

Engaging the Text

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The Moral Dilemmas of Relativism: A Dramatic Exposition
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Narrative to *Engaging the Text*

I have been fascinated with the theater ever since high school. The first play I performed in was *The Laramie Project*, which ironically enough I tried out for, not because I admired the art, I had never even seen a play up till that point, but because I was drawn to the controversial issue that the play dealt with, homosexual equality. As someone who realized his feeling for the same sex at an early age, the play moved me as I recited words that urged for acceptance in front of a conservative Kansas audience. There was even rumor the Reverend Fred Phelps himself, the antagonist depicted in the play, was going to travel to my high school from Topeka to protest the production. Apparently the police held him behind schedule and he was unable to show, but the discourse that the play caused within my community was astounding. It offended some, delighted others, but most of all it showed me the powerful ability theater has to challenge established norms.

But not only did the play challenge my communal standard, it also challenged my sexual identity. Because I choose to act in *The Laramie Project* instead of trying out for track and field, my father first questioned me about my sexuality. I couldn't admit it to him then, but the play's acknowledgement of homosexuality, amidst a community that mostly ignored it, influenced me to eventually tell my father the truth.

While this high school experience gave me the acting bug and an appreciation for the power of the written word, it wasn't until my sophomore year of college that I felt the desire to actually pursue writing. I originally intended to major in political science and minor in English. However, after taking Bragg's 270 Creative Writing course, I realized that I had an aptitude for composing innovative, controversial work. I also came to appreciate how gratifying a finished piece of art can make you feel. I wrote a number of poetry and prose pieces toward which my classmates gave a very positive reception. One memory that especially sticks out in my mind is when Earl had to prematurely excuse himself from class because a student was drinking alcohol during his lesson. He asked me to lead the class discussion while he addressed the problem. This nod of the hat made me feel confident that I had at least some measure of talent, so I went for the English degree.

Nevertheless, other teachers helped guide me toward literature as well. Dr. Stewart's survey of American Lit. course first exposed me to the colorful works of Sam Shepard, my favorite playwright, while Dr. Barrow's Native American Lit. course first opened to me to the abstract mind of my favorite prose writer, Sherman Alexie. Their challenging classes, along with others lead by teachers like Gregory O'Dea, Rebecca Jones, Bryan Hampton and Thomas Balazs, taught me how to look critically at a text and derive a meaning from the work that is unique to my experiences. They taught me that literature is not only meant to discover what the author wants his audience to observe, but also meant to discover a part of self, how

one views the world. I hope teachers know how important they are in the lives of their students. I wouldn't be where I am today if it weren't for these guides.

I have noticed that a piece of art transposes a sentiment about the author that is uniquely his own. There is a tense bond between your work and your psyche which can be an unsettling experience as some of your cynicisms, fears, complaints, and frustrations find their way, often inadvertently, onto the page. And since your ideas are written, there is an unavoidable finality to the work that you can't help but be somewhat apprehensive toward; as if the feelings you express will stay stagnant on the page, while day by day you progress into a faintly dissimilar person.

When a photographer takes our photo, we smile to show the happiest side of our countenance, because in a way the picture is a statement of our complacency with life. Yet when we are snapped off guard, and a picture of our pain or sorrow is captured, one cannot help but worry if someone will in time come across that picture and judge you from its perspective. Walking a road of discontent is an intimidating venture. You eventually move on with your life into happier or sadder times, but the work will remain there, in its original form, to remind you where you once stood. Balancing unsteadily on the edge of a rotting cliff, you gaze below upon the society which eyes you teetering on the edge, and though they say nothing, do nothing, the whispers from their stares, watching your plight in apathy, hushes to you in words of disrepute: "Please, for the sake of others, descend into the rocks. They will comfort you. What you are has no place here." But for the love of the small few who believe in you, your footing takes hold, you get stronger, and step back from the cliff and

linger into the valley to say, with a trembling voice, "No. I think I will stay, even if I have no place here."

Inconvenient to the community, my play threatens the joyous snapshots of our lives. My art also redeems me from the void which, if I were to descend, would tear away the sediments of my self to be instilled into the solitary rock of homogeneity. The rock that gains itself from instituting each grain into its whole, solidifying a dull prison from the fiery atoms which gave it life, horridly trapping me there, where after time speeds, I forget the former splendor of my sedimentary self and cement into the torment of established foundation. I become a dark and solitary pebble in the uniformity of my stoned asylum. The play willfully sacrifices itself into this rocky void I speak of and cries from below the peril of the rotting cliff above.

My fear and resentment of the void is what impelled me to be raw, unconventional, and even conspicuously offensive. I want my audience to watch the play and gasp in awe. I want some to leave out of sheer anger for the heterosexual culture I deconstruct, so that in a small way, as they linger out of the theater to exempt themselves from the grotesqueries I created, they might in some small way know what it feels like to be the one on that cliff, to be the one who wants leave, to be the faggot. For this reason, in spite of the emotional warfare this project has brought upon me, I have also found some of my voice, that voice being a requited, "Fuck you."

So, with this tone I began to create the characters. They are an amalgamation of stereotypes juxtaposed upon counter-stereotypes as a means to deconstruct the

dichotomous notions of identity, namely sexual identity. For example, Liz is ardently religious, and considers herself a decidedly moral person, yet she is driven toward dissolution. She fixates upon the sexual relationship she has with Dr. Rotcliff just as she fixates upon the moral relationship she has with Jesus. This association is established in the scene when Liz uses Dr. Rotcliff's blood to metaphorically baptize Brad while singing "Oh, the Blood of Jesus." This association is also shown near the end of the play when Liz screams the names of Jesus and Dr. Rotcliff as she orgasms. By juxtaposing her worship of Jesus upon her erotic fixation with Dr. Rotcliff, Liz is driven to moral proselytizing and also to sexual promiscuity. Each motive is seemingly at odds with each other, yet by combining them into one character, Liz speaks with the hypocritical voice mainstream society denounces homosexuality. While Liz is heterosexual, she is aroused by the homosexual interaction between Dr. Rotcliff and Brad. The very relationship that she condemns is also the relationship that gives her sexual identity and pleasure. Her sexual nature includes a strange breed of homosexuality. Remember, she used a strap on as a way to give the dominance Dr. Rotcliff desired, this depicts an image of Liz as a kind of semi-transsexual in the audience's mind. She also forces Brad to enter inside her through physical and mental manipulation, in effect raping his innocence. This inversion of Liz's sexuality from the archetypal, compliant female to the dominant male actor, upsets the distinction between the male and the female genders. Liz deconstructs the suggestion that heterosexuality is orthodox concept through her willingness to imagine sexual roles beyond those established by her gender. Her sexual actions make her the most

sexually liberated, but her opposing moral convictions also make her the most sexually repressive. Two opposites exist in her persona, each struggling to dominate the other. I see Liz as the unconscious pseudo-feminist, wanting for Brad and Dr. Rotcliff to end their “sexual peculiarity” while simultaneously creating her own.

However, just because Liz seeks to end the men’s relationship, I do not want the audience to think that she is the antagonist. The blame of the crises does not belong to one character alone. Instead, the disorder is caused by a variety of distortions. Dr. Rotcliff desires Brad because of the romantic belief that his love is reciprocated; however, Brad feel an emotional connection with Dr. Rotcliff, only a sexual one. This becomes apparent when Brad is incapable of telling Dr. Rotcliff what he is like “on the inside” before Brad orgasms. Dr. Rotcliff is a means to sexual exploration, for both Liz and Brad. They use him to discover their sexual identity, consequently leaving Dr. Rotcliff to reject both their company at the end of the play. The world Dr. Rotcliff resides in is inadequate because he is unable to find affirmation in either Liz or Brad, in either the heterosexual or homosexual relationship. This dichotomy is what sets the divisive lines in the play. This line is where the characters wage war with each other and also where they inevitably destroy each other.

This war I speak of is noticeably embodied in Brad’s mental frustrations as he chooses whether to take the key from Liz’s vagina. His decision to do so figuratively represents his decision to forgo his homosexual nature for a heterosexual lifestyle. However, Brad’s new-found heterosexuality is a product of Liz’s manipulation.

Hence, the emblematic rape that Liz performs on Brad is physically manifested in Sara when he arrives at the kegger. This physical rape is discussed through a dialectic metaphor in the firefly scene between Sara and Brad. This scene conveys the human tendency to dominate effects that one does not fully understand. We seek to define these enigmas by trapping them in generalities, but the main motive is to see them die, to see the light slowly drained from them so they do not remind us of their discontinuity. For example, Brad does not understand his sexuality and by physically dominating Sara, he redeems the power lost by Liz's manipulation and reasserts a sense of masculinity he lost by his sexual experimentation with Dr. Rotcliff.

Moreover, the firefly scene serves as an allegory to the theme of sexual dominance and possession which runs throughout the play. Similar to the characters in Sherman Alexie's *The Toughest Indian in the World*, sex acts as a means for Brad, Dr. Rotcliff and Liz to seek authority over each other they perceive will in some way define their nature. However, this desire for sexual supremacy ultimately leaves them abandoned. Their desires to control one another's sexuality, will and ideology, ultimately destroys the control they had in others and in themselves.

The play also deals with matters of perspective. Since the world of the play is seen through Dr. Rotcliff's eyes, determining the factuality of events is difficult, if not impossible. In essence, the characters act as surrogates for Dr. Rotcliff to expel his mental frustrations. The violence which is played out on the stage is done in a manner that is so blatant and nonchalant that the audience is inclined to disregard the spectacle as an extreme display of internal emotion, as discussed in the monologue

introduction. Because Dr. Rotcliff directs the wills of the characters, the audience cannot assume that they will be realistic depictions, but rather mental constructions, tools to demonstrate what lead Dr. Rotcliff to kill his students. Even though Dr. Rotcliff has control over the characters he mentally constructs, he is still unable to control Brad from leaving him or to prevent Liz from manipulating him. In essence, his ability to control the events does not instill within him power, instead it reflects the lack of control he has over his life.

While the play deals with cerebral issues, at the same time the text consciously mocks itself for the overblown severity. For example, while the title of the play is *Engaging the Text*, Shakespeare's sonnets are never analyzed with much depth by the characters. Rather the character's relation to the text is what is explored and dramatically acted out on stage. Essentially, the dramatic action is what engages the text, what engages the audience. The characters are too concerned with their life to go in depth as to its meaning, but the meaning is made clear by their physical portrayal of the poems. I suppose this is my way of making fun of academia's tendency to explain life through an intricate language, when it is sometimes more effective to emotionally guide the reader to mental enlightenment. Of course, not to say this mockery means that academic writing is unnecessary or pretentious, but just to express the low grumbles of a college student who has always enjoyed the theatrical over the cerebral. Meaning, no matter how much I try to explain the nuances I attempt to embed in the text, the reader will not fully understand it until he

or she sits down to experience it live on stage. The play is meant to be heard and felt, not merely read and analyzed.

So, now that I no doubt affronted my audience of academics, let me explain the philosophic basis of my work. The play's essential theme deals with the way mankind tends to chastely conceptualize the world with dichotomies which are frequently presented in opposition to each other. These opposites prevent us from ever realizing our complex nature, which is an inherently derisory statement, since I'm not convinced that such realization is even attainable. What I mean to say is, don't expect me to be consistent. We say that we are this or that as a means to acclimate ourselves with the reassuring notion that, at the end of the day, we are secure in the knowledge of who we are, of what we believe in. We know, in particular as Americans, where it is we fervently stand on issues and hold our conviction against those who seemingly oppose us.

However, I am of the opinion that we do not exist as one constant persona. We are not stock jocks, stock intellectuals, stock women, stock men, stock whoever it is that popular literature make us out to be. What we are, if anything, is a steadfast collection of inconsistencies which paradoxically "creates and negates our very existence." We are schizophrenics who stake belief in compartmentalized ideologies (religion, sexuality, gender, morality, etc.) and superficially act from these frameworks, under the failed assumption we know what they essentially mean, as if they instill within us some kind of truth. We put trust in these discordant concepts until our environment challenges us to forgo them for the practical benefit of self-

interest, or perhaps even for the benefit of the community if we happen to feel altruistic. For instance, we are against murder, that is, until war comes. But then it is not murder, it is something else completely: it is patriotism, it is duty, it is honor. But in the end, it is simply war. And we are also about loving thy neighbor, that is, until a fag comes. But then it is not about loving thy neighbor, it is about salvation, it is about redemption, it is about moral concern. But in the end, what it is really about is, well... bullshit.

Meaning, when we abandon who “we are”, we semantically justify ourselves with euphemisms such as: “I slipped up.” “I dropped the ball on that one.” or “Oh, that wasn’t me, I was drunk.” We construct this notion of identity, and then we disregard those inconstancies as mere exceptions to the rule and not as an intricate part of the rule. Perhaps this divisive, majestic lie is necessary to subsist as an individual in a modern society which worships the ego, but no matter how majestic the notion, it is still a lie. We are not, say, good or evil in the common sense. To beg such descriptions would be to assume a stagnation of time and place, to presuppose a definite order to things, to presuppose a self, to presuppose a god even. But lastly, and most importantly, as I deconstruct the contradictory belief in a unified self, a clever man may ask: “Well then, what are we?” And I must honestly answer, with a content and unending resolution, “I don’t know.” But, is that so bad? Instead of creating these dichotomies and taking sides in them, why don’t we go about our lives and be honest with our emotions, even if those emotions may contradict the notion we have in ourselves, a notion mind you, which from an early age is a product of our

environment, our culture. While these exterior factors are an integral part of who we are, they are not everything. Independent of our society is another identity longing to be explored, and it is this identity which must speak against the community as it seeks to destroy the very product it created.

Engaging the Text

Characters:

BRAD MOLSTER: A student. He sexually experiments with Dr. Rotliff. He is childhood friends with Sara and plays on the soccer team with Greg.

DR. PAUL ROTCLIFF: A man in his early thirties; his face is large and attractive yet worn, as if he hasn't slept in days. He is a muscular, mountain-gear intellectual, with plaid and neutral clothing, scruffy beard and wild hair. He speaks in a way that is not feminine, but soft and reserved. He was sexually involved with Liz, but is now infatuated with one of his other students, Brad.

GREG HORNDLY: One of Brad's teammates. He has a Southern drawl, is dim-witted and immature.

LIZ: Student and former lover of Dr. Rotcliff; she is unable to accept the end of their relationship. Despite the strong religious convictions which dominate her conscience, she manipulates Brad into performing sexual favors as a way to involve herself back into Dr. Rotcliff's life.

MEAGAN PETTICOAT: A sassy, intelligent student.

SARA: A childhood friend of Brad. She is mentally frayed by Brad's physical and sexual aggressions committed against her prior to the action of the play.

WILL and JESSICA: They are overt sexual partners and students of Dr. Rotcliff.

ACT I

A small bricked in class room, plain. One large window on stage center left wall opens up to a scene of ethereal country landscape. It is noon outside; the sun enters through the window with incredible, surreal intensity casting large shadows on stage. An old rusted intercom hangs on the upper center of the stage left wall. There is no other lighting. A medium length table with one large, leather chair is set stage center for DR. ROTCLIFF. A few feet of space is given to each end of the table before eight convening desks surround it symmetrically in a half-circle, discussion forum pattern, four on each side. The door is located on the upstage right wall behind DR. ROTCLIFF's desk. The light from outside goes dark. Spotlight on DR. ROTCLIFF. He is pouring brandy from a milk bottle into a rocks glass with ice.)

DR. ROTCLIFF

You look at me. I am the well-dressed, well-spoken, well-off, well-mannered, well-natured, a hmm...fairly well-conceived by-product of two Catholic parents, eight years of higher learning, and four years of dedicated teaching in the English profession. And to some aimless extent, I am normal.

(big, happy smile)

Just like everyone else in this God-forsaken, God-fucked, fucked-by-God, by-God-

who-fucked-the-world... world. So by establishing this fact I hope you are all aware of the insanity which leaches itself from my mind, sucking the bland stability which reality (*irreverent with "reality"*) rewards us, and instilling in me a fancy for the deranged spontaneities of poets and prophets: mad men. You see, I kill my students. Yes, right here in this classroom some will be shot and others will live. Of course this is no ordinary classroom, mind you. This poorly lit, blandly decorated cornucopia of learning is a representation, a figment of imagination, (*imitates tango*) a burlesque tango between art and the artist. I have no responsibility in their death; I act only as the surrogate which delivers to them the consequence of their refusal to engage the meaning of words. They are more concerned with their sex, their drugs, their pop culture, in general, the pitiful encompass of their lives, than to fixate on ideas: poetic, profound, prolific ideas, which can make them greater than their meager selves combined... And yes, you heard me clear (*emphasized with a matter-of-factness*); some students will die. Of course there will be the usual vulgarities of blood and and sobbing and howling on and on with the same emotional stimulants death prescribes our oh-so affectionate consciousnesses. But don't worry yourselves over this theatrical display of violence. Have we not seen, all for the sake of cheap entertainment, numerous people die under the guillotine of bland b-rate movies? Haven't you possessed that shear raw pleasure witnessing the people you know who should die... die?

(*spacing*)

Like the murder of a drunkard father who beats his child, or the crucifixion of a priest

who lied to his congregation about the truth of earth's formation, or the execution of a mass murderer whose veins deserve every drop of the sweet poison,... or the slow torture of a lover who forsakes the warm comforts of your bed, for the tainted filth of another's sheets, who-who sprays her perfume and incense to cover the pale, rotting flesh of a young woman, a dark lady, turned bitter old by her lies and deceit.

(forcefully and overly dramatic) Receive the sheer raw power of death and justice combined! Feel the still and quiet conscience that the resolution my mind, my class, provides! *(calm and polite)* Accordingly, since I have gone and spoiled the tragic end for you, one simply mustn't get attached to the characters. Calm yourselves and love me

(He spreads out his arms.)

Please do love me. I need your love, all you need is love, love is all I need; love, love, love! Because, it's not that I don't have affection for my students, its just that, well, transgressions have been committed. Bright, dark transgressions, going all the way back generation upon generation to the big bang spawn of energy which created us humble carbon-based life forms out of conflicting ionic opposites. These vibrating energies were the celestial spawn that formed the good and the evil, the servant and the god, the poor and the rich, the sinner and the saint, the sovereign and the submissive, the soul and the soulless... the dead and the dying... the teacher and the student. I am talking about the agnostic beginning which built these primordial dichotomies inside us all. The opposites we simplify reality with, the ones which we invert back and forth with our semantics, gaining and losing meaning in a blur of grey

verbiage. I am talking about the opposing paradox which creates and negates our very existence. The I (*refers to himself*) that forms us, and the they (*refers to audience*) that destroys us. Well, enough of my philosophic banter. One shouldn't dwell in the abstract; it lades the mind with formalities which can easily be demonstrated in real life. I will bring in two of my students to discuss this subject further.

(Enters BRAD and SARA, both are dressed in typical Catholic school uniforms, pressed and clean. DR. ROTCLIFF sits at his desk with one student to each side of him closest to his desk. BRAD and SARA's posture mimic that of DR. ROTCLIFF; straight, orderly.)

DR. ROTCLIFF

Please begin your discussion.

(bell rings)

BRAD

Yes sir. Hello Sara, how is your day performing thus far?

SARA

It has been adequate considering the circumstances.

BRAD

And what might those circumstances be?

SARA

I believe you know of the circumstances.

(She pauses with an inquisitive look to BRAD.)

(facetiously) It is bright as Hyades in here. To think that the world can get this bright.

Can you believe it? I am certainly in disbelief. It is as if God forgot to close her refrigerator and Lucifer himself is ravaging through her passion fruits,
(DR. ROTCLIFF scratches his crotch as BRAD and SARA does so simultaneously)
or as if every light is shining through at this one, infinitesimal moment to spotlight your transgression. And it is a transgression, maybe not of the popular type to discuss, but one still.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Sara, stop jumping from metaphor to metaphor, give us one we can better understand and stay with it. It will help our audience follow along better.

SARA

Ok. Better yet, it is as if millions of fireflies are planning their attack outside this classroom window, right now as I speak, to seek some retribution for the thousands of years of torture their insect selves have undergone; being trapped in glass jars, lids fastened tight, to have the light slowly drained from them with each violent shake of their transparent cage.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Ahh, a war metaphor, predictable yet sound. The conflict is apparent with two sides who want to destroy each other; one the underdog, the other a powerful tyrant, a classic Biblical theme of David verses Goliath. I am sure our audience is clear to the direction now.

BRAD

If you can please forgive me Sara, I absolutely must disagree.

DR. ROTCLIFF

(sips drink)

The opposition!

BRAD

I bottled fireflies when I was a child and they seemed content in their Mason jars. There were no birds of prey to worry about; they had all the food and air they needed, and dozens of others just like them to keep their company. I only wish I was as lucky.

(DR. ROTCLIFF coughs and scratches his nose. The students do the same actions simultaneously.)

DR. ROTCLIFF

Pardon me, allergy season.

SARA

Luck! *(laughs grandly)* Boys like you, semi-functional middle class boys, may call living a life devoid of physical or mental stimulation lucky. But you see Scott, you only make this claim because you are the torturer. Torturers tell themselves things like that because, if they didn't, they would realize the pain their captivity creates and be forced, out of conscience, had you the pleasure to acquire one, to let them go free, to let them live. They are beautiful and you want their light, yet you keep them there, locked away until they are depleted of all use. You are the bird of prey, the black crow which sharpens its beak, hoping to elongate your pathetically small rostrum, to puncture...

Dr. ROTCLIFF

Yes, yes, we get the point. Brad, response?

BRAD

You talk as if these creatures have souls. They are insects. They cannot seek retribution for crimes committed against them. We are much larger than they are, stronger. We have power through natural law over them. They have no clear understanding of us other than some incomprehensible mass rotating around their miniscule, bug-version of the universe.

SARA

How could you possibly know the manner in which fireflies envision the universe?

DR. ROTCLIFF

Excellent question of perspective Sara!

BRAD

How could you?

DR: ROTCLIFF

Oh don't answer a question with a question, that is an easy avoidance. How do you know of the firefly universe? Who informed you of its mysteries? Who is the informant Brad? Which one?

BRAD

Well, I have been-

SARA

No, it is fine, I will answer the question. I am the firefly queen, come to destroy you.

(She pulls out a gun from her desk and fires a shot. BRAD embraces the

oncoming bullet with a smile. SARA shoots BRAD in his head. BRAD dies. Blood splatters and runs profusely on stage. All blood stays on the floor throughout the play. Outside lights become brighter.)

DR. ROTCLIFF

(As if talking to a child.)

Sara, while I appreciate your enthusiasm for the debate, I do not appreciate you ending it so abruptly without allowing Brad to at least finish his sentence. He may have had the answer we seek. Do unto others as you would expect they should do unto you. Didn't your mother teach you any manners?

SARA

Yes, she did, with force and determination. But how could Brad know of the firefly universe since it was my metaphor. I created it; who is he to change my world? People are not incomprehensible masses to fireflies; rather, the largeness of their bodies oppositely reflects the smallness of their souls. The larger they are, the less light they hold. They are more prone to evil.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Yes, yes. You are right. His largeness represents an institution which has hegemony over those who may seem smaller, weaker, but it is we who have the light. How dare he try to make judgments upon your world. A world that he doesn't fully understand. Who is he to defy your kingdom. You are the Queen of the Fireflies, and he now merely a humble servant of death... But he is a beautiful servant: innocent,

(He pets BRAD's hair.)

soft skin, passionate red blood.

(tastes blood)

He is beautiful in every way I can imagine. Maybe we shouldn't have killed him.

Maybe he could have come back to us Sara.

(He holds BRAD in his arms)

What have you done! You whore! You tramp! You- you *cunt*! You did this to him! It was you who enticed him into your world, a world that he didn't understand. Of course he made quick judgments, judgments that a boy of his mental caliber may only assume. Perhaps we... you- you shouldn't have killed him. Take his body away!

(SARA drags BRAD'S body out of the classroom.)

(to audience) Do you see why I need your love? It has been taken from me by the world others have created. This- this blood isn't the product of my judgment. I was not the one who pulled the trigger. Can't you see that? This fluid of life which ran through the boy's body was the product of two entities, man and woman, set apart to oppose each other throughout the human legacy. One has sought to dominate the other in different arenas of life: work, school, politics, science, the kitchen, the bedroom, the grave, and on and on with this same conflict we find necessary to take sides in. We're feminists, or we're in the Good Ol' Boys club; we're in fraternities or sororities; we even excrete our wastes in rooms designed for the anatomy which conveniently distinguishes us. It is a perfect system which keeps the balance between the forces from spinning out of control. Roles are established and maintained. Along with the division they create a basis for our identity. And we are happy to conform.

Well, most of us anyway.

(Looks at his watch.)

Oh my, listen to me rambling. I have completely lost track of time. Class is about to begin. We will continue our discussion at a later moment.

(DR. ROTCLIFF exits with milk bottle and rocks glass. SARA and BRAD enter. They wear Catholic school uniforms as before, but they are augmented to reflect their individual characters.)

BRAD

Oh... hey Sara.

(long pause)

Have you seen Dr. Rotcliff today?

(waits for answer)

He looks really fucked up.

SARA

Oh? He doesn't seem like someone who would just let himself go like that.

BRAD

Yeah, well... he is. I mean totally sloshed. I saw him today when I was running late to U.S. Gov this morning. I walked by his office but he told me to come in and have a seat. I said I was running late, but he just starts asking me all these personal questions: Where were you born? You have any brothers or sisters? Am I dating anyone? Things like that. Like the fucking faggot is coming on to me.

SARA

That's odd you sound so spiteful against him Brad. Word is that you like Dr. Rotcliff.
Word is that you know him pretty well.

BRAD

What? Who said that?

SARA

And just because he's nice to you doesn't mean that he's, --"fucked up". Some people can be nice to other human beings, you know, actually care about them without wanting sex or, -or have alcohol poured down their throats by these people...idiots who think it is some kind of game to see who can throw up first.

BRAD

Sara, I know that I got a little out of-

SARA

And then think that it is ok for you to... like you have the right to just-

(Enters GREG who proceeds to sit in the desk next to BRAD upstage.)

(SARA whispers on the verge of tears.)

I can't talk about this here.

BRAD

Great bitch. Cause I didn't bring it up.

GREG

Bring up what?

BRAD

Nothing.

(Pause.)

GREG

It's bright as hell in here. Isn't it bright? When are they going to put up some blinds up over that damn window? I'm too wasted for all this light in here.

BRAD

It's a small college in the middle of nowhere, what'd you expect Greg?

GREG

True, I hear the bitches up at the four year are better looking and easier to tapidy tap on.

(GREG air humps his desk.)

You know what I'm saying man?

(SARA, offended, loudly yanks Shakespeare's Sonnets from her backpack and reads)

Who put sand up her vagina?

BRAD

Just shut the fuck up.

GREG

Damn, who put sand up your vagina?

BRAD

Ok, the stupid South Park rip-offs, getting old quick man.

GREG

Yeah yeah... Oh man, that was a great kegger last night wasn't it? I mean, having it

out by the creek and all lit up with the full moon out. I still can't believe how many people showed up. We got crazier than those critters out there that's for sure, huh Brad?

(Enters WILLIAM and JESSICA. They sit on stage left farthest downstage from SARA.)

BRAD

(gazing out the window)

I don't know.

(bell rings)

GREG

What the fuck is a bell doing, isn't this college?

BRAD

I don't know.

GREG

Well, we were hell of a lot hornier than them critters, that's for sure. Even some of the professors came. Did ya'll know that Dr. Rotcliff stayed and got real friendly as the night went on with some of the football players? Billy, the q.b., said he would have kicked his ass but, him being a teacher and all, said he didn't want to lose his scholarships or anything. I told him he was being a pussy; Dr. Rotcliff would have kicked his ass for sure. You know, you'd think a big guy who hunts and everything wouldn't be like that, but I guess being an English teacher shows which way he swings his bat.

BRAD

(whispering) That faggot tried pulling the same shit with me earlier today.

GREG

(pointing to BRAD, laughing hysterically)

Fucking fairy!

(He gets up and places hand down BRAD's shirt)

(imitating DR. ROTCLIFF) “Mr. Molster, I didn't receive your term paper yesterday.

You have been a bad, bad schoolboy. What am I ever going to do with you?”

(He fervently humps BRAD.)

(Meagan enters.)

GREG

(straightening.) I was just playing around with him.

BRAD

Get off me faggot.

MEAGAN

Hey, don't ask, don't tell, right?

GREG

Yeah... well, no I mean. You know, I was only messing around with him.

MEAGAN

Sure... hey did any of you guys read the material for today?

JESSICA

Yes, I did. It was great. I love Shakespeare. He reminds me of my baby! So romantic

like.

(JESSICA passionately begins making out with WILL.)

MEAGAN

Oh my God, I've seen enough action for today.

GREG

Meagan, I seriously wasn't-

MEAGAN

I don't care what you do in your free time, *precious*.

GREG

Funny.

MEAGAN

Thank you.

(MEAGAN stares at WIL and JESSICA in disgust for a moment.)

Jessica....Jessica!

JESSICA

Jesus! What Meagan?

MEAGAN

Uhgh! There is no reason to bring Jesus into this. Did you actually read the sonnets?

JESSICA

The what?

MEAGAN

The sonnets, the poems.

(Enters DR. ROTCLIFF. One hand holds a Shakespeare book, the other holds a clear, pint-sized milk bottle full of brandy and a rocks glass. He stays halfway in the door and listens. No one notices him until he speaks.)

JESSICA

Oh those things. Well, not all the way. But I read lines here and there, enough to find out what it was all about. A man who is oh-so passionately in love with his fine-looking lover and can't live one more solitary day until he has her in his possession, until he can caress her and rub her and squeeze her...

(She places William's hands on her breasts.)

WILL

Oh how thou dost love thee Jessica!

GREG

Ummhmm.

MEAGAN

There is something incredibly wrong with this class.

(pause)

DR. ROTCLIFF

Well, I am certainly glad to see that my students are finally engaging the text, as they say. No, no, Will, Jessica, continue on, continue on, please. This is an English class; we have the utmost duty to understand the "human condition". No embarrassment here. Let us continue this conversation further, but before we begin, where is Liz and... and...

MEAGAN

John?

DR. ROTCLIFF

John! Yes, John. Where is John?

MEAGAN

John has been out for two weeks. He has polio, remember?

DR. ROTCLIFF

Aww, polio, how displeasing. Antique disease as well. What I meant to say is...

where is Liz?

(pause)

Errrrr!!

(laughs at his humor)

Well, I suppose she will appear shortly; I know how much she enjoys Shakespeare.

Did you know that she studied at Yale in her twenties? Of course, she didn't finish.

Buckled under the pressure of it all.

GREG

How much of that there milk have you had to drink today Dr. Rotcliff?

DR. ROTCLIFF

No!

(He loudly slams the rocks glass on his table.)

Thank you for your concern Mr. Horndly; however, my calcium intake is not up for discussion today.

(He pours a shot and downs it in one gulp.)

No, today we are going to continue with Meagan's statement about the text, how, -uh, "incredibly wrong" it is.

MEAGAN

Oh, if I may, I meant the class.

DR. ROTCLIFF

No, you may not; you had it better the first time. When Shakespeare-

MEAGAN

But I never said-

DR. ROTCLIFF

Do you interrupt all your teachers Ms. Petticoat or only the ones with a pleasing demeanor about them?

MEAGAN

Well, no, I mean- I was saying that this class is incredibly wrong.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Well, we aren't talking about this class, are we? We are talking about Shakespeare's sonnets. But since you want to get off subject, very well, what is so incredibly wrong with this class?

MEAGAN

I... I don't know.

DR. ROTCLIFF

What do you mean you don't know, you brought it up! It's your opinion; you're the

only one who does know. If this were a test you would get an A as long as you wrote something, anything!

MEAGAN

Yeah, but I didn't mean to talk about it, not here, in front of everyone.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Just tell me!

(He slams his fists on her desk. MEAGAN yelps, pauses, and gets up to leave.)

(calmly) Sit down Ms. Petticoat, the class has not been excused.

(MEAGAN sits hesitantly.)

I understand that you have apprehension towards talking about your problems in public. People have a tendency to be rather judgmental at times. But, this is a place of learning, and part of that learning is discovering yourself, your voice. So, please, say what is on your mind. What is wrong with this class? Is it the lighting? It is a bit bright in here, isn't it?

MEAGAN

I would like to leave. I don't feel well.

DR. ROTCLIFF

We will leave once the bell excuses us, only then. Some may go other places, but all will leave at the same time. Understand?

GREG

This is bullshit; he's drunk. We should just go Meagan.

DR. ROTCLIFF

(He pulls out a pocket gun and places it neatly on the table)

Does anyone know what the modern theater often uses in place of swords for the Shakespearean stage? Anyone?

WILL

You are fucking crazy!

DR. ROTCLIFF:

Partly, yes, but as with any character of a good story, there is often a multiplicity of events which leads him or her to a- a climactic point of action. As Mr. Horndly pointed out, drinking habits may be another consideration as well, cheers *(takes shot)*. However, deeper...darker concerns plague us as well. Do you know what those may be Brad?

(pause)

BRAD

Let's get the fuck out of here guys.

(Everyone except for SARA gets up to leave.)

DR. ROTCLIFF

(He picks up the gun, aims at door and clicks the trigger.)

What was that? I could have sworn that I heard a bell? *(listens)*...No?... Very well, you may all be seated. I suppose imaginative hearing goes with the most creative of minds, ones that I have the utmost pleasure to teach. You know, sometimes I hear voices when.- Will, Jessica?

WILL

Leave her alone you sick bastard.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Oh my, I believe that I may have upset you this afternoon. And a bright one at that.

Don't worry; I was merely noticing that you two weren't holding each other anymore.

Well... don't think that because I have this

(He holds up gun and waves it around the room.)

Anyone? This sword. That it will impede upon your lifestyle or in any way reflect displeasure for your sexual escapades. No embarrassments here, none. You see, here, in my class, you don't have to worry about unsaid judgments or misconstrued opinions. Here it is a habit to say what is on our minds, almost an addiction some would say.

(He sips his drink.)

Hmm, where is Liz, Brad?

(pause)

You know, often in Shakespeare's plays the sword, or gun in this example, acts as a phallic symbol. Does anyone know what a phallic symbol is? No? A hint, Jessica may just as well have one of these in her mouth every night.

GREG

A penis!

JESSICA

Screw you.

GREG

Umm yeah, get me some.

MEAGAN

Grow up Greg.

BRAD

Guys, trust me, this isn't a time to joke around-

DR. ROTCLIFF

Yes, thank you for making the obvious sexual connection Mr. Horndly; I can always depend on you for that. And Brad, stressful times need humor, lighten up some there boy, you'll need it. But you are right Mr. Horndly. A phallic symbol represents a penis. All in fun Jessica. So what does a penis represent then?

MEAGAN

STD's?

DR. ROTCLIFF

Interesting. In Mr. Horndly's case, yes, but traditionally it represents power. The ability to dominate, to take control of a situation which may otherwise fall apart if the other, differing minds were to have their way. Now, what do you think a gun with no bullets in the chamber may represent?

(He shows empty barrel to class.)

GREG

I knew he was fucking with us.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Aww, Mr. Horndly makes another impressive observation. Please continue Greg.

GREG

Well, I mean- you don't seem like the type of guy who would hurt someone.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Oh? What kind of person do I seem like?

GREG

Uhh, well, I don't know.

DR. ROTCLIFF

What am I like? I need a metaphor.

GREG

I said I don't know.

DR. ROTCLIFF

You see, here we go again, you do know and like Meagan here you are afraid to say what that is because of the repercussions you fear it may cause. You all have your notions, I know, I hear them everyday. However, I assure you, the only repercussions that will result from today, will be from a lack of honesty. So, tell me, what kind of person do I seem like?

GREG

Like I said, I don't fucking know.

DR. ROTCLIFF

(He gulps another drink, loudly and with spectacle.)

Very...very well. It seems that our discussion is getting rather off topic anyway. So let's get back to the material, the sonnets that we were to read for today. Now, there

are three main characters that run throughout the stream of these poems. Can anyone tell me what one of these characters is like?

JESSICA

One is like my baby, Will.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Yes, ok, that is a- start. The name is convenient as well. So we have Will.

(He places one bullet from his pocket meticulously on his desk.)

Now, one of these three characters are blank, two are loaded. Who do you think is the blank character?

MEAGAN

Probably the young boy that Will is in love with.

WILL

Excuse me? I'm not a fag.

MEAGAN

I'm talking about the poems idiot.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Excellent Meagan! Why would you say that?

MEAGAN

Well, the introduction calls him the "fair youth"; he knows that he is beautiful and that's all he cares to know. He has complete control over the narrator, not because he is clever or manipulative, but because he just *is*.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Very good Ms. Petticoat.

(He places another bullet on the desk.)

The boy is blank because he does not possess ideas to guide him; instead, he is just a mound of beautiful, soft flesh to be molded. More of an object to be thrown around than an actual character, one could argue. But there is another one, a loaded character,

(He removes another bullet and examines it.)

the one who pulls all the little strings; she is complex, moving, penetrating, intelligent and, not to mention, potentially deadly to the narrator. The introduction-

(Enters LIZ. She is a cheerful, assertive woman with long black hair, wearing clothes and make-up that would make one think she was on here way to chapel. A large crucifix hangs from her neck.)

LIZ

(simultaneous with "names her") What is this?

DR ROTCLIFF

- names her... The Dark Lady.

LIZ

What is going on in here? Paul, Is that your gun? What is in that—

DR. ROTCLIFF

Liz, sorry for you to join us so late. Let's catch her up on the rule for today, class?

WILL

We can't leave until the bell rings, but don't worry- he's just doing it to demonstrate a

point. They're blanks.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Thank you Will. So have a seat Liz.

(LIZ sits hesitantly without taking her eyes off of DR. ROTCLIFF)

However, Will must be preoccupied with something other than our discussion because he forgot one important detail. Only one character, excuse me, bullet is blank.

(DR ROTCLIFF begins loading the bullets into the gun.)

LIZ

Paul, please. What is this ridiculous charade? You silly, silly dear, this has nothing to do with the kids.

DR. ROTCLIFF

You would think so, wouldn't you? But, as we consider our discussion further we may be inclined to see another aspect of this reading, one that is more engaging for all of us. So this dark lady is not your conventional beauty, she is older and her skin pale and unpleasant, yet there is something about her that Will cannot help to appreciate. He wants to possess her and in some way does, shortly. Maybe it is her music or-

LIZ

Oh Paul, let's not discuss this here.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Or the way she stands out from the conventional standard of beauty that we are taught to admire. The problem arises when she spies the fair youth as well, the boy, the one

Will loves passionately. And suddenly, like any good story, a conflict arises. Both characters, Will and the Dark Lady, desire the phallic symbol, the penis of the fair youth, the boy. But underneath deeper, as we discussed earlier, it is really the desire for power, for control.

LIZ

This isn't about power, Paul; this is about civil decency and respect for the students who aren't involved in this petty little dispute of ours. This is no place to discuss matters of a confused man. Now, put the gun down, and we will talk about this the way rational adults handle their concerns.

DR ROTCLIFF

Her eyes prey upon him and, whispering to the boy his expectations of manhood, the youth clings to her breasts like he would his mother, out of need for acceptance and some sense of normalcy. And Will, the true lover of the youth is left, ultimately abandoned and alone by both.

(He looks to WILL and JESSICA.)

The two are content in their conformity. However, do you think The Dark Lady is concerned for either the welfare of Will or the fair youth?

MEAGAN

That doesn't make any sense the-

DR. ROTCLIFF

I am asking Liz. Is she concerned Liz?

(Furious, LIZ gets up to leave; DR. ROTCLIFF points the gun at the door.)

LIZ

Oh my, I believe you have gone absolutely mad.

DR. ROTCLIFF

If you were in class earlier you would know that we have established that fact; except, I am not the one hearing things this time. Now, please, sit down and answer the question. Just tell me what the truth is and nothing- repercussions will not ensue.

LIZ

Did I ever tell you that I love a man with a gun?

DR. ROTCLIFF

(He points the gun at LIZ.)

Sit Down Liz!

LIZ

I absolutely will not!

(He fires a shot; it is the blank bullet.)

Oh my, you tried to kill me! You tried to end my life right here without any consideration for how that would make me feel. That is just like you!

BRAD

You are fucked up, you fucking faggot.

DR. ROTCLIFF

You know, you should really learn to expand your vocabulary Brad.

(BRAD exits to door. DR. ROTCLIFF shoots and kills BRAD. His body lies before the door. LIZ weeps.)

LIZ

You killed him. You have gone and done it now. How do you think we will ever end our dispute without Brad?

DR. ROTCLIFF

Would anyone else like to leave?

SARA

Oh my God! What have you... you said you were only going to humiliate him.

DR. ROTCLIFF

You weren't the only one he violated.

(The bell rings.)

And in honor of this vindication (*standing, dramatic, as if on stage*), "Good Night, Good Night, parting is such sweet sorrow."

(DR ROTCLIFF shoots himself through the mouth. The rest of class exits around LIZ who is holding BRAD, cleaning him like a mother tending to a child's dirty face.)

LIZ

You got blood all over his beautiful face. This will not be easy to get off. Paul!?

Paul!? Oh poor dear, poor, poor dear. All I wanted was for you to be happy, healthy.

That was no lifestyle for you.

(She begins groping BRAD's body.)

A boy of your stature, size, bulk, a strong American boy, has no business in the affairs of madmen. You deserved better, someone who fears the truth, knows the way

of beauty and goodness. I never meant for this to get so out of hand. Pshaw, the dark lady, more like the... the bright lady. Yes, the way of the light, that's what I am. If only the sun wasn't beaming in the room already, you could see my magnificent glow. Well, I guess not now that you're dead.

(She giggles.)

But, if you could see me Brad, as it is now, I am liberally out-shadowed.

(Pause.)

Oh listen to me, where are my manners, babbling on about myself without giving you the holy rites which any soul deserves.

(LIZ crosses BRAD's arms across his chest and performs the sign of the cross over his body. She takes DR. ROTCLIFF's shirt off and uses it to wipe up some of his blood which is liberally flowing onto the floor by now. LIZ begins ringing the blood over BRAD's body while singing "Oh, the Blood of Jesus." As LIZ sings, DR. ROTCLIFF slowly rises back to life.)

LIZ

"Oh, the blood of Jesus!

Oh, the blood of Jesus!

Oh, the blood of Jesus!

It washes white as snow.

What can wash away my sins?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

What can make me whole again?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

(Spotlight on DR. ROTCLIFF. There is blood which drenches the walls from his slaughter.)

DR. ROTCLIFF

(To audience.) That hurt a tad, but death isn't really so bad once it's over. So there is more red on the walls and a slight melancholy feel to the room, but we still have our health! Well, most of us anyway. The justice we seek has come to its full resolution. Here lies a man and a woman, two opposites made by some prime existence to spawn more opposites and propel the intelligence of itself through the human race to a ridiculous end. They fuck and have babies, but the problem is, and I told Liz this, there is some phenomena in nature that decided to end this mundane lineage and mate with its own kind. He and I were that lineage. It happened simply enough. A few glances in the hallway. Then an anonymous meeting on an internet chat room which exposed his inverted sexual desires. Then the sex: the lust, the passion, the hours of play between submission and dominance. After the affair, I had to tell Liz the truth. I had no more feelings for her. I had been living a lie for some sense of normalcy. But she wouldn't have it. She pressed the issue further and became involved in Brad's life through the threat of exposing him and his sexual peculiarity. Intimidating him to her home, she cooed to his ear the expectation of the community, to conform to the common standard, the Good Ol' Boy's Club. Forcing his hands onto her, she showed Brad what a woman's body felt like. He accepted his role as the conventional

male. Out of fear he came to know her body, yet he resented everything about her. The sex he gave her was aggressive, abusive, bloody, but Liz delighted in the fact that she had control over him and, ultimately, over me. Brad, get up Brad. Show them what you have done, but for the sake of decency, be tactful. We have an audience to please you know.

(Lights out.)

ACT II

(In front of the desk and chairs, a bed, a T.V. and a telephone are brought into the middle of the classroom. As lights come up, LIZ is meticulously making the bed while humming religious hymns. BRAD opens the door and watches her for a while. Without looking up from her chore, LIZ speaks.)

LIZ

Hello Brad. I am glad that you came, a little early. I thought we agreed upon eight?

BRAD

I finished soccer practice a little early, and I thought I'd come on over. What did you want to talk about? I've got to get back pretty soon; there's a party.

LIZ

I think you have an idea why you're here. You did find the letter I left you?

BRAD

Yes. It was in an envelope written on women's panties alongside a used condom.

LIZ

Well, what did it say?

BRAD

First, why was there a used condom and why-

LIZ

Oh my heaven's goodness! A used condom? Well, I don't know how that could have gotten in there. Wait, wait a minute. Yes, yes it was probably Bill at the post office. Yes, that's it. He is forever teasing me about how I always come in there alone to deliver my mail. Says he is just the right size of man to take care of my lonesomeness. I never send mail to gentleman names, always business and the like, so he must have figured I had a beau and got jealous. He's such a trickster. I am going to have to give him a spanking next time I see him! Well, now that's all cleared up, read me the letter.

BRAD

Umm, yeah. Well, you know what it says. You sealed the envelope with a kiss and everything.

(He shows her the envelope; there is a red lipstick print on the seam.)

I though that died out like, in the fifties or something. Or was that from the postman too?

LIZ

Bill? No, he doesn't wear lipstick. He is a *postman*, not a post woman silly. What can I say; I'm a girl with some antique class. Go on doll, razz my berries and read the letter back to me. I want to feel my words swell the room.

BRAD

Look, I really have to get back to the-

LIZ

Oh come on, don't be a cube, loosen up some, read it to me.

BRAD

Sure, whatever. "Come what may-

LIZ

Now that's not the voice of an accomplished actor, I saw you in the school's production of Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, an entertaining play but a little absurd for my taste. Thus and so, I believe wholeheartedly in you to rise above that measly little voice you just performed.

BRAD

You saw my play?

LIZ

Yes, of course. I've seen all your plays. Just-unbelievable- unremarkable genius. Now read!

BRAD

"Come what may, come what will, I know where you come, so come over here."

There is your address at the bottom... in crayon, and it says near the crotch, "P.S.

There will be cookies."

LIZ

Hmm, isn't as poetic as I remember. Are you sure that's all of it? I could have sworn to Mother Mary, holy mother of God

(She performs the sign of the cross.)

that I wrote more than that. This is such an important event in our lives, one with a decisive outcome to our fates. I could have at least come up with a Petrarchan poem or an Italian sonnet or, or a soliloquy, something to that grand standard for this occasion. I believe I slipped the bill on this one. Yes, absolutely slipped.

(She sips on her glass of red wine.)

Dear me, I suppose writing anything with a half bottle of wine in your tummy will make any piece of art seem masterful. Te he he! I should be embarrassed, just embarrassed. *(Proudly.)* Well, the meaning is what is most important to any text; at least that came through.

(BRAD looks the panties over in confusion. LIZ finishes making the bed, being sure to pay close attention to every crevice, and notices BRAD is still standing in the doorway).

My manners! Come in, and do take off your shoes, I try to keep the floor clean as much as I possibly can. It is so difficult though, having an animal running around my house all day long unattended. And no, I don't have a husband!

(LIZ laughs hysterically at her own joke. BRAD attempts to be amused but is unable to compete with her convulsion which ends in a slight tone of desperation. On her hands and knees, she sponges up the blood on the floor, paying little attention to BRAD.)

I just can't seem to get Ginger's vulva to stop oozing her post-pubescent hormones all over the place. You know, her being in heat and all. I tell her all the time: "Ginger,

it's not polite to excrete vaginal juices over my new hardwood floors. It will stain red. Take that blood outside so the sun can resurrect the water from within to evaporate into the clouds and replenish the earth with all its liquidic goodness. A lady has no place sponging up after your... menstrual messes.

(She wrings out the bloody water from the sponge into a bucket.)

BRAD

(Turning away from the bucket.)

Really? O.K.

LIZ

If only you came on time, when we agreed, you wouldn't have to see all this filth.

Can you find it in your heart to forgive me?

BRAD

No. I don't mind. Really. I've had dogs; I know how they can be.

LIZ

I say to Ginger repeatedly, on and on I say: "What young doggy is going to want to chaperone you to the park if the house is in such a disgrace." *(Distant.)* But she never listens to poor old Liz, just leaves her trail all over the house, even on my bed. Thinks that she can plague my sheets with her red Nile whenever she pleases. It's like the bitch has a mind of her own, pardon my French. Oooh, I am too risqué today, just too risqué! But please, don't worry.

(She motions BRAD to sit on the bed.)

I put new sheets on specifically for our occasion.

BRAD

She's just a dog, I'm sure she doesn't mean anything by it. You should try rubbing her face in the... stuff. Maybe that would help.

LIZ

You mean, physically debase her?

BRAD

It's a dog. Their kind doesn't understand English. You have to show it who's boss.

LIZ

(She is slightly perturbed, but not angry.)

Show it who's boss? *It* is an a.k.a Caniche poodle which I happened to pay nine hundred and sixty seven euros, that's fifteen hundred U.S. dollars, to buy. *It* is also the only... *thing* that I have to come home to after returning from school; a place which reminds me everyday of the waning years of my youth; that I didn't stick with my last semester the first go around in college. I could have been professor by now you know, teaching students like you the meaning of poetry, prose, maybe even some of my work.

(She takes the panties from BRAD and admires them.)

Granted, it could use a few touch ups here and there. Thus and so, do forgive me if I refuse to beat my precious Ginger like some quivering bitch for bleeding on the floor! It's just her nature.

BRAD

Wow! Hey, look lady, no offense, but I barely know you from our class, and you're

starting to freak me out a little.

(LIZ pats her face with the sponge to calm herself.)

A lot, actually. I'm going to have to go now.

(Brad gets up to leave. LIZ races to the door and locks it with a key from the inside. Still holding the sponge in her hand, she backs Brad away from the door.)

LIZ

Now that's not a polite way to treat a woman. Do you think you can just leave whenever the notion arises? I have something to tell you that will make you quite interested to stay.

BRAD

Hey lady, I'm not cool about being locked inside someone's house. Open the door or I call the cops.

LIZ

The phone is on the nightstand.

BRAD

Just open the door.

LIZ

Pick up the phone Brad, go on.

BRAD

You're serious?

LIZ

Do I look like a lady who would lock a door and just let anyone open it? I am not that easy of a woman.

BRAD

Give me the key.

LIZ

Pick up the phone.

BRAD

Fine, you want to involve the police. I can do that.

(BRAD goes over to the phone and dials for the police. Over the intercom, a conversation between DR. ROTCLIFF and BRAD is projected. The actual DR. ROTCLIFF is sitting at his desk in the classroom by now; phone in hand, he is dressed in underwear attire.)

BRAD

(simultaneous with BRAD's VOICE from the intercom)

Hello?

DR. ROTCLIFF

Hello.

BRAD

Yes, police? I am over at a woman's house who has locked me in with a key and-

BRAD's VOICE

(simultaneous with BRAD.)

Hey Dr. Rotcliff.

BRAD

Say what?

DR. ROTCLIFF

You can call me Paul if you'd like.

BRAD

Is this the police?

BRAD'S VOICE

Sure, o.k. Paul. I feel kind of, I don't know, weird doing this kind of thing.

BRAD

(*To LIZ.*) What is going on? What the fuck is this?

DR. ROTCLIFF

Why feel weird? We are both consenting adults. There is nothing wrong with embracing man's primitive instincts.

LIZ

Are you saying you don't remember?

BRAD'S VOICE

Yeah, I guess so, but you being my professor. I-I don't know.

BRAD

But, how did you-

DR. ROTCLIFF

What's there to know about? Just say what feels right.

LIZ

Isn't technology splendid these days!

BRAD's VOICE

All right.

BRAD

You recorded this?

DR. ROTCLIFF

And let me worry about the student-teacher relationship. As long as the administration isn't privy, I won't be reprimanded. Now, you wrote in the chat room you like to be on top?

(BRAD's VOICE begins to breathe heavier, he titters.)

BRAD

I can't believe that you-

LIZ

(Listening with pleasure.)

Hush! The ears are pleased when they listen most intensely.

BRAD's VOICE

Yeah.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Dominant. I like that.

BRAD's VOICE

Oh yeah?

DR. ROTCLIFF

Unconditionally.

(BRAD, defeated, sits down on the bed. LIZ goes back to scrubbing the floor.

As the conversation progresses, her cleaning becomes more and more sensual.)

BRAD'S VOICE

What- what do you want me to do?

DR. ROTCLIFF

You take charge.

BRAD'S VOICE

Umm O.K.

(Sounds of masturbation are heard over the intercom.)

What- what are you wearing?

DR. ROTCLIFF

A short miniskirt and bra.

BRAD'S VOICE

Umm, oh yeah?

(Sound of masturbation gets louder.)

DR. ROTCLIFF

(DR. ROTCLIFF laughs uncomfortably.)

No- not really. All in jest.

BRAD'S VOICE

(Sound of masturbation stops.)

Yeah, yeah, I know.

(BRAD's VOICE titters)

DR. ROTCLIFF

Actually, I'm in my underwear. Do you want me to take them off?

(Sound of masturbation and heavy breathing begins again.)

I take it that's a yes.

BRAD's VOICE

Yeah, take- take it off.

DR. ROTCLIFF

(DR. ROTCLIFF removes his clothes from behind the desk and begins to please himself.)

There off now Brad. Imagine I am caressing the back of your neck with my lips. I am rubbing you all over Brad. Can you feel your body next to mine? Do you feel me touching you Brad?

BRAD's VOICE

Yeah. Yeah.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Now, enter inside me Brad. Possess me.

BRAD's VOICE

I'm possessing you.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Yes. What do I feel like? Are you inside me? What am I like?

BRAD's VOICE

You're incredible.

DR. ROTCLIFF

No, give me a metaphor Brad. Who am I?

BRAD's VOICE

You're -I'm- I'm about to cum.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Don't cum yet. Tell me! What am I like?

BRAD's VOICE

You're...- you're- oh god!

DR. ROTCLIFF

Don't Brad! What am I...

(LIZ rolls around in the blood, basking in her own orgasm. BRAD's VOICE orgasms along with LIZ's erotic rapture. In exasperation, BRAD picks up the phone and smashes it to pieces on the floor. DR. ROTCLIFF slams his phone on the ringer and begins to weep, climbing naked onto his desk, he holds himself in the fetal position. BRAD rushes for the door, tries in desperation to open it, but fails and collapses in maddened frustration. LIZ, snapping out of her ecstasy, takes notice of BRAD's distress and attempts to coddle him.)

LIZ

What's wrong dear? Did he make you do things that were dirty, that you liked, but made you feel unnatural? Brad, did you get feces on your penis when you entered

him? Don't worry, I can help you Brad.

BRAD

Get the fuck away from me you sick, spying bitch!

LIZ

Why are you upset dear?

BRAD

Why am I upset? Are you fucking- you know everything about me, about Dr. Rotcliff.

(BRAD trails off in his own exaggerated pity, Detached from reality, he speaks as if in soliloquy.)

No matter how hard I try to get these sick ideas out of my head, I can't. Not even when I look at Playboy, or watch the cheerleaders at practice, or cut myself, do I escape the sadistic, satisfying feeling I get when I think about giving it to another guy in the ass. You know that I am a faggot, now everyone is going to think I am some-freak of fucking nature!

LIZ

Oh my child, don't worry, there are no judgments here. Not in my house.

BRAD

I have to get out of here, let me out!

LIZ

Why do you want to leave?

BRAD

I can't take the conviction. Let me out, please.

LIZ

Not until we engage each other.

(BRAD pushes LIZ onto the ground and begins to ravage her clothes in search of the key. LIZ is more than willing to allow BRAD control over her body.)

BRAD

Where is it? Where did you put the key?

LIZ

Oh Brad, you are a frisky one aren't you?

(LIZ gropes BRAD's crotch.)

BRAD

Jesus Christ lady! What is wrong with you?

(LIZ throws BRAD off with a force unbeknownst her size.)

LIZ

(screaming with rage) There is no reason to bring the Lord's name into this!

BRAD

Fuck! Jesus!

LIZ

(offended, shocked) Fuck Jesus?!

BRAD

No, Fuck. Jesus. I mean, I meant them separately.

LIZ

I hope so, nobody *fucks* Jesus. You should work on expanding your vocabulary.

BRAD

What? What is that supposed to mean?

LIZ

It means that Jesus was a virgin and I don't appreciate you involving him in your, sexual peculiarities.

BRAD

Look lady-

LIZ

My name is Liz.

BRAD

Liz, I just want the key so I can get out of here. I didn't mean to offend God, or your dog or anything else. I barely even know you.

(LIZ begins laughing.)

What is so fucking funny?

LIZ

Oh nothing, it's just, the irony is tickling me to the teeth.

BRAD

Irony?

LIZ

Yes, well, you see, God spells dog when read backward. It's called a heteropalendrome. Dr. Rotcliff taught me that. It's similar to a palendrome: a word

that is spelled the same when read backward or forward. But a heteropalendrom is different because it spells a completely different word when read in reverse. So, if say, a person were dyslexic, the word God would actually mean Dog, and vice versa! Can you imagine? Going to chapel and worshipping an entity like Ginger, one that bleeds from her vagina all over my hardwood floors.

BRAD

No, I couldn't imagine.

LIZ

That wouldn't be a far stretch you know. I mean, Jesus bled all over the cross, and that was wood, granted probably not new wood, and for God's sake not hardwood floors, but woods the same. And if you were to *fuck* Jesus, as you put it, him being a virgin and all, it would be logical to assume that he would bleed from his anus, depending upon the force at which you entered.

BRAD

Look, I didn't fuck Jesus. It was an expression. I didn't even mean it that way.

LIZ

But you did- *fuck* Dr. Rotcliff?

BRAD

Over the phone!

LIZ

Oh, so you *fucked* him, - as an expression? As an expression of what Brad? Your love for him?

BRAD

No, I fucked him- I didn't fuck him, I talked about fucking him on the phone.

Through a *verbal* expression, on the phone.

LIZ

I don't see the difference. You *fucked* Dr. Rotcliff through an expression and you *fucked* Jesus through an expression. Either way, you expressed the act of *fucking*.

BRAD

I didn't fuck- I, I don't even know... Jesus!

LIZ

Well maybe you should get to know him. Teach you to clean up that filthy mouth of yours.

BRAD

What? My mouth! You're just as guilty as I am.

LIZ

Oh, no, no, no! Don't try to put this- conversation off on me. I was merely Xeroxing your profanities; those were not copies of my, if I may humbly say so, high-brow lexicon. Guilt by association is not the same as guilt alone. The only foul verbiage I could have possibly initiated in front of you was "bitch", and since I used that in its correct context, in reference to a female dog in heat, I am in no way victim of potty mouthery.

BRAD

Yeah, well when you said bitch, you didn't mean it as bitch, you meant it as BITCH.

It was a-a double entendre.

LIZ

So the boy does know a word other than fuck or its bastard relatives. I am stricken by your sudden flash of genius.

BRAD

Yes, that's right, double en-ten-dre. Dr. Rotcliff taught me that.

LIZ

Oh, what else did he teach you?

BRAD

That's none of your business. Why am I even talking to you? Let me out of here.

LIZ

Not until you tell me what else he taught you.

BRAD

You know what, fine. I'll play your little game if you'll just let me leave. He taught me how to... make love.

LIZ

You mean how to fuck?

BRAD

Yeah, there you go, how to fuck. He taught me how to fuck, plain and simple. Can I go now?

LIZ

Did you enter him?

BRAD

Yes, I did. I entered him. Is that what you want to hear? Are you satisfied?

LIZ

No. I am not satisfied, but I will be. Besides, I already knew that. When we were having sex he always wanted me to enter him. But I told him that I simply wasn't equipped for that kind of performance. I tried a strap on but that wasn't good enough. He wanted to know what he was like on the inside. Who he was. Since I couldn't feel myself through the rubber extension, I was rather at a loss for words. Tell me, I have always wanted to know, what is it like to be inside him?

BRAD

You mean, you and Dr. Rotcliff were together?

LIZ

Yes, that is, until he spotted his selfish eyes on you. And then everything went sour. Suddenly my anatomy wasn't good enough. He wanted something more, something I was unable to give him. But you were, weren't you?

BRAD

Fuck, I wasn't looking to give anybody anything, I was just doing what felt right. I didn't plot to steal Dr. Rotcliff away from you. I don't even know if I like Dr. Rotcliff all that much. I mean, he is a smart guy and all, and- and fairly attractive, but it's not like I want to have a relationship.

LIZ

So you are just using him as some rag doll you can throw in the closet at your

convenience?

BRAD

Look, I am not using anybody. It's not like I promised him that we would get -get married or anything. Hell, we can't even get married.

LIZ

Yes, and do you know why that is?

BRAD

To be honest, I don't even care.

LIZ

It's because marriage is something that Jesus must approve of. Since you refuse to know Jesus, then he refuses to condone matrimony between a man and a man.

BRAD

That's fine. I'm not religious anyway.

LIZ

Who said you had to be religious?

BRAD

You did.

LIZ

No, I said you had to know Jesus.

(She kisses her crucifix.)

BRAD

So Jews or- or Muslims don't get married.

LIZ

Of course not.

BRAD

Well if they don't get married, what do they get then?

LIZ

Well simple, they get to go to hell. Satan can marry them down there if he wants to. But let's not get into religion that always becomes a circular discussion anyway. You want to leave, correct?

BRAD

Yes. I've been explaining that to you ever since you went crazy over your dog being in heat.

LIZ

Well then, leave.

BRAD

The door is locked.

LIZ

Oh, silly me, I nearly forgot. Well, you will have to do two things to get it. Do you have the condom I sent you?

BRAD

I thought that was from the postman.

LIZ

Bill, yes. I lied. Do you have it?

BRAD

Yeah, it's still in the envelope, no way was I going to touch that thing.

LIZ

Give me the envelope.

(He gives Liz the envelope.)

You see, I lied to you because if I had told you when you first entered my home that you were going to have to put the condom on to retrieve the key, then you would have no doubt left before I had the chance to lock the door and explain why you are here.

BRAD

And exactly why am I here?

LIZ

Isn't it obvious? You're here to retrieve the key.

BRAD

No, that's what's keeping me from leaving. I came-

LIZ

Will you stop talking in circles and listen to me? You have to retrieve the key, so you can leave. Wherever that is you want to go-

BRAD

A kegger.

LIZ

Yes, so you can go to a kegger and no doubt get drunk to forget about today's confrontation, to escape the "conviction", as you put it. Which is rather a ridiculous

thing to say when you think about it? I mean, it's not as if I judge you for being a faggot. That's entirely none of my business.

BRAD

I- I'm not a faggot!

LIZ

I am only using your words Brad, calm some. And since I don't judge you, and I only want to help you, I would like for you to leave this house of *conviction*, whatever that may mean, so you can wobble about your life on a happy, pleasant road.

BRAD: Great, I am glad you are finally rational about this whole thing. So, where is the key?

LIZ

The key, Brad, is within me.

BRAD

Within you? Look, I'm not talking about some-personal enlightenment, metaphor shit. I don't need your salvation. All I'm talking about is the fucking key, to open the fucking door.

LIZ

I am too.

BRAD

Well... where is it then?

LIZ

Like I said Brad, the key is within me... in my vagina.

BRAD

In your vagina?

LIZ

Yes, in my vagina. I put it there for safe keeping earlier when you were ravaging my body in frantic search of it. I assumed your sexual nature wouldn't permit you to look in there.

BRAD

Well give it to me then, I answered your questions.

LIZ

No. You have to take the key with your own will.

BRAD

I am *not* going to pull a key out of your fucking vagina! No way lady

LIZ

You will if you want to leave. You do want to leave, or is my company more preferable than a kegger?

(Brad goes over to the window and opens it. He struggles with the bars to escape but they do not give way.)

BRAD

Somebody help! Help! A lady is forcing me to pull a key out of her vagina!

LIZ

Don't be ridiculous Brad. I don't have any neighbors for miles. Nobody can hear you.

BRAD

You are a sick, twisted bitch. You know that? A sick, twisted bi- no, no, you're more than that, you're a cunt!

LIZ

Yes, yes, thank you Brad. I believe you have already expressed those verbal sentiments in one way or the other. But as with any character of a good story, my nature is not as simple as you make it out to be.

BRAD

Not that simple! You want me to put my hand up your- your-

LIZ

Up my vagina Brad.

BRAD

I won't do it. You can keep me here forever.

LIZ

Very well, have it your way then. I have plenty of food to keep us sustained for quite some time. After all, I have been lonely ever since Dr. Rotcliff excused me from his presence. I could use a big, burly man around the house, even if he isn't the best of conversationalists. Have a seat. Would you like some cookies?

BRAD

No, I don't want any cookies. I want to get the fuck out of here!

LIZ

Well, the way it is looking as of now is that either you stay here and eat my cookies, or you retrieve the key from my *cookie*. There you go, that's a funny one of those

double entendres now isn't it? Either way, you are faced with two options that aren't as distasteful as your overblown, temper-tantrum would make them out to be.

BRAD

Temper-tantrum! Temper-tantrum!

(Claustrophobia overwhelms BRAD as he begins to violently tear up th room. He throws the TV into the door trying to break it open. The bed is overturned and the sheets are strung across the room. LIZ is nothing but concerned over his sudden outrage. Amid the commotion, Dr. Rotcliff becomes aware of the scene.)

I don't want to be here. Let me out. Let me out! I can't stand this place. I'm not a faggot. I'm not a fucking faggot! I hate Dr. Rotcliff. He got me into all this shit. I can't stand this place. Let me out! I'm not a faggot. He's the faggot. Not me. Please Liz, just let me out of here.

(BRAD begs for LIZ's mercy.)

DR. ROTCLIFF

That's not true Brad. Don't say that. We are in love Brad. Don't you remember?

BRAD

I never loved him!

LIZ

If you aren't a homosexual, why won't you just take the key.

BRAD

Because, because I- I don't know. I don't know why. I should just take the key and

leave. I won't have to deal with this anymore. I can just go, and nobody will have to know. You won't tell anyone will you?

DR. ROTCLIFF

You can't trust her Brad.

LIZ

Of course not Brad. Once you leave here, no one will have to know what has transpired between us or Dr. Rotcliff. This will all go away once you leave. Just take the key.

(BRAD works up the courage to begin unbuttoning LIZ's dress. He is on the verge of a mental break down. LIZ forces him off with a force unbeknownst her size.)

DR. ROTCLIFF

You traitor, defector, coward! Where is your sense of self? Have you no conviction?

LIZ

Excuse me? What kind of lady do you think I am? I'm not going to simply drop my pants whenever a man tells me to. I have moral standards which are without compromise.

BRAD

Please, just tell me. What do you want me to do?

LIZ

Put on this condom.

(She throws BRAD the used condom.)

BRAD

You never said we were going to have sex.

LIZ

Obviously your choice of language isn't the only thing that is foul. You have a filthy mind!

BRAD

I have- yeah, yeah, you're right! I have a filthy mind. It's me. Can you ever find it in your heart to forgive me?

LIZ

Put the condom on your hand. I don't know where that thing has been.

BRAD

But, don't you at least have a new condom, or maybe a glove even?

LIZ

No, I want you to use this one. This is what Dr. Rotcliff used on me the first time we had sex. So if anyone is going to enter me, I would rather the remnants of his self do so, instead of a boy whom I hardly know. Now, put it on!

DR. ROTCLIFF

I will never enter you again Liz. Do you hear me? Never again! Brad, it's not too late to stop this. Come back to me Brad! I can get us out of here. Listen to me.

(Brad complies with LIZ and slips the condom over his hand. Liz begins making the bed with malevolence greater than when Brad disassembled it.)

LIZ

Now look at that. You got Ginger's blood all over the sheets again! I can never keep these things clean. There is always some animal trampling their will over them without concern for who must reside between their comforts at night. You and Dr. Rotcliff are one in the same. Never willing to make compromises for the desires of the community. Well, listen up some boy. Are you listening? Life is all about compromises. You can't just expect for things to go your way whenever you want them to. Sometimes you have to make amends for the sake of others.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Don't listen to her Brad.

LIZ

You have to be something that you don't always want to be, so that when problems inevitably arise from the disorder in society, the disorder you created mind you, with your- your sexual peculiarities, then you will have the character and uncompromising moral dignity to rise above the fickle belief you possess in yourself, in your identity, and swipe away the individualistic evil which divides us.

(She finishes making the bed and crawls between the sheets.)

Do you understand what I am telling you Brad?

BRAD

I-I think so.

DR. ROTCLIFF

She is telling you deceit. She is telling you about the safeness of complacency. The mundane life of a man who follows duty to the past, a past outdated. We are here

Brad, now, together.

LIZ

Well?

(BRAD slowly crawls into the bed with LIZ.)

BRAD

(To DR. ROTCLIFF.) I have to go to her. There is nothing else I can do.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Don't go to her Brad! Her sheets are filled with blood. It will consume you.

LIZ

Shut up Paul! At least they aren't filled with your shit. Well Brad? Do you understand what I am telling you?

BRAD

Yes, you want me to take the key.

LIZ

Yes.

BRAD

You want me to enter you.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Do not enter her Brad.

LIZ

Yes Brad.

BRAD

You want me to possess you.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Don't possess her Brad.

(Under the sheets, BRAD enters her. LIZ writhes with pleasure.)

LIZ

Yes, Brad, yes. What am I like?

BRAD

You're... on your period.

(Blood flows profusely from under the sheets.)

LIZ

Yes, it's just blood. It's part of my nature, don't worry. What am I like Brad? Give me a metaphor. Who am I?

DR. ROTCLIFF

You are the firefly queen come to destroy me. You are The Dark Lady. You are-

BRAD

You are the firefly queen come to destroy me, you are The Dark Lady. You are-

(Brad retrieves the key from Liz.)

LIZ

(She orgasms.)

Oh yes, Paul! Oh my God! Holy-holy mother of- Jesus! Jesus Christ! Yes!

BRAD

I have the key. I am going to leave now. I no longer want to see either of you. I'm not

what you are. I'm something else completely.

LIZ

You have the key, you can go. Nothing is stopping you now.'

DR. ROTCLIFF

You will not leave this class Brad. Not until the bell rings.

BRAD

Good bye Dr. Rotcliff.

(BRAD gets up to leave and walks toward the door. DR. ROTCLIFF shoots and kills BRAD.)

LIZ

Why did you have to go and do that again Paul? He was only leaving.

DR. ROTCLIFF

Why did I? He knows the rules; no one leaves until the bell rings, only then, some may go other places...

LIZ

This is college Paul, there are no bells here.

(The bell rings.)

DR. ROTCLIFF

What was that then?

LIZ

What was what? I didn't hear anything.

DR. ROTCLIFF

You heard it. You just don't know what it means.

LIZ

Oh Paul, of course I know what it means. Now that Brad is gone, we have each other. Come; lay with me for a while.

DR. ROTCLIFF

I shouldn't. It was you who killed him, not me. I loved him after all, unconditionally loved him. Do you understand?

LIZ

Of course you did Paul. He was lucky to have someone like you there for him, to guide him. Although, I believe now is the time to leave the poor boy to rest in peace.

DR. ROTCLIFF

No! He is mine. Wake up Brad. Brad, get up come to me, and tell me why you love me. Who am I Brad? What am I like on the inside?

(Life begins to possess BRAD again.)

LIZ

No Brad. Go to sleep. You are now a humble servant of death. Rest Brad, rest.

(Life drains from BRAD.)

DR. ROTCLIFF

What are you doing? He is not your creation. He is mine. You have no control over him.

LIZ

Must we continue this metaphorical banter any further Paul? He is no more your

creation than he is mine. Come to bed and lay with me for a while. You won't regret it.

(DR. ROTCLIFF complies and crawls into the bed with LIZ. As he recites the sonnet, LIZ begins kissing him all over, ending with giving DR. ROTCLIFF felacio under the sheets. He is aroused by her play, yet tortured by his desire. The room goes completely dark. Spotlight on DR. ROTCLIFF.)

DR. ROTCLIFF

“In the old age black was not counted fair,
 Or if it were, it bore not beauty's name;
 But now is black beauty's successive heir,
 And beauty slandered with a bastard shame:
 For since each hand hath put on Nature's power,
 Fairing the foul with Art's false borrowed face,
 Sweet beauty hath no name, no holy bower,
 But is profaned, if not lives in disgrace.
 Therefore my mistress' eyes are raven black,
 Her eyes so suited, and they mourners seem
 At such who, not born fair, no beauty lack,
 Sland'ring creation with a false esteem:
 Yet so they mourn becoming of their woe,
 That every tongue says beauty should look so.”

(DR. ROTCLIFF shoots LIZ from under the sheets.)

(Lights out)

(Pause.)

(Another shot is fired.)

END PLAY

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