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STILL, VOICE

ERIC BOTTS
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Reviewed and approved* by the following:

John Champagne
Associate Professor of English
Thesis Supervisor and Honors Adviser

Kim Todd
Assistant Professor of English and Creative Writing
Faculty Reader

* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

ABSTRACT

“Still, Voice” is a one-act play about a young man trying to deal with the recent death of his brother through dream analysis and by mapping religious myths onto his own life. In the spring of 2012, I produced, directed, and acted in two performances of “Still, Voice” with a cast of twelve at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College’s Studio Theatre. I adapted the play from a personal essay titled, “Myths in Petrification.” The process of that adaptation led me to write what I now refer to as a dramatic essay, a nonfiction play with the meditative structure of a personal essay. The critical preface introducing “Still, Voice” begins with an explanation and definition of the dramatic essay. I then offer notes on acting and directing the dramatic essay, and I discuss the processes of writing, producing, and directing the play. Next I examine the nature of the dramatic essay form and its place in the history of dramatic theatre. After that, I discuss two of my major influences in writing “Still, Voice,” Samuel Beckett and Bertoldt Brecht, and how I see their work echoed in “Still, Voice.” The most significant of these influences are the more poetical and imagistic qualities of Beckett’s work and the decidedly intellectual qualities of Brecht’s. I close the preface with a discussion of genre, how I use it as part of my writing process, and the ways in which this play emerged from my willingness to play with generic conventions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	iii
Preface	1
Characters.....	23
Scene 1: Apollo and Daphne.....	25
Scene 2: Teeth and Freud.....	32
Scene 3: The Changeling.....	35
Scene 4: The Stag.....	40
Scene 5: Scheherazade.....	41
Scene 6: Lot's Wife.....	44
Scene 7: End.....	52
Works Cited.....	56

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PREFACE

Essay to Play

This play began as an essay, “Myths in Petrification,” and through a long string of revisions, adaptations, and rewrites, eventually became the play it is now, “Still, Voice.” The essay was a bit unconventional in that parts of it were broken into verse, many of its scenes and ideas were disparate, and the prose was intentionally inaccessible—I had placed the narrator into the roles of all these mythological figures and offered no real hints about the connections I was drawing between them. I regarded it as a masterpiece, something completely original! (Nevermind the obvious influence of lyrical essayists like Jenny Boully and Albert Goldbarth—this had never been done before).

When I brought my masterpiece into my writing workshop, I knew it would cause some confusion, but I hadn’t expected the silence and blank stares. I was distraught; like most essayists and memoirists who write about family death—and there are probably far too many of us—I had sweated over this essay, done the obligatory wrestling with the morality of laying out my dead brother for readers to see, had crafted a work of *great emotional magnitude*, and yet I had somehow failed. I was so preoccupied with the emotional impact of myths and dreams that I never even considered the need to make the subject clear. I had written something that was so concerned with personal experience that

I completely neglected to provide context for the reader. If readers had never experienced the death of an immediate family member, never had dreams of losing teeth, and were not well versed in religious mythologies—that is, if they weren't me—they had little to no points of access.

Though art isn't necessarily "easy" to penetrate, it must be accessible at some level. To open the essay up without abandoning the dreams and myths, I used their imagery and emotional appeal to develop an intellectual discourse and tease out a narrative arc. Drawing from writers and thinkers like Plato, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Sigmund Freud, and James Joyce, the narrator began to struggle with the meanings of myths and dreams, how they connect with reality, what it means for a person to die, the division of self, and the nature and validity of certain types of insight, like the Joycean epiphany. In doing so, I found that, like any philosophical discussion worth having, all of these were at once deeply emotional and intellectual, and the result was a much stronger piece of art.

A year later, a professor assigned me to write a play. Having never written one before, I looked to one of my favorite playwrights, and my first attempt was a poor imitation of Samuel Beckett within the confines of a plot vaguely gesturing toward Magical Realism (how I thought this combination could have panned out, I have no idea). The result was derivative, muddled, and as my professor called it, "stilted" work. The ensuing discussion with him convinced me that I could do something "completely Original," that I could invent a new kind of theatre.

This boosted my ego, and I thought immediately of the essay I'd written a year ago, "Myths in Petrification." I told myself that adapting it into a play would allow me to do things that no one had ever done before. This fiction helped to allay the irrational and conflicting anxieties that plays had to be written with very specific elements (a straightforward and chronological plot, no narrator, etc.) but that I had to do something brand new. In the back of my mind, however, I knew that I wasn't really doing anything new; in truth, I was returning to some recent and some very ancient modes in dramatic storytelling.

What's more, many of the older conventions had already been reinvigorated by twentieth-century playwrights. Though I tried to forget about Beckett and other playwrights (I had to be Original, after all), I was unconsciously drawn to aspects of the theatre of the absurd and Bertoldt Brecht's epic theatre, which themselves are partly built from well established theatrical traditions; the theatre of the absurd, according to Martin Esslin, who coined the term, is rooted in a variety of traditions, from Roman miming to circus clowns and English nonsense verse to "the baroque horror of Jacobean dramatists" (7); and epic theatre draws from a variety of ancient traditions, perhaps most notably from Chinese theatre ("Alienation Effects" 91-2). I can't claim to be so well read or broadly cultured as Brecht or Beckett. If ancient Chinese or Jacobean traditions find their ways into my work, they do so by the second- and third-hand influence of the predominantly Modern and contemporary drama with which I'm familiar.

I can claim, however, that by convincing myself of my own originality, but nonetheless engaging in what playwrights like Brecht and Beckett had already done, I managed to adapt “Myths” the essay into “*Still, Voice*” the play without dooming it to the derivative and stilted fate of my previous effort. Rather, while retaining its own voice, the play appropriates and expands on these conventions, using them as tools for defining a form that I have come to call the dramatic essay. I think the above discussion precludes the validity of calling it a new form, but I’ll at least take credit for naming it. As for the name itself, though it may seem somewhat grandiose and pretentious, it provides a lens that helps me clarify my goals and provide a set of criteria by which the reader can evaluate my success or failure with “*Still, Voice*.”

Defining the Dramatic Essay

As countless essayists before me have noted, the word ‘essay’ comes from the French *essai*, meaning, “To attempt.” The term ‘dramatic essay’ bears with it, then, not only attempts at answering questions, as the traditional essay does, but the attempt at dramatizing its attempts. The dramatic essay (and particularly this play) is driven by its questions, its search, its voice, and the evolution of its contemplation—four forces that have not traditionally driven most dramatic theatre. Using these forces to drive a play means that, for it to succeed, the audience must actively engage them alongside the characters. Thus, the goal of the playwright, director, cast, and crew must be to incite the

audience to ask the play's questions, follow its search, empathize with its voice, and develop intellectually with it.

Acting & Directing the Dramatic Essay

Any good theatrical performance demands that actors understand the content of their lines. In the vein of epic theatre, the dramatic essay demands that actors help the audience do the same. But merely understanding the content in terms of the essay's product—the end results of its contemplation—is not enough. Actors and audience alike must grasp the essay's questions, follow its search for answers, and understand the stakes of that search—what is lost if the essay fails to answer its questions. In short, actors and audience must follow the steps in the essay's contemplative process, including both intellectual development and emotional movement. I'm well aware of the audacity of these demands, and I realize that they can be taxing and off-putting to actors and audiences. To head off these potential problems, I focus on musicality, imagery, and satiric comedy to compel audience to participate, rather than merely demand it.

~Musicality

The words, sentences, and lineation in "Still, Voice" are all in musical conversation and should be delivered with a musician's sensibility. The script is an essay, but it's also a poem (I highlight this fact by breaking sections of it into verse) inscribed with certain

rhythms made clearer by directions such as “without a pause.” The actor must understand these rhythms and elaborate on them with personal style while playing off of the styles of other actors.

During rehearsals for “Still, Voice,” the constant refrain from my cast, crew, and thesis supervisor was, “Who is this line being delivered to? Is this character aware of what that character is saying?” These were questions about musical, as much as intellectual, conversation. Daphne only has two lines in scene one, but Shannon, the actor playing her had, for good reason, trouble delivering them. Her first line, “running from the inescapable Sun God ...” (29), follows directly from the Young Man’s monologue, meaning that they deliver different parts of the same line, so the exchange must feel seamless, as would the exchange of musical phrasing between two instruments in a composition. But Daphne’s situation and state of mind are entirely different from, though connected to, the Young Man’s; thus, her voice must emerge from his but stay rooted in her character as she runs across the stage, delivering the line to the audience and reacting physically to Apollo. In the end, Shannon’s performance was a brief but impressive achievement of both dance and music.

Those parts of the play written in verse must be delivered in ways that make use of poetic form. After watching a fantasy in which the brother never died but was instead taken by fairies and has returned home decades later, having hardly aged, the Young Man closes scene three with the following monologue:

His family will weep when he comes home. Truth revealed. Happily ever after.

...

But sometimes the surface is
 the truth. Beneath it, nothing.
 The child is— But we don't dare say
 the word. We use spacial terms:
 Passed on, No
 longer with us.
 We never say
 the word. Still,
 the end is the end. (38-9)

In my production, I was lucky enough to have a poet, Elliot Smith, to play the Young Man. Being a poet with a keen understanding of lineation and rhythm, he paused briefly and he gently emphasized syllables and words at the ends of lines to give the sense of them as individual units of meaning contained within larger sentences; he took meanings that might at first seem confined to the text alone and used musical phrasing to express them vocally.

~Imagery

Images must be rendered provocatively but must resist spectacle and apparent complexity. I'm not interested in "realistic" sets, though certain props and costumes require elaboration. Someone asked why we used an entire hospital bed for "Still, Voice" on such a small stage when it created such frustrating logistical problems (after our first performance, the actors responsible for moving it forgot to do so until the stage was packed with ten other actors, creating an embarrassing cluster of bodies). Nonetheless, the bed was necessary in scene three precisely *because* it dominated the stage, forcing actors to move around it, thereby emphasizing its dominating presence in the lives and psyches of the Young Man and his Mother (35-9).

On the other hand, many of the props and effects we used were minimalistic. In many cases, an image's success depended on effective and recurrent use of props. Beckett was a master in this regard. "Act Without Words I," for example, uses a cast of props whose significance evolves with each appearance: A palm tree begins as shelter from the desert sun, then shrivels into a cruel joke as it denies shade to the protagonist; a branch reaches out from the tree, and the man resolves to hang himself from it, then watches it drop, removing another means of relief from his suffering; finally, when the man resigns to his fate, the tree rises slowly from the stage as if satisfied with its part in breaking his resolve ("Act Without Words I").

I attempted similar evolutions of images in "Still, Voice." For example, the only prop in scene four was a bit of black fabric to act as tar, which the Stag and Young Man pretended to struggle with as they actually pulled it over the Young Man's body. The image was simple, organic, and among the most visceral in the entire play: The Young Man being engulfed in tar as he attempts to struggle free (40). In scene five, we reused the same black fabric to indicate mud. When the Young Man knelt down, placed his hands into the fabric, and lifted them up again, he pulled the fabric with them (41). The effect wasn't realistic or dazzling, but it subtly recalled the tar of scene four, lending both images more emotional heft and reinforcing the consistent theme of petrification throughout the play.

Effective use of props is not the only way to create powerful images and communicate theme. Beckett put forth painstaking effort in his plays to say something about, ostensibly, the saying of nothing. Toward this effort, his casts, sets, and props were

all minimal. His dialogue and stage directions, however, were incredibly complex. His characters' language often flowed seamlessly between stream-of-consciousness monologue and inter-character dialogue, and his stage directions were aggressively exacting, demanding that actors and directors follow them to the very last pause.

Beckett's work often appears at first to be nihilistic minimalism. Were his plays truly nihilistic though, they would mean nothing. In "Not I" he strips the play from a cast, to a character, to a solitary mouth, a voice illuminated by a single light. That voice is the play's entire world. The audience grasps at its words but cannot grip them because of the speed of delivery; words flood the stage, annihilating the set, props, lights, even the speaker's body. Unable to latch onto those words, audiences are forced to accept the pauses, the voice's gasps for air, as their only respite in the verbal landslide. During those pauses, I find myself struggling to parse the last sentence the voice has said before it moves on. That sentence, then, fills the vacuum of the pause, and the voice itself becomes an image.

In Beckett's work, specifically in "Not I," what at first may seem barren, soon becomes full and provocative. His nearly empty sets, sparse casts, opaque characters, and often stuttered dialogue are all vacuums into which meaning rushes. This is the essential goal of well executed, image-based minimalism. I take the title of my play from "Not I" and from this view of his work. "Still, Voice" is the persistence of meaning in one of Beckett's vacuums, the singularity that exists after implosion, and my initial production of it was very much an homage to his masterful use of imagery.

~**Satiric Comedy**

Above all else, the actors and director of a dramatic essay must maintain control of tone. Actors must often engage the script and audience of “Still, Voice” with a fervent, almost over-the-top earnestness. This approach will eventually send the performance reeling into sentimentality and pedantry—indeed, the script comes off this way when read without distance. To head off these pitfalls, the fervor must shift frequently from earnestness to irony. What was *almost* should become *entirely* over-the-top satire; actors must, at these times, adopt epic theatre’s desire for coolness and relaxation, unempathic acting, and “artistic” stepping out of character, all for satiric or ironic effect (Benjamin 155).

This effect is related to the alienation effect as Brecht envisioned it and which he adopted from traditional Chinese acting:

Above all, the Chinese artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him. He expresses his awareness of being watched. [When this effect is used in Western theatre, t]he audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place. . . . The artist’s object is to appear strange and even surprising to the audience. (“Alienation Effects” 91-2)

According to Brecht, the active acknowledgment of a play’s artificiality allows actors a much broader range of artfulness beyond “complete conversion” to their characters (93). In scene six, the characters of “Still, Voice” call into question nearly everything the Young Man says, and the play becomes a satire of itself. That is, the characters in the play make every effort to alienate themselves and the audience from the Young Man.

Part of my goal here was to push the audience back from identifying blindly with the Young Man and to instead consider the intellectual development of his arguments. Scene six was built from a section of the essay, “Myths in Petrification,” about the Biblical myth of Lot’s Wife. In the original essay, the myth is presented and used to question some of the narrator’s ideas, but to a far lesser extent than in the play. After the narrator recounts an imagined speech from the Stag similar to the speech currently in the play, he muses:

All these allegories and surrogates. Who am I in this? Did I look back on some supposed sin? Or did I leave that dissenter on Mount Gomorrah? Stone testament to my callous obedience under the tyranny of His wrath. Am I the Transparent Eyeball, oblivious/omniscient narrator/witness? Forgotten but present? Present but static? At once vocal and voiceless: The compulsive repetitions of tongues lost in an endless stutter? (7)

Thus ends this section of “Myths in Petrification.” The draft of “Still, Voice”¹ at the beginning of rehearsals contained a scene that only went a bit further with this questioning by using the Stag to challenge the Young Man. After the first run-through of this scene, however, I knew it needed to be bigger. It was still too easy to identify with the Young Man on a simply emotional level and accept his ruminations without serious consideration—so much so that I feared that some of the most essential ideas in the play about the profundity of death might have been drowning in a sea of sentimentality.

If the play was to succeed in its intellectual efforts, it needed to alienate audience members from the Young Man to some extent and force them to think critically about his ideas. He still needed to be a sympathetic character, and the pathos of the essay was still

¹ Actually, the play was still *Myths in Petrification* at the time, but for the sake of clarity, I’m going to refer to it as “*Still, Voice*”.

essential to its content, but its logic was getting lost. Thus, every other character in the scene, a planted Heckler in the audience, even the Young Man's recorded voice needed to make every effort to break the fourth wall, undermine the Young Man's credibility, and convince the audience to laugh in spite of the play's emotional content.

The Emotional Intellect

In his essay, "Is It a Fiction That Playwrights Create Alone?" Tony Kushner discusses the process of writing *Angels in America* and the conversations he's had about it, claiming that he has difficulty speaking of the massive intellectual influence of a friend on his writing the play. He notes that speaking of how their emotional journey after she suffered a car accident influenced the play is much easier than talking about the intellectual effort of writing it because, when it comes to plays, people tend to care more about emotion than intellect, "the two being regarded, incorrectly, as inseparable" (148).

As Kushner points out, the emotional and intellectual processes of creating a work of art are inseparable. The same is true of any worthwhile viewing of art. When I think of my work on "Still, Voice," I can't help but fear that this tendency to favor the emotional over the intellectual content of a play, perhaps of all art, might be true. When I think of the writing workshops in which I've participated, films and paintings and sculptures I've

discussed with people who care deeply about art, I'm struck by the fact that the conversations nearly always center on the emotional power of the piece.

"Still, Voice" is undeniably and unabashedly emotional, and much of the narrator's development as a character is emotional in nature. But to focus solely on the play's emotional effect and gloss over its intellectual content would severely devalue it. Certainly my brother's death was the impetus for "Myths" and therefore "Still, Voice," and it had a deep influence on the play's performance. If, however, I thought that my audience had simply dismissed the play's intellectual content, I don't know that I could ever convince myself to write again.

In the end, to truly grasp the play's meanings, the audience must engage it with an emotional intellect. That is, the audience must grasp the emotional weight of a scene, image, or line of dialogue but also be willing to step back and consider its intellectual significance. In this vein, despite the satire throughout much of "Still, Voice," the director and actors must keep in mind that the play is not a farce and that the dramatic essay, like any essay, is a genuine, emotionally and intellectually difficult struggle to achieve meaning. Thus, the satire of scene six closes with the Young Man trying once more to make meaning:

We grasp for surrogates, stand-ins to undermine the endless dynamism of reality.
 We grasp for something that lets us sleep and wake to our own voices, our own
 stories, so we can be calm in the knowledge that the end comes when we want;
 that there's truth behind the image;
 that the world is finite
 insofar only as we choose to see. (52)

As I've already said, the satiric/ironic "breaks" are moments in which actors and audience can distance themselves from the play's emotional heft and enjoy its comedy. But they are also moments in which actors recap the play's ideas without seeming redundant. Thus, they provide white space for the essay's development, space for the audience to consider the significance of ideas and images.

I think of scene two in "*Still, Voice*," wherein the Young Man mocks Freud for his explanation of the Young Man's "dreams of teeth":

YOUNG MAN

My head hair is pubic hair? My cheeks are buttcheeks?

Extended pause as FREUD nods and, looking at YOUNG MAN, continues to smoke his pipe.

(YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

(Sarcastically.)

Perhaps I should look elsewhere for Truth. (33-4)

I took Freud's explanation directly from *The Interpretation of Dreams* and, because that text is dense to begin with, the Young Man's mockery is partly my attempt to help the audience parse Freud's words. But the exchange is also satiric. Today it's difficult not to scoff a bit at the now clichéd Freudian refrain, "sexual repression." Indulging that scoff and laughing at Freud's questionable interpretation of the dream, in which he suggests ridiculously one-to-one connections between the face and genitalia, gives the audience a break from the play's emotional intensity. After the first scene, in which the audience has just finished watching Apollo nearly rape Daphne, audiences are likely to feel

overwhelmed. Scene two's comedy helps alleviate much of that tension without dismissing or undermining the magnitude of the previous scene or its significance to the rest of the play.

Why Stage the Essay?

Throughout this preface, I've mentioned genre and medium a number of times, but I have yet to address why I chose to write this as a dramatic essay. (To be clear, I'm speaking of genre in the very limited sense that this work is an essay, written as a play, and containing some poetic elements). When it comes to genre and medium, I spend a good deal of the creative process asking myself and the piece whether it should be read or viewed, in lines or in prose, fictionalized or rooted in truth? Often it seems that readers (and writers) take genre and medium for granted. They assume that an essay is an essay because it was written by an essayist or that a poem is a poem because it was written by a poet. In the creation of any work of literature though, genre and medium are malleable, even upon completion—many novels, for example, are successfully adapted to both stage and screen.

For me, genre and medium rarely become definite until many many drafts into a piece of work. I've already said several times that "Still, Voice" began as a personal essay.

That essay, however, was borne out of a poem entitled, “Comb,” about a stag of ancient Scythian legend.

This sharp, lucent thing must have risen
 from Sun’s first light: its teeth reach
 like stag antlers rearing fallen soldiers’
 souls from flesh. As you dredge them
 through embroiled locks of fur, draw
 forth, tease out dead parts, do not idle,
 lest you consider the rest of the stag:
 fur tinged blue like flesh; its eyes,
 like your teeth, sanguin sharp.

Six months after writing the poem, I soon expanded it into a short story, “Stag,” that contained the following:

On the eve after we die [a stag] comes to take us, cradled in his antlers and, in the morning, presents us to his mother the Sun as gifts. She takes us in her arms, then rises to set us among the stars, our brothers and sisters. Sometimes, the dead do not want to leave. They cling to his antlers, beg to be returned to some place they know. . . . Some of the dead stay with him for years, in search of old homes or loved ones. But once the stag has taken them up he will not release them, and the dead can only look upon those things of which they were once a part. (1-2)

The image of the stag obsessed me for some time, and eventually I realized that I needed to write an essay about it. I have since abandoned the poem and story, realizing that if I was to tease out the meanings that they wanted me to tease out, I could only do so in an essay. (This year I wrote another poem that uses the stag, but it works toward different ideas that seem as if I need to explore them in poetry). For some time, I tried to revise the essay alongside the play, thinking that the two could complement one another. In the end,

though, I've abandoned the essay too because the play allows me to get more at the meanings that the project was working toward.

For me, then, genre and medium are part of the writing process. I said that the dramatic essay allows me to get at the meanings of this project better than other artforms, but this is not entirely accurate. I couldn't have written the play without the essay, nor the essay without the story or poem. Each effort revealed something about the project that pushed me toward a new genre or medium, and vestiges of those efforts still exist in "Still, Voice."

In some ways, this is very much what the play is about—exploring in different modes and from different perspectives the ideas and images that obsess the narrator until meanings emerge. The search is often maddening and frustrating, filled with dead ends and false turns. This was exponentially more true in the production of "Still, Voice." Having already moved through much of the search on my own, I now had to return to the beginning and try to lead my cast and crew back through it, pointing out the dead ends and false turns as we went, and I had to show my actors how to do the same for the audience.

Throughout the production, I had to explain that nearly every one of the Young Man's sentences, even his statements, are at least partly questions:

Sometimes, to find meaning, we must decenter ourselves from the search. Become perfect observers. Witness and encroach on everything and nothing: What Ralph Waldo Emerson called the Transparent Eyeball. So I consider my mother's reality. Her fears among a cacophony of silent nurses and deaf doctors as she rubs her elder son's feet[.] (35)

Of course, every sentence in the above quote is a statement, but the Young Man here is questioning whether his own perspective is sufficient in his search for meaning. At first, Elliot wanted to deliver these lines with confidence, as if he knew what truths would emerge from this exercise in shifting his viewpoint. The truth is, however, that I wrote those sentences as much more eloquent expressions of my thought process in writing the essay. I had hit a wall and needed to find a way around, so I used this exercise to do so. Elliot needed to channel this mindset, delivering the passage as something between an aside to himself and a direct address to the audience, encouraging them to join him in the exercise.

This process, however, was reciprocal. Often my cast and crew would ask questions and make suggestions that drastically transformed my understanding of the play and how it should be presented to the audience. Because Elliot and I were playing two aspects of the same character (Elliot playing the Young Man and I, off-stage, playing a voice recording of him), we frequently rehearsed our lines separately from the rest of the cast. This resulted in a great deal of discussion and subsequent revision of certain exchanges between us, especially in scene six, to which I made the most numerous and drastic revisions throughout production.

After the characters have begun their revolt against the narrator's authority, he starts to realize that Emerson's transparent eyeball is an impossible ideal and that he and this performance are necessarily coloring the audience's understanding of the play. To

ensure that the audience recognizes this fact too, he and the other characters emphasize the play's artificiality.

[YOUNG MAN]

(Thoughtfully, to himself.)

Am I the Transparent Eyeball?

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

(Without pause.)

The oblivial/omniscient narrator/witness.

STAG

(Annoyed, still looking for source of recording.)

What the hell's that supposed to mean? Is "oblivial" even a word?

YOUNG MAN

(Irritated, slowly redelivers the cue.)

Am I the Eyeball—

(Sighs and shakes head. Slowly and irritatedly.)

Am I the *Transparent* Eyeball?

SOUND: Cassette tape rewinds.

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

"Seeing all the teeth drop out, death and famine—"

YOUNG MAN

(Yells.)

Too far!

STAG

That's that Emerson thing, right? The Transparent Eyeball? "Witness and encroach on everything and nothing?" (48)

This extreme emphasis on artificiality came about as Elliot and I were rehearsing the passage, “Am I the Transparent Eyeball? The oblivious/omniscient narrator/witness, forgotten but present. Present but static. At once vocal and voiceless: The compulsive repetitions of tongues lost in an endless stutter.” As we were deciding how to divide the passage between the Young Man and the Recording, Elliot asked how the Young Man had reached this point in his thought process. After I explained that the narrator was returning to Emerson’s idea because he had realized that he was necessarily acting as a filter for the ideas, stories, dreams, and images he was exploring.

We promptly stopped rehearsing and talked about how to bring that conflict out in a more concrete way. We decided that, in addition to the Young Man and Recording stating it, the conflict needed to be acted out by the other characters. They needed to challenge the Young Man directly on his ideas and insights. Even though this ended up being one of the most difficult and frustrating scenes to work out in rehearsal, the result was a favorite among the cast and crew, and the audience’s reactions on both night were very positive. They laughed at all the jokes, and a few people approached me after the shows and noted that this was the scene in which the play really came together for them, which was good, because we spent more time rehearsing, re-evaluating, and revising that scene than any other.

Near the end of production, I had determined that I would never subject myself to the torture of producing a play again. This too, however, seems to have been a false turn; on opening night, something new about the play settled into me. In scene seven, the

Father's silhouette behind the screen towered over the Young Man lying in the hospital bed. Both of these staging decisions were made largely out of necessity. I wanted an actual bed for the scene, but we couldn't possibly have fit another one onto the stage; thus, the hospital bed was our only choice. I wanted the Father's silhouette to be standing, but the stage was too small to manage the light behind the screen to make this work; thus, we decided the Father would sit at a bar behind the screen and drink alone. As I watched the scene, speaking into the microphone from the lighting/sound booth, I realized that we had inadvertently or subconsciously reinforced connections between the Father's absence, the brother's death, and the Young Man's dreams.

I seemed to stumble upon yet more meanings that I had not consciously processed. This was true throughout production. Several of the rehearsals revealed new ideas and connections that, only after having finished the performances and writing this preface, I can now grasp. Each time that this has happened, I've found myself stirred into an emotional and intellectual excitement that I simply don't feel at other times. The process has been at once utterly maddening and unbelievably satisfying; watching and conducting the play's movement from script to stage has stirred the sorts of sensations in me that I imagine would stir in the great mythological creators—Gaia, Prometheus, Yahweh, Shiva. But if that seems too self-reverent, pretentious, and megalomaniacal, then allow me to end with this: Nothing in my life has ever left me so drained of energy and at once filled with vitality as the writing and production of this play.

STILL, VOICE

CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

YOUNG MAN

RECORDING OF YOUNG MAN

A recording of the Young Man's voice.

BROTHER

Young Man's recently deceased Brother, older by a few years.

CUPID

Played by same actor as Young Man.

APOLLO

Played by same actor as Brother. The actor must therefore embody the Brother's feebleness due to poor health and Apollo's domineering, godly stature.

DAPHNE

Wood nymph and daughter of the river god Peneus. Ideally, the actor would be nimble and have a background in dance.

SIGMUND FREUD

Actor should look as old as or older than the Mother and Father. Must be able to speak quickly and with precise diction.

A NURSE

MOTHER

Mother of Young Man and Brother.

FAIRIES 1 & 2**STAG**

Played by same actor as Fairy 1. Actor should have a very commanding stage presence, even when silent, and an ominous stature.

SCHEHERAZADE

Could be played by same actor as Daphne to highlight the difference in agency between the two characters.

SULTAN**LOT**

Could be played by same actor as the Sultan.

FATHER

Father of Young Man and Brother.

BARTENDER

Played by same actor as Stag and Fairy 1.

SCENE 1: APOLLO AND DAPHNE

LIGHTS UP: Dim and yellowish.

BEGIN SOUND: Feet hitting earth, quiet at first, but louder as the scene progresses.

YOUNG MAN, STAGE-RIGHT, alone in the woods, standing still as he speaks. STAGE-LEFT, an old shed is hidden (via curtain or other obstruction) from the audience's view. Next to the shed is a small pile of bricks (also hidden).

YOUNG MAN

In dreams I run, but do not move: The sensation of running, but without motion. With my hand over mouth, vomit wells inside me as the world swarms indistinct with reds greens blues bled in and over each other like fractured sun swimming through viscous oil. Under footfall, ground smacks and tendons collapse as ribs claw like beasts at my insides. In dead air, dead space, I run,

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

SOUND: feet hitting earth now very loud.

(YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

(Without pause.)

I am still, I run from— From some unknown thing, an obscured threat, I run and cannot move.

(Pause.)

Later, I'll reduce the meanings of the dream to this:

RECORDING OF YOUNG MAN

The immobile *I* treads a world insubstantial, without Truth.

END SOUND: Feet hitting earth.

YOUNG MAN

I'll tell myself that

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

(Without pause.)

Truth is empirical.

YOUNG MAN

I'll search for it in dreams, memories, stories. I'll reduce reality to a memory:

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

A boy and his brother wander through the woods and find an old shed.

LIGHTS UP.

ENTER BROTHER, STAGE-RIGHT. As BROTHER and YOUNG MAN cross to STAGE-LEFT, the shed is revealed. BROTHER tries to open the shed, but it is locked. He looks around, finds the bricks, picks one up, and throws it through the window on the door of the shed. He nudges YOUNG MAN.

BROTHER

Push the rest of that glass out.

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

The boy pushes with the heel of his right hand til he slips, and broken glass slices his palm.

(For the blood, YOUNG MAN conceals a red ribbon, which is tied to his hand. When he cuts himself, he releases the ribbon, which then hangs from his hand. He palms this ribbon throughout the rest of the play, sometimes opening his hand to look at it, sometimes just rolling it in his hand distractedly.) He clutches the cut hand and drops to his knees.

BROTHER

What'd you do that for? Are you stupid?

(He sighs.)

Come on.

BROTHER lifts YOUNG MAN by the armpits and angrily escorts him out of the woods. BROTHER and YOUNG MAN EXIT STAGE-RIGHT. The shed is once again hidden. REENTER YOUNG MAN.

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

The boy won't remember leaving the woods or telling his mother what happened. He won't remember much more than this: The doctor says he'll need stitches. Images of battle-scarred warriors swarm in his head.

YOUNG MAN

(Without pause.)

Stitches!?

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

(Without pause.)

he replies, as if the word itself were a Badge of Courage. It'll be years before he comes to associate scars and stitches with his brother's chest and belly. With heart and kidney transplants. With catheters and surgical tape. With bruises spread like purpled webs.

YOUNG MAN

I'll experience this memory by the sound of that word,

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

Stitches!?

YOUNG MAN

by the feel of broken glass, by the scar across my palm.

(Looks at right hand, then at PROJECTION.)

BEGIN SOUND: Feet hitting earth.

(YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

I'll recall my dreams through sense:

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

The smack of feet against earth, collapsed tendons, torn viscera.

YOUNG MAN

I'll search these sensations for Truth, and the Truths I find will appear at once feeble and necessary;

END SOUND: Feet hitting earth.

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

(Without pause.)

the fallacies invaluable, worthless.

YOUNG MAN

(Turns back toward audience, looking down at right hand.)

I'll recall the truths of fictions. Staring at the scar, I'll imagine I'm like Cupid mocked by Apollo.

LIGHTS UP.

ENTER BROTHER, STAGE-LEFT.

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

Days later, when his brother teased him,

BROTHER

(Punches YOUNG MAN in the arm.)

Idiot. Why would you use your hand to knock out *broken glass*?

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

The boy shrugged and stared at his bandaged palm.

YOUNG MAN looks down at right hand.

ENTER two EXTRAS. They clothe BROTHER in a Roman-style red cape and YOUNG MAN in a Roman-style white cape. They give bows to YOUNG MAN and APOLLO. BROTHER is now APOLLO, and YOUNG MAN is now CUPID.

ENTER DAPHNE, walking through woods, picking flowers, touching and smelling foliage.

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

But when Apollo mocked Cupid—

APOLLO

(Gesturing toward the bow and arrows.)

These are the weapons of men and warriors, not trifles for a boy.

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

—Cupid shot him with a golden arrow.

(Draws bow, pantomimes shooting APOLLO with golden arrow. Draws bow again, pantomimes shooting DAPHNE with leaden arrow.)

As the Sun God turned to set eyes on the wood nymph, Daphne, he fell in love and watched Cupid's leaden arrow as it sang toward her.

DAPHNE stops what she's doing and seems disturbed. The arrow startles her, but it doesn't hurt. She looks around suspiciously and pulls her clothing tight. She sees APOLLO staring at her and backs away. APOLLO does not run, but walks quickly after her.

CUPID

When the arrow struck, Daphne vowed a life of chastity.

As CUPID continues to speak, ENTER EXTRA to take his bow and cape. EXIT EXTRA. CUPID is now the YOUNG MAN.

BEGIN SOUND: Running water.

YOUNG MAN

She watched Apollo leap from Mount Olympus and fled on his approach. Recalling the unknown threat of my dreams, the sensation of stilled motion, I'll see myself as her,

DAPHNE

(Without pause.)

running from the inescapable Sun God, hiding in Peneus, my father's river.

ENTER two EXTRAS with a length of sheer blue fabric. They wave this in front of DAPHNE, miming the river's movement.

(DAPHNE CONT'D)

His cold waters rush, stiffen, envelope my skin in crescent ripples, stealing my contours.

YOUNG MAN

(Watching DAPHNE.)

She wept, begged for help, but the River God Peneus only watched as,

APOLLO closes in on DAPHNE, quickly at first, then slowing as he finds her in the river. He goes to her and takes her in his arms.

(YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

in his own waters, Apollo descended. Held her. Caressed her trembling torso.

DAPHNE

Cover me, O Mother Earth! Destroy the beauty that has injured me or change the body that destroys my life.

The two EXTRAS drop the fabric. EXIT EXTRAS.

END SOUND: Running water.

BEGIN SOUND: groaning wood and soft wind.

YOUNG MAN

As Gaia took pity on her, Daphne's skin shriveled, stiffened, twisted. Her eyes and ears closed and sank, faded into the body and branches of a laurel tree.

END SOUND: groaning wood (soft wind continues).

DAPHNE is now a tree. APOLLO still caresses as he laments over her transformation.

(YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

Perhaps I was not, in my dream, fleeing. But chasing. Maybe I'm Apollo, clutching at Daphne as she changes. As he lost the woman he'd been made to love, he laid his hand where her chest had been and found a muffled throb behind stiff bark. He tore branches from her body, braided them into a crown.

BEGIN SOUND: Muffled heartbeat.

APOLLO reaches up and tears branches (DAPHNE's arms) from the laurel tree (sound of wood cracking). He kneels down, away from the audience, as if working with the branches. He stands, turns to face the audience, and places a crown of laurel branches on his head.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE 2: TEETH AND FREUD

STAGE-LEFT: A porcelain sink. STAGE-RIGHT: FREUD sits in a Victorian-style armchair. He takes careful notes on the following scene.

LIGHTS UP: Dim and shifting between red, green, and blue.

ENTER YOUNG MAN, STAGE-RIGHT, running across to STAGE-LEFT with his hand over his mouth. Collapses over sink.

YOUNG MAN

I resign, collapse o—

(Heaves and retches.)

I re—

(Heaves and retches.)

I resign, co—

(Heaves and retches. Spits tooth into sink.)

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

I resign, collapse over a sink. Face covered in saltwater and mucus, I spit a tooth clattering over porcelain, then cup hand to mouth as I heave and retch.

Putting his hand back over his mouth, YOUNG MAN heaves and retches. After a while, he removes his hand from his mouth and lifts himself up from the sink, breathing heavily. After a few moments, he leans into the sink again, now vomiting a seemingly endless stream of teeth.

BEGIN SOUND: Endless teeth rushing into sink and spilling onto a tile floor.

(REC. OF YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

From my lips spills a torrent of enamel that floods over the sink and down to the floor like jagged, white coins roaring from a slot machine. The roots of individual teeth prick and pinch, cluster over feet and toes. The torrent never ends before the dream.

END SOUND: Endless teeth.

LIGHTS: No longer shifting colors.

YOUNG MAN lifts himself out of the sink. Throughout scene, he sniffles and wipes his face with his sleeve.

YOUNG MAN

Again, I'll search for meaning. Freud, of course, would say,

FREUD

(Stops taking notes. Stands quickly. Paces, strokes his beard, and smokes from his pipe as he speaks.)

You are sexually repressed, young man. Nothing other than the masturbatory desires of puberty furnish the motive power of these dreams of teeth. The genitals, you see, are replaced by the face in the symbolism of unconscious thought, which equates your cheeks with your buttocks, nose with penis, and head hair with pubic hair.

(Picks up notebook and begins writing. Stops. Looks at projection of teeth. Writes more. Stops.)

Only one feature—the teeth—is beyond all possibility of being compared in this way; but it is just this coincidence of agreement and disagreement which makes the teeth suitable for purposes of representation under the pressure of sexual repression.

YOUNG MAN

(Turns to look at FREUD. Wipes face. Walks toward FREUD.)

So, because teeth don't fit into your theory, they represent— What? The sexually repressed person? Which is supposed to be me, right? And teeth *not fitting* into the theory *proves* it? My head hair is pubic hair? My cheeks are buttcheeks?

Extended pause as FREUD nods and, looking at YOUNG MAN, continues to smoke his pipe.

(YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

(Sarcastically.)

Perhaps I should look elsewhere for Truth. One website suggests that I'll come into money;

(Steps toward Freud, as if mocking him.)

another that I'll lose money;

FREUD doesn't look up, but scoffs again and continues writing.

(YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

one says I fear rejection, embarrassment, inferiority;

FREUD, suddenly interested, looks up and watches YOUNG MAN, then sits back down to write.

(YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

that I lack power and self-confidence.

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

I am voiceless. According to the *Dictionary of Dreams*, "For one tooth to fall out, foretells disagreeable news; "if two, it denotes unhappy states that the dreamer will be plunged into from no carelessness on his part. "If three fall out, sickness and accidents of a very serious nature will follow. "Seeing all the teeth drop out, death and famine usually will prevail."

YOUNG MAN

The Ancient Greeks believed that dreams of rotten or missing teeth foretold sickness or death of a family member.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE 3: THE CHANGELING

BEGIN SOUNDS: Hospital noises (heart monitor; machines that make breath-like sounds; a phone; offstage voices of doctors, nurses, and patients). A soft ticking comes at intervals like a heartbeat but slightly faster.

A barrier divides the stage. STAGE-LEFT, MOTHER sits in a chair at the end of BROTHER's bed in a private hospital room, rubbing his feet while he sleeps. A muted television is on in the background. YOUNG MAN stands behind her, unnoticed, on a raised platform.

STAGE-RIGHT, hospital nursery.

LIGHTS UP, STAGE-LEFT only.

YOUNG MAN

Sometimes, to find meaning, we must decenter ourselves from the search. Become perfect observers. Witness and encroach on everything and nothing: What Ralph Waldo Emerson called the Transparent Eyeball. So I consider my mother's reality. Her fears among a cacophony of silent nurses and deaf doctors as she rubs her elder son's feet

MOTHER

(Without pause.)

for hours until he goes to sleep. I'd sit there all night, watching him and listening to the hospital noises shrink to a mechanical *beep-hum, tick-tock* life, listening to the *chick-chick-chick* behind his scarred chest. I don't sleep. I just think to myself, *If I stay here—stay awake—he won't die.*

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

LIGHTS UP, STAGE-LEFT only.

MOTHER, very tired, still sits at foot of BROTHER's bed.

YOUNG MAN

Come morning, it's like a scene out of some dark-humored sitcom.

As YOUNG MAN speaks: He crosses into darkness from STAGE-LEFT to -RIGHT; ENTER NURSE behind him, with grocery bag full of medications; she motions for MOTHER to follow her DOWNSTAGE, away from BROTHER's bed; NURSE hands bag to MOTHER.

(YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

(Without pause.)

A nurse hands her a grocery bag literally full with medications: Coumadin, Percocet, other pills whose names I can't remember.

NURSE

(To MOTHER, pulling medications out of the bag and replacing them as she speaks. She talks rapidly, as if preoccupied.)

Oscal, 1100 milligrams twice a day; Renagel, 1600 mills three times daily; half a mill of Calcitrol every day; thirty mills of Sensipar every night; Levothroxin, 25 micrograms a day; Sodium Bicarbonate, 1300 mills three times a day; a quarter mill of Requip and half mill of Klonopin twice a day each.²

EXIT NURSE.

MOTHER places bag on the food cart by BROTHER's bed. She drops into the chair and cries.

(YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

She makes no effort to keep from crying. Soon, words like 'dialysis' and 'renal' become part of her daily vocabulary.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK. YOUNG MAN picks up a stool, sets it amid audience and sits, ready to hear the story MOTHER is about to tell.

ENTER two FAIRIES with a bag. In the bag is a stick shaped roughly like a human child. Walking through nursery, one of them stops at a crib and motions for the other to come over. They're enamored by the baby.

² Pronunciation is very important here: Oscal = *oss-kal*; Renagel = *ree-nuh-jel*; Calcitrol = *kal-sit-rahl*; Sensipar = *sense-ip-ahr*; Levothroxin = *leh-voe-throks-in*; Sodium Bicarbonate = *soe-dee-um by-car-bun-ate*; Requip = *ree-quip*; Klonopin = *klon-oh-pin*

MOTHER rises from chair and walks downstage. She paces in front of the audience, speaking directly to them and occasionally motioning to the scene behind her.

MOTHER

If a woman births a beautiful child, she must take care lest the Fairies grow jealous and wish to raise him as their own.

One of the FAIRIES lifts the baby out of the crib. The other replaces him with a stick of comparable size. As FAIRIES EXIT, BROTHER gets out of bed, walks behind barrier into nursery, sits on a stool.

BEGIN PROJECTION: Stick.

(MOTHER CONT'D)

They may steal the child and leave in his place an enchanted stick: A changeling.

As MOTHER speaks, PROJECTION of stick fades sequentially into images that reflect the following description of the stick's transformation into a human child.

(MOTHER CONT'D)

As new limbs reach and split through tender bark, cracks will spread across the stick's surface, flourish into eyes, lips, ears, nostrils. The wood will twist and stretch, and bark will peel into slivers, revealing pink flesh.

As MOTHER speaks, SOUNDS of wood groaning and splitting fade sequentially into the sound of a cello, then a viola, then a violin, then a crying baby.

(MOTHER CONT'D)

Dry at first—the sound of a rotted tree crumbling under its own weight and crashing to the forest floor—the changeling's voice will creak slowly from cello to viola to violin to human child.

END PROJECTION: Stick.

YOUNG MAN rises from audience and takes CENTER-STAGE as MOTHER turns, walks back to BROTHER's room, and again sits at his now empty bed.

YOUNG MAN

We tell stories to explain, to make comfortable what we can't understand:

BEGIN SOUND: Celtic fiddle.

ENTER FAIRIES. They dance around BROTHER and pamper him. BROTHER stands to speak; FAIRIES continue dancing.

(YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

The beautiful child still lives somewhere,

BROTHER

(Without pause.)

among those the Irish and Scottish Celts called the Fair Folk, the Gentry, the Good People. The Fairies pamper me, serenade me with song and dance.

END SOUND: Celtic fiddle.

EXIT FAIRIES.

BROTHER stands, walks downstage to where MOTHER can see him. MOTHER rises and walks toward him.

(BROTHER CONT'D)

Decades later, when I return, I'll hardly have aged.

MOTHER and BROTHER embrace in almost mock sentimentality.

YOUNG MAN

His family will weep when he comes home. Truth revealed. Happily ever after.

EXIT BROTHER. MOTHER follows him, but stops once he's offstage.

END SOUND: Ticking heartbeat.

(YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

But sometimes the surface is

the truth. Beneath it, nothing.

The child is— But we don't dare say
the word. We use special terms:

*Passed on, No
longer with us.*

We never say
the word. Still,
the end is the end.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE 4: THE STAG

LIGHTS UP.

YOUNG MAN walks slowly across an empty stage. Floor is black. As he walks, a ripping SOUND of feet sticking to and peeling from hot asphalt.

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

When we die, we go to the places we remember from life. The boy steps over asphalt melting in summer's heat. Light bends, swells, flits through the air above it. And from a distance, so does the boy. Soft and sticky beneath his shoes, the ground gives way, lets out wet rips with each step, a fresh stink like burnt wax. He litters the road with tarred black footprints, each releasing a billow of once-trapped air.

ENTER STAG. From edge of stage, he watches YOUNG MAN.

(REC. OF YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

The Ancient Scythians said that when we die, a great Stag cradles our souls in his antlers, carries us to the afterlife. One day, the Stag will find me wandering this road as it melts in the sun.

YOUNG MAN stops walking, as if stuck in the asphalt. ENTER two EXTRAS. They clothe YOUNG MAN in a black cloak, textured like asphalt. EXIT EXTRAS. STAG approaches and circles the YOUNG MAN, sizing him up to figure out how to lift him.

(REC. YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

I only hope that when he does find me, I won't sink into black tar, that it won't rise over me, clutching my flesh in molten stone, filling my pores and the spaces between them, seeping into every hole til I'm preserved, stiff from the inside out, too heavy for the Stag to lift.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE 5: SCHEHERAZADE

LIGHTS UP.

Curtain hides a construction yard at STAGE-LEFT.

STAGE-RIGHT, SULTAN and SCHEHERAZADE sits on a couch.

YOUNG MAN

Another image. Another surrogate for myself: Scheherazade began her tale to the Sultan just one hour before she was to be killed. And the Stag waited for her.

ENTER STAG, STAGE-LEFT. He watches SCHEHERAZADE.

SULTAN

(Outraged to the point of absurdity. Rises from couch and paces as he rants.)

I'll revenge all women for my Queen's infidelity! Each day I shall take a new bride, and each night I shall consummate the marriage. Come morning, my bride shall be strangled.

(Sits down on couch.)

SCHEHERAZADE

(Rises from couch.)

But I didn't finish my story that night or the next. In his desire for closure, the Sultan suspended my execution til I'd resolve the tale. I held him in wait for an end that wouldn't come for a thousand-and-one nights, and I vowed that when I finished, I'd become his queen, a willing sacrifice stuck between life and living: My body and voice to the Sultan in exchange for the lives of others.

Takes SULTAN's hand. Leads him to EXIT, STAGE-LEFT, as she speaks. As they approach their exit, STAG steps aside to let them pass.

There was formerly, sire, a merchant, who was possessed of great wealth, in land, merchandise, and ready money. Having one day an affair of great importance to settle at a considerable distance from home, he mounted his horse, and with only a sort of cloak-bag behind him, in which he had put a few biscuits and dates, he began his journey...

EXIT STAG behind SCHEHERAZADE and SULTAN.

BEGIN SOUND: Ticking heartbeat.

YOUNG MAN

We tell stories so their subjects can live again and again, a thousand lives and more.

END SOUND: Heartbeat.

YOUNG MAN begins walking the construction yard with BROTHER. They stop and kneel at a mud puddle.

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

Once, kneeling on the damp ground of a construction site after a night's rain, the boy's brother told him,

BROTHER

(Without pause. Pointing at the mud puddle.)

Hey, put your hands in this.

YOUNG MAN reaches down and places his hands in the mud puddle. He smiles, enjoying the feeling of the mud and the ompany of his BROTHER.

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

Mud rolled over his hands, warm and pressing, dense. But when he pulled them out,

YOUNG MAN pulls his hands out of the mud. As BROTHER speaks, YOUNG MAN finds that he cannot move his hands.

BROTHER

(Laughing.)

That's special mud. It'll harden, and you'll never be able to get it off.

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

The boy watched in horror as sun-baked mud stiffened and cracked over his hands. He thought they'd never move again.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

END SOUNDS.

SCENE 6: LOT'S WIFE

BEGIN SOUND: Intense fire.

BEGIN VIDEO: Burning city.

LOT and STAG stare at a statue of LOT's wife. LOT does not look at PROJECTION of burning city throughout the scene.

YOUNG MAN

When the Stag came for him, Lot asked,

LOT

(Looking at his wife's statue, but speaking to STAG.)

Will I see my wife again?

YOUNG MAN

But the Stag didn't speak.

(Looks at STAG.)

If he had, he'd have said that her flesh was a prison, that she'd remain—

(Looks at projection. Looks at STAG. Looks at statue.)

That she'd remain this statue of salt because she looked back on the sinful lands of Sodom and Gomorrah that God had ordered burned, that He'd instructed Lot and his family to leave.

(Looks at STAG. Waits. STAG doesn't speak.)

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

(In a booming voice.)

“You!”

STAG

(Looks around, trying to locate the source of the recording. Looks back at YOUNG MAN.)

What the hell was that? Did you seriously record yourself?

YOUNG MAN

The Stag would've said—

(Waits for STAG to speak.)

STAG

(Annoyed.)

No. No. I wouldn't have said anything. I'm a stag. Stags don't talk.

YOUNG MAN

He'd have said,

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

(In an even louder, more powerful voice, almost mockingly.)

“You and your daughters alone were spared.”

STAG

Besides, you jackass, you're mixing up your mythologies. There's no stag in the Biblical story of Lot's Wife.

(To LOT.)

Unless I'm sorely mistaken.

LOT

No, no stags. Angels, sure, but no stags.

(To YOUNG MAN.)

See, what happened is—

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

(Interrupts LOT. Even louder than before.)

“You who offered young girls, your own daughters, to suffer the abuses of

men who'd have killed angels to delay God's wrath. Men He blinded for their anger, vice, and arrogance."

YOUNG MAN looks at STAG, then projection, then LOT.

LOT

But, see, things were different back then. It was customary for men to offer
—

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

(Interrupts LOT. Louder, now angry.)

"You who did not look back. You who would not lament your nameless wife when she turned to witness her home's destruction and was transformed into this statue of salt."

LOT

Well, I mean, she had a name. It just wasn't really important to the story. Her name was—

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

(Interrupts LOT.)

"You who lay drunk with your own daughters are spared. Father to the sons of incest. You and your daughters alone."

LOT

Now wait just one minute—

STAG

(Puts up a hand to quiet LOT. To YOUNG MAN, Annoyed.)

All these allegories and surrogates.

(Pointing at LOT as he approaches YOUNG MAN.)

Who's he supposed to be in all this? You?

LOT

(To STAG.)

You know, that's a good point.

(To YOUNG MAN.)

Just what're you trying to say with all these stories? What authority do you even have here?

YOUNG MAN

Well, I *am* the storyteller—the *author*. I imagine that gives me some kind of *author-ity*, right?

LOT

Oh, come on.

(Points to STAG, still looking at YOUNG MAN.)

Answer his question already. Are you trying to compare yourself to me? Or, what, my wife?

STAG

(Waits for YOUNG MAN to answer.)

Well, which is it? Are you saying you looked back on some supposed sin? Or that you left this lone dissenter from God's word on the cliffs of Mount Gomorrah?

LOT

(With sudden realization, points up toward God. To YOUNG MAN, mockingly.)

A stone testament to your callous obedience under the tyranny of His wrath.

YOUNG MAN

(Feeling frustrated and defeated.)

Fine. Forget the damn story. I was trying to say something about petrification in myth and link it to my own emotional— I wanted to say something about how I'm connected to these stories, but you obviously don't get it.

(To LOT.)

Nevermind, okay. Just go. It's not working.

EXIT LOT, STAGE-LEFT.

LOT'S WIFE

(To YOUNG MAN, maintaining her pose.)

Can I go too? This is getting really uncomfortable.

END PROJECTION: Burning City.

YOUNG MAN

Fine. Go ahead.

EXIT LOT'S WIFE, STAGE-RIGHT.

(YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

(Thoughtfully, to himself.)

Am I the Transparent Eyeball?

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

(Without pause.)

The oblivial/omniscient narrator/witness.

STAG

(Annoyed, still looking for source of recording.)

What the hell's that supposed to mean? Is "oblivial" even a word?

YOUNG MAN

(Irritated, slowly redelivers the cue.)

Am I the Eyeball—

(Sighs and shakes head. Slowly and irritatedly.)

Am I the *Transparent* Eyeball?

SOUND: Cassette tape rewinds.

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

"Seeing all the teeth drop out, death and famine—"

YOUNG MAN

(Yells.)

Too far!

STAG

That's that Emerson thing, right? The Transparent Eyeball? "Witness and encroach on everything and nothing?"

YOUNG MAN

(Grits teeth. Exhales for pause. Begins again, very slowly, looking angrily at STAG.)

Am I *Emerson's* Transparent Eyeball?

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

(Without pause.)

The oblivial/omniscient narrator/witness, forgotten but present.

YOUNG MAN

(Without pause.)

Present but static. At once vocal

YOUNG MAN & REC. OF YOUNG MAN

(YOUNG MAN speaks two or three words ahead of REC. OF YOUNG MAN.)

and voiceless: The compulsive repetitions of tongues lost in an endless stutter.

(YOUNG MAN smiles, pleased with himself for getting this last bit of dialogue right.)

STAG

(Scoffs.)

Oh, for Christ's sake.

EXIT STAG, STAGE-LEFT.

ENTER FREUD, STAGE-RIGHT, with The Interpretation of Dreams. Approaches YOUNG MAN. Watches him.

YOUNG MAN

I've read that dreams predict the future,

FREUD groans angrily. YOUNG MAN stops for a moment, but pretends not to notice.

(YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

that they tell us how to live or how not to. Some say that they're machinations, divinations of God or the gods.

FREUD lowers his head in anger and frustration.

(YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

That they're the dead clinging to the blurred rims of our memories. That they're our inner selves—if you believe in such things.

FREUD

Which I, of course, absolutely do not.

YOUNG MAN

Our souls. Our collective soul.

FREUD

(Throws down his book.)

What!? Oh, go ahead! Say it! Say it! Our "collective unconscious?" That's where you're going with all this? A lot of garbage, that's what that is, damned refuse!

(Scoffs and storms off.)

YOUNG MAN

I've read that dreams are the id in search

FREUD stops and looks back, over his shoulder.

(YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

of satisfaction. That they have meaning we can divine if we search, interpret, let go of the self and witness. I've also read that dreams speak for those dissonant parts of our days that we most often don't remember.

(Looks at FREUD. Pointedly.)

That they're meaningless—

EXIT FREUD, STAGE-RIGHT, angrily.

(YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

(Clears throat.)

That dreams are simply meaningless thoughts and events that break off soon after they begin. We grasp for endings to unfinished stories. For a change, a revelation triggered by a moment or object having achieved its absolute purpose; what Plato called its *telos*; what James Joyce called its *radiant whatness*.

HECKLER FROM AUDIENCE

Yeah, and what someone else probably called some other fancy-pants, tie-tightening, garbage! Get to the point already!

YOUNG MAN

(Obviously affected, but ignores HECKLER. Clears throat, turns from audience. Paces briefly. Stops. Faces audience.)

We grasp for surrogates, stand-ins to undermine the endless dynamism of reality. We grasp for something that lets us sleep and wake to our own voices, our own stories, so we can be calm in the knowledge that the end comes when we want;

that there's truth behind the image;

that the world is finite

insofar only as we choose to see.

ENTER EXTRA with bed. EXIT EXTRA.

YOUNG MAN lies down to sleep.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE 7: END

A bar counter divides the stage. STAGE-LEFT of bar, a screen with a silhouette of FATHER sitting at bar. STAGE-RIGHT of bar, BARTENDER pours him whiskey and ginger ale, cleans glasses, wipes counter, counts money in register, etc. throughout scene.

SOFT SPOTLIGHT on YOUNG MAN, still in bed.

BEGIN SOUND: Ticking heart.

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

Someplace I'm not

sleeping, a man sits

at a bar, waits

for someone who has

left, is leaving, will

leave.

In his eighth 7 & Ginger Ale,

he dreams he's at rest,

at home with his sons—

both alive, awake. He dreams

that he sleeps & doesn't

dream. That his breath isn't

breath, but a pulse—not

his, ours, as we are

still. In bed I wake,

END SOUND: Ticking heart.

As REC. continues, YOUNG MAN opens his eyes. Throughout scene, his body convulses slightly as he tries to breathe and cough.

(REC. OF YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

or think I wake, trying to cough, unable to move. My eyes—the only animate parts of my body—search the air darkly

BEGIN SOUND: High-pitched, sustained ringing. Quiet at first, it grows louder as scene goes on.

SOUND: Thick-sounding thud, as of heavy object falling onto a carpeted floor.

BEGIN PROJECTION: A silhouette standing in a doorway.

(REC. OF YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

(Without pause.)

for the source of an indistinct sound, for a presence I can feel. Sometimes, despite my fear of that presence, I think it's my father, but most often it's nondescript. He hovers in the doorway. I don't remember him sitting by me, but I'm certain he was. His back's to me as if he's leaving and has stopped only for a moment to reconsider, to say something. But he doesn't turn back or speak. My abdomen tightens as I try

YOUNG MAN's body moves slightly as he tries and fails to speak.

(REC. OF YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

(Without pause.)

to push air through my vocal chords. But they're thick, stiff like stone, wet, immovable. Suddenly, I'm the men and women of ancient myth: Daphne, Echo, Scheherazade; I'm Apollo, Orpheus, Lazarus; I'm buried, chained, weighted, silent.

END SOUND: High-pitched ringing.

(REC. OF YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

I want only to utter, to speak, to call out, to move,
to escape this palsy.

The man has returned to his

childhood home. He spends nights
 with strange men & women. Eyes
 rose-rimmed, they offer drugs
 from his youth. Most nights
 he declines. But other nights I hear him:

LIGHTS UP SLIGHTLY, but still dim.

(REC. OF YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

(Without pause.)

Pressure builds where air is stopped. Stone cracks and crumbles.

END PROJECTION: Silhouette in doorway.

BEGIN SOUND: Falling hail.

(REC. OF YOUNG MAN CONT'D)

Outside my dream, lips part like dead wood shorn from ancient trees as an
 unsettled

YOUNG MAN

(Without pause.)

Uhh.

(Groans as REC. continues.)

REC. OF YOUNG MAN

(Without pause.)

crawls from between them. Pieces of a fractured groan roll from my throat,
 take up speed. Thrown from the dream,

LIGHTS UP: Almost painfully bright.

YOUNG MAN

(Sits up quickly, inhales and exhales once, very loudly and deeply. Continues to breathe heavily as he looks, terrified, at the blank projection screen.)

I lock eyes on the doorway and search for the man, but he's gone. My breath is staggered, fierce. My skin trembles,

swamped in sweat. I still hear

marble words roll from his tongue: Velar

consonants blunted by drunken vowels.

I wonder if he wakes

in the night. Does he call

our names? Does he cough

(Waits for cough, but silence.)

as I remember? Phlegm clattering

in his trachea; hail

breaking over wet stone.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

SOUND of hail rises, holds at a high volume for several seconds.

FADE OUT SOUND of hail.

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ACADEMIC VITA

Eric Botts

2324-B East 43rd Street

Apartment 4

Erie, PA 16510

Education

B.F.A, Creative Writing, Minor in English Literature, Forthcoming 2012, Penn State Erie,
The Behrend College, Erie, PA

A.A., Multimedia Graphic Design, 2007, Erie Institute of Technology, Erie, PA

Honors and Awards

Smith and Eugenie Creative Writing Scholarship, Pennsylvania State University (2010-12)

Fiction Semi-Finalist: Four-Year College Writing Contest, The Norman Mailer Center and
the Norman Mailer Writers Colony (2012)

First Place: Corey Farrell Award in Literary Nonfiction, Pennsylvania State University
(2012)

First Place: Katey Lehman Award in Journalism, Pennsylvania State University (2012)

Second Place: Katey Lehman Award in Poetry, Pennsylvania State University (2012)

Third Place: Matthew Mihelcic Poetry Award, Pennsylvania State University (2012)

Semi-Finalist: Small Format Book Contest, The Poetry Society of New Hampshire (2012)

Lake Erie Trustee Scholarship, Pennsylvania State University (2012)

Merwin Trustee Scholarship, Pennsylvania State University (2012)

First Place: Undergraduate Fiction Award, Pennsylvania College English Association
(2011)

Third Place: Katey Lehman Award in Journalism, Pennsylvania State University (2011)

Third Place: Katey Lehman Award in Fiction, Pennsylvania State University (2011)

Third Place: Kennedy Fiction Award, Pennsylvania State University (2011)

Honorable Mention: Katey Lehman Award in Poetry, Pennsylvania State University (2011)

Merwin Trustee Scholarship, Pennsylvania State University (2011)

Evan Pugh Award for Academic Excellence, Pennsylvania State University (2011)

Nominee: Outstanding Writing Tutor Award, Pennsylvania State University (2011)

First Place: Edward J. Nichols Award in Literary Nonfiction, Pennsylvania State
University (2010)

First Place: Edward J. Nichols Award in Fiction, Pennsylvania State University (2010)

First Place: Kennedy Fiction Award, Pennsylvania State University (2010)

Second Place: Katey Lehman Award in Fiction, Pennsylvania State University (2010)

President's Freshman Award, Pennsylvania State University (2009)

Dean's List, Pennsylvania State University (2009-12)

Association Memberships/Activities

President of the Roundtable Society, Penn State Erie, The Behrend College Fine Arts Club
(2011-12)

Treasurer of the Roundtable Society (2011)

Editorial Experience

Lake Effect Literary Magazine, Nonfiction Editor (2011-12), Poetry Editor (2011)

Three Bad Names, Penn State Erie, The Behrend College Student Literary Magazine,
Editor-in-Chief (2011-12)

City Birds, collection of poems by Harding Elementary students in Erie, PA, Editor (2012)

Junkyard Starship, mock instruction manual for building a starship out of Legos, Primary
Editor (2012)

Tutoring and Teaching Experience

Writing Tutor, Learning Resource Center at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College, (2010-
12)

GRE Preparation Instructor, Learning Resource Center at Penn State Erie, The Behrend
College (2011-12)

Composition Support Tutor, Learning Resource Center at Penn State Erie, The Behrend
College (2012)

Private Tutor (2011-12)

Teaching Assistant, Dr. Archie Loss at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College (2009)

Research Interests

I am interested in the connections and divisions among literary genres. I want to explore the ways in which contemporary literature has become divided into poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and drama and the ways in which authors like Jenny Boully, Salman Rushdie, and Samuel Beckett have challenged those divisions.

I also have broad interests in world mythologies and folk tales, particularly in Greek, Roman, Hindu, and Abrahamic traditions. Specifically, I am interested in the direct and indirect influences of those traditions on modern and contemporary literature.

Professional Presentations

Theatrical performance of original play, “Still, Voice;” sponsored by the Schreyer Honors College, Penn State Erie, The Behrend College, and the office of Humanities and Social Sciences at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College; the Studio Theatre at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College; 2012

Public reading of personal essay, “They Implore His Goodness to Let Them Know;” sponsored by the Pennsylvania College English Association and Penn State Erie, The Behrend College; Hilton Scranton Hotel and Conference Center in Scranton, PA; 2012

Public reading of short story, “Under the Trailer;” sponsored by the Pennsylvania College English Association and Penn State Erie, The Behrend College; Sheraton Bayfront Hotel in Erie, PA; 2011

Public reading of personal essay, “Myths in Petrification;” sponsored by the Annual Gender Conference at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College; Smith Chapel at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College; 2011

Writing Projects and Publications

“Atrophied, Swollen.” *Kalliope*. 2012.

Journalistic article about a charity benefit for an impoverished family in Erie, PA;

Won the 2012 Katey Lehman Award in journalism and was published in that year's issue of *Kalliope*

We in Our Tongues Divided. Forthcoming 2012.

Undergraduate thesis consisting of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction

"We in Our Tongues Divided." 2012.

Title poem of undergraduate thesis; Retelling and synthesis of Tower of Babel and Prometheus myths; Won second place in the Katey Lehman Award for poetry in 2012

"Frank's Hands." 2011.

One of fourteen poems in a double crown of sonnets; Protagonist, Frank, transforms metaphorically into an image of Christ; Won third place in the Matthew Mihelcic Poetry Award for 2012

"They Implore His Goodness to Let Them Know." 2011.

Personal essay about notions of paradise and utopia; Won first place in the Corey Farrell Award in literary nonfiction for 2012

"Stag." 2010.

Short story about woman who kills a mythological stag; Won third place in the Kennedy Fiction Award for 2011

"Myths in Petrification." 2010.

Personal essay about death, myths, and dream analysis; Won first place in the Corey Farrell Award in literary nonfiction for 2011; Won first place in the Edward J. Nichols Award in literary nonfiction for 2011

"Under the Trailer." 2010.

Short fiction about a young interracial boy and his family; Won first place in the

Undergraduate Fiction Contest for the Pennsylvania College English Association in
2011

“Friction on the Kitchen Floor.” 2010.

Short fiction companion piece to “Under the Trailer;” Fiction semi-finalist for the
Norman Mailer Four-Year College Writing Contest in 2012; Won second place in
the Katey Lehman Award for fiction in 2010