radio drama has largely been excluded from the critical discourse,<sup>8</sup> perhaps because, as Barry Humphries notes, today we are Watchers rather than Listeners.<sup>9</sup> How do you write for the listener?

Opinions have differed. Tyrone Guthrie (1931) wanted writers of radio drama to ‘explore the purely symphonic possibilities’ by using ‘contrasting vocal colour, changing tempo, varying pitch’.<sup>10</sup> Writing radio drama was like composing music. The American poet, Archibald MacLeish (1937), compared radio drama to poetry, for ‘only the ear is engaged and the ear is already half poet’.<sup>11</sup> The writer should focus on word choice and rhythm. Radio drama has also been described as having the ‘flexibility of film’; it can move quickly from short scene to short scene, ‘each with its own vividness but meaningless except in relation to the whole’.<sup>12</sup> Here, montage creates the drama. Raban (1980) suggested that radio drama is like the novel because in both forms, ‘characters and places have room to grow in the space between the listener’s ear and the pattern of coded symbols being transmitted from the radio receiver’.<sup>13</sup> The writer does not have to be too ‘literal’. Radio drama has also been compared to (and indeed, did develop from), the radio feature with its combination of narration, interview (dialogue) and linking music and sound effects. There continues to be a debate between those who think radio drama is primarily about poetic language and those who think it is primarily about story. Both these (extreme) positions are more palatable than the view that says that radio drama is primarily about sound.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Crook, *Radio Drama*, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Films are widely reviewed; even those that do not have a cinema release and go straight to video, will be previewed when they appear on television. A professionally-produced stage play, no matter how small and obscure the theatre in which it is staged, will usually be reviewed—somewhere. In contrast, no radio plays broadcast in Australia are reviewed. Very few are previewed. Furthermore, few courses in writing radio drama are offered at Australian universities. Some radio plays are published but audio copies of the radio production are rarely available for sale. Audio-books are just that—recordings of book-readings. Yet, relatively large numbers of people still listen to, and enjoy, radio drama, and writers continue to writing for the form.

<sup>9</sup> B. Humphries, *Myself as Me* (Camberwell, 2002), p. 177.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Rodger, *Radio Drama*, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> A. MacLeish, *The Fall of the City* (London, 1937), p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> D. McWhinnie, *The Art of Radio* (London, 1959) quoted in Rodger, *Radio Drama*, p. 116.

<sup>13</sup> J. Raban, ‘Icon or symbol: the writer and the medium’, P. Lewis (ed.) *Radio Drama* (London, 1980), p. 81.

<sup>14</sup> I shall return to this later in the essay.



Most commentators seem to agree on one thing—that radio drama is not a stage play without the costumes and set. Guthrie (1931) was particularly scathing about the relative powers of stage and radio. The (imaginative) radio writer ‘will create illusions infinitely more romantic than the tawdry grottos of the stage’.<sup>15</sup> Radio drama has the ability to create *better* costumes and sets. However, at the time that Guthrie was asserting the difference between the radio drama and the stage play, the BBC was instructing its listeners to close the door, turn off the lights and sit down—as if they were at the theatre. We did close the door and sit down, arranging ourselves, in the semi-darkness, in a semi-circle around the radiogram (walnut veneer, and plenty of it). We sat in silence. We did not move. We listened. Later, as the radiogram gave way to the ‘trannie’ or car radio, we began listening while we did something else—ironing, perhaps, or lying on the beach, or dying, or driving to work. We were no longer listening in the company of others—we were on our own—and the essential difference between the stage play and the radio drama became apparent; it was written for the Listener and not the Watchers.

When I first began writing for radio, I was advised to write for a blind man who must never know that he is blind. This seems to suggest that the writer must ignore the visual, and concentrate on the aural, but it does, in fact, mean the exact opposite. The words I write in the dramatic text will be broadcast as sounds but will, if they are written with skill, be experienced by the listener as ‘pictures’; the blind will see.<sup>16</sup> Radio drama ‘is not only psychologically visual but also experienced by most people in physical visual space as well as acoustic space’.<sup>17</sup> The dialogue embodies the actors and moves them around in space (helped by their varying distance from the microphones). The sound effects become the costumes, sets and lighting. But whereas for the watchers in the theatre, the drama is over *there*, for the listener, the drama is *here*. As Levy (2002) suggests, radio drama is ‘theatre within the skull’.<sup>18</sup> To use a different metaphor, it is as if the listener is running a film of the drama in his mind. The listener is both projectionist and what is projected.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Rodger, *Radio Drama*, p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> I have recently become aware of an unpublished MA thesis by C. Burgess, ‘Sight to the ‘blind’: the stimulation of the imagination through techniques of audio drama production for radio’ (Goldsmiths College, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> Crook, *Radio Drama*, p. 64.

<sup>18</sup> S. Levy, *Samuel Beckett’s Self-Referential Drama* (Brighton, 2002), p. 79.

This is not as easy as it sounds. There is no material reality in a radio drama.<sup>19</sup> There are no actors moving around the set. The actor playing John in *Awa' the Crow Road* will not be sitting by the bed of his dying father (played by an actor doing a great deal of heavy breathing). He will be standing in a recording studio reading his lines from the script. The sound of laboured breathing will be added later. The listener will see nothing. He must imagine everything. He does not imagine the actor standing in a recording studio, although he knows this to be the case. He imagines John sitting next to his dying father in a bedroom of a suburban Australian house. The audience at a stage play has merely to forget (in most cases), through the suspension of disbelief, that the actors are actors and the set is a set. The listener to a radio drama has first to 'create' the actors and the recording studio, and then forget: 'the imagination of the listener has to fictionalize the idea of performers attempting to prevent an audience from forgetting that the play is all an illusion'.<sup>20</sup>

This means that the listener of a radio drama is a more 'active' participant than the audience at a stage play. He is also a more sophisticated participant because he doesn't just create actors on a set, he 'creates' the realism of film, or perhaps, even, the 'realism' of life. The listener 'sees' John holding the bundle of old aerogram letters. He 'sees' John placing the wetted cotton bud in his father's mouth, and then mopping up the excess water that has dribbled down his father's chin. Most importantly he 'sees' John's father who never speaks. All this from a series of sounds. Of course, the writer must help him, and help him more than he must help the theatre audience. The theatre audience walks a tightrope, from which it can fall into confusion or boredom. The listener is similarly poised but with the further difficulty: it is his attention that keeps the tightrope tight. If the listener stops listening, the rope slackens and he begins to lose his balance. This is not the same as the moment of temporary distraction we experience at the theatre when someone coughs or an actor misjudges a prop. We stop listening for a moment, but the stage

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<sup>19</sup> There was a time when radio dramas and comedies were recorded in front of an audience. *The Goon Show* made use of the difference between the reality and the imagination (eg coconuts banged together for horse's hooves) in a very post-modern way. Perhaps this is why the show is only now (February 2004), departing from ABC radio.

<sup>20</sup> Crook, *Radio Drama*, p. 72. I had an experience of this recently when I switched on my car radio and began listening to what I thought was an interview between a journalist and a doctor. When the questioning became very confrontational I realised that I was, in fact, listening to a radio play (Alana Valentine's *Savage Grace*). I immediately imagined the actors (I had seen the stage play and was familiar with both actors) and then began to imagine the scene between the doctor and the journalist.

play goes on regardless. When the listener stops listening, then it can be said that the drama stops and becomes merely sound. This means that the radio drama must ‘grip and hold attention from first to last’.<sup>21</sup>

There are few conventions to prepare the listener for what will follow. He does not change his clothes, travel to a theatre, share a pre-show drink with a friend, find his seat, chat for a few minutes before the house lights go down and the curtain goes up. Radio drama has the convention of a fixed time slot.<sup>22</sup> There may be some introductory music to this ‘slot’ which may have a name. There will be a brief introduction to the play. The listener may have heard, during the preceding week, ‘promos’ advertising the play. There is a moment of silence.

‘The beginning is everything’, asserts Crook (1999).<sup>23</sup> The listener has to create the world of the drama, and he has to do this quickly if he is to continue listening. It is too easy for him to turn off the radio or turn to a different channel, although, it must be said that, as radio drama has become less popular and more literary, so the listener is more likely to persist for longer. He has planned to listen to a radio play. However, he will only give it so long. He has paid no money. There is no theatre out of which he must creep. There is no one to witness his departure. Therefore, the writer must write an opening sequence that will quickly engage the listener. It must intrigue (so that he will keep listening), but it must also allow him to start the projection of images ‘in his skull’. If this is too difficult—if he cannot create the images quickly and clearly enough—then he is likely to give up. How does the writer help the listener?

*Awa’ the Crow Road* begins in silence, as do all radio dramas.<sup>24</sup> Story-telling on the stage happens by subtraction; the curtain rises, the audience examines the set and any actors who might be on the stage, then one actor speaks and the audience attends to him until another actor speaks (or there is a lighting change, or someone moves). Story-telling in radio drama works by addition; to the silence are added, one by one, other sounds. To the silence at the start of *Awa’ the Crow Road* is added the

<sup>21</sup> E. Sackville-West, *The Rescue* (London, 1945), p. 8. Sackville-West was referring to the radio talk but the same holds true for radio drama.

<sup>22</sup> As I write this, the Australian Broadcasting Commission has only one slot for radio drama—*Airplay*—which is half an hour on a Sunday afternoon (3.05pm) on Radio National.

<sup>23</sup> Crook, *Radio Drama*, p. 157.

<sup>24</sup> H. Nimmo, ‘Awa’ the Crow Road’ (Unpublished Edith Cowan University PhD Thesis, 2004).

sound of a steam train travelling along the tracks.<sup>25</sup> This is what Crook (1999), in his list of sound design vocabulary based on the work of Lance Sieveking (1934), calls a ‘conventionalised effect’, one that is easily recognisable (even though steam trains are now considered ‘heritage’), and have become so clichéd that the listener knows he is listening to a sound effect.<sup>26</sup> This creates a kind of *Verfremdung* effect which warns the listener that he is to listen and think, not merely ‘feel’.<sup>27</sup> Over the sound of the steam train the listener hears the voice of a young child announcing what seems like a title, ‘The Boy in the Train’. This child (‘Probably a boy’, the listener tells himself), then recites a verse of a poem (‘The lines rhyme’), in an accent and dialect which to an Australian listener, sound improbably Scottish.<sup>28</sup> The listener is probably able to pick out the phrase, ‘the engine say toot-toot?’, which will be confirmed by the sound of the train’s whistle (another cliché), following. The pace of the recitation picks up, as does the speed of the steam train. The effect is likely to be perceived as comic, as is the poem, with its use of words like ‘nicht’ (‘It’s a braw moonlit nicht th’ nicht’) and electric ‘licht’. But the increase in pace (and the steam train’s increase in pace) also has a ‘symbolic, evocative effect’, the purpose of which is ‘to represent or express confusion in the character’s mind’.<sup>29</sup> We are not yet sure who this character is. The recitation is interrupted, on the words, ‘Is the next stop—’. This line is repeated by the boy, with a ‘[l]ess Scottish’ accent, and then by an adult male, with an Australian accent. This is a joke—the poem stops on the word ‘stop’. There is a moment of silence, broken by the sound of ‘a crow, *mocking*’ (‘A bird? A crow? An Australian crow?’). This could be considered a conventionalized effect for Australian listeners but the sound is not as easily recognised, and therefore clichéd, as the British seagull. The same adult voice announces the real title of the radio drama. This is followed by another conventionalized effect (particularly for Australian listeners,

<sup>25</sup> The text reads, ‘*Steam train, Scotland, 1963*’. This is information for the sound engineer. The listener may be able to discriminate between steam trains of different country and vintage. I cannot.

<sup>26</sup> Crook, *Radio Drama*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>27</sup> Crook points out that radio producers addressed such issues as ‘alienation’ and ‘representation’ long before Brecht and Barthes. He reminds us that ‘Brecht was introduced to non-English theatre audiences as a result of translation and radio production by BBC Radio in the 1950s’. p. 72.

<sup>28</sup> The only people who speak like this on Australian radio are Billy Connolly and trade unionists of the more militant hue.

<sup>29</sup> Crook, *Radio Drama*, p. 71.

who are likely to be born overseas or have parents who were born overseas),—the sound of a jumbo jet taking off. All this happens in just over thirty seconds.<sup>30</sup>

This opening has (hopefully) intrigued the listener, who if he has heard the ‘promo’ for the play, will know that this is a Scottish-Australian story by a writer who has won awards for her radio drama.<sup>31</sup> He has had to create and then reject a number of disconnected images: the steam train; a boy reciting a poem about a boy on a train—somewhere; an interruption to the recitation; a transition from broad Scottish accent, to less Scottish accent, to Australian accent; a transition from child to adult; a crow—Australian?; a (large) plane taking off. These images have, to some extent, been prepared for by the ‘promo’, but it is now time for the story to emerge and connect them. Richards (1991) talks of ‘a lovely theoretical possibility’ of radio as ‘pure art’, in the sense that conceptual music is ‘pure art’.<sup>32</sup> I find the possibility far from lovely and not helpful for the writer. Too much abstraction is the enemy of drama; the drama is in the detail and the connections between that detail. Story is detail linked together to create narrative. Story turns a series of ‘stills’ into a series of frames that can be projected inside the listener’s skull. Raban (1980) says there are tensions between the producer’s desire to ‘manifest an illusion, a form of sound cinema’ with the ‘literary roots’ of radio:

The producer makes icons; the writer, symbols.  
The one is complete in itself, requiring only an  
audience to witness it; the other demands an active  
readership, or listenership, which will do its own share  
of the creation.<sup>33</sup>

Sounds effects on their own are difficult to ‘read’ unless they are stereotypical; they need the ‘anchorage’ of words to ‘fix the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs’.<sup>34</sup> These words can only act as anchors if they have some ‘grounding’ in an identifiable world. The audience at a stage play can more readily accept a non-realistic world because there are live actors on a visible stage. The listener has to project realism, although Crook (1999) suggests that this

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<sup>30</sup> Nimmo, ‘Crow Road’, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> *I’ll Write to Richie Benaud* won the 2003 Awgie (Australian Writer’s Guild) for Best Radio Script. The five-part drama *Fly in—Fly out* was nominated for the 1997 WA Premier’s Book Award, Script.

<sup>32</sup> K. Richards, *Writing Radio Drama* (Sydney, 1991), p. 160.

<sup>33</sup> Raban, ‘Icon or symbol’, p. 83.

<sup>34</sup> R. Barthes, *Image - Music - Text* (trans.) S. Heath (London, 1977), p. 39. Quoted in Crook, *Radio Drama*, p. 70.

may be as much to do with the fearfulness of writers and producers than the limitations of the medium.<sup>35</sup>

The first scene of *Awa' the Crow Road* establishes the world of the play. It begins with the sound of a '[h]ot Australian suburban backyard, 1963'. No matter how skilful the sound engineer, the listener will not be certain of the image he is creating until Dad's line, 'We're here. We're Australian. We're not going back'.<sup>36</sup> He will never have absolute confirmation that the backyard is 'suburban', or even that it is a *backyard*. These details are not important to the story, but it is important that the conversation takes place somewhere 'real'. This conversation is the 'engine' that drives the story and it is important that the listener understands that is actually took place; it is not a figment of John's imagination. The listener does not yet know who these people are, although he can probably guess at their relationship by such things as the content of what is being said, tone of voice and the ages of the speakers.<sup>37</sup> John will not be identified as 'John' until the end of scene three. Dad has only three more lines of dialogue.<sup>38</sup> The listener must assume that the speaker is the same man who in scene two (and for half of the play) lies dying in his bedroom. We only hear his breathing. In scene two, an adult Australian male identifies him as 'Dad'.<sup>39</sup> My intention throughout is to keep the listener engaged by hinting at the connections but leaving him to actually make them. This is how radio drama works best. This can only be done if the story is clear and simple. As William Trevor (the noted writer of short stories) says, 'there is something very boney about radio'.<sup>40</sup> If the story is too complicated then too much has to be explained. Exposition on the stage can be 'sugar-coated' by embedding it in an argument, or creating action which draws the attention away from the fact that necessary, but not very exciting information is being imparted to the audience. Exposition on radio sounds like—exposition. There are no visuals to distract. Too many lines ending (or beginning) with 'Dad' or 'John'—

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<sup>35</sup> 'writers and producers have not had the courage to represent alienation, dislocation and the loneliness of the human condition by using sound to 'cast the anchor' and deliberately render the listener 'adrift'', Crook, *Radio Drama*, p. 71.

<sup>36</sup> Nimmo, 'Crow Road', p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> We are now very good at understanding the conventions of story, having been exposed to so many through radio, television and film. One wonders whether this is the reason why so many of us seem to find 'life' so difficult—because it does *not* conform to the conventions of story.

<sup>38</sup> Which means that the actor playing Dad will also play Craig (or perhaps the Deputy Headmaster). Will he also be required to perform the breathing, or can the sound engineer do this without using an actor? I'm not sure. These considerations should not *unduly* concern the writer.

<sup>39</sup> Nimmo, 'Crow Road', p. 3.

explaining who is talking to whom—remind the listener that he cannot see the characters, and so weakens his power to imagine. The use of distinctive voices, the clever linking of adjoining scenes by a ‘hinge’, the judicious use of music and sound effects and the convention of ‘hearing’ a character’s thoughts all help to liberate the listener’s imagination.

The actor embodies the dramatic text of the radio drama through his voice. It is important that the characters have voices which are attractive to the ear, not too similar and which can be recognised quickly. The producer must decide on a style of vocal delivery which is consistent; Australian producers often prefer a more ‘natural’, filmic style of delivery but this can sound ‘flat’ and unengaging on radio. We are, after all, listening to a play. We know this is not ‘real’ and unlike in film there are no visuals to support the dialogue. The dialogue must create the visuals. As Rodger (1982) notes, ‘characters by their voices and accents convey within a few moments their likely social position and previous history’.<sup>41</sup> *Awa’ the Crow Road* is a play about language and so great care will have to be taken with accent and dialect.<sup>42</sup> An Australian listener may struggle with the Scottish accent and Craig’s use of Scots, but that struggle reflects the struggle between Craig and John. How can these brothers communicate when they share neither language, recent history, allegiance and memory?

Scene changes can hinge on a word.<sup>43</sup> The ‘hinge’, which helps open a door to another world, another place, can be funny or clever, or both. The word ‘away’—or as Craig says, ‘awa’—acts as the hinge which connects scene two to scene three and then scene three to scene four. The Scottish music at the end of Scene seventeen and Craig’s first line in scene eighteen, ‘He hated the bagpipes’, connects Dad’s death in scene seventeen with the wake, and also indicates the funeral which has intervened.<sup>44</sup> Scottish music has earlier been used to herald Craig’s unexpected arrival.<sup>45</sup> Music and sound effects are also devices used to take the listener to ‘another

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<sup>40</sup> Rodger, *Radio Drama*, p. 116.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137. This may be more the case in 1980s Britain than in Australia.

<sup>42</sup> There have been a number of bilingual plays on ABC radio but very few featuring different dialects of English and none featuring the Scots language, even though there is a large number of Australians of Scots descent.

<sup>43</sup> Rodger, *Radio Drama*, p. 127.

<sup>44</sup> Nimmo, ‘Crow Road’, p. 18.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

place'. Sounds on their own are not going to be enough. Iser (1978) says that modern literary works are 'full of apparent inconsistencies' which are there to 'act as hindrances to comprehension' so that the reader must think new thoughts.<sup>46</sup>

However, the listener is working so hard with so little, compared to the reader of a novel or the audience at a stage play, that he needs help rather than 'hindrances'. He needs the help of story.

This is not to say that radio drama must always be 'realistic'. Guralnik (1996) suggests that radio allows writers to explore 'the action of the mind above the actuality of matter'<sup>47</sup>, although she notes that even Beckett, that exponent of the radio 'piece', couldn't suppress narrative completely as 'stories persist in arising'.<sup>48</sup> Crook (1999) draws attention to the connection between radio and modernity. He cites Paul Tissien (1993) who suggests that writers such as Joyce and Eliot 'seemed to be imitating, or parodying' the new media of radio and film through their explorations of 'subjectivity, dream, memory, and the unconscious'.<sup>49</sup> *Awa' the Crow Road* takes advantage of the media to combine what takes place in John's mind with 'reality'. In *Embers*, Beckett (1959) takes us into the mind of his character so much so that we are never sure if anything is happening other than in Henry's consciousness.<sup>50</sup>

Pinter and Beckett did have problems getting their radio plays accepted, as those reading them did not always see the point.<sup>51</sup> There was often no 'point' to see (or hear). Radio drama has a different 'shape' from the stage play.<sup>52</sup> It does not necessarily build to a climax, or some final *point* of understanding. It is rather like a pebble being dropped into a pond. The beginning of the play sets off ripples which work their way outwards, and then are no more. Once more the pond is still. Furthermore, radio drama is not written to 'be performed' in the way that a stage play is performed. Rather, it is written, as Rodger (1982) notes, to be overheard.<sup>53</sup> This allows the plotting to work by implication. Things do not have to be spelled out. The

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<sup>46</sup> Iser, *Act of Reading*, p. 18.

<sup>47</sup> E.S. Guralnik, *Sight Unseen* (Athens, Ohio, 1996), p. 100.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Crook, *Radio Drama*, p. 13.

<sup>50</sup> S. Beckett, *Krapp's Last Tape and Embers* (London, 1959).

<sup>51</sup> Rodger, *Radio Drama*, p. 111.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123. Michael Bakewell (a BBC producer in the 50s) first used the term 'radio shape' in relationship to the plays of Giles Cooper.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101-102.



voice is quiet. No one shouts (for very long) on the radio. There was a rejection of ‘the rich hyperbole and the grand manner’.<sup>54</sup> The invention of the tape recorder allowed a generation of writers to hear speech as it was spoken by ‘ordinary people’ and they exaggerated the hesitations, repetitions, non sequiturs that they heard, so that the speech became ‘artful’. Pinter and Beckett avoided rhetorical devices and the set speech. They used language which was elliptical, precise and economical. For much of *Awa’ the Crow Road* the action is, indeed, being overheard by the dying man. John talks to his father and we hear what he hears. When John goes to answer the phone, the listener stays in the bedroom with John’s father.<sup>55</sup> It is only after Craig arrives that the perspective changes. Then the listener follows John into the kitchen.<sup>56</sup>

In the theatre or on television ‘the actors are seen and are reminders always of the present’.<sup>57</sup> Richards (1991) suggests that ‘time can be fractured, dislocated, compressed or elongated and it is possible (in theory anyhow) to have no time at all’.<sup>58</sup> There are three different time schemes in *Awa’ the Crow Road*. A poem is recited from beginning to end (but by different voices, and at different times). The contemporary story takes place in the present, over about a week. There is also the story of the Fowlie family’s departure from Scotland in 1963, and some scenes from John’s life since then. The poem rushes the narrative along. The present is more leisurely (and much ‘smaller’ in dramatic terms, than could happen on stage). The ‘flashback’ scenes are linked to the present through John’s thoughts.

The radio drama usually only delivers the story from one point of view.<sup>59</sup> Radio plays often began with a narrator. Many members of the new audience for this new medium were not familiar with the theatre and its conventions. The narrator was a comforting presence who ‘could take the listeners by the hand and lead them into and out of the dramatic action’.<sup>60</sup> In *Awa’ the Crow Road* the story is delivered from John’s point of view. We hear Craig’s arguments but we are ‘inside’ John’s head. We ‘hear’ his memories, especially the voice of his younger self and the argument that

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>55</sup> Nimmo, ‘Crow Road’, p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 13-14.

<sup>57</sup> Rodger, *Radio Drama*, p. 77.

<sup>58</sup> Richards, *Writing Radio Drama*, p. 160.

<sup>59</sup> Dylan Thomas’s *Under Milk Wood* has three ‘central’ points-of-view: the blind Captain Cat and First and Second Voice. D. Thomas, *Under Milk Wood* (New York, 1954).

<sup>60</sup> Rodger, *Radio Drama*, p. 28.

goes on between them. As I have said, there is a sense that the first few scenes of the play are also being told from Dad's point of view. When John goes to answer the phone, the listener hears the conversation from Dad's perspective. The microphone stays near to the breathing. Craig's voice becomes louder as he comes closer to his father.<sup>61</sup> When the breathing stops and Dad is no longer a controlling figure in the brothers lives then the story is told largely from a point of view external to John and Craig.

Crook (2003) comments on the 'poor' ending of many radio plays which 'lack the intrigue and plot sophistication' of the screenplay.<sup>62</sup> Writers might believe that they need to keep it simple for the listener, but the listener who has stayed the course is not going to turn off in the last five minutes. The writer can afford to take risks. Crook (2003) notes four factors that can affect how the writer ('and/or the cultural production environment') writes the ending: 'social and political ideology'; how much the writer wants to please or disturb the audience; how much the writer wants to be 'avant-garde, rebellious and poised against the mainstream culture'; and how much the writer wants to achieve '[s]ymmetry and Gestalt finality'.<sup>63</sup> In writing the ending of *Awa' the Crow Road*, I was influenced by the second and the fourth factors. In the last line of dialogue in *Awa' the Crow Road*, Craig reveals to John that John's memory of their departure from Scotland was correct, and that he, Craig, had been lying when he accused John of misremembering. John has just broken down at the thought of his own fear of 'homelessness' if he returns to Scotland. He has confronted his nostalgia (represented by the voice of his younger self) and said it must stop. The play ends with both brothers revealing vulnerability—to each other. This satisfies my desire for symmetry and for a hopeful resolution to the brothers' estrangement.<sup>64</sup>

Crook (2003) has drawn attention to the influence that the 'cultural production environment' may have on the ending. There is only one production house for radio drama in Australia—the Australian Broadcasting Commission—and

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<sup>61</sup> Nimmo, 'Crow Road', p. 12.

<sup>62</sup> Crook, 'The ending of sound story narratives', notes for his forthcoming book, *Sound Storytelling* (Kultura Press, 2003), emailed to the writer, March 2003.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> A plane takes off. We don't know who is on it. John may never return to Scotland.

an enthusiastic producer must persuade the reading committee (of two or three producers from different States, and the Head of Radio Drama) to accept the script for production. Once accepted, there will be rewrites made in response to suggestions from the producer, discussions about casting (voice is most important) and a half-day rehearsal with the cast who might ask questions. Some (rapid) rewriting might occur here. The final editing of the taped drama is left to the producer and technical producer, and this is where further 'writing' of the rehearsal text takes place—without the writer. Lines might be cut to fit time restrictions, poor quality recording (rare), and where the producer thinks the dialogue is prolix. There are no previews in radio drama. The writer, therefore, has no opportunity to make changes in response to the reaction of the listener, even if he was able to observe that reaction. This means that only the listener can 'write' the performance text. The actors cannot vary the pace or change lines. The writer cannot suggest deletions or additions. There will be no second production where he can 'get it right'. The radio drama may be repeated, perhaps with some further editing but that is unusual. There is only one opportunity to write the ending

Therefore it seems that to write the ending of the radio drama, the writer must write a beginning; a beginning that will make sense of the rest. The beginning must quickly engage the listener, and the writer must not let the pace, or tension, of the drama, slacken. There is no three-act structure but rather a series of ripples spreading out from the first minute or so of the drama. These ripples must 'last' for the duration of the drama. The ending can happen very quickly. Music and sound effects after the last words of dialogue can give further time for the implications of the ending to be absorbed by the listener. There is less fear of 'strangulation' in the writing of the end of a radio play because the form eschews dramatic endings. The radio shape moves confidently, like a piece of music, towards the end. There is no anxiety about closure, because from the beginning the writer knows how the drama will end. In silence. 'Not a sound.'<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Beckett, *Embers*, p. 39.

It is finished

—*The Gospel according to John*

I'm getting fucking tired of apocalypses ... What about something with some hope

—Sam Shepard, *Mad Dog Blues*

Shall I end this essay on writing the end, with strong closure, weak closure or in a spirit of anti-closure? Strong closure asserts that a play has a beginning, middle and end; the playwright must write an ending that creates a sense of an ending in the audience; it is better to 'strangle' the play than to leave it in a state of suspended animation. Weak closure argues that, yes, a play does have an end ... but the playwright can choose not to write it ...for aesthetic reasons, of course ... because even if the play were to stop ...the audience would 'read' this 'stopping' as an end.... Convention works in weak closure's favour. Furthermore, if the audience has come to believe that all they are going to get at the end is 'weak closure' then they will accept anything—a voice telling them to leave the theatre, a reprise of the opening line of the play, a holding of the last image. Anti-closure refuses to offer any justification for what he or she does or does not do. This isn't a play—it's a performance. A performance doesn't have to end. What's 'a sense of an ending' anyway? It's just some bourgeois, patriarchal, homophobic, Western, Christian, 'high culture', pro-invasion, anti-refugee constraint. All the audience—sorry, the spectators—have to do, is turn up, and it doesn't matter if they don't, because there's nothing for them to do when they get there, and a Government grant has paid for the production anyway, and it's only on for five nights.

I write plays and because I write plays I write endings. I write endings and because I write endings I write plays. Whichever way I put it, this puts me on the side of meaning. In 1956, Nathalie Sarraute asserted that we were living in 'the age of suspicion'.<sup>1</sup> Now, it seems, many of us have grown suspicious of suspicion. We want to believe in *something*. We yearn for *some* certainties. We know that we cannot avoid making meaning, even if that meaning proves provisional. As Stephen

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Smith, *Poetic Closure*, p. 240.

J. Bottoms (1998) remarks in his study of Sam Shepard's use of popular forms, 'popular art forms may be compromised and clichéd, but are they not popular precisely because they express underlying human desires in widely understood ways?'<sup>2</sup> An audience wants to experience a sense of an ending. Therefore, I write endings but those endings are not 'pinned down'. I want the audience to 'kiss the joy as it flies'.<sup>3</sup> I write endings that draw attention to endings. I want the audience (and the listener) to be aware at the end that they have experienced a play, not a slice of life. I write endings that are hopeful. Kermode (1966) tells us that 'when the end comes it is not an end, and both suffering and the need for patience are perpetual.'<sup>4</sup> So is the need for hope. I want my audience to support my 'refusal to identify with meaninglessness', which Cotsell (1989), discussing the novels of Barbara Pym, defines as 'the refusal to separate art from our human need to make meaning in our lives'.<sup>5</sup>

The classic plays still draw large audiences. In 2003, in addition to *Three Sisters*, London's West End hosted new productions of *Brand, Absolutely! Perhaps?* and *Mrs Warren's Profession*.<sup>6</sup> In 2004, Cate Blanchett will be appearing at the Sydney Theatre Company as Hedda Gabler.<sup>7</sup> The 2004 Sydney Festival featured Strindberg's *Dance of Death* after a sell-out season in London's West End.<sup>8</sup> How to explain the continuing success of these so-called 'well-made plays'?<sup>9</sup> Undoubtedly it is because they offer great parts to great actors.<sup>10</sup> These actors are often well-known from film and television.<sup>11</sup> It is also because their writers have written dramatic texts

<sup>2</sup> Stephen J. Bottoms, *The Theatre of Sam Shepard* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 89.

<sup>3</sup> From Blake's poem, *Eternity*. See footnote 79 on page 20.

<sup>4</sup> Kermode, *Sense of an Ending*, p. 82. In the epilogue (which he wrote in 2000), Kermode notes that the 1960s was a time of crises (the Cuban missile crisis, the assassination of President Kennedy) and that fears of apocalypse have now abated. However, he goes on: 'Terror does not depend upon an accurate estimate of the threat', p. 181-2.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Cotsell, *Barbara Pym* (London, 1989), p. 5. He identifies Pym as a modernist but not one of the 'hard-riding existentialists, profuse Joyceans, insistent nihilists'.

<sup>6</sup> *Brand*, Royal Shakespeare Company, Theatre Royal, Haymarket, June, 2003; *Absolutely! Perhaps?*, directed by Federico Fellini, Wyndham, May, 2003; *Mrs Warren's Profession*, directed by Peter Hall, Aldwych, October 2002.

<sup>7</sup> The play opens in Sydney on July 22, 2004. The season booked out by Christmas 2003.

<sup>8</sup> *Dance of Death*, starring Ian McKellen, opened January 2004.

<sup>9</sup> The irony is that the plays of Ibsen and Shaw and Chekhov were written in opposition to the 'well-made' plays of French boulevard comedy.

<sup>10</sup> In 2002/2003 I saw, on various London stages, Ralph Fiennes as Brand, Kristin Scott Thomas as Masha, Joan Plowright as the mother in Pirandello's *Absolutely! Perhaps?*, Kenneth Branagh in Mamet's *Edmond* and Judi Dench and Maggie Smith in Hare's (very thin) *The Breath of Life*.

<sup>11</sup> The pleasure an audience has in watching a film star act on stage is perhaps another example of an 'underlying human desire'.

which in production, resemble well-crafted boxes whose snugly-fitting lids are left open so that every generation of director, actor, designer and theatre-goer can make discoveries among the contents, and so add to those contents.

The disembodied voice tells us to leave the building and we tell ourselves that this is 'The End'. But we keep returning to the theatre to hear and see the last few minutes of the play and, together, make an end of it:

At that point, then, in the well-wrought play (and perhaps in the honestly examined life), we will understand that what seemed accidental was essential, we will perceive the pattern wrought by our character, we will be free to sigh or mourn. And then we can go home.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> D. Mamet, *Three Uses of the Knife* (London, 2002), p. 69.

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