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CHILDERS, MICHAEL EUGENE. The Direction and Presentation of Tango, a Play by Slawomir Mrozek. (1977) Directed by Dr. David Batcheller. Pp.

The purpose of this study is to analyze, direct, present and evaluate an originally conceived interpretation of the play, Tango, written by Slawomir Mrozek. The first chapter contains the director's analysis of the play; included in that analysis are the following topics: Historical Considerations, Stylistic Considerations, Character Description, the Setting and the Interpretation.

Chapter Two is the promptbook of this director's production of Tango. Contained therein is the script, all stage directions and several photographs indicating composition and picturization.

The third chapter is a critical evaluation of the overall production. Included in that evaluation are the Achievement of Interpretation, Actor-Director Relationships, Audience Reaction and a Brief Summary.

THE DIRECTION AND PRESENTATION OF TANGO,
A PLAY BY SLAWOMIR MROZEK

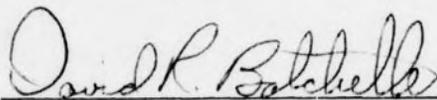
by

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to analyze, direct, present and evaluate an originally conceived interpretation of the play, Tango, written by Slawomir Mrozek. Tango was chosen for its challengingly subtle comedy and its uniquely developed characters. The clever employment of these characters within a peculiar situation should provoke thought on contemporary topics of freedom, Communism, political anarchy and the ever-increasing disintegration of moral and religious values.

Slawomir Mrozek was born in Poland in 1930, was nine years old when the Second World War started, fifteen when it ended, and twenty-three when Stalin died. During the first thirty years of his life he lived "in a society which had passed through the phase of permissiveness and had landed in a period of much greater repression, political, artistic and moral."¹

Mrozek began his career as a writer-cartoonist for a local newspaper. By the age of twenty-six he was famous for his short stories and turned his interests and abilities toward playwriting. Most of his works indicate a great

¹Martin Esslin, "Eastern Absurdist: Slawomir Mrozek," Drama at Calgary 3 (June 1969) :16.

dissatisfaction with the present totalitarian regime ruling in Poland and attack a number of its causes and the effects it has on his people. Among his most popular works are The Elephant, a collection of his best short stories, Tango and Vatzlav, his two major full-length plays to date and The Police, Striptease, Repeat Performance, Out at Sea, Charlie and The Martyrdom of Peter Ohey, six of his most frequently produced one-act plays. In his short story, I Want To Be A Horse, he attacks the unchanging and ever-present conformism found under totalitarian rule.

I should attract the interest of women. "You're so different," they would say.

And when the time came for me to go to Heaven I should naturally get a pair of wings. I should become a Pegasus. A winged horse! Can there be a more beautiful fate for a man?²

Censorship would obviously prevent straightforwardness in such works but Mrozek communicates his message through the clever use of grotesque imagery and Aesopian language.

Mrozek's political conscience caused him to denounce his nation's participation in the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Consequently, he was forced into exile. Since that time, he has not returned to Poland and performances of his works are prohibited there. He now lives in Paris where he continues to express his anxieties about "the future that is looming ahead of our planet and the

²Slawomir Mrozek, The Elephant (New York: Grove Press, Inc. 1963), p. 121.

extent to which the world will still be a livable place."³

"Tango, written in 1964 and considered Mrozek's finest play, won him international fame as a major European playwright."⁴ It weaves his most inventive elements of stage device, intellectual comedy and political allegory into a work that possesses the potential to fulfill at least two of the theatre's primary functions: to entertain and to enlighten.

The play concerns a young man, Arthur, who is preoccupied with the revolt against his parents. The traditional roles of the generations are reversed with Arthur revolting because his parents are too permissive and have lost all interest in conventional standards and moral values. His father, Stomil, is an extreme avant-garde artist and his mother, Eleanor, sleeps with Eddie, a sleazy house guest from down the street. After several unsuccessful attempts to impose order on the family, Arthur realizes the only solution is to institute a rule of terror. "The only possible answer is power . . ."⁵ However, Arthur cannot sustain his rule for he is weakened by a much greater passion for human values through his love for his cousin Ala. Eddie, the only one

³Magnus J. Krynski, "Mrozek, Tango and an American Campus," The Polish Review 15 (Spring 1970): 115.

⁴Ibid., p. 114.

⁵Slawomir Mrozek, Tango (New York: Grove Press, Inc. 1968), p. 98.

(or type) ruthless enough to maintain such a regime, murders Arthur and carries out the original plan.

. . . Mrozek explores the disintegration of traditional values, presents a capsule history of Polish intelligentsia attitudes over several decades, and translates into an allegory the various solutions proposed in our century: the return to tradition, the search for ideology, fascism and proletarian revolution.⁶

The first performance of Tango took place at the Jugoslovensko Dramsko Pozoriske in Belgrade, Yugoslavia on April 21, 1965. The first Polish performance took place in Warsaw on July 7, 1965 at the Teatr-Wspolozesny and was directed by Erwin Axer. It was "characterized as the most explosive event in the theatrical history of Poland for half a century."⁷ New York's first presentation of Tango took place at the Pocket Theatre on January 20, 1969. It was staged by Heinz Engles and based on the original staging by Erwin Axer. Reviews of the New York Tango range from biting sarcasm about its "inept" translation and "inept" presentation, to kind remarks concerning the play's obscurity to foreign viewers. These contradictory reactions provide this director with the challenge to develop original ideas about Tango and its presentation for an American audience.

⁶Czeslaw Milosz, The History of Polish Literature (London: The Macmillan Company, 1969), p. 514.

⁷Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1969), p. 174.

Historical Considerations

Poland's social and political history has, since her birth, been largely chaotic and undesirable. She has always been a small country uncomfortably lodged between two major powers; Russia to the east and Germany to the west.

The military and diplomatic events following the First World War had four major effects on Poland. First, she regained her independence after well over a century of partition and occupation. Second, there was a renewal of her age old problem of being "a relatively small and weak state surrounded by more powerful neighbors interested in expanding their territory."⁸ Third, the Russian Revolution of 1917 had made the U.S.S.R. an extremely powerful military threat whose leaders predicted that Poland would eventually become integrated with the system and find herself under Communist rule. Fourth, the same agreement which had given Poland her independence also contributed to the rise of Hitler and his aggressive policies which "triggered World War II and the chain of events which eventually brought Poland into the Communist system."⁹

After the Polish Republic was set up at the end of WW I, a democratic government was put into effect. In 1926,

⁸James F. Morrison, The Polish People's Republic (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), p. 3.

⁹Ibid.

Marshal Pilsudski took over the executive position in that system and eventually developed a kind of authoritarian regime which lasted until his death. Although Poland had a one party system at this time, it was not a totalitarian system. This period between the wars is known as the Pre-entry Period and it lasted from 1918 until 1939. Much of the Polish foreign policy at this time was geared toward reestablishing the Polish state and regaining the better part of its former territory. However, it was soon apparent that Poland was too weak to recapture her lost territory and her foreign policy became less aggressive and more defensive for the remainder of the period.

The Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. Sixteen days later the Soviet Union moved in to occupy her eastern territories. Thus began the Communist occupation of Poland. The existing government was forced into exile and one and a half million Poles were deported to Russia's interior. Approximately thirteen thousand Polish officers were executed after they had surrendered to Soviet forces and "tens of thousands of other Poles were sent to German labor camps all over Europe . . ."10

The net effect was the elimination of an important part of the politically active population, particularly those who would have been most openly opposed to Poland's transformation into a Communist

10Ibid., p. 30

state and its integration into a Communist system.¹¹

The war did irreparable damage to Poland both physically and psychologically. The capital city, Warsaw, along with many historical buildings and monuments, was destroyed and the strong nationalistic tendencies were temporarily weakened.

When the Germans were driven from Polish territory and the war brought to a close in 1945, the Soviet army and secret police provided protection for the new Polish Communist government which was establishing its own foundation and security. The Germans were no longer a threat since they were defeated and lay under the occupation of the allied forces. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, was now much stronger than before and seemed to have every intention of transforming Poland into a friendly socialist stage.

After the war, the strong Polish Nationalists were strengthened once more and their most immediate purpose was to rebuild their country. Though most Poles wanted Soviet troops out of Poland and the removal of Communists from power, "it became increasingly clear that Poland would unavoidably be dominated by the U.S.S.R. and ruled by the Polish Communists and their supporters."¹² In addition, most Poles were tired of war and fighting and felt that the

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 38.

moderate program of the coalition government offered more hope than did active resistance."¹³

Eventually, Poland became very dependent on the Soviet Union for protection against possible German invasion and for raw materials to keep them economically stable. Nonetheless, the Polish people opposed the loss of independence and the indirect political and social costs brought about by an unwanted government.

The government was controlled largely by the Soviet Union, which allowed the Poles to make no decisions contrary to Soviet interests and which forced the Polish government to agree to many decisions that were clearly opposed to the interests of the Polish Communist elite and the population as a whole.¹⁴

Censorship became very severe as Communist propaganda initiated by the Soviet Union gradually became the rule. Plays which gave the slightest indication of opposition to Soviet policies were censored and suppressed. The death of Stalin in 1953 relaxed conditions somewhat but the disillusionment continued to grow as it became more apparent that the existing government was not capable of fulfilling its promises or satisfying the nation's needs.

In 1956, the Polish elite were able to unite and win more independence for Poland (especially in domestic policy) but they remained under the Communist rule. The majority of the population saw a ray of hope for freedom but tight

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 131.

control and the threat of ultimate Soviet military intervention made the possibility of a successful revolution seem very remote.

The present political situation in Poland indicates that the conditions are not as bleak as most critics would have us believe. At the same time there is not the freedom for which one might hope. Though the theatre is under fewer restrictions than most of its other communication subsystems, less than thirty percent of the "excellent plays being published in Poland today is ever seen in Poland's fifty theatres where drama is produced."¹⁵ Censorship is still severe, but those plays which poke fun at the government or express disapproval of political tactics through the use of Aesopian language and bizarre symbolism can be produced in most instances.

They may even serve as a relatively harmless outlet for the pent-up emotion which they convert into amusement and laughter, and even provide an illusion of relative freedom. In other words: even oppositional plays, so long as they are couched in allegorical terms, can serve their purpose as safety valves.¹⁶

If Mrozek's family in Tango represents a weak and disunited Poland immediately following the Russian Revolution, then Arthur is the intervention of Communist political power and its imposition of extreme conformity. Mrozek has not

¹⁵Damian S. Wandycz, Studies in Polish Civilization (New York: Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America, 1969), p. 199.

¹⁶Esslin, "Eastern Absurdist," p. 13.

only presented a capsule of Polish history but has predicted the future outcome of her political past.

Eddie represents the lower proletariat class and Mrozek employs him as such to pose an obvious revolutionary threat on the present totalitarian regime ruling Poland. Cleverly concealed also is the playwright's warning to the Polish elite to reunite and concern themselves once again with collective freedom as opposed to the individual decadent liberation to which they have resigned themselves. In this respect, Eddie also poses a threat to Poland at large for if there were a proletariat revolution, her people would suffer greatly under vindictive control.

Stylistic Considerations

Tango has been characterized as belonging to a relatively contemporary category of drama labeled the "Theatre of the Absurd." Along with Bertolt Brecht's "Epic Theatre," Luigi Pirandello's "Anti-Theatre" and Jean-Paul Sartre's "Existentialism," the "Theatre of the Absurd" is generally grouped under a larger category headed the "Theatre of the Avant-Garde." "The word avant-garde comes to us from the French and is a military term . . . which Webster defines as 'the part of an army which goes ahead of the main body in an advance--the leading position in a movement.'"¹⁷

¹⁷Edward A. Wright, Understanding Today's Theatre (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972), p. 69.

The "Theatre of the Absurd" arose in Western Europe at the close of World War II with playwrights such as Eugene Ionesco and Samuel Beckett. The central themes with which they generally dealt concerned the collapse of values, the debasement of language and "the isolation of western man in a society which, with the collapse of religious as well as political ideologies, went on working and producing an abundance of goods but without any sense of purpose or idealism."¹⁸ The term "absurd" carries with it a different connotation in the theatre from that meaning normally attached to it in everyday use. Martin Esslin makes a relatively clear distinction between the different uses of the term in the following excerpt:

Absurd originally means out of harmony, in a musical contest. Hence its dictionary definition: "out of harmony with reason or propriety; incongruous, unreasonable, illogical" In an essay on Kafka, Ionesco defined his understanding of the term as follows: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose . . . Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless."¹⁹

It follows then, that not only do the Absurdists view life as purposeless, but they are equally pessimistic about the future in that they suggest that man is trapped in a dilemma about which he can do nothing.

¹⁸Esslin, "Eastern Absurdist," p. 11.

¹⁹Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, p. 5.

The two characters, Vladimir and Estragon, in Beckett's Waiting for Godot are classic characterizations of the human condition described by the above definition. Vladimir and Estragon are alive and free to do as they like but there is no sense of purpose. It seems there is "nothing to be done,"²⁰ nor any reason to do it. Furthermore, Beckett does not give us the slightest hint that there may be a possible solution. A mere mention of the problem would at least instigate some search for a solution. But mentioning the problem is part of what the "Theatre of the Absurd" tries to avoid. It refuses to "spoonfeed" its audience with logically developed plot and dialogue. Its medium of communication has its roots in Antonin Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty." Artaud sensed the effectiveness of movement, grotesque visual imagery and inventive stage device when he concluded that truly moving theatre should be a "bombardment of the senses." His replacement of words with communicative sounds lay the groundwork for Beckett's and Ionesco's "devaluation of language."

The director of this study believes that Tango does, indeed, share many of the qualities with what has been described as the "Theatre of the Absurd." The family's collapse of religious ideologies and moral values has left them in a stage of degenerated purposelessness. The very idea of a young man, Arthur, rebelling against his parents

²⁰Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1954), p. 7.

for having no modesty, no moral codes, and no social order seems "out of harmony" with what might be considered psychologically normal. It is incongruous with present-day conventions. Arthur punishes his grandmother by forcing her to lie down on the catafalque of her dead husband's coffin. He punishes his uncle by putting a bottomless birdcage over his head and he insists on marrying his cousin, Ala, with her wearing an old Victorian wedding dress found in the attic as one of his steps toward the return to tradition. If these images strike us as "absurd" they should in turn provoke laughter for at the heart of both Absurdism and comedy is one basic likeness: incongruity, a term given us by Schopenhauer who used it in determining the cause of laughter.

Schopenhauer was the first to define . . . laughter "is simply the sudden perception of incongruity" between our ideals and actualities before us.²¹

Tango, then, possesses Absurdist qualities and its inherent comic value is considerable. Eugenia, the grandmother, is a decadent little old lady who plays poker with the fellas and wears a baseball cap. Stomil, Arthur's father, wears buttonless pajamas throughout most of the play but refuses to button them for the sake of principle alone. Arthur imposes an entire code of Victorian behavior and dress upon his family during the third act and their

²¹Wylis Sypher, "The Meanings of Comedy," cited by Robert W. Corrigan, Comedy--Meaning and Form (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1965), p. 26.

opposition to such extremity provides the basis for the comedy therein.

For the sake of neat compartmentalization, the director of this study simply refers to Tango as an avant-garde comedy; a comedy with absurdist thematic content and conventions. It is a funny play with serious overtones and intentions. One indication of these serious intentions is found late in the play when Arthur acquires Christ-like characteristics and is betrayed and crucified. Though the serious intentions are there, it is this director's opinion that the comedy must prevail for the production to entertain and/or enlighten. The religious interpretation chosen for emphasis in this production doesn't blossom until the middle of Act III. Therefore, the comedy in Tango is its only means of survival until that point. The desired audience reaction is that of total involvement with the storyline as well as general comic response until grandmother Eugenia dies in Act III. At that point Arthur begins to employ her idea of death to exercise his rule over the family and the mood acquires a grim, sadistic quality. Slowly the tragic hero emerges as his family's saviour and the action rises until his untimely death.

The director of this study has chosen a realistic production concept for his production of Tango. He believes that anything which is funny or absurd can only be considered so when compared to or contrasted with that which seems

normal or natural. The scenic design will give the essence of a realistic setting though limitations imposed by the circumstances of a revolving repertory prohibit the utilization of a "box" set. Moreover, the actors will be directed toward objectively valid characters with sincerely portrayed emotions. Consider the following discussion on the theme of progress:

Arthur: Meaning what?

Eddie: Well, progress . . . general progress.

Arthur: But what kind of progress?

Eddie: The progressive kind, the kind that goes right ahead.

Arthur: You mean forward?

Eddie: Right. With the front moving forward.

Arthur: And the back?

Eddie: The back moving forward too. Right out there in front.

Arthur: Then the front will be at the back.

Eddie: Depends how you look at it. If you look at it from the back, the front will be at the front, though from the back view.

Arthur: That doesn't sound very clear to me.

Eddie: No, but it's progressive.²²

If this conversation were given any other treatment besides that of total sincerity with objectively valid surroundings, it might lose enough of its ludicrousness to make it only confusing and frustrating for the audience.

Tango will be performed as a comedy with its thematic interpretation secondary to the humor therein. Yet it has been pointed out that his play is an Absurdist play and Mrozek blatantly supplies us with a strong Absurdist theme: the purposelessness of existence in a world which cannot

²²Mrozek, Tango, p. 92.

find a compromise of order between total chaotic freedom and the rigid rules of conduct imposed by outmoded forms and traditions. He even concludes the play with a dance, the tango, which is a very strong visual metaphor suggesting that he supplies no solutions to the problem. The sound of the music and the steps of the tango continually go from one extreme to the other. They seem to suggest only "right" and "left" or right and wrong. The tango never compromises or settles at a "happy medium" and it seems to never end.

Character Description and Analysis

There are seven characters in Tango. They are: Arthur, the rebellious son; Stomil, his father; Eleanor, his mother; Ala, his cousin; Eugenia, his grandmother; Eugene, his great-uncle; and Eddie, the proletariat house guest. Here will be given a brief character description and analysis in terms of their particular needs, desires, fears and principal relationships.

Arthur is the young revolutionary who rebels against his family for the reestablishment of values and standards. He is a redeemer, for he recognizes the need for a greater depth and meaning to human existence and undergoes a desperate search to save the world.

Mrozek's hero, Arthur, is one significant step ahead of the modern young idealist who want to strive against

the sterile conventionalism of a social tradition or the rigidity of a political system. Rather than break habits Arthur wants to rebuild them²³

Generally speaking, he is not unlike most young men who tend to resist certain attitudes and traditions characteristic of the older generation. His problem is all of those battles have been won and "there aren't any conventions left to rebel against."²⁴ Arthur is defeated because his love for Ala weakens him at a crucial moment in his siege of power. Stomil puts it well when he observes that Arthur "was ruled by the mind, but with too much passion. Abstraction betrayed his sentiment, and sentiment killed him."²⁵ Arthur's Polish counterpart is the intellectual who enjoys observing the persecution of the bourgeoisie. "It is a rich reward for the degradation he felt when he had to be part of the middle class, and when there seemed to be no way out of the cycle of birth and death."²⁶

Stomil, Arthur's father, is probably the most obvious in his defense for liberalism. He is the nouveau artist who rebelled against his father also and won his battle for total chaotic freedom. His principal relationship is with his son, whom he cannot understand because tradition and archaic moral codes provide the most unheard-of cause for

²³Marketa Goetz Stankiewica, "Slawomir Mrozek: Two Forms of the Absurd," Contemporary Literature 12 (Spring 1971): 198.

²⁴Mrozek, Tango, p. 24. ²⁵Ibid., p. 105.

²⁶Czeslaw Milosz, The Captive Mind (New York: Random House, Inc., 1953), p. 10.

rebellion. Stomil's exterior would have us believe he is a happy man within the present state of conditions. His constant defeat by unsuccessful experimentation, however, would reveal a man desperately searching for purpose.

Mrozek describes Eleanor as "a woman in the flower of middle-age."²⁷ She is Arthur's mother but has very little time for him, or for any other member in the house, save Eddie. With Eddie she fulfills her sexual needs and desires and thus represents another downfall in the old morality. Her primary need is directly related to her present-day counterpart. Eleanor is a sexually frustrated housewife who is painfully aware of her age and desperately tries to retain her youth.

Ala, Arthur's cousin, is beautiful, young and in love. Mrozek describes her as "a girl of eighteen with a good figure and long hair."²⁸ Her age would indicate she has grown up amidst the total lack of moral values and as yet has not confronted the philosophical viewpoints posed by Arthur. When Arthur proposed to her as a step in his plan to reestablish conventions, she was bewildered as she would gladly sleep with him anyway. But Ala is in love with Arthur. She agrees to marry him on the grounds of principle because she still has hope that he will recognize and display his love for her. To Ala, ". . . everything

²⁷Hamish Thoms, "The Calgary Tango," Drama at Calgary 3 (June 1968): 48.

²⁸Mrozek, Tango, p. 30.

comes and seems natural; herself, her bed, the political system. She has no conflicts and has the aseptic attitude to love said to be the characteristic of Scandinavian girls."²⁹

The grandmother, Eugenia, Mrozek describes as "an elderly but well-preserved and lively lady, who suffers only occasionally from senile absentmindedness."³⁰ The poker-playing old lady represents the high aristocracy that became so well-ordered, that its only real enjoyment was mingling with the lower class, with the crudity, the sloppiness, and the authenticity for which it stands. ". . . greedy for life, ready to play cards in the middle of a battlefield, she is oblivious to real problems."³¹ Her death represents the eventual death of a rapidly disintegrating social class in Poland and a fast-disappearing generation of refinement throughout the world.

Eugenia's brother, Eugene, is a complicated character. He is a reactionary at heart but must be compared to the very real social opportunist who attaches himself to whatever power happens to take charge. He first supports Arthur in his revolution but when Eddie assumes command, he submits to the new ruler. Eugene has a strong need for recognition and responsibility but he hasn't the strength

²⁹Jan Kott, "Mrozek's Family," Encounter 25 (December 1965): 56.

³⁰Mrozek, Tango, p. 10.

³¹Stankiewica, "Slawomir Mrozek," p. 199.

or courage to obtain it alone. He is afraid of power and would probably frighten himself were it given to him.

Eddie is the purest example of disintegrated values. "He is sloppy, uncouth and authentic . . ." ³² and he seems to care little or nothing about anyone or anything. His bedroom activities with Eleanor and Ala fairly demonstrate present-day man's desires for sex without conventions. Eddie has a generally friendly tone with everyone in the play, but Arthur's constant insults, orders and dehumanizing efforts build up an unbearable desire for revenge and merciless power. In Poland, Eddie and his ultimate siege of power would bring to mind an eventual revolution of the lower working class. In this light, Mrozek's play can be interpreted as a threat to the existing totalitarian regime.

The Setting

"The action of Tango takes place in Poland, that is to say, everywhere." ³³ The idea is to create an environment which is as representative of American culture as it was of the Polish at its first performance in Warsaw. This necessitates costume and set designs which are neither recognizably Polish nor recognizably American. In correspondence to a realistic production concept, the director of this study has asked for a set which can be accepted as a

³²Thoms, "The Calgary Tango," p. 50.

³³Kott, "Mrozek's Family," p. 54.

believable environment where real people live; a realistic design concept which reflects objectively valid shapes, sizes, colors and set pieces. Opposing the written style of the play, the visually grotesque or bizarre shall be purposely avoided. Moreover, the function of this set will be to aid the actors in the sincere playing of their roles. The limitations posed by the nature of a revolving repertory make the building of a realistic "box" set virtually impossible. However, the director and designer have come to terms with a workable design which, with the aid of furniture and props, should be reasonably suggestive in its picture of a realistic household.

Mrozek has given a vivid description of the cluttered nature of the set in his list of stage directions at the beginning of the play. The living room, at the opening of the play, is cluttered with age-old reminders of the past social order. Full of debris and in a state of complete disorder, it presents a mood of chaotic carelessness and uncleanliness brought about by absolute freedom.

Subtle references to Polish political history and anti-Communist thematic content place the time of Tango in the mid-sixties.

. . . Arthur endeavors to reinstate the old social and moral codes by ending what his uncle calls fifty years of "jokes." Though Mrozek has not specified the time of the action of his play, it is clearly contemporary with the date of the initial production of the work in

1965. This places the beginning of the "joke" chronologically in the immediate vicinity of the Russian Revolution. . . .³⁴

Apart from the costume design and the stage properties, however, the time will not be emphasized for the theme is considerably contemporary with the present both at home and abroad.

Without forcing any specific time or place on our audience, we leave open to the imagination the wide variety of interpretations and nuances contained in the play. This setting avoids basic limitations which were not intended by the play's author, and allows one to "listen for whatever one may find in it."³⁵

Interpretation

It has long been felt that Polish drama is too Polish, "too tucked away in specifically and abstrusely national areas of experience to be penetrable for a foreign audience."³⁶ There is some truth in this, but Mrozek's Tango is on universal ground. It is a contemporary avant-garde comedy of the modern theatre and is not and should not be solely recognized as unduly Polish. Inherent in the play are themes ranging from man's destroyed sense of purpose

³⁴Mardi Valgema, "Socialist Allegory of the Absurd: An Examination of Four East European Plays," Comparative Drama 5 (Spring 1971): 45.

³⁵Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, p. 1.

³⁶August Grodzicki, "Mrozek's Danse Macabre," Polish Perspectives 8 (November 1965): 62.

under the mechanized formation of totalitarian rule to the contemporary disintegration of moral values and its ultimate effect on society.

It would be wrong to think that Tango has relevance only for the Communist sphere. The destruction of values, the invasion of the seats of power by vulgar mass man, can after all also be detected in the west.³⁷

Though the totalitarian inferences are readily apparent and unquestionably have a dramatic effect on East European audiences, the purpose is to define this director's originally conceived interpretation. This interpretation, for purposes of an American production, is universal in nature but particularly avoids totalitarian association.

Arthur tries in desperation to restore outmoded conventions and standards of conduct by which to measure good and evil. He senses there is something of a higher realm which is necessary to maintain such an order but he is unable to grasp it because he has not experienced it and is too intellectual and philosophical to make himself vulnerable to it. Unable to define that metaphysical being or belief in something greater than man, Arthur realizes he must "transcend" himself. He will become that powerful being. At this point Arthur portrays a Christ-like figure.

. . . I am the act, the will and the way. I am power. I am above, within and beside all things. Give thanks to me for fulfilling the dreams of your youth. This is my gift to you.³⁸

³⁷Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, p. 276.

³⁸Mrozek, Tango, p. 99.

But Arthur's family is insulted by this act and ignores his "adolescent foolishness." He so sincerely wants to save them from their purposeless existence that he must institute a rule of terror and threaten them with death. These threats are taken with a grain of salt because this household, along with modern man, has for some time now placed less and less emphasis on the metaphysical power.

At the most crucial peak of Arthur's reign, he is grossly weakened by the discovery that the girl he is to wed has been unfaithful to him. At once, Arthur sees himself as what he is, only man. But he painfully discovers, at least for himself, something more powerful than man, love.

Eddie, whose previous description typifies the essence of total moral disintegration, takes advantage of this moment of weakness. He brutally murders Arthur and puts into effect a strong-arm dictatorship. This strikingly symbolic event is representative of today's rapid devaluation and eventual elimination of religious values; a second crucifixion of Christ.

As the play comes to a close, Eddie invites Uncle Eugene to dance. Mrozek calls for "all the figures of the Tango"³⁹ and its implications are clear enough. Can this society find a compromise between conventions for their own sake (Eugene) and complete moral and religious disintegration (Eddie)? Neither lifestyle by itself and apart from

³⁹Ibid., p. 107.

the belief in something greater than man, will supply purpose for man's existence in present-day society. Arthur was the only possible link between rules of conduct and the purpose which governs their existence. And he is dead. Tango will be directed to emphasize its inherent religious thematic content; that man is gradually letting go of his religious ties (God) and that once those ties are totally broken, he faces defeat and everlasting hell. If we kill Arthur (Christ) we will have to reckon with all the Eddies in the world and face an inevitable doom to a life of turmoil and purposelessness.

It is this director's intention to prod the audience into reevaluating their own religious beliefs. Although Arthur has been killed in the action of the play, his death should serve as the very reminder that Christ is not dead at all. We have simply neglected him. What are our beliefs? Do they need rekindling? These are the questions over which each member of the audience must ponder for himself.

CHAPTER II

PROMPT BOOK

Act One

(A LARGE, HIGH ROOM. THE WALLS ARE NOT VISIBLE. THIS GIVES THE IMPRESSION THAT THE ROOM EXTENDS BEYOND THE EDGE OF THE STAGE. BETWEEN ONE CORNER OF THE WALL AND THE LEFT EDGE OF THE STAGE THERE IS A DOORWAY SUGGESTING A KIND OF CORRIDOR LEADING OFFSTAGE TO THE LEFT. ANOTHER DOWN STAGE RIGHT INDICATES THE CORRIDOR CONTINUES OFFSTAGE TO THE RIGHT. THE DOORS ALL LOOK THE SAME: HIGH, PAINTED A DARK COLOR, AND ORNAMENTED IN A STYLE BEFITTING OLD, SOLIDLY MIDDLE-CLASS HOUSES. UPSTAGE RIGHT IS A LARGE PLATFORM SUPPORTING A MARBLE CATAFALQUE AND A SINGLE STANDING CANDLEABRA. UPSTAGE CENTER IS A HIGH CURTAINED ARCHWAY CONCEALING A SMALL GAME ROOM WHICH LEADS TO OTHER PARTS OF THE HOUSE. ON THE STAGE: A TABLE WITH EIGHT CHAIRS, ARMCHAIRS, A COUCH, SMALL TABLES. THE PROPERTIES ARE ARRANGED HAPHAZARDLY AS THOUGH THE FAMILY HAD JUST MOVED IN OR WERE ABOUT TO MOVE OUT. GREAT CONFUSION. IN ADDITION, THE WHOLE STAGE IS FULL OF DRAPERIES, HANGING, LYING OR ROLLED, ADDING TO THE IMPRESSION OF CONFUSION AND BLURRING THE OUTLINES OF THE ROOM. AT ONE POINT ON THE FLOOR DRAPERIES ARE THROWN INTO A HEAP, FORMING A KIND OF BED. AN OLD-FASHIONED BLACK BABY CARRIAGE ON HIGH, THIN WHEELS. A DUSTY WEDDING DRESS. A DERBY HAT. THE VELVET TABLECLOTH IS SHOVED HALF-ASIDE. THREE PERSONS ARE SEATED AT THE UNCOVERED PART OF THE TABLE. THE FIRST, WHO WILL BE CALLED GRANDMA FOR THE PRESENT, IS AN ELDERLY BUT WELL-PRESERVED AND LIVELY LADY, WHO SUFFERS ONLY OCCASIONALLY FROM SENILE ABSENTMINDEDNESS. HER DRESS, IN A GARISH-COLORED FLOWER PATTERN, HAS A TRAIN ATTACHED; SHE WEARS A JOCKEY CAP AND SNEAKERS. SHE SEEMS TO BE NEAR-SIGHTED. A GRAY-HAIRED, EXTREMELY POLITE OLD MAN. HE IS WEARING GLASSES WITH THIN GOLD RIMS, BUT HIS DRESS IS DISORDERED, AND HE SEEMS DUSTY AND INTIMIDATED. SWALLOW-TAIL BUT KHAKI-COLORED SHORTS, SCOTCH-PLAID KNEE SOCKS, TORN PATENT-LEATHER SHOES, BARE KNEES. THE THIRD INDIVIDUAL, WHO GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF BEING CRUDE AND SHADY, WEARS BAGGY, LIGHT-GRAY RUMBLED PANTS AND AN UGLY CHECKED SHIRT, OPEN AT THE CHEST. HIS SHIRTSLEEVES ARE ROLLED UP. HE HABITUALLY SCRATCHES HIS FAT BEHIND. LONG GREASY HAIR, WHICH HE FREQUENTLY COMBS WITH A COMB WHICH HE TAKES FROM HIS BACK POCKET. SMALL, SQUARE MUSTACHE. UNSHAVEN. A WATCH WITH A SHINY GOLD WRISTBAND. ALL THREE ARE DEEP IN THEIR CARD GAME. ON THE VELVET TABLECLOTH: DISHES, CUPS, CARAFES, ARTIFICIAL FLOWERS, SCRAPS OF FOOD.

BUT ALSO A FEW INCONGRUOUS OBJECTS: A LARGE, EMPTY, BOTTOMLESS BIRD CAGE; A LADY'S SHOE; A PAIR OF RIDING BREECHES. EVEN MORE THAN THE REST OF THE FURNISHINGS, THIS TABLE GIVES AN IMPRESSION OF HAPHAZARDNESS, ECCENTRICITY AND DISORDER. EACH PLATE COMES FROM A DIFFERENT SET, EACH OBJECT IS OF A DIFFERENT PERIOD AND STYLE. FROM STAGE LEFT ENTERS A YOUNG MAN OF TWENTY-FIVE AT THE MOST: IMPOSING AND PLEASANT APPEARANCE. NEAT, FRESHLY PRESSED, READY-MADE SUIT THAT FITS HIM PERFECTLY, WHITE SHIRT, TIE. UNDER HIS ARM HE IS CARRYING BOOKS AND PAPERS. HE STANDS STILL AND OBSERVES THE SCENE. THE THREE CARD PLAYERS DO NOT NOTICE HIM. THE TABLE IS QUITE FAR TO THE LEFT. THE PERSON TEMPORARILY KNOWN AS GRANDMA IS SITTING WITH HER BACK TO THE YOUNG MAN, HER PROFILE TO THE AUDIENCE. THE ELDERLY GENTLEMAN IS FACING HER. AT THE HEAD OF THE TABLE THE THIRD PLAYER, WITH HIS BACK TO THE AUDIENCE. THE YOUNG MAN WHO HAS JUST COME IN IS TO ONE SIDE OF HIM.) [SEE FIGURE 1]

PERSON TEMPORARILY KNOWN AS GRANDMA

(THROWING A CARD ON THE TABLE WITH EXAGGERATED GUSTO):
Three of spades. Razor blades.

PLAYER WITH MUSTACHE

(THROWING DOWN A CARD): Down on the table goes old Aunt Mabel. (HE DRINKS BEER FROM A BOTTLE STANDING BESIDE HIS CHAIR.)

OLD GENTLEMAN

(TIMIDLY CLEARING HIS THROAT; SPEAKS WITH A VISIBLE EFFORT):
Indeed, yes. I mean. . . Well, plunk! (HE THROWS DOWN A CARD.)

PERSON TEMPORARILY KNOWN AS GRANDMA

(WAITS FOR A MOMENT, THEN WITH DISAPPROVAL): Plunk! Oh come on, Eugene! Plunk what?

OLD GENTLEMAN or EUGENE

(STUTTERING HELPLESSLY): Plunk. . . plunk. . . .

PLAYER WITH MUSTACHE

The old gentleman's not in form today.

HE TAKES A SWIG FROM THE BOTTLE.

PERSON TEMPORARILY KNOWN AS GRANDMA

Eugene! If you're going to play with us, you've got to do it right. Plunk's all right, but then what?

EUGENE

Well, just plain plunk!

PERSON TEMPORARILY KNOWN AS GRANDMA

Certainly not. Why don't you help him out, Eddie?

PLAYER WITH MUSTACHE or EDDIE

With plunk? That's a tough word to work with. How about: Scram, Sam. We're on the lam.

EUGENE

Splendid! Splendid. But if you'll excuse my asking, what does it mean? Who's on the lam?

EDDIE

It's what they say, that's all.

PERSON TEMPORARILY KNOWN AS GRANDMA

See, with a little effort you can do it too.

EDDIE

The old gentleman is a bit bashful.

PERSON TEMPORARILY KNOWN AS GRANDMA

Thank you, Eddie dear. I don't know what we would do without you.

EDDIE

Don't mention it. (HE SEES THE YOUNG MAN AND QUICKLY HIDES THE BOTTLE UNDER THE TABLE.) I'd better be leaving.

PERSON TEMPORARILY KNOWN AS GRANDMA

What? Why? What's got into you? Right in the middle of our game?

YOUNG MAN

Good morning!

PERSON TEMPORARILY KNOWN AS GRANDMA

(TURNS AROUND, ANNOYED): Oh, it's you.

YOUNG MAN

Yes, me. What's going on here anyway?

PERSON TEMPORARILY KNOWN AS GRANDMA

What do you mean? We're just having our little game.

YOUNG MAN

I can see that. But with whom?

PERSON TEMPORARILY KNOWN AS GRANDMA

With whom? Don't you recognize your Uncle Eugene any more?

YOUNG MAN

I wasn't asking about Uncle Eugene. I'll settle with him later. Who is this individual? (HE INDICATES EDDIE.)

EDDIE

(STANDS UP): I'll just be running along now: Madam, the pleasure was mine.

PERSON TEMPORARILY KNOWN AS GRANDMA

Edward! Stay!

YOUNG MAN

Out! Out!

EDDIE

(REPROACHFULLY TO GRANDMA): Dear lady, didn't I tell you we shouldn't have played today?

EUGENE

(POINTING TO GRANDMA): It's her fault. Entirely her fault.

I didn't even want to play.

YOUNG MAN

(STEPPING UP TO THE TABLE): I said Out!

EDDIE

Easy, Aces. I'm going!

ON HIS WAY OUT HE COMES CLOSE TO THE YOUNG MAN. HE TAKES ONE OF THE BOOKS FROM UNDER HIS ARM AND OPENS IT.

YOUNG MAN

(RUSHING TOWARD THE TABLE): How often have I told you never to let this happen again?

(HE RUNS AROUND THE TABLE IN PURSUIT OF GRANDMA, WHO TRIES TO EVADE HIM.)

PERSON TEMPORARILY KNOWN AS GRANDMA

No! No!

YOUNG MAN

Oh yes, oh yes! And right now too!

EDDIE

(LEAFING THROUGH THE BOOK): Fabulous!

PERSON TEMPORARILY KNOWN AS GRANDMA

What do you want of me anyway?

YOUNG MAN

(RUNNING AFTER HER): You know very well what I want.

EUGENE

Arthur, have you no pity for your own grandmother?

YOUNG MAN or ARTHUR

Oh, so you're talking back again are you, Uncle?

EUGENE

Not at all. I simply wanted to say that even if Eugenia may have forgotten herself a bit. . . (EUGENE STANDS, ARTHUR SLOWLY BACKS HIM AROUND FRONT OF TABLE STAGE RIGHT TO PLATFORM)

ARTHUR

Then I'll just have to remind her. And you too, Uncle. Pity! How can you talk about pity? Do any of you have any pity for me? Does she ever try to understand me? Oh, but this time, Uncle, you're going to get what's coming to you. Why aren't you working? Why aren't you writing your memoirs?

EUGENE

I did write a bit this morning, but then they came barging into my room, and. . .

PERSON HITHERTO KNOWN AS GRANDMA or EUGENIA

Eugene! Traitor!

EUGENE

(HYSTERICALLY): Why can't you all just leave me in peace?

ARTHUR

Oh, we will. But you've got to be punished too. (HE PUTS THE BOTTOMLESS BIRD CAGE OVER EUGENE'S HEAD) Now sit there until I let you out. (EUGENE SITS ON DOWN LEFT CORNER OF PLATFORM)

EUGENIA

Serves him right.

ARTHUR

Don't think you're going to get off free. (HE LEAPS UP ON THE PLATFORM AND UNCOVERS A HUGE MARBLE CATAFALQUE) Hup! Up you go!

EDDIE

(LOOKING THROUGH THE BOOK WITH INCREASING INTEREST): Terrific! (HE SITS DOWN OFF TO ONE SIDE.)

EUGENIA

Again? I don't want to!

ARTHUR

Not another word!

(EUGENIA HUMBLY APPROACHES THE CATAFALQUE, EUGENE ATTENTIVELY OFFERS HER HIS ARM.)

Up you go.

EUGENIA

(ICILY): Thank you, Judas!

EUGENE

Your cards were no good anyway. (CROSSES TO CHAIR STAGE CENTER)

EUGENIA

Fool!

ARTHUR

This ought to cure you of your disgusting frivolity. (TAPPING HIS POCKETS.) Matches! Who's got a match?

EUGENIA

(LYING DOWN ON THE CATAFALQUE): At least spare me the candles, Arthur.

ARTHUR

Quiet, or I'll think up something really grim.

EDDIE

(WITHOUT TAKING HIS EYES OFF THE BOOK, PRODUCES A BOX OF MATCHES): Here!

(ARTHUR TAKES THE MATCHES, LIGHTS THE CANDLES. EUGENE TAKES THE ARTIFICIAL FLOWERS FROM THE TABLE, PLACES THEM BESIDE EUGENIA, TAKES A FEW STEPS BACK TO EXAMINE THE EFFECT, ADJUSTS THE FLOWERS AGAIN.)

Great pictures! (HE GIGGLES.)

EUGENIA

(RAISING HER HEAD): What's he looking at?

ARTHUR

Lie down!

EUGENE

(STEPS UP TO EDDIE AND LOOKS OVER HIS SHOULDER): HANDBOOK OF ANATOMY.

EUGENIA

Just what he needs!

EDDIE

Is Mr. Arthur studying medicine?

EUGENE

He's studying for three different degrees. One in philosophy. (SITS IN CHAIR STAGE CENTER)

EDDIE

Is there something like this for philosophy?

EUGENE

Don't be ridiculous! They don't illustrate philosophy.

EDDIE

Too bad. It might be good.

EUGENIA

(SITTING UP): Let me see!

ARTHUR

Lie down!

EUGENIA

To think that you're the youngest one of us all! Why don't you enter a monastery?

ARTHUR

Why do you simply refuse to understand me, Grandmother?

EUGENE

Yes, I've been wondering about that myself. Why do you refuse to understand him, Eugenia?

ARTHUR

I just can't live in a world like this!

(ELEANOR ENTERS FROM BEHIND THE CURTAINS UPSTAGE CENTER. SHE HAS DEFINITELY CROSSED THE THRESHOLD OF MIDDLE AGE. SHE IS WEARING A SHORT WINE-COLORED DRESS, PARTICULARLY STYLISH IN THE MID SIXTIES.)

ELEANOR

What kind of world? What ARE you people doing?

ARTHUR

Good morning, Mother.

ELEANOR

Mama! On the catafalque again?

EUGENIA

A good thing you've come, Eleanor. Now you can see for yourself how he treats me.

ARTHUR

How I treat YOU? She had to be disciplined.

EUGENIA

He's trying to educate me.

ARTHUR

She really goes too far.

ELEANOR

What did she do?

ARTHUR

She knows.

ELEANOR

But why the catafalque?

ARTHUR

To remind her of eternity. Let her lie there and look within.

ELEANOR

(SEEING EDDIE): Ah, Eddie. (CROSSES DOWN LEFT TO EDDIE AT SOFA)

EDDIE

Hi!

ARTHUR

You mean you know each other?

EUGENE

(TO HIMSELF): Here we go.

Eleanor

Everybody knows Eddie. Why not?

ARTHUR

I'm going mad. I come home and what do I find? Laxity, chaos, shady characters, ambiguous relationships. And on top of all that, it turns out that even you. . . No! No! Why does all this have to happen? Where is it all going to end? (FINDING REFUGE AT TABLE STAGE RIGHT)

ELEANOR

Perhaps you'd like something to eat?

ARTHUR

Eat? No. All I want is to get the situation under control.

ELEANOR

Oh Lord. I sleep with Eddie from time to time. Don't I, Eddie?

EDDIE

(ABSENTLY): What? Oh yes. Of course. (HE UNFOLDS SOME COLOR PLATES INSERTED IN THE BOOK.) Look at that! And all in color!

ARTHUR

What's that? What did you say, Mother?

ELEANOR

I'll get you something to eat. I won't be long.

(SHE GOES OUT THROUGH THE DOOR LEFT REAR. ARTHUR SITS DOWN DISTRAUGHT.)

EUGENE

(TO HIMSELF): She did put that a bit bluntly. I must say. (TO ARTHUR.) May I take this off now? (SILENCE.) Arthur? (SILENCE.) Arthur! (SILENCE.) Arthur, I say, may I take this thing off now?

ARTHUR

Take it off. (TO HIMSELF.) Nothing matters now.

EUGENE

(TAKING THE BIRD CAGE OFF HIS HEAD): Thank you! (HE SITS DOWN NEXT TO ARTHUR.) What's wrong, Arthur?

EUGENIA

Christ, this thing is hard!

EUGENE

I can understand that this business about your mother must be rather upsetting. I can well understand that. I'm an old-timer. (PAUSE.) Eddie's not a bad sort. He has a good heart even if he doesn't look very bright. (MORE SOFTLY.) Between you and me, he's not quite all there. . . . (LOUDER.) But what can you expect, my dear boy? Life must be taken as it is. . . . (MORE SOFTLY) . . . or must it? (LOUDER.)

Now, now, Arthur. Chin up! Eddie has his good points, and after all, my goodness . . . we've got to face up to it: your mother isn't quite what she used to be. (MORE SOFTLY.) You should have seen her when she was young, before you were born, of course. Even before Stomil came along . . . (PONDERING, MOVES HIS CHAIR CLOSER TO ARTHUR; VERY SOFTLY.) What are you planning to do about Eddie anyway? Frankly, he's a thoroughly bad sort. His fingernails are always so dirty. A sleazy type, wouldn't you say? And I'm convinced that he cheats at cards. He smacks his lips when he eats and he goes around here as if he owned the place. I wouldn't even shake hands with him if I weren't afraid of offending Eugenia. You know what he did yesterday? I go to Eugenia and I say: "Look here, it's fine with me if Eddie doesn't brush his teeth, but if he has to borrow my toothbrush, I wish he'd brush his teeth with it instead of his shoes." And what does he say? "There's nothing wrong with my teeth. They're white. They're sharp. But sometimes my shoes get dirty." That's what he says and then throws me out. I wouldn't want to influence you one way or another, but if I were you, I'd get rid of him. How about throwing him down the stairs? Hm?

ARTHUR

Oh, that wouldn't really solve anything.

EUGENE

Or maybe a left hook right in the face?

ARTHUR

That, too, would leave the basic situation unchanged.

EUGENE

Just a small one right in the face? It couldn't do any harm. If it's all right with you, I'll tell him to get ready for one.

(EUGENIA HAS MEANWHILE SAT UP AND IS LISTENING. AS SOON AS EUGENE NOTICES THIS, HE MOVES AWAY FROM ARTHUR. LOUDER.)

Eddie is simple, yes, simple and very decent. I have never in all my years met a simpler man.

EUGENIA

What's wrong with him?

EUGENE

I don't know. He just doesn't react anymore.

EUGENIA

What are you whispering in his ear?

EUGENE

Me? Nothing. I've just been telling him about the life of the bees. (HE SITS IN CHAIR STAGE CENTER.)

ELEANOR

(BRINGS IN A TRAY WITH A CUP AND COOKIES): Breakfast is ready, Arthur!

ARTHUR

(WAKING OUT OF HIS THOUGHTS; AUTOMATICALLY): Thank you, Mother.

(HE SITS DOWN AT THE TABLE. ELEANOR SETS THE TRAY DOWN IN FRONT OF HIM, ROUGHLY SHOVING OTHER OBJECTS ASIDE. ARTHUR STIRS HIS COFFEE. THE TRAY IS TILTED UP. HE PULLS A WOMAN'S SHOE OUT FROM UNDER IT AND HEAVES IT ANGRILY INTO THE CORNER.)

EDDIE

Could you let me have this until Tuesday?

ARTHUR

I'm afraid not. I've got an exam on Monday.

EDDIE

Too bad. Some terrific pictures in here.

ELEANOR

Mother, get down off that thing, will you? You look like a character out of Edgar Allen Poe. (ELEANOR RETRIEVES SHOE)

EUGENIA

A who, out of what?

ELEANOR

Oh, just like somebody on a catafalque. It's all so terribly old-fashioned.

EUGENIA

(MOTIONING TOWARD ARTHUR): But what will he say?

ELEANOR

He's eating now. He won't say anything.

EUGENIA

Arthur, may I get down?

ARTHUR

It's all the same to me. (HE DRINKS.) This coffee's bitter.

ELEANOR

We're all out of sugar. Eugene ate it.

EUGENE

I beg your pardon. All I ate was the jam. It was Eddie who ate up the sugar.

(EUGENIA COMES DOWN FROM THE CATAFALQUE AND CROSSES TO CHAIR LEFT OF TABLE.)

ELEANOR

And blow those candles out, will you? We've got to economize. (LOOKING AT THE CARDS.) Who's winning?

EUGENIA

Eddie.

EUGENE

There is something positively unnatural about Edward's good luck.

ELEANOR

Eddie, have you been cheating?

EDDIE

Me? Never.

ELEANOR

You haven't? But you promised you'd lose today, remember?
I need the money for groceries. (SHE SITS BY EDDIE ON SOFA)

EDDIE

(THROWING UP HIS ARMS): I must be a born winner. Tough
luck!

(ENTER STOMIL, ARTHUR'S FATHER. IN PAJAMAS, SLEEPY.
YAWNING AND SCRATCHING HIMSELF. HE IS A LARGE, CORPULENT
MAN WITH GRAY HAIR LIKE A LION'S MANE.)

STOMIL

I smelled coffee. (CATCHING SIGHT OF EDDIE.) Hello, Eddie.

(ARTHUR THRUSTS THE TRAY ASIDE AND OBSERVES THE SCENE WITH
TENSE INTEREST.)

ELEANOR

I thought this was your day to sleep until noon. The bed
will be occupied after lunch.

STOMIL

I can't sleep. A whole new idea suddenly came to me.
Who's drinking coffee anyway? Oh, it's you, Arthur . . .
(HE STEPS UP TO THE TABLE.)

ARTHUR

(DISGUSTEDLY): Good God, Father, can't you at least button
your pajamas?

STOMIL

What for?

ARTHUR

What for? What do you mean, what for?

STOMIL

I mean: What for? Such a simple question and you can't find an answer. (CROSSES STAGE RIGHT BEHIND ARTHUR)

ARTHUR

Because . . . because one just doesn't appear like that.

STOMIL

(DRINKING ARTHUR'S COFFEE): You see? Your answer is meaningless. It's pure convention. It won't stand up under the scrutiny of the intellect.

ARTHUR

Isn't that enough?

STOMIL

(BACKTRACKS BEHIND ARTHUR TO TABLE LEFT): Not at all. Not for me. I'm the kind of man who goes deeper. If we're going to discuss this, we've got to take the imponderables into account.

ARTHUR

Oh Lord, Father, can't you button your fly first and then talk it over?

STOMIL

(PROCEEDS WITH MORNING EXERCISES WHILE DELIVERING THIS SPEECH): That would be a complete reversal of the logical thought process. The effect would precede the cause. Man should never act without thinking, never act like an automaton.

ARTHUR

I take it then that you will not button your pajamas.

STOMIL

No, son. Anyway, I can't. No buttons.

(HE TAKES A SWALLOW OF COFFEE. HE SETS THE CUP DOWN ON THE TABLE. UNNOTICED, EDDIE HAS CREPT UP BEHIND ARTHUR.)

ARTHUR

I might have expected as much.

STOMIL

Not at all. In this case at least, matter springs from the mind.

(EDDIE REACHES OVER ARTHUR'S SHOULDER FOR THE CUP AND DRINKS.)

ARTHUR

That's precisely what I wanted to talk to you about, Father.

STOMIL

Later, boy. Later. (TAKES A SWALLOW OUT OF THE CUP WHICH IS NOW IN FRONT OF EDDIE. LOOKS TOWARD THE CATAFALQUE.) Isn't anybody ever going to remove that thing?

ELEANOR

Why?

STOMIL

Well, I have nothing against it on purely formal grounds. Actually it enriches reality, stimulates the imagination. But I could use the space for my experiments.

ELEANOR

But you've got the whole house.

EUGENIA

I'd be glad, too, if you got rid of it. Then Arthur couldn't torture me.

ARTHUR

(POUNDING THE TABLE WITH HIS FIST): You see? What's going on in this house? Chaos, anarchy, entropy! How long has it been since Grandfather died? Ten years! (LEAPS UP ON PLATFORM BESIDE CATAFALQUE) And all that time nobody's ever thought of riddling the house of that catafalque. Incredible! We should be grateful, though, that you at least took Grandfather out of the house.

EUGENE

We couldn't keep Grandfather any longer.

ARTHUR

I'm not interested in the details. It's the principle of the thing.

STOMIL

(DRINKING COFFEE, BORED): Really?

ARTHUR

(JUMPS UP AND RUNS ACROSS THE STAGE): But it's not only Grandfather. I was born twenty-five years ago and my baby carriage is still standing here. (HE KICKS THE BABY CARRIAGE.) Why isn't it up in the attic? And what's this thing? Mother's wedding dress. (HE PULLS THE DUSTY VEIL FROM UNDER A PILE OF RUBBISH.) Why isn't it put away in a closet? And Uncle Eugene's riding breeches. What are they lying around here for when the last horse he ever rode died forty years ago? No order, no sense of reality, no decency, no initiative. You can't move in this place, you can't breathe, you can't live!

(TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE CONFUSION, EDDIE CROSSES STAGE LEFT TO SOFA BY ELEANOR AND EMPTIES THE CUP AT ONE GULP.)

ELEANOR

(ASIDE TO EDDIE): How beautifully you drink, Eddie!

STOMIL

My boy, tradition doesn't interest me in the slightest. Your indignation is absurd. You know very well we attach no importance to these monuments of the past, these relics of family tradition. That's why everything's lying around like this. We live in freedom. (HE LOOKS INTO THE CUP.) Where's my coffee?

ARTHUR

No, no, Father, you just don't understand me. That's not what bothers me. No, that's not it.

STOMIL

Then kindly explain yourself more clearly, will you, boy?

(TO ELEANOR.) Isn't there any more coffee?

ELEANOR

No, there won't be any until the day after tomorrow.

STOMIL

Why the day after tomorrow?

ELEANOR

How should I know?

STOMIL

All right, Never mind. (STOMIL SITS AT ELEANOR'S RIGHT ON SOFA. EDDIE IS TO HER LEFT.)

ARTHUR

Listen to me! It's not this particular tradition that bothers me. (ARTHUR CORSES TO STAGE CENTER.) It's a fact that in this family there's no frame of reference at all. All that's left is bits and pieces, fragments, rubbish. You've destroyed everything but you go on destroying; you've gone on so long you've finally forgotten why you began in the first place.

ELEANOR

He's right. Stomil, do you still remember how we shattered tradition? How, in protest against tradition, I gave myself to you with Mummy and Daddy looking on? In the first row of the orchestra at the opening night of Tannhauser. What a gorgeous scandal that was! (ARTHUR CROSSES RIGHT TO TABLE FOR SUPPORT) Where are the days when people were still shocked by such things? And then you proposed to me.

STOMIL

As I recall it was at the National Museum's first avant-garde exhibition. The critics gave us rave reviews.

ELEANOR

No. It was at the opera. At the exhibition it wasn't you, or maybe it wasn't me. You're getting everything mixed up.

STOMIL

Possibly. (WITH ENTHUSIASM.) The days of revolt, the time of the great leap forward. Liberation from the fetters of the old art and the old way of life. Man coming into his own, man overthrowing the old gods and putting himself on the pedestal. (CROSSES STAGE RIGHT TO TABLE AND THROWS ARM AROUND ARTHUR) The seed burst open, the chains snapped. Revolution and release. That was our slogan then. Away with outmoded forms, down with convention! Long live the dynamic! (EXCITED, STOMIL CROSSES TO TRUNK DOWNSTAGE LEFT) Life as creation, an incessant striving toward new frontiers! Movement and struggle! All form transcended!

ELEANOR

Stomil! You've been drinking at the fountain of youth! I hardly recognize you. (SHE CROSSES TO STOMIL DOWNSTAGE LEFT)

STOMIL

Yes, we were young once.

ELEANOR

What do you mean? We haven't grown any older. We've never betrayed our ideals. Why, even now our motto is still: Forward! Ever forward!

STOMIL

(SITS ON TRUNK WITHOUT ENTHUSIASM): Yes. Yes. That's right.

ELEANOR

Do we have any prejudices? Do conventions mean anything to us? (SITS BESIDE STOMIL) Aren't we still fighting against the old? Aren't we free?

STOMIL

The old what?

ELEANOR

Well, the old times. Don't you remember? Don't tell me you've forgotten what we were just talking about? All those fetters, those rusty chains of religion, morality, society, art. Especially art, Stomil. Art!

STOMIL

Yes, of course. But when was all that actually?

ELEANOR

Just a minute. Let me figure it out. We were married in 1900 . . . no, just let me think . . . Arthur was born in 1930, or . . . oh, be quiet, will you? Or was it 1940?

STOMIL

Oh, then. I see. (HE LOOKS INTO A SMALL HAND MIRROR, PASSES HIS HAND OVER HIS FACE.)

ELEANOR

Don't interrupt me. You're getting me all mixed up . . . (FIGURES IN AN UNDERTONE, THOROUGHLY ABSORBED.) 1914 . . . 1918 . . . 1921 . . .

STOMIL

(AT THE MIRROR): We're young. Eternally young. . .

ARTHUR

Father's right.

STOMIL

What do you mean?

ARTHUR

It's all dead and gone now. All in the past.

(ELEANOR RUNS ACROSS THE STAGE, WHISPERING DATES, BECOMING MORE AND MORE ENTANGLED IN HER CALCULATIONS.)

STOMIL

What's gone?

ARTHUR

All those fetters and chains! They're all gone now, unfortunately.

STOMIL

Unfortunately? You don't know what you're saying. (PROGRESSES STAGE RIGHT TO ARTHUR) If you'd lived in those days, you'd know how much we've done for you. You have no idea what the world was like then. Can you imagine how much courage it took to dance the tango? Do you realize that in those days there were hardly any fallen women? That the only recognized style of painting was naturalism? That the theater was utterly bourgeois? Stifling. Insufferable. You couldn't even put your elbows down on the dinner table! I can still remember a youth demonstration on that very issue. (SITS AT CHAIR RIGHT OF TABLE) Why, it wasn't until after 1900 that the boldest, the most advanced spirits stopped giving up their seats to elderly people. No, we didn't spare ourselves in our struggle for these rights and if you today can push your grandmother around, its to us your thanks are due. You simply can't imagine how much you owe us. To think how we struggled to give you this freedom which you now despise!

ARTHUR

And what did you do with it? What did you produce? This bawdyhouse where nothing works because everyone can do what he pleases, where there are no laws and no violations?

STOMIL

I know only one law: Don't hesitate, do what you feel like. Every man is entitled to his own kind of happiness.

ELEANOR

(RUNNING ACROSS THE ROOM STAGE RIGHT TO STOMIL): Stomil, I've got it! I've figured it out! It was 1928.

STOMIL

What was?

ELEANOR

(IN CONSTERNATION): I've forgotten

ARTHUR

You've poisoned the generations before you and after you with your freedom. (RISES, CROSSES STAGE RIGHT) Look at Grandmother! She's completely addled. Haven't you noticed?

EUGENIA

I just knew he'd drag me into it.

STOMIL

There's nothing wrong with Mama. What do you mean?

ARTHUR

Naturally you're not shocked by her senile demoralization. (CROSSES BEHIND TABLE STAGE LEFT TO GRANDMOTHER) Once she was a dignified, self-respecting grandmother. And now? Now she plays poker with Eddie!

EDDIE

I beg your pardon. We also play bridge, you know.

ARTHUR

I wasn't talking to you.

STOMIL

Each has the right to do what he wants and with whomever he chooses. Old people too.

ARTHUR

That's not a right. It's a moral obligation to be immoral.

STOMIL

You astonish me. Your opinions are so terribly outdated. When we were your age, we considered every kind of conformity disgraceful. Rebellion! Rebellion alone had any value for us.

ARTHUR

What value?

STOMIL

A dynamic and therefore positive value, though sometimes in a negative way. (ARTHUR LAUGHS AND SITS ON TRUNK DOWN-STAGE LEFT--STOMIL FOLLOWS AND SITS BESIDE ARTHUR) I trust you don't think we were merely blind anarchists? Certainly not. We were a column marching off to the future, a movement, a historical process. History is indebted to us. What is rebellion? The rock on which progress builds its temple and the greater the scope of the rebellion the grander the temple will be. Believe me: the scope of our rebellion was prodigious.

ARTHUR

But if that's the case . . . why these misunderstandings? If you too are trying to do something constructive, why can't we build together? (UNOBSERVED, EDDIE HAS CROSSED STAGE RIGHT TO THE TABLE AND TAKEN A SEAT)

STOMIL

Impossible. What I said just now was purely objective. I described our historical role, but said nothing of our intentions. Well then, what were our intentions? Why, to do what we wanted, go our own ways, each for himself. We have always pursued our own inclinations. But by opposing everything, we paved the way for the future.

ARTHUR

What future?

STOMIL

That's not my affair. My job was to shatter existing forms.

(STOMIL RETREATS STAGE LEFT TO SOFA.)

ARTHUR

(ARTHUR FOLLOWS HIM.) In other words, we're still enemies?

STOMIL

Why take it so tragically? All you need to do is stop worrying about principles.

ELEANOR

Yes. What I still can't understand is why you, the youngest of us all, should be the one to harp on principles. It used to be the other way around.

ARTHUR

Because I'm starting out in the world. But what a world! If I want a world, I've got to make one.

STOMIL

But you're young, Arthur. Don't you want to be modern? At your age?

ARTHUR

That's just the point. These modern times of yours. Even Grandmother has grown old in this world that has lost its standards. That's how modern your era is. What's more, you've grown old in it.

EUGENE

If you'll allow me to put in a word, (EUGENE STANDS AT HIS CHAIR STAGE CENTER) I should like to call your attention to certain achievements, for instance, the right to wear short pants . . . ah, the fresh feel of the breeze. . .

ARTHUR

Oh, keep quiet, Uncle. (EUGENE SITS AGAIN) Don't you realize that, precisely because everything is possible, nothing is possible anymore? If you were at least bucking convention with your short pants. But all convention was

broken ages ago. By the time you came along it was all taken care of. The whole thing is absurd.

STOMIL

Well, what DO you want then? Tradition?

ARTHUR

An orderly world!

STOMIL

That's all?

ARTHUR

. . . and the right to rebel.

STOMIL

That's it. That's what I've been telling you all along:
REBEL!

ARTHUR

Don't you see that you've deprived me of every last chance to revolt? You've been nonconformists so long that there aren't any conventions left to rebel against. You've left nothing for me . . . nothing! Your only norm is the absence of all norms. The only thing left for me to rebel against is you . . . you and your immorality.

STOMIL

Go right ahead. Did I ever tell you not to?

EUGENE

That's the stuff, Arthur. You'll show them. (EUGENE ENTERS THE CARD GAME AT TABLE)

ELEANOR

Maybe it would calm you down. (ELEANOR APPROACHES ARTHUR STAGE CENTER)

(EUGENIA* MAKES SIGNS TO EDDIE; THEY COME TO AN UNDERSTANDING BEHIND ARTHUR'S BACK AND PICK UP THE CARDS.)

ARTHUR

(FALLS INTO AN ARMCHAIR STAGE CENTER WITH RESIGNATION):
Impossible!

ELEANOR

Why?

EUGENE

We're all in favor of it.

ARTHUR

Rebel against you? What are you anyway? A formless mass, an amorphous blob, an atomized world, a mob without shape or structure. Your world can't even be blown up; it's disintegrated all by itself.

STOMIL

You mean we're no good for anything?

ARTHUR

Exactly.

ELEANOR

But couldn't you just try?

ARTHUR

There's nothing to try. It's hopeless. You're all so disgustingly tolerant.

STOMIL

Yes, that could be irritating, I suppose. Still, I don't like to see you feeling so left out.

ELEANOR

(STANDS BEHIND HIM AND STROKES HIS HAIR): Poor little

Arthur. You mustn't think your mother's heart is made of stone.

EUGENE

We all love you, Arthur. We want to help you.

EUGENIA

(TO EDDIE): I pass.

ARTHUR

It's hopeless. This nonconformism you're pushing me into is only a new kind of conformism. But I can't be a conformist forever. I'm twenty-five. My friends are all laughing at me.

STOMIL

But what about art, Arthur? What about art?

ELEANOR

Exactly. You've taken the words out of my mouth.

ARTHUR

What art?

STOMIL

Well, art in general. I've devoted my whole life to art. Art is eternal rebellion. Why don't you give it a try?

EDDIE

Bring your bedding. Skip the wedding.

EUGENIA

Crash, smash, I'm out of cash.

ARTHUR

Father, you bore me. I want to be a doctor.

ELEANOR

A disgrace to the whole family! I've always dreamed of his becoming an artist. When I was carrying him in my womb, I ran through the woods stark naked, singing Bach. All for nothing!

ARTHUR

Maybe you sang out of tune.

STOMIL

All the same, don't give up hope. You still don't understand the value of art. I've just had an idea for a new experiment. You'll see. (CROSSES UPSTAGE RIGHT TO PLATFORM FOR PUPPETS)

ELEANOR

(CLAPPING HER HANDS): Eugenia, Eddie. Stomil has come up with something new.

EUGENIA

Again?

STOMIL

Yes. It came to me this morning. It's absolutely original.

ELEANOR

You'll put it on right away, won't you, Stomil?

STOMIL

I'm ready.

EUGENE

Heaven help us!

ELEANOR

Eugene, move the table. Make room.

(EUGENE SHOVES THE TABLE ASIDE WITH A GOOD DEAL OF CRASHING AND THUMPING. EUGENIA AND EDDIE PICK UP THE CARDS AND STEP TO ONE SIDE. UNDER THE MOUND OF DRAPERIES SUGGESTING A BED, SOMETHING STARTS TO MOVE. FINALLY COUSIN ALA'S HEAD COMES TO LIGHT.)

ALA

(A GIRL OF EIGHTEEN WITH A GOOD FIGURE AND LONG HAIR. SHE BLINKS IN THE LIGHT AND YAWNS): Where am I? First all that shouting and now they're moving furniture . . . What time is it anyway?

ARTHUR

Ala! (HE RUNS DOWNSTAGE CENTER TO ALA)

ELEANOR

I forgot to tell you, Ala has been here since six o'clock this morning.

STOMIL

This is marvelous, Ala. You're just in time for the show. (TO EUGENE.) That's fine. Now the catafalque.

ARTHUR

But why didn't you tell me? If I'd known, I'd have kept them quiet.

(HE NOTICES THAT EDDIE IS APPROACHING ALA WITH INTEREST.)

Back Eddie. Face to the wall.

(EDDIE STEPS BACK OBEDIENTLY AND RETURNS TO THE GROUP PREPARING FOR THE ENSUING EXPERIMENTATION.)

Did you sleep well?

ALA

So so.

ARTHUR

How long can you stay?

ALA

I don't know. I told Mother I might never go back.

ARTHUR

And what did she say?

ALA

Nothing. She wasn't there.

ARTHUR

Then how could you tell her?

ALA

Maybe I didn't. I don't remember.

ARTHUR

You've forgotten?

ALA

It was so long ago.

ARTHUR

How about some breakfast? Oh! We're out of coffee. May I sit beside you?

ALA

Why not?

(ARTHUR GETS THE TRUNK AND SITS DOWN BESIDE THE PILE OF DRAPERIES.)

ARTHUR

You're very lovely.

(ALA LAUGHS LOUDLY.)

What are you laughing about?

ALA

(SUDDENLY STOPS LAUGHING. GLOOMILY): Me? Laughing? I'm not laughing.

ARTHUR

But you WERE.

ALA

Are you trying to pick a fight?

ARTHUR

I've been thinking about you a lot, Ala.

ALA

(LOUD AND COARSE): Go on.

ARTHUR

I thought about meeting you!

ALA

Go on.

ARTHUR

And sitting down beside you . . .

ALA

Go on.

ARTHUR

. . . and talking with you . . .

ALA

(GRADUALLY GROWING EXCITED AS THOUGH WATCHING A BOXING MATCH): Go on.

ARTHUR

. . . about one thing and another . . .

ALA

Go on.

ARTHUR

(LOUDER): About different kinds of things.

ALA

Go on! Go on!

(ARTHUR PICKS UP A BOOK ON THE TRUNK AND THROWS IT AT ALA. SHE DODGES AND HIDES UNDER THE COVERS.)

ARTHUR

Come out!

ALA

(STICKING HER HEAD OUT): What's wrong with you?

(ARTHUR SAYS NOTHING.)

Why did you do that?

(ARTHUR SAYS NOTHING.)

What do you want anyway?

ARTHUR

That's what they all keep asking me.

ALA

Never mind. I don't need to know.

STOMIL

Kindly take your seats. Kindly take your seats.

(THE STAGE IS SET FOR STOMIL'S EXPERIMENT. TO STAGE RIGHT THE TABLE. NEARER THE PROSCENIUM, FOUR CHAIRS ARE LINED UP WITH THEIR BACKS TO THE AUDIENCE. EUGENIA, ELEANOR AND EUGENE SIT DOWN FROM LEFT TO RIGHT. EDDIE TRIES TO TIPTOE AWAY. EUGENE SEES HIM AND POINTS HIM OUT TO ELEANOR.)

ELEANOR

Eddie, where are you going?

EDDIE

Be back in a minute.

ELEANOR

You stay right here!

(EDDIE TURNS AROUND WITH RESIGNATION, SITS DOWN ON THE CHAIR TO THE RIGHT OF EUGENE, INTENTIONALLY STEPPING ON HIS FOOT.)

Arthur, Ala, what are you doing? We're waiting for you.

ALA

What's going on?

ARTHUR

Experimental drama. You know my father.

(HE GIVES HER HIS HAND. ALA JUMPS UP. SHE HAS ON A SHORT NIGHTGOWN THAT IS PARTICULARLY INVITING. IT SHOULD NOT BE TRANSPARENT--THIS IS CALLED EXPRESSLY TO THE ATTENTION OF DIRECTORS WHO LIKE TO MAKE THINGS EASY FOR THEMSELVES. THEY SIT ON THE TRUNK STAGE CENTER WITH BACKS TO THE AUDIENCE.)

STOMIL

(WHO HAS MEANWHILE COME BACK WITH A BIG BOX AND GONE BEHIND THE CATAFALQUE SO THAT ONLY HIS HEAD CAN BE SEEN): Ladies and gentlemen, your attention please. Here are the principal characters of our drama. (IN THE TONE OF A CIRCUS DIRECTOR INTRODUCING THE NEXT NUMBER.) Adam and Eve in paradise! (OVER THE CATAFALQUE WHICH SERVES AS THE STAGE, TWO PUPPETS MANIPULATED BY STOMIL ARE SEEN: ADAM AND EVE.)

EUGENE

We've had that.

STOMIL

(IN CONSTERNATION): When?

EUGENE

At the beginning of the world.

STOMIL

That was the old version. This is a new one.

EDDIE

Where's the snake?

ELEANOR

(WHISPERING): Shhh!

STOMIL

The snake is in our imagination. We all know the story.
Attention please! Here we go! (IN A DEEP VOICE.)

So this is Paradise.
I'm Adam and before me lies
A world of possibilities.
But now it starts. From Adam's bone
Eve steps upon the earth.
To what will SHE give birth?
O Destiny, 'tis known
To you alone.

(IN A SOPRANO.)

Adam was first, but he
Did not exist until
I also came to be.
He walks so proudly still.
Doesn't the poor man see
For all his intellection
That there is no perfection
Except in what is not?

Where does the darkness go
 When the sun comes out?
 O Destiny!

(A LOUD REPORT AND ALL THE LIGHTS GO OUT. GENERAL CONFUSION.)

ELEANOR'S VOICE

(ELEANOR STANDS AND RUNS STAGE CENTER): Stomil, Stomil, what's happened? You're not dead, are you?

EUGENE'S VOICE

Fire! Fire!

(ARTHUR LIGHTS A MATCH AND THEN THE CANDLES OVER THE CATAFALQUE. STOMIL APPEARS, HE IS HOLDING AN ENORMOUS REVOLVER.)

STOMIL

Well, what do you say? Not bad, eh?

ELEANOR

Stomil, you frightened us so!

STOMIL

Every experiment must shock. That's my first principle.

EUGENE

If that's what you were after, it was a success all right. My heart's still pounding.

ELEANOR

How did you do it, Stomil?

STOMIL

I unscrewed the fuse and fired the revolver. (STOMIL MEETS ELEANOR STAGE CENTER.)

ELEANOR

Marvelous!

EUGENE

What's so marvelous about it?

STOMIL

Don't you understand?

EUGENE

No, I don't.

ELEANOR

Don't mind him, Stomil. Eugene has always been slow.

STOMIL

How about you, Eugenia

EUGENIA

Huh?

STOMIL

(LOUDER): Did you understand the experiment, Mama?

ELEANOR

The experiment has made her deaf.

EUGENE

That doesn't surprise me.

STOMIL

Let me explain. (HE STEPS UP ON PLATFORM) The shock method creates an immediate unity of action and perception. See?

EUGENE

Yes, but . . .

STOMIL

Yes, but what?

EUGENE

But what's that got to do with Adam and Eve?

ELEANOR

Eugene, do try to concentrate.

STOMIL

What we are dealing with here is an intrinsically theatrical phenomenon, the dynamics of sense perception. That means something to you, doesn't it?

EUGENE

Frankly, I don't think it does.

STOMIL

(THROWS THE REVOLVER ON THE CATAFALQUE): I give up. (HE COLLAPSES IN CHAIR STAGE CENTER)

ELEANOR

Don't be discouraged, Stomil. Who's going to experiment if you lose heart?

(ALL STAND UP AND PUT THE CHAIRS BACK IN THEIR PLACES.)

EUGENE

A flop, friends.

EDDIE

Give me the movies.

ELEANOR

Well, now what should we do?

ARTHUR

Clear out! All of you. Out!

STOMIL

What's got into you?

ARTHUR

All of you! I can't bear the sight of you.

STOMIL

Is that a way to treat your own father?

ARTHUR

I used to have a father. Not anymore. I'll have to make myself a father.

STOMIL

You? YOU make ME? (HE STANDS)

ARTHUR

You and the whole lot of you. I'm going to make you all over. (HE MARCHES TO DOWN LEFT CORNER OF PLATFORM) And now get out. This minute!

STOMIL

That boy's going just a bit too far.

ELEANOR

Never mind, Stomil. Thank God, we're enlightened.

STOMIL

You think I should really go?

ELEANOR

Why not? After all, you're not really interested in anything but your experiments.

STOMIL

Ah yes, art! Modern art! Give me God and I'll make an experiment out of Him.

ELEANOR

There. You see!

(THEY ALL EXIT BEHIND PLATFORM UPSTAGE RIGHT.)

EDDIE

(TO EUGENIA): Come on, Grandma.

EUGENIA

Don't forget the cards.

(EDDIE PICKS UP THE CARDS AND GOES OUT WITH EUGENIA)

EDDIE

(TURNING AROUND AGAIN, TO ARTHUR): If you need anything

. . .

ARTHUR

(STAMPING HIS FOOT): Get out!

EDDIE

(CONCILIATORY): Okay, okay!

(HE GOES OUT WITH EUGENIA)

EUGENE

(AFTER MAKING SURE THAT THE OTHERS ARE GONE): You're absolutely right, Arthur. Between you and me, they're a bad lot.

ARTHUR

You too. Out!

EUGENE

Certainly. Certainly, my boy. I'm going. I only wanted to tell you that you can count on me.

ARTHUR

What do you mean?

EUGENE

Never mind. Just do what you think right. But remember. I can be useful to you. I'm not as far gone as the rest of them. (MORE SOFTLY.) I'm an old-timer.

ARTHUR

Glad to hear it. But now leave us alone, will you?

EUGENE

(GOES OUT TURNS AROUND AGAIN AND SAYS WITH EMPHASIS): An old-timer. (EXITS.)

ALA

Now what?

ARTHUR

Now I'll explain everything.

(BLACKOUT)

Act Two

(THE SAME SCENE AS IN ACT ONE. THE ONLY LIGHT COMES FROM A SIMPLE STANDING LAMP. ARTHUR IS SITTING IN AN ARMCHAIR. SOMEONE ENTERS FROM THE RIGHT.)

ARTHUR

Who's there?

FIGURE

Me.

ARTHUR

Who's me?

FIGURE

Your Uncle Eugene.

ARTHUR

Password?

EUGENE

New life. Countersign?

ARTHUR

Rebirth. (PAUSE.) All right. Come in.

(EUGENE STEPS INTO THE LIGHT. HE SITS DOWN FACING ARTHUR.)

EUGENE

Oof. I'm exhausted. (SITS ON COUCH)

ARTHUR

Is everything ready?

EUGENE

I've brought everything I could down from the attic. You should see the moths! You think it will work?

ARTHUR

It's got to work.

EUGENE

I'm worried, worried. They're so demoralized . . . Think of it. A whole lifetime in this bawdy-house . . . I beg your pardon, I meant this atmosphere of moral disintegration. You see, it's contagious. Forgive me.

ARTHUR

Forget it. What's my father doing?

EUGENE

He's in his room, working on a new production. (CROSSES)

STAGE RIGHT BEHIND CHAIR TO TABLE) Don't you feel sorry for him sometimes? After all, he actually believes in that art of his.

ARTHUR

Then why do you discourage him?

EUGENE

For spite. To get his goat. But the fact is, those experiments of his don't mean a thing to me. What do you make of them?

ARTHUR

I've got other problems. And Mother?

(EUGENE PEERS THRU CURTAINS UPSTAGE CENTER)

EUGENE

Can't see a thing. Either she's turned the light out or hung something over the keyhole. (HE CROSSES BACK TO THE SOFA AND SITS.)

ARTHUR

And Grandmother Eugenia?

EUGENE

Probably sitting at her mirror, putting on makeup.

ARTHUR

Good. You may go now. I have an important appointment in a few minutes.

EUGENE

(STANDS UP): Any further orders?

ARTHUR

(STANDS): Be vigilant. Eyes open, mouth shut, and ready for action.

EUGENE

Yes, sir. (ON HIS WAY OUT.) God protect you, Arthur, my boy . . . Maybe we'll manage to bring the good old days back again yet.

(EXITS UPSTAGE RIGHT. ALA ENTERS BY WAY OF THE CORRIDOR RIGHT. SHE IS STILL WEARING HER NIGHTGOWN.)

ALA

(YAWNING): What did you want me for?

ARTHUR

Shh . . . quiet.

ALA

Why?

ARTHUR

This is private--between you and me.

ALA

You think they care what we do. We could climb up the walls and sleep on the ceiling for all they care. (SHE SITS DOWN, ON SOFA WINCING AS THOUGH IN PAIN.)

ARTHUR

What's wrong?

ALA

Stomil pinched me twice today.

ARTHUR

The rotter!

ALA

Arthur, he's your father!

ARTHUR

(KISSING HER HAND GALLANTLY): Thank you for reminding me.

ALA

It sounds so old-fashioned, nobody calls his father a rotter nowadays.

ARTHUR

(STANDING BEHIND SOFA): What do you call him then?

ALA

Nothing. You just ignore him.

ARTHUR

(DISAPPOINTED): Then I was mistaken.

ALA

Well, it's your headache that he's your father. Personally, I think he's great.

ARTHUR

(CONTEMPTUOUSLY): An artist!

ALA

What's wrong with that?

ARTHUR

Artists are a plague. They were the first to contaminate our society.

ALA

(BORED): Oh, who cares? (YAWNS.) What did you want me for? It's cold in here. I'm practically naked. Hadn't you noticed?

ARTHUR

Well, what do you say? Have you thought it over?

ALA

You mean will I marry you? But I've already told you. I don't see the point.

ARTHUR

You mean the answer is no?

ALA

Why do you get so worked up about it? I mean--I don't care--if it means so much to you, we can get married tomorrow. We're already cousins.

ARTHUR

But I want you to care! I want you to realize that marriage is something very important.

ALA

Important? Why? I don't get it. If I'm going to have a baby it'll be with you, not with the minister. So what's the problem?

ARTHUR

Well, if it's not important in itself, then we've got to make it important.

ALA

What for?

ARTHUR

Nothing is important in itself. (ADVANCES TO LEFT OF SOFA) Things in themselves are meaningless. Unless we give them character, we drown in a sea of indifference. We have to create meanings, because they don't exist in nature.

ALA

But what for? What for?

ARTHUR

Well if you must have a reason, let's say: for our own pleasure and profit.

ALA

Pleasure?

ARTHUR

Yes. (SITS ON SOFA ARM LEFT.) We derive pleasure from profit and we only profit from doing things we attach importance to--difficult things, the unusual things that seem rare and precious. And that's why we have to create a system of values.

ALA

Philosophy bores me. I think I prefer Stomil. (SHE STICKS HER LEG OUT FROM UNDER THE NIGHTGOWN.)

ARTHUR

You only think that. Kindly remove that leg.

ALA

You don't like it?

ARTHUR

That has nothing whatsoever to do with the subject.

ALA

(OBSTINATELY): You really don't like it?

ARTHUR

(WITH DIFFICULTY TAKES HIS EYES OFF HER LEG): Oh, all right, show your leg if you want to. Anyway, it only proves my point.

ALA

My leg? (SHE EXAMINES HER LEG CLOSELY.)

ARTHUR

Yes. Do you know why you're showing your leg? Because I don't leap all over you like my artist father and everybody else does. That worries you. You were pretty bewildered this morning when we were all alone. You thought you knew what I wanted from you.

ALA

That's not true. (SHE PLOPS FEET ON COFFEE TABLE.)

ARTHUR

Not true? Ha. You think I didn't see how upset you were when I proposed marriage instead of just picking you up and throwing you down on the bed?

ALA

I had a headache.

ARTHUR

Headache? Go on. You just couldn't figure out WHAT was going on. You thought I wasn't attracted, that you must be losing your charms. If I suddenly started acting like my father, it would be a relief, wouldn't it? Yes. Except you'd run away, just to get even with me.

ALA

(STANDS UP WITH DIGNITY): I'm running all right.

ARTHUR

(TAKES HER BY THE HAND AND PULLS HER DOWN INTO THE CHAIR): Sit down. I haven't finished yet. All you care about is your sex appeal. You're so primitive! You can't think about anything else. You don't know anything else!

ALA

Are you suggesting that I'm backward? (SHE TRIES AGAIN TO STAND UP.)

ARTHUR

(HOLDING HER DOWN): You stay right here. You've confirmed my theory. My behavior was atypical; that baffled you. The unusual is a value in itself. See? I have given meaning to an encounter that would otherwise have meant nothing. I! (SITS ON RIGHT ARM OF SOFA)

ALA

Well, if you're so terribly clever, what do you need me for? (CROSSES DOWNSTAGE TO PILE OF CLOTHING) If you're so awfully superior, why don't you just live all by yourself?

ARTHUR

You don't have to be so touchy. (HE STANDS)

ALA

We'll see how far you get alone. Or with Uncle Eugene. (SHE RESOLUTELY DRAWS HER NIGHTGOWN OVER HER KNEES, BUTTONS IT UP TO THE NECK, AND WRAPS HERSELF IN A STEAMER RUG. SHE PUTS ON THE BOWLER AND DRAWS IT DOWN DEEP OVER HER FOREHEAD.)

ARTHUR

(SHYLY): Don't be angry. (HE CROSSES DOWNSTAGE CENTER TO ALA)

ALA

What do you care?

(PAUSE)

ARTHUR

Aren't you too warm . . . in that blanket?

ALA

No.

ARTHUR

Uncle Eugene's hat doesn't look very good on you.

ALA

I don't care.

ARTHUR

Suit yourself. Where were we anyway? Oh yes, a system of values . . . (HE MOVES TRUNK CLOSER TO ALA AND SITS) Now, generally speaking, a system of values is indispensable to the proper functioning both of the individual and of society. (HE SEIZES ALA'S HAND.) Without the right kind of values we can never hope to create a harmonious world or establish the necessary balance between those elements commonly termed good and evil--though of course I use these words in their larger rather than strictly ethical sense. Now in this connection our task is two-fold: We must, one, restore the practical relevance of these concepts and, two, formulate rules of conduct which . . .

(HE FLINGS HIMSELF AT ALA AND TRIES TO KISS HER. SHE STRUGGLES FREE; THEY WRESTLE. EDDIE ENTERS FROM CORRIDOR RIGHT WITH HIS TOWEL AROUND HIS NECK AND A HAIRNET ON HIS HEAD CROSSES TO PILE DOWNSTAGE CENTER.)

EDDIE

(WITH THE PRETENTIOUS ENUNCIATION TYPICAL OF THE SEMI-LITERATE): Oh, do excuse me.

ARTHUR

(LETS ALA GO AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED. ALA STRAIGHTENS HER HAT AND RUBS HER SHOULDER DEMONSTRATIVELY): What are YOU doing here?

EDDIE

I was just going to the kitchen for a drink of water. I beg your pardon, I didn't know you were conversing.

ARTHUR

Water? Water? What for?

EDDIE

(WITH DIGNITY): Because I'm thirsty, sir.

ARTHUR

At this hour? In the middle of the night?

EDDIE

(OFFENDED): If that's the way you feel about it, I can go without.

ARTHUR

(FURIOUS): Drink and get out!

EDDIE

As you wish. (HE CROSSES MAJESTICALLY TOWARD CURTAINS UP-STAGE CENTER.)

ARTHUR

Just a minute.

EDDIE

Yes, sir?

ARTHUR

The kitchen is on the right.

EDDIE

There? Impossible.

ARTHUR

I believe I know where the kitchen is in my own house.

EDDIE

You just can't be sure of anything these days. (HE CHANGES HIS DIRECTION AND GOES OUT THROUGH THE DOOR UPSTAGE LEFT.)

ARTHUR

That idiot! I'll have to take care of him once and for all. (RETURNS TO ALA DOWNSTAGE CENTER.)

ALA

(ICILY): Have you finished taking care of me? (STANDS AND
CROSSES TO TRUNK THEN SITS)

ARTHUR

It's all his fault.

ALA

I suppose it was his fault you nearly twisted my arm off.

ARTHUR

Does it hurt very much? (BEHIND ALA AT TRUNK)

ALA

What do you care?

(SHE AFFECTS A CRY OF PAIN. ARTHUR, TROUBLED, TRIES TO
EXAMINE HER SHOULDER.)

ARTHUR

Where does it hurt? (HE TOUCHES HER SHOULDER, BUT NOT WITH
ORIGINAL PURPOSE.)

ALA

(UNCOVERING HER SHOULDER): Here . . .

ARTHUR

I'm terribly sorry.

ALA

(UNCOVERING HER BACK): . . . and here . . .

ARTHUR

(DISMAYED): Really, I didn't mean to . . .

ALA

(THRUSTS HER LEG FORWARD): . . . and here . . .

ARTHUR

How can I ever make it up to you? . . .

ALA

(LAYS HER FOREFINGER ON HER RIB): . . . and here too!

ARTHUR

Forgive me. I didn't mean to . . .

ALA

(JUMPS UP AND EXCAPES STAGE RIGHT TO TABLE. ARTHUR FOLLOWS IN SELF-DEFENSE): Now you've shown what you really are--a brute. First a lot of talk and then the usual. We poor women! Is it our fault we have bodies? If we could only check them somewhere like a hat or a coat. Then maybe we'd be safe from our sweet-talking cousins. Frankly, I'm surprised. You with your noble ideals.

ARTHUR

(CONFUSED): But really, I . . .

ALA

No excuses! You don't think I like a good conversation too? But that calls for a nice restful atmosphere. How can I converse when some philosopher is clutching at my legs? But never mind. (SHE RETREATS TO CHAIR STAGE CENTER) What were we talking about? It was just beginning to be interesting when you . . .

(BEHIND THE DOOR THROUGH WHICH EDDIE HAS PASSED A SOUND OF GUSHING WATER IS HEARD. THEN GARGLING.)

ARTHUR

This is too much. (ARTHUR CROSSES TO LEFT OF STAGE CENTER CHAIR.) Do you seriously think I wanted to rape you?

ALA

(ALARMED): Didn't you?

ARTHUR

Certainly not. I was only teaching you a lesson.

ALA

Thanks. I know that subject.

ARTHUR

You can only think about one thing. Then why did you resist?
Come on. Why?

ALA

You're vulgar.

ARTHUR

Science knows no shame. Why?

ALA

Well, why did you attack me?

ARTHUR

Attack you? I was sacrificing myself.

ALA

What?

ARTHUR

Yes, sacrificing myself in my effort to make certain things
clear to you. It was a pure exercise in sexual pragmatics.

ALA

Pig! Scientific pig! Pragmatics? What is it anyway? Some
new kind of perversion?

ARTHUR

There's nothing new about it. I'm sure we'll always be
friends. Yes, women will follow me. (CROSSES TO PILE

DOWNSTAGE CENTER)

ALA

Women? Which women?

ARTHUR

All women. Women throughout the world will be my allies. And once the women are convinced, the men will soon come around.

ALA

What women? Anybody I know? (FOLLOWS HIM JEALOUSLY, RETURNS TO SOFA AND SITS) Anyway, do what you like with them. I couldn't care less.

ARTHUR

(HE CROSSES UPSTAGE LEFT TO SOFA ARM RIGHT.): Look here. The central fact of history is the total enslavement of women, children and artists by men.

ALA

I thought you didn't approve of artists.

ARTHUR

That's beside the point. The reason men don't like artists is that artists aren't men. That's what has always brought artists and women together--unfortunately. (SITS AT ALA'S RIGHT) The ideas men have dreamed up--like honor, logic, progress--have always been foreign to women and artists. It's only very recently that the male has even begun to suspect the existence of such things as ambiguity, relativity, forgetfulness--in short, the glamor and poetry of this world, the exact opposite of what he had originally invented in that thick soldier's skull of his and tried to impose on women, children and artists.

ALA

But what about you? (SEDUCTIVELY) Aren't you a male?

ARTHUR

(STANDS): I transcend myself; I take an objective view.
That's essential if I'm to carry out my plan.

ALA

Can I trust you?

ARTHUR

It was only to make up for their lack of imagination that men invented the concept of honor. And, at the same time, of effeminacy. Why? To guarantee male solidarity. Anyone who dared question the code of manly virtues was immediately accused of being effeminate. The result was that, in self-defense, women, children and artists closed ranks to form a single community. They had no choice. . . . Just a second.

(THE GARGLING IS STILL HEARD FROM THE KITCHEN. ARTHUR CROSSES TO THE KITCHEN DOOR--OPENS DOOR--SEES EDDIE WHO HAS BEEN LISTENING WITH HIS GLASS TO THE DOOR--SLAMS THE DOOR QUICKLY)

ALA

Maybe he's washing.

ARTHUR

Him? Not likely! (HE GOES BACK TO HIS PLACE.) Let's get back to the subject.

ALA

I just don't believe you. I see what you're getting at.
You can't fool me.

ARTHUR

I have no desire to fool you. I'm simply trying to make you aware of your own interests as a woman.

ALA

What does that mean? You want me to strip?

ARTHUR

Oh, don't be tedious. Once you've finally come to see that our interests coincide, you'll be willing to work with me. What do men want? They want to abolish all conventions relating to sex. And why? To make life easier for THEM, to do away with all barriers between desire and satisfaction.

ALA

(STANDS UP AND CROSSES DOWNSTAGE RIGHT): You've got something there. They jump you like a bull. Like you did just now.

ARTHUR

I can't deny that as an individual I'm subject to natural drives. But I have a higher goal. Taking advantage of the general breakdown in values, men have done everything they could to do away with the last remaining rules governing sexual behavior. I can't believe that women really like it, and that's the basis of my plan.

ALA

I like it fine.

ARTHUR

That's a lie. You CAN'T.

ALA

Yes, I like it. It means I'm free, I can do as I please. For instance, if I take my clothes off right now, what can you do about it? (SHE THROWS OFF THE STEAMER RUG AND REMOVES HER HAT.)

ARTHUR

Stop it. This is a serious discussion.

ALA

(UNDOING THE RIBBONS OF HER NIGHTGOWN): Why should I? Who's going to stop me? You? My mother? God? (SHE BARES HER SHOULDERS.)

ARTHUR

Cover yourself this minute! Pull up that nightgown. (HE TRIES DESPERATELY TO STOP HER)

ALA

I will not. It's my nightgown.

(EDDIE'S HEAD IS SEEN IN THE DOORWAY)

Oh, hi, Eddie. Come on in. (SKIPS STAGE LEFT TOWARD EDDIE)

ARTHUR

(PUSHING EDDIE AWAY): Get out or I'll kill you. Taking your clothes off in front of this . . . Have you no shame?

ALA

He may not be very cultured, but he has marvelous eyes. (CROSSES STAGE LEFT--ARTHUR FOLLOWS)

ARTHUR

Eyes like a pig.

ALA

I like them.

ARTHUR

I'll kill him.

ALA

(SWEETLY): You wouldn't be jealous by any chance?

ARTHUR

I'm not jealous.

ALA

First he's brutal. Then he's jealous. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. (KIDDINGLY PUSHES ARTHUR STAGE RIGHT)

ARTHUR

(FURIOUS, FACE TO FACE WITH ALA): Go on then. Undress!
I'm not stopping you.

ALA

I don't feel like it anymore.

ARTHUR

Suit yourself.

ALA

(RETREATING): I've changed my mind.

ARTHUR

(FOLLOWING HER): Oh, you don't feel like it anymore.
(ANGRILY IN PURSUIT OF HER STAGE RIGHT AROUND CATAFALQUE)
Tell me, why don't you want to anymore! Tell me why you
wanted to before.

ALA

My God, what a lunatic!

ARTHUR

(SEIZES HER BY THE ARM): Why?

ALA

I don't know.

ARTHUR

Tell me!

ALA

What should I say? I don't know, I just don't know. Let
me go.

ARTHUR

(LETTING HER GO): You know perfectly well. It's because

you only pretend to like all this absence of rules, this debauchery, this promiscuity.

ALA

Oh, I only pretend, do I?

ARTHUR

Of course. You really hate it, because it's not to your advantage. This lack of forms and norms cuts down your freedom of choice. There's nothing left for you to do but take off your clothes and put them back on again.

ALA

(FINDS REFUGE AT CHAIR STAGE CENTER): That's not true.

ARTHUR

Then why this sudden modesty? (HE CROSSES FROM STAGE RIGHT PLATFORM TO HER RIGHT STAGE CENTER.)

(PAUSE)

ALA

Now you're being logical. You just said that logic was nonsense.

ARTHUR

I said that?

ALA

Yes, only a minute ago. I heard you.

ARTHUR

(DISGRUNTLED): You must have heard wrong.

ALA

I heard you quite clearly.

ARTHUR

Well, let's not bicker. But I still don't believe you. I'm convinced that the convention of unconventionality goes against your grain. You didn't make it up.

ALA

Who did then? (SITS IN CHAIR STAGE CENTER)

ARTHUR

Men! You only pretend to like it. And now you're stuck with it, and nobody likes to admit he's just following the herd.

ALA

But if I don't like it why should I go along with it?

ARTHUR

For fear of losing your attractiveness. To keep up with the fashion. Admit it!

ALA

No.

ARTHUR

No? All right. At least you admit there's something to admit. Come on. Why all these lies? Can't you see that important issues are at stake? I simply refuse to believe that you want to go to bed with every man in the world. Wanting to attract them is something else again. You want to be able to choose for yourself. But how can a woman choose when there are no conventions? Tell me that.

ALA

I'm free. I know exactly what I want.

ARTHUR

But you're weak by nature. What chance do you have when you're all alone with a strange man who's stronger than you and there's no convention to protect you. (HE CROSSES DOWN-STAGE RIGHT TO TABLE) Let's assume, for instance, that you

don't care for me. If Eddie hadn't butted in, you'd have been sunk, because I'm the stronger.

ALA

(SHE JUMPS UP AND CROSSES DOWN RIGHT TO ARTHUR): I could always take up judo.

ARTHUR

You take everything so literally. Can't you women ever understand a general idea?

ALA

Lots of girls study judo. I'd have you begging for mercy.

ARTHUR

Excellent. You're getting there. You're coming around. Don't you see? Why does it have to be judo when conventions are quite effective? I'd be kneeling at your feet with a bouquet in my hand begging you to take pity on me, to grant me a ray of hope. Behind a solid wall of conventions, without any wrestling, without even getting your hair mussed, you'd have me at your mercy. Wouldn't that be better than judo?

ALA

You really mean it? Down on your knees?

ARTHUR

Certainly.

ALA

Okay. Go ahead.

ARTHUR

Go ahead and what?

ALA

Down on your knees!

ARTHUR

Impossible.

ALA

(DISAPPOINTED): Why?

ARTHUR

Because there are no conventions left. Now do you see what a fix you're in?

ALA

Isn't there anything we can do about it?

ARTHUR

Yes.

ALA

What?

ARTHUR

Establish new conventions or bring back the old ones. And that's exactly what I'm going to do--with your help. Everything's prepared. All I need is your help.

ALA

Great! And you'll really get down on your knees?

ARTHUR

I will.

ALA

All right. Now what can I do to help? (CROSSES UPSTAGE LEFT TO SOFA AND SITS)

ARTHUR

Marry me. (ARTHUR SITS BESIDE HER AT SOFA) That's the first

step. No more promiscuity, no more DOLCE VITA. A real marriage. Not just dropping into city hall between breakfast and lunch. A genuine old-fashioned wedding with an organ playing and bridesmaids marching down the aisle. I'm especially counting on the procession. It will take them by surprise. That's the whole idea. And, from then on, they won't have time to think, to organize resistance and spread defeatism. It's the first shot that counts. (SEE FIGURE 2) Catching them off guard like that, we can force them to accept conventions they'll never breakout of again. It's going to be the kind of wedding they'll have to take part in, and on my terms. I'll turn them into a bridal procession, and at long last my father will be forced to button his fly. What do you say?

ALA

And I'll get to wear a white wedding gown?

ARTHUR

White as snow. Everything strictly according to the rules. And at the same time you'll be helping all the women in the world. The rebirth of convention will set them free. What used to be the first rule of every encounter between a man and a woman? Conversation. A man couldn't get what he wanted just by making inarticulate sounds. He couldn't just grunt, he had to talk. And while he was talking, you--the woman--sat there demurely, sizing your opponent up. You let him talk and he showed his hand. Listening serenely, you drew up your own order of battle. Observing his tactics, you planned your own accordingly. Free to maneuver, you were always in command of the situation. You had time to think before coming to a decision and you could drag things out as long as you wanted. Even if he gnashed his teeth and secretly wished you in the bottom of hell, you knew he would never dare hit you. Up to the very last minute you could move freely, securely, triumphantly. Once you were engaged, you were safe, and even then traditional avenues of escape were open to you. Such were the blessings of conversation! But nowadays? Nowadays a man doesn't even have to introduce himself--and you will admit it's handy to know who a man is and what he does for a living.

(EDDIE TIPTOES FROM THE KITCHEN DOOR TO THE CURTAINS UPSTAGE CENTER. AS HE DISAPPEARS IN THE DOORWAY, ARTHUR SEES HIM AND GOES AFTER HIM.)

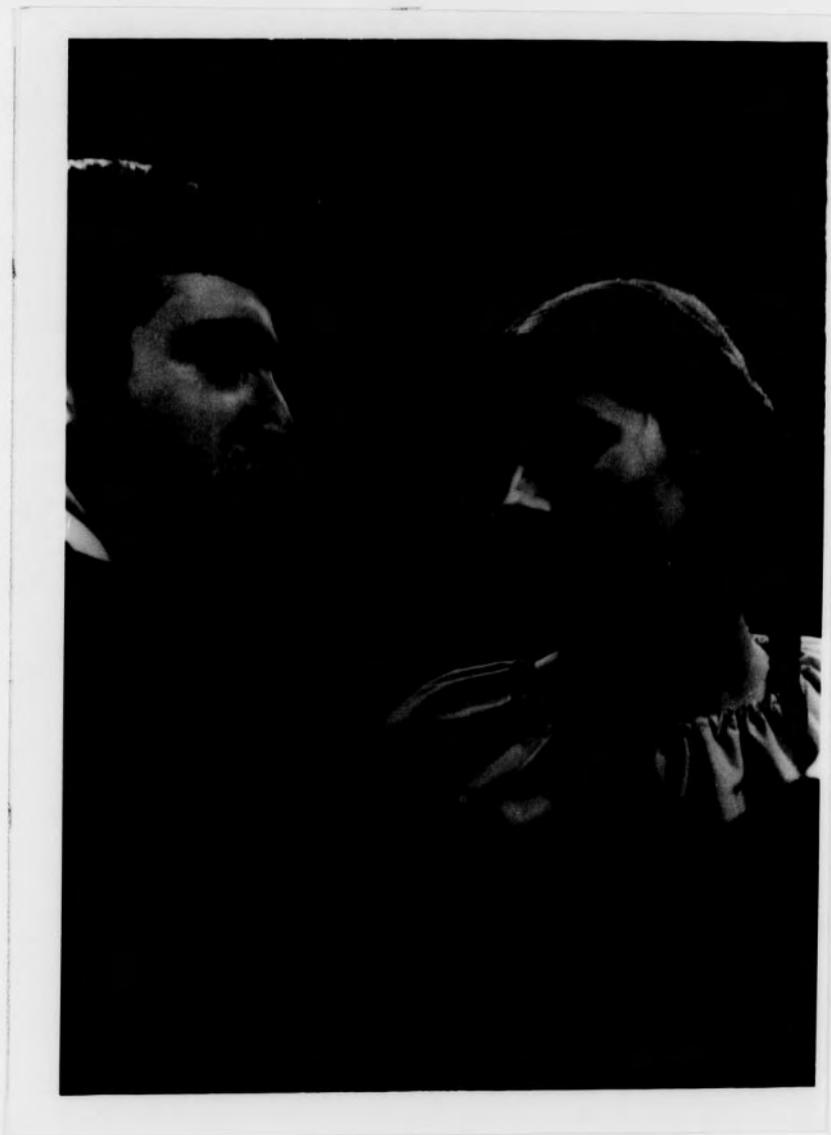


Figure 2

ALA

Was somebody listening? (STANDS)

ARTHUR

(COMING BACK): No.

ALA

I had the feeling there was. (CROSSES TO STAGE CENTER)

ARTHUR

Let's settle this matter once and for all. (CROSSES TO ALA STAGE CENTER) Do you consent?

ALA

I don't know yet.

ARTHUR

You don't know? You mean I haven't convinced you?

ALA

Yes.

ARTHUR

Yes? Then you consent?

ALA

No . . .

ARTHUR

Yes or no?

ALA

I've got to think about it.

ARTHUR

But what is there to think about? It's as plain as day.

I've got to rebuild a world, and for that I must have a wedding. It's perfectly simple. What don't you understand?

ALA

The whole thing, I guess.

ARTHUR

What do you mean?

ALA

Wait . . . Give me time.

ARTHUR

No, I can't wait. (GRADUALLY PUSHES HER STAGE LEFT TOWARD EXIT) There just isn't time. I'll stay here while you go think it over. When you've made up your mind, come back and give me your answer. It's sure to be yes. I've explained everything.

ALA

And you really have nothing else you want to tell me?

ARTHUR

Run along now. I'll see you later.

ALA

You're throwing me out?

ARTHUR

No, I have a little private business to attend to.

ALA

Can't I stay?

ARTHUR

No this is a family matter.

ALA

All right. Then I'll have my little secrets too. Just wait. You'll see.

ARTHUR

(IMPATIENTLY): Yes, yes, but run along now. Remember, I'll be waiting for you here.

(ALA EXITS LEFT. ARTHUR CROSSES STAGE RIGHT TO THE CORRIDOR DOWNSTAGE RIGHT. HE KNOCKS SOFTLY.)

STOMIL'S VOICE

Who's there?

ARTHUR

(RATHER SOFTLY): Me. Arthur.

STOMIL

What do you want?

ARTHUR

Father, I've got to talk to you.

STOMIL

At this time of night? I'm busy. Come back tomorrow.

ARTHUR

It's urgent.

(PAUSE)

STOMIL

But I've already told you, I'm busy. You can speak to me tomorrow.

(ARTHUR EXITS THRU CORRIDOR TO FIND FATHER. BOTH ENTER THRU SAME DOOR. STOMIL IS IN HIS PAJAMAS AS USUAL.)

Are you mad? What's going on?

ARTHUR

(IN AN OMINOUS WHISPER): Not so loud, Father.

STOMIL

(WHISPERING, TOO, IN SPITE OF HIMSELF): Why aren't you in bed?

ARTHUR

I can't sleep. It's time to take action.

STOMIL

In that case, good night.

(HE STARTS FOR HIS ROOM ARTHUR HOLDS HIM BACK.)

ARTHUR

I only wanted to ask you, Father, doesn't it bother you?

STOMIL

What?

ARTHUR

This thing with Eddie.

STOMIL

Eddie? Oh yes, I remember the man.

ARTHUR

What do you think of him?

STOMIL

He's amusing.

ARTHUR

Amusing? He's repulsive.

STOMIL

Oh I wouldn't say that. Eddie's an unusual type. A very modern, very authentic type.

ARTHUR

Is that all you have to say about him?

STOMIL

You see, our trouble is that we're still too conscious, too cerebral. (SITS AT TABLE CENTER CHAIR) Enslaved by centuries of culture. Of course we've been doing our best to throw culture off, but we're still a long way from nature. But Eddie's lucky. He was born with what the rest of us can acquire only by art and effort. He interests me as an artist. (ARTHUR SITS IN CHAIR STAGE CENTER.) I admire him the way a painter admires a landscape.

ARTHUR

Some landscape!

STOMIL

But don't you know there's been a complete revolution in aesthetics and morality. You keep making me remind you of things that ought to be self-evident. If Eddie shocks us now and then, it's because we're decadent. Sometimes I can't help feeling guilty toward Eddie. But I fight it down. We've got to get rid of these atavistic attitudes.

ARTHUR

And that's all you have to say?

STOMIL

I've been perfectly frank with you.

ARTHUR

Then I'll have to start all over again. Why do you tolerate him in your house?

STOMIL

Why not? He enriches our environment, he gives it a new tone, he adds a dash of authenticity. He even stimulates my imagination. We artists need an exotic touch now and then.

ARTHUR

Then you really don't know?

STOMIL

(STANDS, CROSSES STAGE LEFT TO ARTHUR): No, I don't know a thing.

ARTHUR

You're lying. You know perfectly well.

STOMIL

I repeat--I don't know. I don't want to know.

ARTHUR

He sleeps with Mother.

(STOMIL STARTS PACING.)

What do you say to that?

STOMIL

My dear boy. Let's assume what you say is true. Sexual freedom is the cornerstone of human freedom. What do YOU say to that?

ARTHUR

But it's the truth! They DO sleep together!

STOMIL

I said we'd assume it's true. What follows? Nothing. (SITS AT SOFA)

ARTHUR

Then you insist on treating it as an abstract hypothesis?

STOMIL

Why not? I'm a modern man. On the intellectual plane we can envisage any hypothesis, even the most ticklish. Without such hypotheses human thought would mark time. So do speak freely. I trust we can discuss this business without prudery. Now, what's your opinion?

ARTHUR

My opinion? I haven't got any opinion and I refuse to treat this matter as a theoretical exercise. This isn't a philosophical problem. It's the naked truth. Can't you see that? It's life. They've put horns on you. Long ones! And arguing isn't going to make them go away.

STOMIL

Horns! Horns! Horns are a primitive image, not an instrument of analysis. (NERVOUSLY) Let's not descend to that low level.

ARTHUR

Father, you're a cuckold.

STOMIL

Hold your tongue. I forbid you to talk to me like that.

ARTHUR

You can't stop me. You're a cuckold.

STOMIL

I can't believe it. (AVOIDING ARTHUR)

ARTHUR

Ha! Now I've got you where I want you. Want me to prove it? Open her door. (HE POINTS TO THE CURTAINS UPSTAGE CENTER)

STOMIL

No!

ARTHUR

Are you afraid? (CROSSES TO THE CURTAINS UPSTAGE CENTER)
Of course it's easier to perform theatrical experiments.
When it comes to experiments you're a giant. In real life
you're a midget.

STOMIL

Me?

ARTHUR

(CROSSES DOWNSTAGE TO FATHER): A hero in pajamas! A pint-
sized Agamemnon!

STOMIL

I'll show you. You say they're in there?

ARTHUR

Look for yourself.

STOMIL

I'll show them. I'll show you. I'll show the whole lot of
you! (HE RUNS TO THE CURTAINS, STOPS.) Or you know what
I'll do? I'll take care of this whole thing tomorrow. (HE
TURNS AROUND.)

ARTHUR

(BARRING THE WAY): No you won't. You're going in there
right now.

STOMIL

Tomorrow! Or by mail. A letter. What do you say?

ARTHUR

Phoney!

STOMIL

What did you say?

(ARTHUR MAKES HORNS ON HIS FOREHEAD AND LAUGHS SARDONICALLY)

All right then. Here I go!

ARTHUR

(STOPS HIM): Just a second.

STOMIL

(WITH A MARTIAL AIR): Let me at them.

ARTHUR

You'd better take this.

(HE TAKES THE REVOLVER WHICH STOMIL HAD LEFT ON THE CATAFALQUE IN ACT ONE AND GIVES IT TO HIS FATHER.)

STOMIL

What's that?

ARTHUR

You can't go in there bare-handed.

(PAUSE)

STOMIL

(CALMLY): Now I see through you.

ARTHUR

(PUSHING HIM TOWARD THE CURTAINS): Get in there! There's not a minute to lose.

STOMIL

(TEARING HIMSELF LOOSE): Now I understand. You want a tragedy!

ARTHUR

(RETREATING): A tragedy? What do you mean?

STOMIL

So that's what you're after, you dim little runt of a brain-storm, you . . .

ARTHUR

What are you trying . . .

STOMIL

You want me to kill him? (EDGING ARTHUR DOWNSTAGE RIGHT TOWARD THE TABLE) And then her? And then myself? Right?

ARTHUR

Of course not. I was only joking. I just thought that in case Eddie . . . he might do anything.

STOMIL

You'd love that, wouldn't you! The injured husband wiping out his shame in blood. Where do you GET such ideas? From romantic novels?

ARTHUR

Father, you know I never . . .

STOMIL

I always knew the younger generation cared more about ideas than life, but I never expected my own son to sacrifice his father to an idea. Sit down!

(ARTHUR SITS DOWN OBEDIENTLY, TABLE CHAIR LEFT)

That's it. Now we'll have a little talk. You want to bring back the old values. What for? Well, never mind that. That's your business. I've let you talk, I've heard you out, but now you're going just a bit too far. How fiendishly clever! So you need a tragedy! Tragedy has always been the most perfect expression of a society with established values.

So you needed a tragedy and thought you'd drag me into it. Instead of the art form--which demands time and effort--you wanted the thing itself. Or, never mind if somebody's killed, never mind if your own father goes off to prison. No, all you care about is your idea. Do you want to know what I think of you? A formalist. A vulgar formalist. That's what you are. Your father and mother mean nothing to you. We can all die as long as form wins out. And the worst of it is that you don't even care about yourself. You're a fanatic!

ARTHUR

Maybe my motives aren't as formal as you think.

STOMIL

You dislike Eddie?

ARTHUR

I hate him.

STOMIL

Why? Eddie is necessity. He's the pure truth we've been searching for so long because we always thought it was somewhere else. Eddie is a fact. You can't hate facts. You've got to accept them.

ARTHUR

What do you want me to do, hug him?

STOMIL

Good Lord. (HE CROSSES STAGE LEFT TO SOFA) You talk like a petulant child. I can only see one explanation. Maybe you've got an Oedipus. (RELAXES ON SOFA)

ARTHUR

A what?

STOMIL

An Oedipus complex. Have you consulted an analyst?

ARTHUR

No. Mother's wonderful, but that's not it.

STOMIL

Too bad. Then at least we'd know where we were at. Anything is better than sheer lunacy. I guess you're just a formalist.

ARTHUR

I am not.

STOMIL

Oh yes you are. And an insufferable and dangerous one at that.

ARTHUR

(HE STANDS AND CROSSES LEFT TO SOFA ARM RIGHT.): It may look that way to you, but the truth is that I . . . I just can't go on like this. I can't live with you people.

STOMIL

I see. That's more like it. In other words, you're an egoist.

ARTHUR

Call it whatever you like. That's the way I am, that's all.

STOMIL

But suppose you succeeded in making me kill him, in packing me off to prison for life, what good would that do you?

ARTHUR

Something would be accomplished. Something tragic. You're right. Please forgive me. Tragedy is a form so vast and powerful that reality can never escape its grip.

STOMIL

You poor devil. You really believe that? Don't you realize

that tragedy isn't possible anymore? Reality erodes all forms and that goes for tragedy too. Suppose I actually killed him. What would be the good of it?

ARTHUR

It would be something irrevocable, masterful, classical.

STOMIL

Not for a minute. It would be a farce. In our time only farce is possible. A corpse won't change anything. Why can't you face facts? Actually, a farce can be very nice too.

ARTHUR

Not for me.

STOMIL

(HE STANDS AND INTOLERANTLY CROSSES STAGE RIGHT TO TABLE.):
Lord, you can be stubborn!

ARTHUR

I can't help it. I've got to find a way out.

STOMIL

Regardless of reality?

ARTHUR

Yes. At any cost.

STOMIL

That's not so easy. I'd like to help you, but I don't see how.

ARTHUR

Couldn't we give it a try?

STOMIL

Give what a try?

ARTHUR

(POINTING TO THE CURTAINS LEFT REAR): With them.

STOMIL

You still have illusions?

ARTHUR

Even if you're right about farce . . . (GRADUALLY HE RESUMES HIS AGGRESSIVENESS.) It's only because you people are such cowards. You complain, but you're stuck in a farce because no one has the courage to rebel. Why can't you free yourself by one act of sheer violence? You're so logical, so analytical, you see everything in the abstract. Instead of changing anything, you make diagrams. You've come a long way, but what have you actually done? Sat in a chair and discussed. But this situation calls for action. If tragedy has become extinct it's only because you don't believe in it. You and your damned compromises.

STOMIL

But why should we believe in tragedy? Come here, son. I want to tell you something. (ARTHUR CROSSES STAGE RIGHT TO STOMIL AT TABLE.) All right. Eleanor is unfaithful to me with Eddie. What's so bad about that?

ARTHUR

But, Father, don't you know?

STOMIL

So help me, when you come right down to it, I don't. Maybe you can explain. (THEY BOTH SIT ON DOWNSTAGE EDGE OF TABLE. STOMIL TO RIGHT AND ARTHUR TO LEFT.)

ARTHUR

I've never been in such a situation . . .

STOMIL

Try.

ARTHUR

It's obvious . . . Let me think . . .

STOMIL

Think away. Actually, I'd be delighted if you could convince me.

ARTHUR

Really?

STOMIL

To tell you the truth, I don't much care for this kind of thing either. In fact, I detest it. Only the more I think about it, the less I know why.

ARTHUR

So if I could convince you . . .

STOMIL

. . . I'd be very grateful.

ARTHUR

And you'd . . .

STOMIL

Go in and make a scene they'd remember as long as they lived. But I need a rational justification.

ARTHUR

Then you'd go in? Without being pushed?

STOMIL

I'd be delighted to. I've had it in for that bastard a long

time. Believe it or not, nothing would please me more than to settle his hash. Except that my reason doesn't tell me why.

ARTHUR

Father, let me hug you.

(THEY HUG EACH OTHER)

To hell with reason!

STOMIL

But what can we do? It won't let go of us. You were talking about compromise. It's reason that makes us compromise.

ARTHUR

Well, then, Father, shall we give it a try? What have we got to lose? If the worst comes to the worse, you'll shoot him.

STOMIL

Think so? If I could only be sure.

ARTHUR

Certainty comes later. The main thing now is to make up your mind.

STOMIL

Hm. Maybe you're right.

ARTHUR

I know I'm right. You'll see. We'll have our tragedy!

STOMIL

You've given me back my strength. The enthusiasm of youth untrammelled by the skepticism of the times. Ah, youth, youth!

ARTHUR

Shall we go in?

STOMIL

Yes. With you beside me, I feel better.

(THEY STAND UP.)

ARTHUR

Just one more thing. Give up those experiments of yours, will you? They only speed up the process of disintegration.

STOMIL

Well, but what can we do? Tragedy impossible, farce a bore-- what's left but experiments?

ARTHUR

They only make things worse. Give them up, Father.

STOMIL

I don't know . . .

ARTHUR

Promise.

STOMIL

Later. Now we go in.

(ARTHUR PUTS THE REVOLVER BACK INTO STOMIL'S HAND.)

ARTHUR

I'll wait here. If you need any help, just shout.

STOMIL

That won't be necessary. If anybody yells, it'll be him, not me.

ARTHUR

Father, I've always had confidence in you.

STOMIL

With good reason, my boy. I was the best shot in my regiment. Farewell! (HE CROSSES TO THE DOOR UPSTAGE LEFT.)

ARTHUR

No, that's the kitchen.

STOMIL

(IRRESOLUTE): I could use a drink.

ARTHUR

Later. When it's all over. No time now.

STOMIL

Right! I'll kill him on the spot. (HE GOES TO THE CURTAINS.) That scoundrel! Now he's going to pay!

(HE ENTERS THE ROOM CAUTIOUSLY, CLOSES THE CURTAINS BEHIND HIM. ARTHUR WAITS TENSELY. TOTAL SILENCE. ARTHUR PACES NERVOUSLY BACK AND FORTH. GROWS MORE AND MORE IMPATIENT. LOOKS AT HIS WATCH. FINALLY HE MAKES A DECISION AND FLINGS BOTH PANELS OF THE CURTAINS OPEN, SO THAT THE WHOLE ROOM CAN BE SEEN. UNDER A BRIGHT, LOW-HANGING LAMP ELEANOR, EDDIE, EUGENIA AND STOMIL ARE SITTING AT A ROUND TABLE, PLAYING CARDS.)

ARTHUR

What's Eddie doing here? Why isn't Eddie . . . ?

STOMIL

Shhh! Take it easy, boy!

ELEANOR

Oh, it's you, Arthur? Are you still up?

EUGENIA

I told you he'd find us. He sticks his nose into everything.

ARTHUR

Father! . . . You . . . with them!

STOMIL

That's how it worked out . . . It's not MY fault.

ELEANOR

Stomil turned up just in time. We needed a fourth.

ARTHUR

Father, how could you!

STOMIL

I told you it would end in a farce.

EDDIE

Your play, Mr. Stomil. What you got?

STOMIL

Here you are. (TO ARTHUR) A harmless pastime. You see the situation. What could I do?

ARTHUR

But, Father, you promised!

STOMIL

I promised nothing. We'll just have to wait.

ELEANOR

Instead of talking so much, would you please put your mind on the game, Stomil?

ARTHUR

For shame!

EUGENIA

(THROWS DOWN HER CARDS): I simply can't play under these conditions. Can't anybody throw this little twerp out of here?

EDDIE

Easy, Grandma. Take it easy.

ELEANOR

Arthur, you ought to be ashamed, upsetting your grandmother like this.

EUGENIA

I told you we should lock the door. He's always looking for some way to pester me. You'll see. He'll put me back up on the catafalque!

ELEANOR

Oh, no he won't! We've got to finish this rubber first.

ARTHUR

(POUNDING THE TABLE WITH HIS FIST): Stop it!

ELEANOR

But we've just started.

EDDIE

You'd better listen to your mother. She's right. Look at the score cards, they're practically blank.

ARTHUR

(TEARING THE CARDS OUT OF THEIR HANDS): Now you listen to me! I've got something to tell you. Now! This minute!

STOMIL

But Arthur, that was strictly between the two of us. Don't shout it from the rooftops.

ARTHUR

I pleaded with you. You wouldn't listen. Now I'm going to use force. Stop the game!

ELEANOR

What's going on?

EDDIE

What's got into you anyway? If I were your father, know what I'd do? I'd give you a good hiding.

ARTHUR

You shut up. (CALMLY BUT FIRMLY.) Father, the revolver.

EDDIE

A guy can still make a joke, can't he?

ELEANOR

A revolver? For God's sake, Stomil, don't give it to him. Talk to him. Do SOMETHING. After all, you're his father.

STOMIL

(TRYING TO TAKE A SEVERE TONE): Now see here, Arthur, you're not a child. I'm sorry to have to speak to you like this, but . . .

(ARTHUR TAKES THE REVOLVER FROM STOMIL'S PAJAMA POCKET. ALL JUMP UP.)

EUGENIA

He's gone mad. Stomil, why on earth did you make this child? Criminal negligence--that's what I call it.

EDDIE

Look here, Mr. Arthur . . .

ARTHUR

Silence! Into the living room, everybody.

(ONE AFTER ANOTHER THEY GO TO THE CENTER OF THE STAGE. ARTHUR REMAINS STANDING AT THE DOOR. AS STOMIL PASSES HIM.

I'll talk to you later.

STOMIL

What's wrong? I did my best.

ARTHUR

Your best!

(EUGENIA SITS DOWN ON THE SOFA, ELEANOR BESIDE HER. EDDIE STANDS IN THE CORNER, UPSTAGE LEFT TAKES A COMB FROM HIS BACK POCKET AND RUNS IT NERVOUSLY THROUGH HIS HAIR.)

STOMIL

(FACING ELEANOR, RAISES HIS ARMS): I did everything I could to quiet him down. You saw me . . .

ELEANOR

Idiot. And you call yourself a father. Oh, if I were only a man!

STOMIL

That's easier said than done. (STOMIL SITS IN CHAIR EXTREME STAGE LEFT)

(EUGENE RUNS IN FROM UPSTAGE RIGHT.)

EUGENE

(TO ARTHUR): Has it started yet?

ARTHUR

Not yet. I'm still waiting for an answer.

EUGENE

I thought it had started. I heard a noise and I came running.

ARTHUR

That's all right. I'm glad you've come. Stay here and keep an eye on them. I'll be back in a second.

(HE GIVES HIM THE REVOLVER.)

EUGENE

Yes, sir. (EUGENE TAKES REVOLVER, CROSSES DOWNSTAGE CENTER AND TURNS ON THEM ALL)

ELEANOR

Am I dreaming?

ARTHUR

(TO EUGENE): Don't let anybody make a move.

EUGENE

Yes, sir.

ELEANOR

Have you both gone mad?

ARTHUR

If anybody does move, shoot to kill. Understand?

EUGENE

Yes, sir.

ELEANOR

It's a plot! Mama, your brother's a gangster!

EUGENIA

Eugene, do put that thing away. People don't play cowboys at your age. (SHE STARTS TO STAND UP.)

EUGENE

Stay where you are!

EUGENIA

(ASTONISHED): Eugene, it's me--your sister Eugenia.

EUGENE

When I'm on duty, I have no sister.

EUGENIA

What duty? Don't be a fool.

EUGENE

I have enlisted in the service of an ideal!

ARTHUR

Splendid. I see I can rely on you. I'm going to leave you for a moment.

STOMIL

But, Arthur, can't you tell me, at least, what's going on? I thought we'd just become friends.

ARTHUR

I'll tell you everything in due time.

(HE EXITS UPSTAGE RIGHT. EUGENE SITS DOWN IN A TABLE CHAIR WITH BACK TO THE AUDIENCE, HOLDING HIS REVOLVER IN READINESS. HE AIMS IT VAGUELY BUT MENACINGLY AT EACH IN TURN.)

ELEANOR

(AFTER A PAUSE): So that's it . . . Eugene, you've betrayed us.

EUGENE

Silence! (THEN JUSTIFYING HIMSELF.) That's not true, I haven't betrayed anybody.

ARTHUR'S VOICE

(OFF): Ala! Ala!

ELEANOR

You've betrayed your generation.

EUGENE

No, you're the traitors. You've all betrayed our good old days. I'm the only one who hasn't.

ARTHUR'S VOICE

(OFF): Ala! Ala!

ELEANOR

All you are is the tool of a mad pack of young zealots. With a missionary complex. You think you're so clever. They'll use you and then kick you out like a dog.

EUGENE

We'll see who uses whom. I've been waiting a long time for someone like Arthur to come along.

ELEANOR

Now at least you've shown who you really are. All these years you've been wearing a mask, you hypocrite.

EUGENE

Yes, I have. And all these years I've suffered. I hated you for your degradation but I kept quiet because I had to, because you were the stronger. Now at last I can tell you what I think of you! What a pleasure!

ELEANOR

What are you going to do to us?

EUGENE

We're going to give you back your dignity. We're going to turn you degenerates back into human beings with decent principles--that's what we're going to do.

ELEANOR

By force?

EUGENE

If we can't do it any other way, yes.

STOMIL

This is a counter-reformation.

EUGENE

But for you it's salvation.

STOMIL

Salvation? From what?

EUGENE

From your damnable, diabolical freedom.

ARTHUR

(ENTERS FROM UPSTAGE RIGHT): Uncle!

EUGENE

Sir?

ARTHUR

She's gone.

EUGENE

Look for her. She must be somewhere.

ARTHUR

Yes. She's got to be. I'm still waiting for her answer.

EUGENE

What? You mean she hasn't consented yet?

ARTHUR

She's got to. Everything else is ready now. She can't leave me in the lurch at a moment like this.

EUGENE

I don't mean to criticize you, Arthur, but haven't you rushed things a bit? I mean, shouldn't you have made sure of HER before starting in on (HE POINTS TO THE OTHERS WITH HIS PISTOL BARREL) these people?

ARTHUR

The time was ripe. I couldn't put it off.

EUGENE

Well, that's how it is with a COUP D'ETAT. Always some unforeseeable factor. Still, we can't back out now.

ARTHUR

Who could have dreamed of such a thing? I was so sure I had convinced her. (HE CALLS.) Ala, Ala! (IRRITABLY.) All because of some dumb cousin. Incredible! (HE CALLS.) Ala, Ala.

EUGENE

Women have been the ruin of kingdoms and empires.

ALA

(ENTERS FROM CORRIDOR LEFT. SHE CROSSES TO STAGE CENTER.):

Gosh, are you all still up?

ARTHUR

(REPROACHFULLY): At last! I've been looking all over for you.

ALA

What's going on? Uncle with a gun? Is it real? Is Uncle real?

ARTHUR

That's none of your business. Where have you been?

ALA

Out for a walk. Anything wrong with that?

EUGENE

Yes! At this solemn hour, there is.

ARTHUR

Steady, Uncle. You're on duty, remember. (TO ALA.) Well?

ALA

Well, what? It's a lovely night.

ARTHUR

I wasn't asking about the weather. Do you consent?

ALA

I think I need a little more time, Arthur.

ARTHUR

I need an answer immediately. You've had plenty of time.

(PAUSE)

ALA

Yes.

EUGENE

Hurrah!

ARTHUR

Thank God! Now we can start!

(HE GIVES ALA HIS ARM AND LEADS HER TO THE SOFA WHERE EUGENIA IS SITTING.)

Grandmother, your blessing.

EUGENIA

(STARTS UP FROM THE SOFA IN A FRIGHT): Oh, leave me alone. I haven't done anything to you.

ARTHUR

But Grandmother, everything's changed now. I'm going to marry Ala. Give us your blessing.

EUGENE

(TO THE OTHERS): On your feet, everybody! Can't you see this is a solemn occasion?

ELEANOR

My goodness, is Arthur going to get married?

STOMIL

Is that any reason to make such a fuss?

EUGENIA

Get that boy out of here! He's going to torture me again.

ARTHUR

(MENACINGLY): Grandmother, your blessing.

STOMIL

A tasteless joke. It's gone on long enough now.

EUGENE

(TRIUMPHANTLY): The jokes are over now. You've been having your jokes for fifty years. Stomil, button your pajamas immediately! Your son has just plighted his troth. The day of the wide-open fly is past. Bless them, Eugenia.

EUGENIA

What should I do, Eleanor?

ELEANOR

Give them your blessing if it means so much to them.

EUGENIA

Can't they do without it? It makes me feel so old.

EUGENE

A good old-fashioned engagement. Give them your blessing, or I'll shoot. (SEE FIGURE 3) I'm going to count to three.
One . . .

STOMIL

This is incredible. If a man can't be comfortable in his own house . . . (HE TRIES TO BUTTON HIS PAJAMAS.)

EUGENE

Two . . .

EUGENIA

(LAYS HER HAND ON THE HEADS OF ALA AND ARTHUR): My blessing upon you, dear children . . . and now go to hell!

EUGENE

(MOVED): Just like old times.



Figure 3

ARTHUR

(KISSES EUGENIA'S HAND): We thank you, Grandmother.

EUGENE

Stomil has buttoned his fly! A whole new era has begun!

STOMIL

Eleanor! You're crying?

ELEANOR

(SOBBING WITH EMOTION): Forgive me . . . But Arthur's getting engaged . . . and after all he is our son . . . I know I'm being terribly old-fashioned, but it's so moving. Forgive me.

STOMIL

Oh, do what you want, all of you! (HE RUNS OUT OF ROOM EXITING CORRIDOR STAGE RIGHT IN A RAGE.)

EDDIE

If you'll permit me, on this joyous occasion I would like to wish the young couple all the best for the days to come and especially . . . (HOLDS OUT HIS HAND TO ARTHUR.)

ARTHUR

(NOT TAKING HIS HAND): You! To the kitchen!

(HE POINTS DRAMATICALLY TO THE KITCHEN DOOR. EDDIE SAUNTERS OUT)

And stay there until you're called.

EUGENE

To the kitchen.

ELEANOR

(IN TEARS): When's the wedding?

ARTHUR

Tomorrow.

EUGENE

Hurray! We've won!

(BLACKOUT)

Act Three

(DAYLIGHT. THE SAME ROOM, BUT WITH NO TRACE NOW OF THE FORMER DISORDER: A CONVENTIONAL MIDDLE-CLASS LIVING ROOM OF ABOUT FIFTY YEARS AGO. NONE OF THE PREVIOUS CONFUSION AND BLURRED CONTOURS. THE CATAFALQUE IS STILL IN ITS OLD PLACE--BUT IT IS COVERED WITH NAPKINS AND KNICKKNACKS, SO THAT IT LOOKS LIKE A BUFFET.

ON STAGE ELEANOR, EUGENIA, STOMIL, AND EUGENE. EUGENIA IS SITTING ON THE SOFA IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM. SHE IS WEARING A BONNET AND A DARK GRAY OR BROWN DRESS BUTTONED UP TO THE NECK AND ADORNED WITH LACE CUFFS AND RUCHING. SHE HAS A LORGNETTE WHICH SHE FREQUENTLY RAISES TO HER EYES. TO HER RIGHT SITS ELEANOR WITH HER HAIR DONE UP IN A CHIGNON; SHE IS WEARING EARRINGS AND A STRIPED VIOLET OR BURGUNDY-COLORED DRESS GATHERED AT THE WAIST. BOTH SIT BOLT UPRIGHT, IMMOBILE, THEIR HANDS ON THEIR KNEES. BESIDE THEM STANDS STOMIL, HIS HAIR COMBED, POMADED AND PARTED IN THE MIDDLE. HIS STIFF COLLAR FORCES HIM TO STRETCH HIS HEAD AS THOUGH LOOKING INTO THE DISTANCE. HE IS WEARING A BROWN SUIT THAT IS OBVIOUSLY TOO TIGHT FOR HIM, AND WHITE SPATS. HE IS RESTING ONE HAND ON A LITTLE ROUND TABLE ON WHICH STANDS A VASE WITH FLOWERS; THE OTHER IS BRACED ON HIS HIP. ONE FOOT IS BALANCED NON-CHALANTLY ON THE TIP OF HIS SHOE. IN FRONT OF THE GROUP NEAR THE PROSCENIUM, A LARGE CAMERA ON A TRIPOD, COVERED WITH BLACK VELVET. BEHIND THE CAMERA STANDS EUGENE. HE IS STILL WEARING HIS BLACK SWALLOWTAIL COAT BUT HIS KHAKI SHORTS HAVE BEEN REPLACED BY LONG BLACK TROUSERS WITH PIN STRIPES. A RED CARNATION IN HIS BUTTONHOLE. IN FRONT OF HIM ON THE FLOOR, HIS TOP HAT, WHITE GLOVES AND A CANE WITH A SILVER KNOB. HE FUSSES WITH THE CAMERA WHILE THE OTHERS HOLD THEIR POSE. EUGENIA SAYS "AH . . . AH" SEVERAL TIMES AND SNEEZES LOUDLY.)

EUGENE

Don't move!

EUGENIA

I can't help it. It's the moth balls.

EUGENE

Hold it!

(STOMIL REMOVES HIS HAND FROM HIS HIP AND SCRATCHES HIS CHEST)

Stomil, your hand.

STOMIL

But I'm itching all over.

ELEANOR

Why should you be itching?

STOMIL

Moths.

ELEANOR

Moths! (SHE JUMPS UP AND RUNS UPSTAGE CENTER CHASING MOTHS, OCCASIONALLY CLAPPING HER HANDS.)

EUGENE

At this rate we'll never get a picture. Sit down, Eleanor.

ELEANOR

(REPROACHFULLY): The moths come from Mama.

EUGENIA

They do not. They come out of this old rag.

EUGENE

Let's not quarrel. They come from the attic.

EDDIE

(ENTERS DRESSED AS A VALET, IN A CRIMSON VEST WITH BLACK

STRIPES): You called, Madame?

ELEANOR

(STOPS CLAPPING HER HANDS): What? What is it now? Oh yes.
My salts, Edward!

EDDIE

Salts, Madame?

ELEANOR

Those smelling salts . . . you know . . .

EDDIE

Certainly, Madame. (HE EXITS STAGE LEFT DOOR TO KITCHEN)

STOMIL

(LOOKING AFTER HIM): I must admit it's a relief to see that
fellow put in his place.

EUGENE

You haven't seen anything yet. Everything's going splendidly.
You won't regret a thing.

STOMIL

(TRIES TO LOOSEN HIS COLLAR): If only this collar weren't
so damn tight!

EUGENE

That's the price you've got to pay for having Eddie wait on
you. Everything has its price.

STOMIL

(CROSSES TO EUGENE, STAGE CENTER.): And my experiments?
Will I have to give them up?

EUGENE

I couldn't say. Arthur hasn't announced his decision on

that point yet.

STOMIL

Maybe he'll let me go on with them. He hasn't said anything?

EUGENE

There hasn't been time. He went out early this morning.

STOMIL

Perhaps you could put in a good word for me, Uncle?

EUGENE

(PATRONIZINGLY): I'll speak to him when the opportunity arises.

STOMIL

At least once a week. After all these years I can't just suddenly stop. You ought to realize that.

EUGENE

That will depend entirely on your conduct, Stomil.

STOMIL

But I'm on your side. What more do you want? I'm even putting up with this collar. (HE TRIES AGAIN TO LOOSEN IT.)

EUGENE

Well, I can't promise.

(EDDIE ENTERS WITH A TRAY ON WHICH A BOTTLE OF VODKA IS VERY MUCH IN EVIDENCE.)

What is that?

EDDIE

The salts for Madame, sir..

EUGENE

(MENACINGLY): Eleanor, what is the meaning of this?

ELEANOR

I can't imagine. (TO EDDIE.) I asked for my smelling salts.

EDDIE

Madame no longer drinks?

ELEANOR

Take it away immediately!

EUGENIA

Why? As long as he's brought it . . . I don't feel too well.

EDDIE

As you wish, Madame.

(HE GOES OUT. ON THE WAY HE TAKES A GOOD SWIG FROM THE BOTTLE. ONLY EUGENIA, LOOKING AFTER HIM LONGINGLY, NOTICES.)

EUGENE

Don't let it happen again!

EUGENIA

God, am I bored!

EUGENE

Back to your places! (STOMIL RETURNS TO HIS PLACE BEHIND SOFA)

(ELEANOR, STOMIL AND EUGENIA SIT UP AND FREEZE AS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE ACT. EUGENE DUCKS UNDER THE VELVET CLOTH, THE TICKING OF THE TIMER IS HEARD. EUGENE REACHES QUICKLY FOR HIS STICK, TOP HAT AND GLOVES, AND TAKES A STANCE BESIDE EUGENIA. THE TICKING STOPS. RELIEVED, THEY ALL RELAX.)

STOMIL

Can't I unbutton these buttons for just a second?

EUGENE

Certainly not! The wedding is at twelve!

STOMIL

I seem to have put on weight. The last time I wore these things was forty years ago.

EUGENE

You have only your experiments to blame for that. Experimental art pays so well these days.

STOMIL

That's not my fault, is it?

ELEANOR

When will that picture be ready? I think I blinked. I know I'm going to look simply awful.

EUGENE

Don't worry. The camera hasn't worked for years.

ELEANOR

What? Then why take the picture?

EUGENE

(HE CROSSES STAGE RIGHT TO BEHIND TABLE.): It's the principle of the thing. It's a tradition.

STOMIL

You begrudge me my innocent experiments but is an old-fashioned broken-down camera any better? You know what I think of your counterrevolution? It's a fiasco.

EUGENE

Watch your tongue.

STOMIL

I bow to superior force, but I can still say what I think.

ELEANOR

(TO EUGENIA): What do you say, Mother?

EUGENIA

I say we're in one hell of a mess and this is only the beginning.

EUGENE

It can't be helped. Our first job is to create the form. The content comes later.

STOMIL

You're making a colossal mistake, Eugene. (CROSSES TO TABLE SITS AT TABLE CHAIR LEFT.) Formalism will never free you from chaos. You'd be better off if you could just accept the spirit of the times.

EUGENE

That's enough out of you. Defeatism will not be tolerated!

STOMIL

All right, all right. I can still have an opinion, can't I?

EUGENE

Of course. As long as it agrees with ours.

(ALA ENTERS UPSTAGE RIGHT. SHE IS WEARING A WEDDING DRESS WITH A LONG VEIL. SHE MAJESTICALLY CROSSES TO STAGE CENTER)

STOMIL

Ah, here comes our dear little bride!

ELEANOR

Oh, Ala, it's so becoming!

EUGENIA

My dear child!

ALA

Isn't Arthur back yet?

EUGENE

We're expecting him any minute. He had a few final formalities to attend to.

ALA

These damned formalities.

EUGENE

But the spirit of life can't run around naked. It must always be dressed with taste and care. You mean Arthur hasn't discussed that point with you yet?

ALA

For hours on end.

EUGENE

And rightly so. Someday you'll understand and be grateful to him.

ALA

Oh, stop making such an ass of yourself, Uncle.

ELEANOR

(CROSSING TO ALA STAGE CENTER): You mustn't talk like that, Ala dear. Today is your wedding day and no time for family quarrels. There'll be plenty of time for that later.

EUGENE

Don't worry. No offense. I quite understand.

ALA

So old and so stupid. I can understand it in Arthur. But you, Uncle . . .

ELEANOR

Ala!

STOMIL

He had it coming.

ELEANOR

Forgive her, Eugene. She's so excited she doesn't know what she's saying. After all, this is a big day in her life. I remember the day I was married to Stomil . . .

EUGENE

I can tell when I'm not wanted. But don't delude yourselves. You can laugh at me as much as you like but childish insults won't change a thing. Stomil, come with me. I have a proposition to make to you.

STOMIL

All right. Just don't try to brainwash me!

(THEY GO OUT.)

ELEANOR

Mama, you might go for a stroll too. (ELEANOR HELPS EUGENIA TO KITCHEN DOOR STAGE LEFT.)

EUGENIA

Anything you say. It's all the same to me. Either way I'll be bored to death. (SHE GOES OUT.)

ELEANOR

There. Now we can talk. Tell me, what's happened? (RETURNS TO ALA AT CHAIR STAGE CENTER)

ALA

Nothing.

ELEANOR

Something's bothering you. I can see that.

ALA

Nothing's bothering me. This veil doesn't fall quite right. Help me with it, will you, Mother?

ELEANOR

Of course. But you don't have to take that tone with me. With the others it's different. They're such fools.

ALA

(SITS DOWN IN CHAIR STAGE CENTER.): Why do you all despise each other?

ELEANOR

I don't know. Maybe because we have no reason to respect each other.

ALA

Yourselves or each other?

ELEANOR

It comes to the same thing. Shall I fix your hair?

ALA

It's got to be done all over again.

(SHE TAKES OFF HER VEIL. ELEANOR COMBS HER HAIR.)

Are you happy, Mother?

ELEANOR

I beg your pardon?

ALA

I asked if you were happy. What's so funny about that?

ELEANOR

It's a very indiscreet question.

ALA

Why? Is it a disgrace to be happy?

ELEANOR

No, I wouldn't say that.

ALA

Then you're not very happy, are you? Because you're ashamed. People are always ashamed about not being happy. It's like having pimples or not doing your homework. It makes them feel guilty, almost criminal.

ELEANOR

"It is the right and duty of all to be happy, now that the new era has set us free." Stomil taught me that.

ALA

Oh. So that's why everybody's so ashamed nowadays. But how do YOU feel about it?

ELEANOR

I've always done as much as I could.

ALA

To make Stomil happy?

ELEANOR

No. Myself. That's the way he wanted it.

ALA

Then in a way it was for him?

ELEANOR

Of course it was for him. Oh, if you'd only known him when he was young . . .

ALA

It's not right yet on this side. Does he know?

ELEANOR

What?

ALA

Don't be like that. I'm not a baby. Your affair with Eddie.

ELEANOR

Of course he knows.

ALA

And what does he say?

ELEANOR

Nothing, unfortunately.. He pretends not to notice.

ALA

That's bad.

(EDDIE COMES IN WITH A WHITE TABLECLOTH.)

EDDIE

May I set the table now?

ELEANOR

Sure, Eddie. (SHE CORRECTS HERSELF.) Yes, Edward, you may set the table.

EDDIE

Yes, Madame. (HE LAYS THE CLOTH ON THE TABLE AND TAKES THE CAMERA OUT WITH HIM.)

ALA

What do you see in him?

ELEANOR

Oh, he's just so simple . . . like life itself. He can be rough, of course, but that's the secret of his charm. A man without complexes--it's so refreshing. He just wants what he wants. Wonderful. And the way he sits--nothing unusual about it, but it's real, honest-to-goodness sitting. And when he eats, when he drinks! His stomach becomes a symphony of nature. (SHE SITS ON CHAIR ARM LEFT.) I just love to watch him digest. It's so simple, so direct. It's like the elements. Have you ever noticed how divinely he hitches his trousers up? Stomil admires authenticity too.

ALA

I know. It doesn't fascinate me very much. I'm afraid.

ELEANOR

You're too young. (SHE STANDS.) You haven't had time to learn the value of genuine simplicity. You will. It takes experience.

ALA

I'll certainly try. (STANDS, CROSSES STAGE RIGHT TO TABLE.) Tell me, Mother, do you think it's a good idea for me to marry Arthur?

ELEANOR

Oh, Arthur is something else again. He has principles.

ALA

But Stomil has principles too. You said so yourself. All that stuff about the right and duty to be happy.

ELEANOR

Oh, those were only opinions. Stomil has always detested principles. Arthur, on the other hand, has cast-iron principles.

ALA

And that's all he has.

ELEANOR

Ala, how can you say a thing like that? Arthur's the first man in fifty years to have principles. Doesn't that appeal to you? It's so original! And it's so becoming to him!

ALA

You really think principles are enough for me?

ELEANOR

Well, I admit, they're rather old-fashioned. But so unusual these days . . .

ALA

I'll take Arthur with principles if I have to, Mother. But principles without Arthur--no.

ELEANOR

But didn't he propose to you? Isn't he going to marry you?

ALA

Not Arthur.

ELEANOR

Then who? What are you talking about?

ALA

His principles!

ELEANOR

Then why did you accept?

ALA

Because I still have hope.

ELEANOR

That, my dear, is fatal.

(EDDIE ENTERS UPSTAGE LEFT WITH A STACK OF PLATES.)

EDDIE

May I continue?

ALA

Clatter away, Eddie boy. (CORRECTS HERSELF.) I mean, yes, Edward, clatter away. I mean, do continue, Edward. (EDDIE CROSSES STAGE RIGHT TO SET TABLE.)

ELEANOR

Tell me, Eddie, does it depress you? All these changes thought up by a bunch of fools? (ALA CROSSES STAGE LEFT TO COFFEE TABLE.)

EDDIE

Why should it depress me?

ELEANOR

Didn't I tell you? He's as free and natural as a butterfly. Oh, Eddie, you set the table so gracefully.

EDDIE

I'm not knocking myself out, that's for sure.

ALA

Eddie, come here.

EDDIE

At your service. (HE CROSSES STAGE LEFT TO ALA) What can I do for you, Miss?

ALA

Tell me, Eddie, have you got principles?

EDDIE

Principles? Sure.

ALA

What kind?

EDDIE

The best.

ALA

Tell me one. Please.

EDDIE

What's in it for me?

ALA

Well, can you or can't you?

EDDIE

If I have to, I guess. Just a sec. (HE PUTS THE PLATES DOWN ON THE FLOOR AND TAKES A LITTLE MEMO BOOK FROM HIS POCKET.) I've got one written down here somewhere. (HE LEAFS THROUGH THE BOOK.) Here it is! (HE READS.) "I love you, and you're sound sleep."

ALA

That's all?

EDDIE

"You made your bed, now lie in it."

ALA

Oh, come on, Eddie. Read.

EDDIE

I did read. That's a principle.

ALA

Then read another!

(EDDIE GIGGLES.)

What's so funny?

EDDIE

Well, there's one here . . .

ALA

Read it! . .

EDDIE

I can't, not in mixed company. It's too good.

ALA

And those are your principles?

EDDIE

Actually, no. I borrowed them from a friend who works for the movies.

ALA

You haven't got any of your own?

EDDIE

(PROUDLY): No.

ALA

Why not?

EDDIE

What do I need them for? I know my way around.

ELEANOR

Oh yes, Eddie. You certainly do.

(STOMIL RUSHES IN FROM DOWNSTAGE RIGHT CORRIDOR, PURSUED BY EUGENE CARRYING A LACED CORSET. EDDIE GOES ON SETTING THE TABLE.)

STOMIL

No, no! That's asking too much!

EUGENE

Take my word for it. You'll be glad once it's on.

ELEANOR

Now what's wrong?

STOMIL

(RUNNING FROM EUGENE): He wants to strap me into that thing.
(THEY CONTINUE THE CHASE ONCE AROUND THE CHAIR STAGE CENTER)

ELEANOR

What is it?

EUGENE

Great grandfather's corset. Indispensable. Pulls in the waist, guarantees a perfect figure for every occasion. (HE CATCHES STOMIL DOWNSTAGE LEFT OF CENTER CHAIR.)

STOMIL

No, no, no. I'm wearing spats, I've got this collar on. What are you trying to do--kill me?

EUGENE

Now, Stomil, let's not do things by halves.

STOMIL

I've gone far enough. Let me live!

EUGENE

You're falling back into your old habits, Stomil. Come on. Stop making such a fuss. You admitted yourself you'd been putting on weight.

STOMIL

But I want to be fat! I want to live in harmony with nature!

EUGENE

You just don't want to be bothered. Come on. Don't fight it. It won't do any good. (STOMIL ESCAPES AND RUNS STAGE RIGHT TO CORRIDOR.)

STOMIL

Eleanor, save me!

ELEANOR

You don't think it might improve your looks? (STOMIL STOPS SUDDENLY AS DOES EUGENE)

STOMIL

My looks? What for? I'm a free fat artist.

(HE RUNS INTO HIS ROOM STAGE RIGHT. EUGENE FOLLOWING.)

ELEANOR

These perpetual scenes. And you say you still have hope? (ELEANOR CROSSES STAGE LEFT TO ALA.)

ALA

Yes.

ELEANOR

And if you're only deluding yourself?

ALA

What difference does it make?

ELEANOR

(TRIES TO TAKE HER IN HER ARMS): My poor Ala! . . .

ALA

(FREEING HERSELF): You don't need to pity me. I can take care of myself. (ALA CROSSES STAGE RIGHT TABLE.)

ELEANOR

But what if things don't work out?

ALA

That's my secret.

ELEANOR

You won't tell even me?

ALA

It will be a surprise.

STOMIL'S VOICE

Help!

ELEANOR

That's Stomil.

ALA

Uncle Eugene is really overdoing it. Do you think he has any influence on Arthur?

STOMIL'S VOICE

Let me go!

ELEANOR

I doubt it. It's probably the other way around.

ALA

Too bad. I thought it was all Uncle's fault.

STOMIL'S VOICE

Get out of here!

ELEANOR

I'd better go see what they're up to. I have a feeling something awful is going to happen. (SHE CROSSES TO RIGHT OF TABLE.)

ALA

So do I.

STOMIL'S VOICE

Murderer! Let me go!

ELEANOR

Good God, how will it all end?

STOMIL'S VOICE

No, no! I'll burst! I'll explode! Help!

ELEANOR

Eugene's going too far. But you, Ala, do be careful.

ALA

Careful?

ELEANOR

Don't go too far--like Uncle Eugene. (SHE EXITS STAGE RIGHT INTO STOMIL'S ROOM.)

ALA

Eddie, my veil!

(EDDIE HANDS HER THE VEIL AND STANDS BEHIND HER. FROM STOMIL'S ROOM SCREAMING AND THE SOUND OF A STRUGGLE ARE HEARD. ARTHUR ENTERS. ALA AND EDDIE DON'T NOTICE HIM. ARTHUR'S COAT IS OPEN. HE LOOKS GRAY. HIS LISTLESS, UNNATURAL MOVEMENTS SHOW THAT HE IS HAVING GREAT DIFFICULTY KEEPING HIMSELF GOING. HE CAREFULLY REMOVES HIS COAT AND THROWS IT DOWN SOMEWHERE. SITS DOWN IN CHAIR STAGE CENTER AND SPRAWLS OUT HIS LEGS.)

STOMIL'S VOICE

Damn you!

ARTHUR

(IN A LOW, DULL VOICE): What's going on?

(ALA TURNS AROUND. EDDIE DUTIFULLY PICKS UP ARTHUR'S COAT AND EXITS UPSTAGE RIGHT.)

ALA

(AS THOUGH MERELY MAKING AN OBSERVATION): You're late.

(ARTHUR STANDS UP AND CROSSES TO DOORWAY STAGE RIGHT.)

ARTHUR

Let him go.

(STOMIL, EUGENE AND THEN ELEANOR COME OUT OF THE ROOM.)

EUGENE

Why? It would have given him that final polish.

ARTHUR

I said let him go.

STOMIL

Thank you, Arthur. I'm glad to see you're not completely devoid of human feeling. (STOMIL STRAIGHTENS HIS CLOTHING AND SITS AT TABLE CHAIR CENTER.)

EUGENE

I protest!

(ARTHUR GRABS HIM BY THE TIE AND PUSHES HIM BACK.)

ELEANOR

Arthur, what's happened? He's as pale as a ghost!

ARTHUR

You whited skeleton? (ARTHUR PUSHES EUGENE STAGE LEFT TO SOFA)

EUGENE

Arthur, it's me, it's your Uncle Eugene! Don't you know me? You and I together . . . the new life . . . saving the world. Don't you remember? You're choking me. You and I . . . together . . . Don't . . .

ARTHUR

(PUSHING HIM BACK STEP BY STEP): You stuffed zero, you synthetic blob . . . you worm-eaten false bottom!

ELEANOR

Do something! He's choking him!

ARTHUR

You fake . . .

(MENDOLSSOHN'S "WEDDING MARCH" RESOUNDS, LOUD AND TRIUMPHANT. ARTHUR LETS EUGENE GO, PICKS UP A CARAFE FROM THE TABLE AND HURLS IT OFF STAGE RIGHT WHERE IT LANDS WITH A LOUD CRASH. THE MARCH BREAKS OFF IN THE MIDDLE OF A MEASURE. ARTHUR SINKS INTO AN ARMCHAIR STAGE CENTER.)

EDDIE

(ENTERS UPSTAGE RIGHT): Do you wish me to change the record?

ELEANOR

Who told you to put that on?

EDDIE

Mr. Eugene. His orders were to put it on as soon as Mr. Arthur entered the room.

EUGENE

(GASPING FOR AIR): My orders. Yes, that's right.

ELEANOR

We won't need any music right now.

EDDIE

As you wish, Madame. (HE EXITS UPSTAGE LEFT)

ARTHUR

It's a fraud . . . The whole thing . . . a fraud! (HE COLLAPSES.)

STOMIL

(LEANS OVER HIM): He's dead drunk.

EUGENE

That's a slander, (EUGENE STANDS AND CROSSES TO ARTHUR STAGE CENTER) an infamous slander. This young man knows his duty. He's the soul of moderation.

ELEANOR

I can't believe it either. Arthur never drinks.

STOMIL

Take it from me. I'm an expert.

ELEANOR

But why today of all days?

STOMIL

His last hours as a free man.

(ALA POURS WATER INTO A GLASS AND FEEDS IT TO ARTHUR)

EUGENE

There must be some misunderstanding. It would be unwise to draw premature conclusions. The truth will soon be known.

STOMIL

Yes. If we wait just a minute, he'll explain. He was just getting started.

ELEANOR

Shh . . . he's coming to.

ARTHUR

(RAISES HIS HEAD AND POINTS TO STOMIL): What on earth is that?

ELEANOR

He doesn't know his own father. Ohhh! (SHE BURSTS INTO TEARS.)

ARTHUR

Quiet, you females! It's not my parents I'm asking about. What's the meaning of this masquerade?

STOMIL

(LOOKING AT HIS LEGS): These . . . these are spats.

ARTHUR

Oh . . . yes, of course. They're spats. (HE SINKS INTO THOUGHT.)

EUGENE

Arthur's a little tired. Conditions will return to normal in a moment. Take your places. Attention! (ELEANOR AND STOMIL RETURN TO A FORMAL POSITION STAGE LEFT IN FRONT OF COFFEE TABLE) There will be no change in the program. (TO ARTHUR IN A FRIENDLY TONE:) Ha ha, well, Arthur, my boy, you were just joking, weren't you? Putting us to the test, you little devil! Don't worry. We won't abandon our positions. Here we are, all buttoned up from top to toe, once and for all. Stomil was even going to put on a corset. Cheer up, my boy. A little rest, and then . . . on with the wedding!

STOMIL

Same old song and dance! Can't you see, you ghost of the past, that he's stewed to the gills? His father's son all right.

EUGENE

That's a lie! Quiet! Come on, Arthur. It's time for action now. Everything's ready. Just one last step.

ARTHUR

(GOES DOWN ON HIS KNEES TO STOMIL): Father, forgive me.

STOMIL

What's this? Some new trick?

ARTHUR

(DRAGGING HIMSELF AFTER STOMIL ON HIS KNEES): I was insane! There's no going back, no present, no future. There's nothing!

STOMIL

(EVADING HIM): What is he now? A nihilist?

ALA

(TEARING OFF HER VEIL): What about me? Am I nothing?

ARTHUR

(CHANGING DIRECTION AND DRAGGING HIMSELF AFTER HER STAGE RIGHT): You too . . . forgive me!

ALA

You're a coward, that's all you are. A child and a coward and impotent!

ARTHUR

No, please don't say that. I'm not afraid, but I can't believe anymore. I'll do anything. I'll lay down my life . . . but there's no turning back to the old forms. They can't create a reality for us. I was wrong.

ALA

What are you talking about?

ARTHUR

About creating a world.

ALA

And me? Isn't anybody going to say anything about me? (ALA SLOWLY RETREATS STAGE RIGHT TO SIT ON DOWNSTAGE LEFT CORNER OF PLATFORM)

EUGENE

This is treason!

ARTHUR

(CHANGING DIRECTION AGAIN AND HEADING FOR EUGENE STAGE CENTER): You must forgive me too. I raised your hopes and I've let you down. But believe me, it's impossible . . .

EUGENE

I refuse to listen to this kind of talk. Pull yourself together. Stand up and get married. Raise a family, brush your teeth, eat with a knife and fork, make the world sit up straight. You'll see, we'll do it yet. You're not going to throw away our last chance, are you, Arthur?

ARTHUR

There never was a chance. We were wrong. It's hopeless.

EUGENE

Stomil's right. You're drunk. You don't know what you're saying.

ARTHUR

Yes, drunk. (ARTHUR COLLAPSES IN STAGE CENTER CHAIR ONCE AGAIN.) When I was sober I let myself be deceived, so I got drunk to dispel my illusions. You'd better have a drink too, Uncle.

EUGENE

Me? Certainly not. . . . Well, perhaps just a little one. (HE POURS HIMSELF A SHOT OF VODKA AND DOWNS IT AT ONE GULP.)

ARTHUR

I had cold sober reasons for getting drunk. I drank myself sane again.

STOMIL

Nonsense. You got drunk out of despair.

ARTHUR

Yes, despair too. Despair that form can never save the world.

EUGENE

Then what can?

ARTHUR

(STANDS UP, SOLEMNLY): An idea!

EUGENE

What idea?

ARTHUR

If I only know. Conventions always spring from an idea. Father was right. I'm a contemptible formalist.

STOMIL

Don't take it so hard, son. You know I've always been indulgent. Frankly, though, I've suffered plenty from your ideas. Thank God, that's all over now. (STARTS TAKING OFF HIS MORNING COAT.) Where are my pajamas?

ARTHUR

(RUSHES OVER TO HIM AND PREVENTS HIM FROM TAKING OFF HIS COAT): Stop! A reversion to pajamas is equally impossible.

STOMIL

Why? Are you still trying to save us? I thought you'd got over that.

ARTHUR

(AGGRESSIVELY, GOING FROM ONE EXTREME TO THE OTHER AS DRUNKS DO; TRIUMPHANTLY): Did you think I was going to cave in completely just like that?

STOMIL

Just a minute ago you were acting like a human being. Don't tell me you want to be an apostle again.

ARTHUR

(RELEASING STOMIL, WITH EMPHASIS): My sin was reason . . . and abstraction, the lewd daughter of reason. Now I have drowned my reason in alcohol. I didn't get drunk the usual way. Though my aim was mystical, I drank most rationally. The fire water cleansed me. You've got to forgive me because I stand before you purified. I clothed you in vestments and tore them off again because they proved to be shrouds. But I will not abandon you, naked, to the gales of history; I'd rather have you curse me. Eddie!

(EDDIE ENTERS UPSTAGE LEFT.)

Shut the door.

ELEANOR

Yes, Eddie, shut the door, there's a draft. (ELEANOR SITS AT SOFA)

ARTHUR

Don't let anybody leave.

EDDIE

Okay, boss.

STOMIL

This is a violation of civil rights!

ARTHUR

You want freedom? There is no freedom from life, and life is synthesis. You'd analyze yourselves to death. Luckily, however, you have me.

EUGENE

Arthur, you know I don't agree with Stomil. But aren't you going a little too far? I feel it's my duty to warn you. In spite of everything, I stand by the freedom of the individual.

ARTHUR

Good. Now what we need is to find an idea.

STOMIL

(SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH EUGENE AND ELEANOR): Is this any way to treat your father? (HE SITS IN CHAIR STAGE CENTER.)

EUGENE

I wash my hands of the whole business.

ELEANOR

Arthur, lie down for a while. I'll make you a nice cold compress.

ARTHUR

Until we come up with an idea, nobody leaves this room.
Eddie. Guard the door!

EDDIE

Yes, sir. (HE STANDS GUARD STAGE LEFT CORRIDOR.)

(PAUSE)

ELEANOR

Find him an idea, somebody, so he'll leave us alone. If
I don't go to the kitchen, the cake will be burned to a
crisp.

EUGENE

Better humor him.

ARTHUR

What do you suggest, Uncle?

EUGENE

Search me . . . God, maybe?

ARTHUR

That's been done. Lost His appeal.

EUGENE

True. Even in my time there wasn't much you could do with
God. I grew up in an age of enlightenment and exact science.
I only mentioned Him for the sake of form.

ARTHUR

Forget about form. What we're after now is a living idea.

EUGENE

How about sports? I used to ride horseback.

ARTHUR

Everybody goes in for sports nowadays. A lot of good it does them.

EUGENE

Sorry. Maybe Stomil has an idea.

STOMIL

Experiment. There's an idea.

ARTHUR

Please, this is serious.

STOMIL

Well, I'm serious too. Blazing trails, opening new frontiers! Man is always looking for new worlds to conquer and conquest comes from experiment. From trial and error. But always with an aim in view: The new life, radically new!

ARTHUR

A new life! I don't even know what to do with the old one.

STOMIL

Well, everything is still in the experimental stage, that's why.

EUGENE

Eleanor, have you got an idea?

ARTHUR

There's no sense asking a woman.

ELEANOR

I had an idea, but I've forgotten. I'm supposed to look after everything. Why don't you ask Eddie? He's got a good head on his shoulders, and when he does say something, you can depend on it.

STOMIL

That's right. Eddie is the collective mind. (STOMIL AND EUGENE FOLLOW ARTHUR STAGE LEFT TO CONFRONT EDDIE.)

ARTHUR

Well, what do you say then, Eddie?

EDDIE

Well, if anybody were to ask me, I'd say progress, sir.

ARTHUR

Meaning what?

EDDIE

Well, just that, sir: progress.

ARTHUR

But what kind of progress?

EDDIE

The progressive kind, the kind that goes right ahead.

ARTHUR

You mean forward?

EDDIE

Right. With the front moving forward.

ARTHUR

And the back?

EDDIE

The back moving forward too. Right out there in front.

ARTHUR

Then the front is in back?

EDDIE

Depends on how you look at it. If you look from back to front, the front is in front, though somehow or other it's also in back.

ARTHUR

That doesn't sound very clear to me.

EDDIE

No. But it's progressive.

(EUGENIA ENTERS UPSTAGE CENTER, LEANING ON A CANE.)

EUGENIA

(TIMIDLY): There's something I must tell you . . .

ELEANOR

Not now, Mother. Can't you see the men are discussing politics?

EUGENIA

Just two words . . .

ARTHUR

No, I don't like it. I need an idea that naturally, inevitably, leads to form. Your kind of progress leads nowhere.

EUGENIA

Please listen to me, my darlings. I won't take much of your time.

STOMIL

What is it now?

ELEANOR

I don't know. Something's wrong with Mama.

STOMIL

Later. We're busy now. (TO ARTHUR.) I still say we should get back to experiments. Then the idea will come by itself.

(EUGENIA TAKES THE KNICKKNACKS AND NAPKINS OFF THE CATAFALQUE)

ELEANOR

What are you doing, Mama? (ELEANOR CROSSES STAGE RIGHT TO PLATFORM.)

EUGENIA

(MATTER-OF-FACTLY): I'm dying.

ELEANOR

Mother! That's not very funny, you know.

(SILENTLY EUGENIA TIDIES UP THE CATAFALQUE. SHE WIPES AWAY THE DUST WITH HER SLEEVE.)

Mother says she's dying.

EUGENE

What? Dying? Can't she see we're busy?

ELEANOR

Did you hear that, Mama?

EUGENIA

Help me.

(INVOLUNTARILY ELEANOR GIVES HER HER ARM. EUGENIA CLIMBS UP ON THE CATAFALQUE.)

ELEANOR

But don't be silly, Mama. There's going to be a wedding

today. You wouldn't want to spoil everything by dying, would you?

STOMIL

Dying? What's all this about death? I never thought about that . . .

ARTHUR

(TO HIMSELF): Death? Excellent idea! . . .

EUGENE

This is ridiculous, Eugenia. Pull yourself together. This is no way to behave.

ALA

It wouldn't be normal, Grandmother.

EUGENIA

I don't understand you people. You're all so intelligent, but if somebody wants to do something as simple as dying, you don't know what to make of it. Really, you are very strange people. (SHE LIES DOWN ON HER BACK AND FOLDS HER HANDS OVER HER BREAST.)

ELEANOR

Look at her. Do something . . . Maybe she's really . . . (EUGENE CROSSES STAGE RIGHT TO EUGENIA'S SIDE)

EUGENE

Eugenia, this is carrying eccentricity too far. This sort of thing isn't done in our family.

STOMIL

It's sheer hypocrisy.

EUGENIA

You'll find the key to my room on the table. I won't need it anymore. I'll be able to come and go as I please. The

cards are in the drawer. All marked . . .

ARTHUR

Death . . . the supreme form!

STOMIL

Not exactly viable, though, is it?

ARTHUR

Why not? When it's somebody else's death.

(HE SEEMS TO HAVE HAD A REVELATION, BEATS HIS FOREHEAD.)

Grandma, you're brilliant!

ELEANOR

You ought to be ashamed of yourself! You all ought to be ashamed of yourselves.

EUGENE

Eugenia, lie properly at least. You're all hunched up. Elbows at your sides. Or get up this minute. Dying is no way to behave in society. Death is irrational.

STOMIL

Death is final and therefore no good as an experiment. An experiment has to be repeatable. Of course, if you're only rehearsing, that's something else again. But even so, there's not much point in it.

ALA

Stop! Can't you see what's happening? (ALA STANDS AND CROSSES STAGE RIGHT TO DOWN RIGHT CORNER OF PLATFORM.)

EUGENIA

Come closer, my children.

(ALL EXCEPT EDDIE GO OVER TO THE CATAFALQUE.)

Eddie, you too!

(EDDIE JOINS THE OTHERS.)

Who are you?

EUGENE

We're . . . it's just us.

(EUGENIA STARTS GIGGLING, FIRST SOFTLY, THEN LOUDLY.)

Now she's insulting us. Did I say something funny?

STOMIL

I'm not feeling so well myself. Must be a headache.

(HE STEPS ASIDE, FEELS HIS PULSE, TAKES A MIRROR OUT OF HIS POCKET, AND LOOKS AT HIS TONGUE.)

ARTHUR

Thank you, Grandmother, I'll make use of your idea.

STOMIL

(PUTTING THE MIRROR AWAY): Nothing serious, I guess. Must be these tight clothes. (HE SITS IN CHAIR STAGE CENTER)

(EUGENIA DIES)

ELEANOR

Try again, Mama.

ARTHUR

She's dead. Strange. She was always so frivolous.

ALA

I can't stand it! (ALA SITS ON STAGE RIGHT CORNER OF PLATFORM.)

EUGENE

I don't understand.

STOMIL

I don't want to have anything to do with this.

ELEANOR

I never dreamed . . . Stomil, why didn't you warn me? (SHE
CROSSES STAGE CENTER TO STOMIL.)

STOMIL

Of course, it's all my fault. Frankly I don't see that this
changes anything at all. My collar's as tight as ever.

ARTHUR

(COVERING EUGENIA WITH THE TABLECLOTH): Eddie, come here.
(ARTHUR CROSSES UPSTAGE CENTER.)

(EDDIE COMES OVER AND STANDS AT ATTENTION. ARTHUR FEELS HIS
MUSCLE.)

You pack a good punch, don't you?

EDDIE

Not bad, sir.

ARTHUR

And if necessary, you could . . . ? (HE RUNS HIS FINGER ACROSS
HIS THROAT)

EDDIE

(PHLEGMATICALY AFTER A PAUSE): You ask me a question, Mr.
Arthur? I'm not sure I heard you right.

(PAUSE. ARTHUR LAUGHS, UNSURE OF HIMSELF, AS THOUGH WAITING
TO SEE. EDDIE LAUGHS WITH A SIMILAR "HA HA" ARTHUR LAUGHS
ONCE AGAIN MORE LOUDLY AND WITH MORE ASSURANCE. WHEREUPON
EDDIE UTTERS A RESOUNDING LAUGH. ARTHUR SLAPS HIM ON THE
SHOULDER.)

ARTHUR

Eddie, I like you. I've always liked you.

EDDIE

And I've always thought we'd understand each other someday.

ARTHUR

Then you do understand?

EDDIE

Eddie understands all right.

STOMIL

This business has rather upset me. I'm going to lie down for a while.

ARTHUR

Stay right where you are, Father.

STOMIL

Oh stop ordering me around, you little punk. I'm tired.
(HE STARTS FOR HIS ROOM.)

ARTHUR

Eddie!

(EDDIE BARS STOMIL'S WAY)

STOMIL

Who do you think you are? (FURIOUSLY POINTING AT EDDIE, TO ELEANOR:) And you've been having an affair with this flunky?

ELEANOR

For God's sake, not now. Not with Mama lying there.

(EDDIE PUSHES STOMIL BACK INTO THE CHAIR.)

ARTHUR

Just a bit more patience, please. It's all quite clear to me now. I shall show you the way to a better future.

EUGENE

(SITTING DOWN AT SOFA): I just don't seem to care anymore . . . I must be getting old. We're just not as young as we used to be, are we, Stomil?

STOMIL

Speak for yourself. You're almost as old as Eugenia was, you old hypocrite. I feel fine. By and large. (PLEADING) Eleanor, where are you?

ELEANOR

Here, Stomil, right beside you.

STOMIL

Come here.

ELEANOR

(RESTING HER HAND ON HIS FOREHEAD): How do you feel?

STOMIL

I don't know what's wrong, but not well at all.

ARTHUR

Uncertainty and indecision are behind us now. Now the road lies before us, straight and clear. From now on there will be only one law and one herd. (ARTHUR PROCEEDS DOWNSTAGE LEFT TOWARD CORRIDOR.)

STOMIL

What's he jabbering about now? . . . Oh, my head!

EUGENE

Something about a new legal code for livestock.

ARTHUR

Don't you see the logical conclusion. (TURNS AND FACES THE FAMILY) Ah, creatures of flesh, caught up in your glandular secretions and terrified at the thought of your death, ARE

YOU INCAPABLE OF ALL UNDERSTANDING? But I understand!
 Unthinking cattle, behold your redeemer! I have risen above
 this world, and I will draw you all up after me, because I
 alone have a brain freed from the snares of the bowels.

EUGENE

Instead of insulting us, my dear great-nephew, kindly express
 yourself more clearly.

ARTHUR

(HE CROSSES TO STAGE CENTER AND AGAIN FACES HIS FAMILY WITH
 BACK TO THE AUDIENCE): Won't you ever understand, you whose
 lives rot away like mushrooms? You're like blind puppies
 that would walk in circles forever if they had no master to
 lead them. Without form or ideas, you would crumble to
 chaos and be consumed by the void if I weren't on hand to
 save you. Do you know what I'm going to do with you? I'm
 going to create a system in which rebellion will be combined
 with order, nonbeing with being. I will transcend all
 contradictions. (HE CROSSES STAGE RIGHT TO TABLE.)

EUGENE

It would perhaps be better if you'd just leave the room.
 You've disappointed me. It's all over between us. (TO
 HIMSELF.) I'll probably return to writing my memoirs.

ARTHUR

Let me just ask you this: if nothing exists and if even
 rebellion is impossible, then what CAN be raised up out of
 this nothingness and made to exist?

EUGENE

(TAKES OUT A WATCH WITH A LITTLE CHAIN): It's late. We
 could all do with a bite to eat. (HE SITS IN CHAIR EXTREME
 STAGE LEFT.)

ARTHUR

Isn't anybody going to answer me?

STOMIL

Eleanor, what are we having for lunch today? I'd like something light. My stomach's a bit queasy. It's high time we took better care of it.

ELEANOR

You're right, Stomil. From now on we'll look after you. A little nap after lunch, a little stroll after napping. The morning will be for experiments.

STOMIL

And everything cooked in butter, or maybe cut out fats entirely.

ELEANOR

Yes. We'll sleep better that way too.

ARTHUR

What? Silence? All right, I'll tell you. (HE PUTS HIS CHAIR ON THE SET TABLE, CLIMBS REELING ON THE TABLE AND SITS DOWN IN THE CHAIR.)

ELEANOR

Careful of the dishes, Arthur.

ARTHUR

The only possible answer is power.

EUGENE

Power? What power? We're your family, remember?

STOMIL

He's raving. Don't pay any attention to him.

ARTHUR

Power alone can exist in a vacuum. Now I am up here above you, and you are beneath me.

EUGENE

Brilliant, isn't he?

ELEANOR

ELEANOR CROSSES STAGE RIGHT TO ARTHUR): Arthur, come down. You're getting the tablecloth all dirty.

ARTHUR

You grovel beneath me in dust and ashes. (SHE RETREATS STAGE LEFT TO SOFA)

EUGENE

How long are we going to put up with this?

STOMIL

Let him talk. We'll take care of him after lunch. It's beyond me where he gets these tendencies. Must be his upbringing.

ARTHUR

Everything depends on being strong and decisive. I am strong. Look at me then. I am the answer to your dreams. Uncle Eugene, there will be order. Father, you have always rebelled, but your rebellion consumed itself in chaos. Now look at me. Power, too, is rebellion. A revolution in form and order, the revolt of the top against the bottom, the high against the low. The mountain needs the plain and the plain needs the mountain, otherwise each would cease to be what it is. Power resolves the paradox of opposites. Neither synthesis nor analysis, I am the act, the will and the way, I am power. I am above, within and beside all things. Give thanks to me for fulfilling the dreams of your youth. This is my gift to you. Yet I have a gift for myself as well: the form I have always longed for. For I can now create and destroy not just one but a thousand possible forms. I can incarnate and disincarnate myself. I have here within me--everything. (HE BEATS HIS BREAST.)

EUGENE

Poor boy. Sad to see a thing like this happen.

STOMIL

Oh don't take it so seriously. Adolescent foolishness.
Words, words, words. What power has he got over us?

EUGENE

Right! What does all his talk amount to anyway? We're
united by blood, not by abstractions. He can't do a thing
to us.

ARTHUR

It's very simple. I can kill you.

STOMIL

(RISES FROM HIS CHAIR AND FALLS BACK AGAIN): I absolutely
forbid you . . . There are limits.

ARTHUR

Limits can be transcended. YOU taught me that. Power over
life and death. What greater power can there be? A simple
but profoundly important discovery!

EUGENE

Nonsense! I'll live as long as I please. That is, I mean,
as long as it pleases. . . . I don't know whom, do you,
Stomil?

STOMIL

Well . . . Nature?

EUGENE

Exactly. Nature or fate.

ARTHUR

No. ME!

EUGENE

(JUMPING UP): Don't make me laugh!

ARTHUR

But suppose I become your fate, Uncle?

EUGENE

Eleanor, Stomil, what does this mean? I won't stand for it. He's your son, after all. (EUGENE SITS AGAIN)

ELEANOR

(STANDS): Look what you've done, Arthur. You've frightened your uncle. He's white as a sheet. Don't get up, Stomil. I'll get you a pillow. (SHE FINDS A PILLOW FOR HIM ON THE SOFA)

ARTHUR

Did you really think I'd start something I couldn't finish? Each one of you has a death shut inside you like a nightingale locked in a cage. All I have to do is let it out. Well, do you still think I'm a utopian, a babbler, a dreamer?

EUGENE

Ha ha! There's no getting around it, Arthur-- (EUGENE GETS UP AND CROSSES STAGE RIGHT TO TABLE CHAIR LEFT, FACING ARTHUR) you've got a head on your shoulders. You've thought this whole thing out very nicely. Nothing like a good university education, I always say. Hopeless to argue with you; you'll always win. But while we talk, time is flying and though there's nothing I enjoy more than a philosophico-scientific discussion, especially with the younger generation, we've talked long enough. Our horizons have been expanded, but now it's time for something concrete. Enough theory. Let's have something to eat. What do you say, Eleanor?

ELEANOR

I wanted to suggest that some time ago, but I couldn't get a word in edgewise. (SHE CROSSES STAGE RIGHT TO TABLE) Enough now, Arthur, come down. Or at least take your shoes off.

ARTHUR

You're right, Uncle, it's time for something concrete.

Eddie, my dark angel, are you ready?

EDDIE

Ready, chief.

ARTHUR

Then grab him. (EDDIE SLOWLY AGGRESSES ON EUGENE DOWNSTAGE RIGHT AT TABLE)

EUGENE

What are you going to do? (HE ESCAPES UPSTAGE BEHIND STAGE CENTER CHAIR.)

ARTHUR

First we're going to rub out Uncle Eugene.

ELEANOR

Rub out? Where on earth did you pick that up?

STOMIL

And now of all times, with my blood pressure skyrocketing! (ELEANOR CROSSES STAGE CENTER STOMIL)

EUGENE

(STILL ESCAPING EDDIE STAGE LEFT IN FRONT OF SOFA): Why me?

(EDDIE FOLLOWS, GETTING CLOSER AND CLOSER.)

ARTHUR

So I'm all just theory, am I? Eddie, show him he's mistaken. You trash! What do you take me for?

(EDDIE TRIES TO CATCH EUGENE BUT EUGENE ESCAPES ONCE MORE UPSTAGE LEFT BEHIND SOFA.)

EUGENE

This isn't a system. It's mob rule. (EDDIE CHANGES DIRECTION AND PURSUES EUGENE FROM STAGE RIGHT SIDE OF SOFA)

ARTHUR

Do your duty, Eddie.

EUGENE

(RUNNING DOWNSTAGE LEFT FROM EDDIE, WHO FOLLOWS HIM WITH SURE, CATLIKE MOVEMENTS): What does this ape want of me? Keep your hands off me!

ARTHUR

He's not an ape. He's the right arm of my spirit, my word made flesh.

STOMIL

(TEARING HIS COLLAR OPEN): Eleanor, I feel awful. Eleanor!

ELEANOR

Look, your father's fainted.

EUGENE

(RUNNING UPSTAGE CENTER): Madman! Murderer!

ARTHUR

(STANDS UP AND STRETCHES OUT HIS ARM): No! A man who has seen the one possibility and doesn't shrink from it. I am pure as nature. I am free. Free!

ALA

(SHE STANDS): Arthur!

ARTHUR

Wait. First we've got to save the world.

ALA

I've been unfaithful to you. With Eddie.

(EDDIE AT SOFA RIGHT AND EUGENE BEHIND SOFA SUDDENLY STOP STILL AND LOOK AT ARTHUR AND ALA. ELEANOR IS BUSY SLAPPING STOMIL'S CHEEKS, TRYING TO ROUSE HIM FROM HIS FAINT.)

ARTHUR

(SLOWLY LOWERING HIS ARMS, AFTER A MOMENT OF SILENCE. SEE FIGURE 4): What?

ALA

I didn't think you'd mind. After all, you only wanted to marry me out of principle.

ARTHUR

(SITS DOWN, DAZED): When?

ALA

This morning.

ARTHUR

(TO HIMSELF): I see . . .

ALA

I didn't think you'd care. I thought . . . Look, I'm ready for the wedding. (SHE PUTS ON HER VEIL.) How do I look?

ARTHUR

(GROPES HIS WAY CLUMSILY OFF THE TABLE STAGE RIGHT): Wait a second, wait . . . You? You did that to me?

ALA

(WITH AFFECTED NONCHALANCE): I forgot to tell you. You were busy . . . We can go now. Should I wear my gloves? They're a bit tight. You like the way I've done my hair?

ARTHUR

(BELLOWING): You did that to ME?

ALA

(AFFECTING SURPRISE): You still going on about that? I didn't think you'd even be interested. Let's change the subject, shall we?



Figure 4

ARTHUR

(IN A STAGE OF COLLAPSE, GROPEs HIS WAY AROUND THE TABLE DOWN LEFT, HE SEEMS TO HAVE LOST CONTROL OVER HIS MOVEMENTS; IN A PLAINTIVE MONOTONE): How could you . . . how could you?

ALA

But you said you only needed me to help you with your plan. Don't you remember? I didn't misunderstand you, did I? (ALA FOLLOWS ARTHUR QUICKLY AND GETS AHEAD OF HIM TO STOP HIM STAGE CENTER.) Yesterday, when we were talking and you said such clever things, I was impressed. Really. Eddie could never have spoken like that.

ARTHUR

(BELLOWING): Eddie! (ARTHUR EDGES ALA SLOWLY ACROSS THE ROOM, STAGE LEFT)

ALA

Eddie's something else again.

ARTHUR

(PLAINTIVELY): Why did you do that to me?

ALA

What's got into you, darling? I've told you, I didn't think you'd care. Frankly, I'm surprised at you, making such a fuss over nothing. Now I'm sorry I even told you.

ARTHUR

But why?

ALA

Oh, my stubborn darling! I had my reasons.

ARTHUR

(SHOUTING): What reasons? (ARTHUR AND ALA STOP DOWNSTAGE LEFT.)

ALA

Let's forget about it. You're just getting yourself all worked up.

ARTHUR

Tell me!

ALA

I only wanted to . . .

ARTHUR

Go on. Your reasons . . .

ALA

(FRIGHTENED): Oh, the stupidest, silliest little reasons . . .

ARTHUR

Go on!

ALA

I won't tell you. You always get mad.

ARTHUR

Oh God!

ALA

If you want, we'll never say another word about the whole thing. Is it all my fault?

ARTHUR

(CROSSES STAGE CENTER TO ELEANOR): Why are you all against me? What have I done to you? Mother, did you hear that?

ELEANOR

Ala, I warned you.

ARTHUR

(GOING TO ELEANOR): Mama, tell her she mustn't do such things. Do something, help me, I can't live like this. Tell her . . . How can she treat me like this . . . (HE BURSTS INTO TEARS.)

ELEANOR

(TEARING HERSELF AWAY FROM HIM): Get away from me, you silly child.

ARTHUR

(REPULSED, STAGGERS DOWNSTAGE RIGHT TO TABLE TEARFULLY): I wanted to save you. I was so close . . . And now you've ruined it all. Ah, the world is evil, evil, evil.

ALA

Come to me, Arthur! Oh, my poor boy, I feel so sorry for you. (CROSSES TO ARTHUR, STAGE RIGHT)

ARTHUR

(SHOVING HER AWAY): You! Sorry for me? You dare to pity me? I don't need anyone's pity. You don't know me yet . . . but you're going to now. All right. You've rejected my idea. You've trampled me under-foot. (TO ALA) And you besmirched the noblest idea in all history, you goose! Oh! What blindness! You can't even begin to imagine who it is you've lost. And who did you do it with? With this half-witted punk, this garbage dumped out by our times. (EDDIE DISAPPEARS BEHIND CURTAINS.) I'll go away, but I won't leave you behind in this world. You don't know what you're living for anyway. Where is he, your darling lover? Where's that rotten beer belly anyway? I'll fix that early bird's guts! (HE RUNS DESPERATELY AROUND THE ROOM, LOOKING BLINDLY FOR SOMETHING ON THE TABLES AND ON THE SOFA.) The revolver! Where can it be? It's impossible to find anything with all this damned order! Mama, have you seen the revolver?

(EDDIE CREEPS OUT FROM BEHIND THE CURTAINS WITH THE REVOLVER AND, TAKING A WIDE SWING (SEE FIGURE 5) HITS ARTHUR IN THE BACK OF THE NECK WITH THE BUTT. ARTHUR SINKS TO HIS KNEES DOWNSTAGE CENTER. EDDIE TOSSES THE REVOLVER ASIDE, PUSHES



Figure 5

ARTHUR'S HEAD DEFTLY FORWARD SO THAT IT HANGS DOWN, CLASPS HIS HANDS AND, RAISING HIMSELF ON HIS TIPTOES, SWINGS HIS HANDS DOWN ON ARTHUR'S HEAD LIKE AN AX. ARTHUR FALLS OVER, HITTING THE FLOOR WITH HIS FOREHEAD. THIS SCENE MUST LOOK VERY REALISTIC.)

ALA

(KNEELS BESIDE ARTHUR): Arthur!

ELEANOR

(KNEELS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF ARTHUR): Arthur! My son!

EDDIE

(STEPS ASIDE STAGE LEFT LOOKS AT HIS HANDS, WITH SURPRISE):
Hm, that was hard.

ARTHUR

(SLOWLY AND SOFTLY, AS THOUGH AMAZED): Strange . . .
everything's disappeared . . .

ALA

But I didn't want . . . It's not true!

EDDIE

Ha ha ha!

ARTHUR

(STILL WITH HIS FACE ON THE FLOOR, VERY SOFTLY): I loved
you, Ala.

ALA

Why didn't you tell me before?

EDDIE

"I love you and you're sound asleep."

ELEANOR

(RUNS TO STOMIL AND SHAKES HIM): Wake up. Your son is
dying!

STOMIL

(OPENING HIS EYES): Can't you people spare me anything?

(HE STANDS UP WITH DIFFICULTY AND LEANING ON ELEANOR APPROACHES ARTHUR. ELEANOR, STOMIL AND EUGENE STAND OVER HIM, ALA KNEELS.)

ARTHUR

(STRETCHING OUT ON THE FLOOR): I wanted . . . I wanted . . .
(PAUSE).

ALA

(STANDS UP; MATTER-OF-FACTLY): He's dead.

EUGENE

Perhaps he's better off. He nearly murdered his uncle.

STOMIL

Forgive him. He wasn't happy.

EUGENE

(MAGNANIMOUSLY): Oh, I don't bear him any grudge. He can't hurt me now.

STOMIL

He tried to overcome indifference and mediocrity. He lived for reason, but lived too passionately. He died because his thought had betrayed his feelings.

EDDIE

He meant well, but he was too highstrung. His kind never gets old.

(ALL TURN TOWARDS EDDIE.)

STOMIL

Hold your tongue, you scoundrel, and get out of my house. You ought to be glad to get off so easy.

EDDIE

Why should I leave? I'll say it again: he meant well. I'm staying.

STOMIL

Why?

EDDIE

It's my turn now. Now you're all going to listen to me.

STOMIL

We listen? To you?

EDDIE

Sure, why not? You've seen that I pack a wicked punch. Nothing to worry about so long as you keep quiet and do what I say. You'll see. You won't have to worry. I'm a regular guy. I like a joke, like a good time. But get this: There's got to be order.

EUGENE

We're in for it now.

EDDIE

You know, you talk too much. Take my shoes off for me, will you? (EDDIE CASUALLY CROSSES TO CHAIR STAGE LEFT AND SITS)

EUGENE

I submit to brute force. But I'll despise him in my heart.

EDDIE

Go ahead and despise me, but now take my shoes off, and quick.

(EUGENE KNEELS IN FRONT OF HIM AND TAKES OFF HIS SHOES.)

STOMIL

I've always thought we were slaves of abstractions, but that someday humanity would take its revenge. Now I see that it's only Eddie.

ELEANOR

Maybe it won't be so bad. He certainly won't mind if you diet.

EUGENE

(HOLDING THE SHOES): Should I shine them, sir?

EDDIE

No, you can have 'em. I'm changing anyway. (HE STANDS UP, TAKES OFF ARTHUR'S JACKET, PUTS IT ON AND EXAMINES THE FIT) A little tight, but not bad!

STOMIL

Come, Eleanor. We're only a poor old couple now.

EDDIE

Don't go too far, and be ready to come running when I call.

ELEANOR

Are you coming with us, Ala?

ALA

I'm coming. He loved me, nobody can take that away from me.

STOMIL

(TO HIMSELF): We may as well assume it was love.

ALA

Did you say something, Father?

STOMIL

Me? No.



Figure 6

(ELEANOR AND STOMIL EXIT UPSTAGE RIGHT, HOLDING HANDS. ALA
FOLLOWS. EUGENE STOPS BESIDE ARTHUR.)

EUGENE

I've got the feeling, Arthur, my boy, that nobody needs
you anymore.

(HE STANDS THERE MEDITATING. THE TANGO "LA CUMPARSITA"
RESOUNDS VERY LOUD AND CLEAR. IT MUST BE THIS TANGO AND
NO OTHER.)

EDDIE

Well, Uncle Eugene, would you like to dance?

EUGENE

Me? With you . . . Oh, all right, why not?

(EUGENE PUTS DOWN THE SHOES BESIDE ARTHUR. EDDIE PUTS HIS
ARM AROUND HIM. THEY TAKE THE PROPER POSITION, IMMEDIATELY
DOWN STAGE OF ARTHUR'S DEAD BODY ON THE ORCHESTRA PIT, WAIT
OUT ONE MEASURE AND START DANCING. EDDIE LEADS. THEY
DANCE. (SEE FIGURE 6.) EDDIE IN ARTHUR'S JACKET THAT IS TOO
TIGHT FOR HIM, HIS POWERFUL ARMS PROTRUDING FROM THE SLEEVES
THAT ARE TOO SHORT. HE HAS TAKEN EUGENE BY THE WAIST. THEY
DANCE ALL THE FIGURES OF THE TANGO. AS THEY DANCE, THE
ORCHESTRA PIT SLOWLY DESCENDS LEAVING ARTHUR'S HEAD AND ARMS
DANGLING OVER THE DOWNSTAGE CENTER EDGE OF THE STAGE. THE
DANCE IS PERFORMED ON THE DESCENDING ORCHESTRA PIT WITH A
BRIGHT SPOTLIGHT FOLLOWING THE MOTION. THE MUSIC ENDS.)

BLACKOUT

(AS THE LIGHTS GO ON IN THE THEATRE, THE MUSIC RESOUNDS ONCE
AGAIN AS THE AUDIENCE EXITS.)

END

CHAPTER III

Introduction

Tango was performed seven times in revolving repertory between June 9 and June 28, 1976. The director believes the production might best be termed a "moderate success." This, of course, shall be qualified within the ensuing pages of this chapter.

The following critical report will include four areas of evaluation: Achievement of Interpretation, Actor-Director Relationships, Audience Reaction and a brief Summary.

Achievement of Interpretation

The director of Tango has previously labeled Mrozek's play an avant-garde comedy. This would indicate that he desired a fair amount of audible humorous response from any given audience. At the same time, he has chosen to communicate the inherent religious theme within the play. Thus arose one of the most difficult problems; how to communicate comic values and religious values simultaneously, yet achieve something which is both entertaining and thought-provoking. The director believed he should first and foremost entertain the audience, so he put the emphasis on the comedy. He intended to achieve this comedy through

newly-gained information. What follows is a brief summary of this re-evaluation.

The director has concluded from post-production research that, were he to direct Tango again, he would concentrate on three major changes in approach. First, he would try to achieve a sense of "comic detachment" as opposed to "character identification" which was sought in this production. "Comedy demands a treatment which will allow the audience to view the situation, characters, or ideas objectively . . . it is difficult to laugh at anything with which we are too closely allied either through sympathy or hatred."¹ Being most conducive to comedy, this detachment serves as a safety valve which allows an audience to respond freely without fear for any of the characters in the play.

Secondly, the director would coach the actors to develop their characters more from an "outside-inside" approach instead of the opposite which was used in this production. Activities would include finding out everything one could about the character but distorting part of it so as to create a comic character. It would also include finding the blind side of the character or that which he doesn't understand about himself and emphasizing his lack of self-knowledge. These ideas concerning

¹Oscar G. Brockett, The Theatre: An Introduction (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1964), p. 40.

character apply to one of the main causes of laughter; incongruity. "Incongruity of character involves a contrast between the ideal and the real, or between the appearance and actuality."² Eugenia, the grandmother, would have been much more of a comic character had she exaggerated the incongruities between her age and her decadent behavior. Eleanor and Eddie, likewise, would have received more comic response had they been coached to hide their affair from Stomil. This would have created more imbalance and comic tension and in turn would have precipitated the essential element of surprise. This approach to actor coaching and characterization would directly oppose that which was taken in this director's production of Tango.

Thirdly, the director of Tango would have used more of what Henri Bergson described as automatism. The automatic, mechanical kind of behavior which Eddie acquired for the third act was both appropriate and funny. Had the other members of the family shown some of this quality while the Victorian conventions were being imposed upon them, the first part of the third act would have developed more of the humorous quality it needed. It also would have given a better indication that the family was dissatisfied with the outmoded forms of behavior and would have given the actors more variety within which to express themselves.

²Theodore W. Hatlen, Orientation to the Theatre (New York: Meredith Corporation, 1972), p. 120.

The preceding changes in approach would have enhanced the overall interpretation for the comic value created would have kept the audience entertained until the turnabout in the third act where the thematic content supersedes and leads to the terrifying murder and siege of power. The shock value at this point was nonexistent in this production of Tango, a moment which is absolutely necessary for a successful realization of this director's interpretation.

Communications and relationships were exceptionally good between the director and his scenery and costume designers. The simplified scenery was highly suggestive of a realistic setting with appropriately painted hanging moulding, door frames and platforms. The result was a very realistic outline of a large Victorian living room. The coordinating browns, greens and golds provided a soft, attractive touch to the design. The director believes the groundplan was most functional in terms of actor movement and stage picturization.

The costumes effectively aided the actors in the development of characterization and properly represented the periods for which they were designed. They also added a sense of beauty and visual fluidity to the overall production. The color concept for the third act costumes was particularly clever and stimulating. The idea was to

color-coordinate all the costumes within the narrow array of colors found in a very old photograph. An interesting combination of browns, beiges, off-whites and blacks determined the total image of Act III and it was extremely effective.

The prop designer and builder for Tango deserves honorable mention for very nearly going "beyond the call of duty." His handmade furniture, old-fashioned camera, marble catafalque and huge chandelier were notably effective assets to the production. These, of course, were only a few of the some 175 props required by Tango.

The lighting design for Tango was interesting but inappropriate. This stems primarily from the director's lack of effective communication with the designer and personal awareness of the influential powers of light itself. A great deal of freedom was given the lighting designer but the mood created for the first two acts was not conducive to that of comedy. Instead, a grim solemnity created by shadows and low intensity was achieved. The director was unable to recognize at that time that light was creating a contradictory mood to his interpretation of the play. After several performances, the designer made some favorable changes in intensity which improved the nature of the design for the remainder of the run.

Generally speaking, the director's interpretation of Tango was not achieved in this production. Although rather

visually interesting, the approach taken by the director repressed the comedy and created a somewhat sombre mood. This mood, in conjunction with a dialogue of exhausting philosophizing reaped a mixed bag of styles and interpretations.

Actor-Director Relationships

Tango has a cast of seven characters, four men and three women. This director tried particularly to avoid biases and cast those seven people who seemed to best capture the physical and emotional essence of those characters. At the same time attention was focused on creativity and response to coaching stimuli. Ironically, the chosen cast was composed largely of the director's close friends and peers. Among the cast of seven were six graduate student directors and one undergraduate actor. This was naively overlooked by the director until six various interpretations of Tango began creeping into rehearsals. There was no conscious attempt on the part of the cast to alter the direction of the production but personal opinions and interpretive ideas inevitably influenced performances.

The actress playing the part of Eleanor agreed that Tango was a comedy and although it contained some thought-provoking matter, the action should never cease to be funny and the comedy should carry through to the very end. This gave her portrayal a tongue-in-cheek attitude which,

ironically, was very seldom funny. Conversely, the actor playing the part of Stomil admitted he saw nothing whatsoever funny about Tango. Although he did a consistent and believable performance with that role, he never achieved and sustained a comic character for his largest scene in Act II.

Despite the differences in artistic opinion, the director believes he was working with a responsible and dedicated cast from which he could expect professional results. His biggest directorial mistake at this point was the utilization of improvisational and loose rehearsal techniques. Theatre games and unconventional ideas were used to stimulate creativity but in conjunction with the various interpretations, it harvested diversification and defied unification.

Some of the directorial techniques utilized were supervised nondirectional blocking, gibberish, singing dialogue, contact exercises, and object-involvement games. The director also prohibited early line memorization for fear of restricting creative character development. This approach was geared toward achieving a kind of legitimate exaggeration or what the director referred to a "heightened reality." Though public performances posed professional limitations, this objective provided the cast with too much freedom within which to create and develop.

Described above is an improvisationally-oriented approach to the directing of Tango and the development of characters. However, those devices are very general in nature and gave the actors little from which to create and retain. For this reason, the director also coached the actors from the standpoint of character objectives and inner motivations. This was another sizeable error on the director's part for not only do the two techniques together cause frustration and confusion among the cast, but they can and do create contradictory characters and relationships. This is especially true for an absurdist play such as Tango, for the action often serves a totally different purpose than does the meaning.

Generally, the actor-director relationships were very good. Rehearsal schedules were met with punctuality, actors were relaxed but professional and there seemed to be an air of sincere willingness to follow directions. The director's lack of general knowledge in the area of comedy caused his primary difficulty in dealing with the cast. He realized too many times that a specific scene or action was comic in nature but he was unable to communicate that feeling to the cast in technical terms to which they could respond directly. Instead, he relied on previously described techniques hoping the cast would become aware of those comic moments through rehearsals.

Such unreliable communication bred frustration and pessimism about both the play and the director. It was not so much a loss of discipline as it was a gradual loss of respect. Eventually, the director realized his own shortcomings and reached a point when he could no longer think of guidance to achieve his desired result.

Aside from the director's own communication problems, it was discovered that some members of the cast were unable to handle the freedom which they were given both in rehearsals and performances. The actresses playing the part of Eleanor very often found it difficult to be sincere in what she was doing unless tight reins were held by the director. The director admits, however, much to his regret, that those reins were never held tight enough. The actor playing the role of Eddie took unprofessional advantage of that freedom once Tango was in performance. His newly created actions too often upstaged action which was directed for audience focus. Moreover, many of those actions were obscene or otherwise distasteful to an already restless audience.

Despite the many complications, some of the theatre games were priceless in developing character relationships. A game called "singing dialogue" in which the actors simply sing their lines, brought out most of the heightened behavior, stage business and blocking in a large scene between Arthur and Ala in Act II. A contact game which demands that actor make some kind of meaningful contact with his

fellow player each time he speaks, completely developed a short touching scene between Eleanor and Ala in Act III.

One very positive response to this director's stimuli was from the actor playing the role of Arthur who created that role virtually "eye to eye" as the director had conceived it. Although his comic nature fell short occasionally early in Act I, his portrayal of the betrayed Savior in Act III was one of Tango's few saving graces.

The director acquired a substantial number of basic directing skills from his experience with this production of Tango. For instance, in the future he would allow much less freedom than what he permitted the Tango cast, especially in a short rehearsal period. Upon directing again, he would be sure that he could communicate effectively to his cast the purpose of each character and scene before attempting the playing of theatre games. Avoiding the casting of peers and other directors would inevitably reduce the chances of possible intimidation and its detrimental effects. Finally, the director concluded that a mixture of techniques is probably unwise unless each idea or exercise is carefully selected in conjunction with the others to achieve a specific result.

Audience Reaction

Tango had little impact, humorous or otherwise, on audiences viewing this director's production of the play.

Laughter was restricted to a few obvious moments and it often seemed to be accompanied by a question mark. Although audiences were less entertained than the director had hoped, one review of the production might indicate that more was taken home from the theatre than was accounted for in terms of response. Joe Knox from the Greensboro Daily News writes:

The subject for discussion is personal liberty. "Tango" presents choices in the matter. Is the quality of personal liberty advanced when everybody does his own thing and lets it all hang out? Is happiness enhanced when the meanest acts of everyday life are structured and rigidly disciplined?³

Although not the specific interpretation chosen for emphasis in this production, this one by Mr. Knox is perfectly valid and if nothing else, indicates enlightening potential.

Of the seven characters in the play, the audience seemed to enjoy Arthur, Stomil, Eddie and Eugenia most. Eddie's distasteful additions to early performances were enjoyed by a select few but seemed generally offensive to the silent majority. However, audience response indicated that his mechanical behavior in Act III was very funny. Arthur's exaggerated reactions to the family's disgusting frivolity, immorality and disorder were received with legitimate humorous response and Stomil's artistic liberal attitude was enjoyed throughout the play.

³Joe Knox, "Unique Ending Makes 'Tango' Memorable," Greensboro Daily News, 11 June 1975, sec. B, p. 2.

The tango at the end of the play seemed particularly effective as a conclusion to the production. In fact, Mr. Knox titled his review, "Unique Ending Makes 'Tango Memorable.'" While it first brought a considerable amount of laughter, the emotional response took a sudden turnabout as a realization of the meaning came over the audience. Mr. Knox writes:

It took me a while to understand the ending, which amounts only to two men dancing the tango. It was fascinating to watch, wildly comic and at the same time death-like and chilling, and after you digest what it means, it becomes, well . . . how you react is what you are. I thought it was frightening.⁴

In terms of what the director had hoped to achieve in the way of audience response, there was considerably less throughout the entire play. He aimed for laughter until the middle of Act III. In turn, the last half of Act III was perhaps less exciting or fear-provoking than he had predicted. Generally, the audience was less entertained and enlightened than the director had intended but they were cultivated to some extent in that they were exposed to a style of theatre other than that to which they were accustomed. Mr. Knox describes it as "a new kind of comedy that could come only from behind the Iron Curtain-- at once sophisticated, gross, subtle and slapstick."⁵

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

Summary

In retrospect, then, Tango can be termed a "moderate success" for its shortcomings did not outweigh its assets. Offering something different in the way of cultural stimulus, it was rather received like a spoonful of medicine, but yet seemed to entertain or enlighten some, if only a few, who dared to see it. Greater still were the benefits reaped by the director, for in his search for solutions to difficult problems, he developed a greater consciousness of the stage and a respect for its potential. Besides learning to communicate more effectively with actors and designers, he was afforded the task of post-production research which gained for him additional knowledge about the nature of comedy. In the final analysis then, this director views his learning experience with Tango as one more rung of that ladder which leads to success.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1

UNC-G Summer Repertory Theatre
presents

TANGO

by Slawomir Mrozek

Directed by Michael Childers
Lighting designed by Robert Thurston
Scenery designed by David Ramsey
Costumes designed by Karen N. Thompson

CAST

Eugenia Nancy Watkins
Eddie Mitch Sommers
Eugene Dwight E. Watson
Arthur Steve Washer
Eleanor Bell Wesel
Stomil Ed K. Simpson
Ala Barbara Blackledge

Act I: One Morning

Act II: Late That Evening

Act III: The Next Day

"It is the right and duty of all to be happy, now that the new era has
set us free." —TANGO

There will be one fifteen minute intermission between Act II and Act III.

Performance Dates: June 9, 10, 15, 19, 22, 25, and 28 at 8:15 p.m.

Produced by special arrangements with Samuel French, Inc.