A Post-Marxist Perspective on Chuck Palahniuk’s Early Novels and the Four Plays of Incarcerated

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A POST-MARXIST PERSPECTIVE ON CHUCK PALAHNIUK'S EARLY NOVELS AND THE FOUR PLAYS OF INCARCERATED

by

Ron Riekki

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Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
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Ron Riekki
A POST-MARXIST PERSPECTIVE ON CHUCK PALAHNIUK'S EARLY NOVELS AND THE FOUR PLAYS OF INCARCERATED

Ron Riekki, Ph.D.
Western Michigan University, 2007

_Incarcerated: a collection of four plays_ includes the plays _Home Schooling_, _Good Behavior_, _2 Mics_, and _All Saints' Day_. Incarcerated explores Foucault's carceral networking and Althusser's Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses as exemplified in characters faced with such cataclysmic events as the Holocaust (_Home Schooling_ and _All Saints' Day_) and the degradation/slavery of the American prison system (_Good Behavior_ and _2 Mics_). In this RCG-centered working class playwriting, we see how performativity is inherent in carceral sociology, where each character in all four plays has to take masks and costumes and roles in order to survive, because incarceration (whether in literal prisons or metaphorical prisons) is all about one word: survival.
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INTRODUCTION

In a 12/08/04 paper I wrote for the Studies in Drama course at WMU entitled “Postmodern Fragmentation: The Writing of Kathy Acker and Sarah Kane,” I argue that playwriting and fiction writing should not be categorically separated, that they mesh together and speak to each other. In that paper, I look at the dialogue/playwriting-centered style in Acker’s prose in sections from her *The Adult Life of Toulouse Lautrec* and *Implosion* and the experimental prose-centered style of Kane’s playwriting in sections from her *Blasted* and *4.48 Psychosis*. As someone with MFAs in Fiction Writing (Virginia) and Playwriting (Brandeis), I feel it is critical—at least for my own writing—to incorporate the techniques of both forms in my writing. I’m also an avid fiction reader (Kathy Acker, Richard Allen, Samuel Beckett, Richard Brautigan, Charles Bukowski, William S. Burroughs Jr., Don DeLillo, Bret Easton Ellis, Nick Hornby, Franz Kafka, Jack Kerouac, Jay McInerney, George Orwell, and the list goes on). In fact, I read more fiction than I do plays. More often than not, I *see* plays. I *go to* plays—as many as I can. I want to experience the visuals of plays, experience the audience of plays, experience the experience of plays, so when I think of my own writing, even when it’s playwriting, especially when I am analyzing my own work, I first think of fiction writers over playwrights. Fiction writers influence my playwriting so much that I have found myself adapting the works of Jane Collier, Joseph Conrad, Jerome K. Jerome, Edgar Allan Poe, and even my own fiction.
But I would expand a list of my strongest influences out beyond fiction writers to include literary theorists. When I write, in the back of my mind are the theories of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Sigmund Freud, Rudolph Otto, Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Martin Luther King, Jean Baudrillard, Laura Mulvey, Donna Haraway, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Judith Butler, . . . To say what theories exactly informed the techniques in my work, to point out those specifics, in a way, can feel like some of the magic of writing is lessened. I can find myself almost forcing an explanation that, after I say it, feels like I have missed the target or, as Larry McMurtry puts it:

John Barth said that writers talking about their work are like athletes talking about a game after they’ve played it: they can create ingenious explanations for why they did what they did, but while they’re playing, they’re essentially just hitting the ball. And they’re hitting the ball well or badly because of highly trained intuitions, skills, disciplines, actions, etc. And I feel that way about trying to talk about my work. I don’t think I should ever be taken as the definitive commentator on it. [...] Anything writers say about their own work should be taken with a grain of salt because mostly they’re just sort of schmoozing (Bunge 171).

To resist schmoozing, faux, forced commentary on my own work—which I could imagine happening if, for example, I compared my own writing to Shakespeare’s—instead I have chosen to focus on who I actually feel has influenced me and that is not the playwriting of William Shakespeare but rather the fiction of Chuck Palahniuk. But the reason I feel Palahniuk’s writing has influenced mine is that we have the same literary theorists who influenced our writing, namely Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser.
Foucault and Althusser interest me because their theories on incarceration (the carceral) and surveillance (panoptics) are so relevant to contemporary American society. As of December 2000, there were 1,933,503 people in federal and state prisons and local jails and 4,565,059 people on probation or parole and “in the past decade, the total correctional population increased 49%. There were 2.1 million more men and women under correctional supervision in 2000 than in 1990” (“Correctional” 1). The 2006 numbers are close to 2.2 million people in the U.S. prison population. The interconnection of capitalism, surveillance, and ever-expanding incarceration is central to Althusser and Foucault’s literary theories, Palahniuk’s fiction, and my own playwriting.
A POST-MARXIST PERSPECTIVE ON CHUCK PALAHNIUK'S EARLY NOVELS AND THE FOUR PLAYS OF INCARCERATED

O: In talking about your works in the past, you've quoted Michel Foucault, Marshall McLuhan, Camus, Kierkegaard... Do you read a lot of philosophy and cultural critique?
CP: Yeah, I do, because it's always giving me glimpses into understanding parts of the world I took for granted before. I love that. You just think things are a certain way, and then you find out the nature of why they're that way. I'm in love with that moment of insight.
O: Do you consciously write to meet philosophical theories you've read?
CP: Totally consciously (Robinson 1).
—excerpt from an interview with Chuck Palahniuk from The Onion A.V. Club

From structuralism to feminist literary criticism, there are plenty of ways to approach a text, but when Chuck Palahniuk himself tells you that he "totally consciously" writes with theory in mind and when he has been known to quote directly from Michael Foucault in interviews, then a Foucaultian analysis of his texts seems not only obvious, but necessary. In his Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Foucault argues that society "is itself prisonlike, 'carceral'" ("Michel" 1618) linked by a network of prisonlike or carceral "apparatuses" (Foucault 1639). By 'carceral' Foucault means the prison-like qualities of modern existence, the ever-present watchfulness of camera, how people are constantly under surveillance and in fact crave that watchfulness. The term is "[r]elated to the act of incarceration and to

1 The creative dissertation aspect to my dissertation is entitled Incarcerated: A Collection of Four Plays and includes my plays Home Schooling, 2 Mics, Good Behavior, and All Saints’ Day. The plays of Incarcerated immediately follow the theoretical aspect of my dissertation entitled "A Post-Marxist Perspective on Chuck Palahniuk's Early Novels and the Short Plays of Incarcerated."
institutions that discipline the body, especially prisons” (“Foucault” 1636). This conception of Foucault is critical to understanding Palahniuk’s writing, and, as my writing is so influenced by Palahniuk’s, this conception is also critical to understanding my own writing. In tandem with Foucault’s conception of carceral apparatuses/mechanisms is Louis Althusser’s post-Marxist conception of the inter-networking of corresponding (and in many ways similar) Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs).

The State is a ‘machine’ of repression, which enables the ruling classes [. . . ] to ensure their domination over the working class, thus enabling the former to subject the latter to the process of surplus-value extortion (i.e. to capitalist exploitation).

The State is thus first of all what the Marxist classics have called the State apparatus. This terms means: not only the specialized apparatus (in the narrow sense) whose existence and necessity I have recognized in relation to the requirements of legal practice, i.e. the police, the courts, the prisons [or carceral]; but also the army (“From” 1487).

The parallels between Foucault’s “hegemony”-intertwined (Foucault 1670) ‘carceral’ and Althusser’s “class”-linked (“From” 1484) ‘prisons’ are obvious; they are one, unified. And, they are represented both in Palahniuk’s fiction writing and my playwriting, but, beyond that, almost seem like a trend of the 90s.

Perhaps this weaving of post-Marxist theory and “transgressive” (Foucault 1628) fiction/discourse that occurs in the 1990s is a reaction against 1980s Reaganomics; but wherever its roots lie, the results are several 1990s era authors fascinated by this combination. Examples include Bret Easton Ellis (American Psycho, 1991), Scott Bradfield (Animal Planet, 1995), Irvine Welsh (Filth, 1998), and
Douglas Coupland (*Microserfs*, 1995). These writers' novels all have strong post-Marxist commentary central to their themes. In Coupland's book, for example, a character says, "Just think—we're rapidly approaching a world composed entirely of jail and shopping" (Coupland 261). We see the same post-Marxist theory and economics infatuation in the Pulitzer Prize winning dramas *Rent* (1996) by Jonathan Larson and *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* (1993) by Tony Kushner. Right as this time, I was also writing one of my first produced plays, which, without even knowing it, was perfectly tied into transgressional, post-Marxist, post-80s writing—a play that was an anti-capitalism rant entitled *Coffeehouse Philosophy and the Pain It Causes* (1996). This link between capitalism and the carceral/prison-like is perhaps at its apex artistically in the mid-90s novels of Chuck Palahniuk.

Palahniuk's novels repeatedly take anti-capitalistic stances, a viewpoint of mocking corporations, often destroying the symbols of capitalistic enterprise, those enterprises being encrusted with and entrusted to the complex network of ISAs—complex and yet quotidian. In Althusser's groundbreaking *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes toward an Investigation)* he distinctly labels several of the primarily identifiable ISAs, including the religious, the educational, the familial, the legal, the political, and the cultural. Palahniuk's satirical attack on ideology—and thereby a direct attack on capitalism as capitalism and ideology are inseparable bedmates—is not disguised; in both *Survivor* and *Invisible Monsters*, it is an in-your-face brutal unmasking of those ISAs. This unmasking operates in terms of attacking
ideology on a grand scale: religious, familial, and political ISA representations are mocked and symbolically ransacked.

Palahniuk’s early novels *Survivor, Invisible Monsters*, and *Fight Club* equally undermine property-family ideology. In his fiction, Palahniuk views the ‘house’ as a symbol to be overturned: the house serving as a prison-like protective edifice to maintaining ideological order. The ‘house’ and all of its capitalistic ramifications and manifestations are treated with disdain, something to be destroyed, set fire to, looted, and even exploded. These capitalistic manifestations of ‘house’ include “a condominium on the fifteenth floor of a high-rise” (*Fight Club* 41) and the “Parker-Morris Building” (*Fight Club* 13) that are both completely decimated, a “baronial West Hills manor house” set on fire, (*Invisible Monsters* 272), a “four-bedroom Maplewood Chateau” (*Survivor* 51) where the contents are smashed “in the street” (*Survivor* 46), “a commercial bakery that’s going to explode” (*Survivor* 183), “a gas station going to explode” (*Survivor* 181), a “movie theater [. . . that] will burn,” (*Survivor* 119), etc. The house has direct connections to a plethora of ISAs; in many ways it is the ISA symbol (with the White House perhaps being the RSA symbol). Legal steps must be taken to acquire a house. It is a religious ceremony—marriage—that most often triggers the purchase of a house, or an upgrading to a larger house. The family, of course, is centered in the house. Links to communication ISA/ideology-spreading devices are commonplace in the home; large screen and Dolby surround sound ensure the communication ISA is given added weight, significance, volume. This interrelationship is centered in the home and it is the
home that Palahniuk sets out to if not destroy then to significantly redefine, a redefinition of the cliché nuclear family of contemporary conservative familial ideology. Palahniuk’s writes about a man battling against capitalistic servitude with various ‘houses’ as symbol of that battle. The destruction of those houses is a violently symbolic repudiation against the carceral “power of normalization” (Foucault 1647).

In my own writing, Good Behavior, 2 Mics, and Home Schooling are all house-less plays, taking place in a prison interrogation room, an automobile, and an unidentified room respectively. In many ways this house-lessness is tied to the homelessness represented in the plays. The attempt was to formulate a literature in what Hungarian critic Georg Lukacs termed as “the ‘epic of homelessness’ […] a human being lost among commodities” (Inchausti 49). Home Schooling, in fact, is a selection from a longer work that was given funding through the Graduate College to write a play on the international homeless situation. Palahniuk’s deconstructivist approach to the house as familial ISA symbol is in my short plays inverted to a lack of house and thereby a lack of family. Think in terms of the absent fathers in Good Behavior, 2 Mics, and Home Schooling. All Saints’ Day though is much more in vein with Palahniuk’s writing with houses as an omnipresent fixture to the set, although represented solely through the use of door as prop. The commentary on consumerism is as constant in the play as is found in Palahniuk’s novels with All Saints’ Day’s ending stage direction symbolically exemplifying Marx’s/Palahniuk’s conception of capitalism’s inevitable “demise” (“Karl” 761):
NON-TOT tips his head to TOT. TOT heads out into the night. NON-TOT watches. The sound of cold wind that blows the smiling skeleton down onto the ground. Very faintly, a flicker, in the distance, somewhere between where TOT left and NON-TOT stands, preferably on the same spot where the smiling skeleton hung, shows an image of Auschwitz, of the Holocaust, skeleton images in their real manner, sad and historical. Then it is gone in the blink of an eye. This image should appear the second that NON-TOT turns to go back into the house, so that if NON-TOT had stayed looking a moment more, the image would have been perhaps seen, noticed, and not missed. Fade to black, except for one sole light shining on the skeleton lying on the ground, the skull especially, its facial expression. From all around comes the soft, haunting, long sound of “sh.” Fade to black, hold black.

This passage falls in line with the general post-apocalyptic clutter and debris of 90s transgressive fiction such as Palahniuk’s *Survivor* end world with its stacks of “vibrators with dead batteries, dog-eared playing cards, expired condoms, brittle and fragile” (*Survivor* 26).

Palahniuk methodically and imagistically\(^2\) represents Capital as reckless, without remedy, leading to its own demonstrated inevitable demises/destructions. In Palahniuk’s first novel *Fight Club* (1996), the author takes pleasure in setting up the extravagance of appliances within the protagonist’s condominium, filling it with IKEA furniture such as Njurunda coffee tables and a Haparanda sofa group with orange slip covers, in order to have them explode, fly down, burning, fifteen stories.\(^3\)

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\(^2\) This reliance on image-to-convey demonstrates Althusser’s belief “that the peculiarity of art is to ‘make us see’ (nous donner à voir)” (“A Letter” 1480).

\(^3\) Palahniuk takes similar pleasure with *Fight Club*’s opening scene in the Parker-Morris Building: “The breaking glass is a window right below us. A window blows out the side of the building, and then comes a file cabinet big as a black refrigerator, right below us a six-drawer filing cabinet drops right out of the cliff face of the building, and drops turning slowly, and drops getting smaller, and drops disappearing into the packed crowd” (*Fight Club* 12). Again, we see house/building/property deconstruction in *Survivor*: “The windows we left open suck air inside, and the easy-living open floor
Over the next three years, in *Survivor* (1999) and *Invisible Monsters* (1999), Palahniuk only expanded upon that almost terroristic approach to materialistic lavishness. The term “terroristic” here is used intentionally. There are overtones of the World Trade Center in Palahniuk’s Parker-Morris Building, both Ground Zeros; and *Survivor* is about an airplane hijacker. (This is coincidental, as the books were written years before 911, but there is a feel that—similar to Kushner’s *Homebody/Kabul*, which was also written prior to 911—the author has his fingers on the world’s pulse.) In *Survivor* the exploding condo of *Fight Club* becomes an endless list of corporate violence scattered throughout the book, a heavy-handed Marxist take on the violence of capitalism. Fertility Hollis dreams of chandeliers falling, planes crashing, and trains derailing; she has visions of movie theaters burning. Those visions it is revealed are coming true, visions including multiple car accidents, tanning salon explosions, subway collisions, oil tanker and cruise ship capsizings, stadium collapsings, and casino fires. A casino on fire—could there be any grander example of Palahniuk’s iconoclastic approach to the money-grubbing West—especially during these current times of Vegas overdose, of endless commercialization of gambling into the mainstream, poker as ESPN ‘sport’? Marx believed that the contradictions of capitalism would eventually lead to its collapse; it plan channels this airstream out through the front doors. Embroidered throw pillows blow off the sofa and bounce out the front doors around Adam. They fly at Fertility, hitting her in the face and almost tripping her. Framed decorative art, botanical print reproductions mostly and tasteful racehorse prints, flap off the walls and sail out to explode into shards of glass and wood slivers and art” (*Survivor* 47). In *Invisible Monsters*, Palahniuk opens up with a house on fire.
is as if Palahniuk is demonstrating that dialectic and the subsequent unavoidable (and near?) collapse of the base and thereby the superstructure—the plots of *Fight Club*, *Survivor*, and *Invisible Monsters* as thesis confronting antithesis.

*Home Schooling*, *Good Behavior*, and *2 Mics* are in many ways post-apocalyptic, thesis and antithesis have already confronted and those who are not of the elite class have already lost—the terrors of the Holocaust, the imprisonment of the ‘criminal,’ the unemployment of the ex-convict. The world of the plays are similarly and symbolically barren—the simplicity of *Good Behavior*’s Belleview Prison with its “Only things in room: three cheap chairs and a cheap table” (*Good 2*), *Home Schooling*’s “a table nearby” (*Home 2*), *2 Mics*’ “car” (*2 3*), and *All Saints’ Day*’s “just a door center-stage” (*All 3*). Whereas, Palahniuk would make the tables and doors and cars into the tables and doors of a “big manor house” (*Invisible 14*) with accessory “red sports car” (*Invisible 208*) only to unabashedly destroy them, the set pieces of the short plays in *Incarcerated* already look as if they have “been through a war” (*Good 2*). The car of *2 Mics* is implied as being beaten up, lower class, used. The environment barely changes, but if it does it is towards one of destruction—the table in *Good Behavior* gets even more war torn, the car in *2 Mics* has even more of its garbage thrown around inside it by play’s end. Working within the confines of the short play, change is much more minimal in terms of environment. The real change happens in respect to the characters (the death of the lawyer in *Good Behavior*, the

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4 *Invisible Monsters* was actually completed before *Fight Club*. In the “Interviews” section of disc 2 of the DVDs to *Postcards from the Future*, Palahniuk’s Doubleday editor Gerry Howard talks about
unspoken vow for Surreal to quit his drug addiction in *2 Mics*, the connecting of family in *Home Schooling*).

In his 297 pages of *Invisible Monsters* and 289 pages of *Survivor*, Palahniuk has much more time than the limitations of the short play form allows to tear apart his "big house[s]" (*Survivor* 271) to ensure his metaphor is thoroughly delivered. This metaphor is significant, because Palahniuk’s satire attacks family ISA/"house" symbolism and perhaps more importantly its counterpart of all-encompassing capitalistic ‘corporate house’ symbolism. But Palahniuk’s satire also aims at products that fill these houses, the output of these corporations, specifically their commodities. Traditionally thought of as helping ease life’s burdens, in Palahniuk’s fiction products themselves are actually weapons.⁵ (In *Good Behavior*, we see this when Teej “begins choking the LAWYER with the LAWYER’s necktie” [*Good* 13].) Suicides occur with and by the aid of capitalistic product. For Palahniuk the technology of capitalism is demonstrably object-bondage, tied to alienation, and this manifests in suicide using capitalistic object, death from labor-separated object. In *Survivor*, a battery explodes acid into a car mechanic’s face; a hair spray bottle supposedly explodes into Shannon McFarland’s brother’s face. In the consumer society of Palahniuk’s fictional worlds (and our non-fictional worlds), face has specific meaning—face is more valuable than soul. Furthering this demonization of product, receiving *Invisible Monsters* before *Fight Club*.

⁵ Other writers link product and violence. An abbreviated list includes Stephen King’s *Maximum Overdrive*, J G Ballard’s *Crash*, and Bret Easton Ellis’ *American Psycho*. But where those authors
in *Invisible Monsters*, the Creedish believe that evil flows through technology’s electrical wires; and this is proven to be in many cases true. It is via the phone that Tender Branson convinces the suicidal to kill themselves. When the Creedish do commit suicide it is by hanging themselves with extension cords and drinking herbicide. Or, when Tender Branson’s caseworker wants to commit suicide very slowly, is uninterested in living to old age, she uses cigarettes—alienation through commodity, death through product. The surface of capitalism is easier salads and shinier teeth; the dehumanizing reality of capitalism is slitting your wrists with Gillette and enduring botched expensive plastic surgeries with no refund.

The greatest product of all is the commodification of humans as subjects to the elite. The protagonists of both *Survivor* and *Invisible Monsters* go through a marketing of the self, whereby they become owned, become property, as is exemplified clearly by having one character be referred to as “Evelyn Cottrell, Inc.” (*Invisible* 265). This dehumanizing commodification of the individual is distinctively separate from the Marxist bifurcation of bourgeoisie (property owners) and proletariat (propertyless workers); this is human as property, sub-proletariat, slave. Palahniuk’s protagonists even know that they are capitalistic slaves. In *Survivor*, Tender Branson says, “Bred and trained and sold little slave that I am, I go right to work cleaning” (*Survivor* 16). Their struggle is to break free of that self-acknowledged servitude, a servitude that extends. Slaves enslave others. In *Invisible* may dedicate a book to the concept, Palahniuk seems more radically obsessed with the violence of capitalism (and one could argue the capitalism of violence) in the entirety of his first three novels.
Monsters, “Evie’s house was big—white with hunter green shutters, a three-story plantation house [. . .] she has these minimum-wage slave Laotians who refuse to live in” (123). Tender Branson, Shannon McFarland, and Brandy Alexander go through Kafka-esque transformations that explicitly illustrate the ability of consumer culture to convert humans into products, then struggle to transform and escape subjectification to the consumerist system and objectification into products themselves. In Survivor, Tender Branson and his communications ISA/media-controlled ilk succumb to “Deca-Durabolin and testosterone cypionate” (137), “Equipoise” (137), “levothyroxine sodium” (136), “Metahapoctehosich” (135), wearing a “wig” (135), “tanning” (134), “wearing makeup” (134), “Retin-A” (134), “Rogaine” (134), “steroids” (134), “laser resurfacing” (89), “chemical peels” (89), “[d]ermabrasion” (89), and more. Shannon McFarland and Brandy Alexander go through nose and “jawline contouring” (180), extracted ribs (196), “torpedo boob job” (82) “silicone” (198) implanting, shaved trachea and brow (198), lipo-sucked hips (198), realigned forehead (198), “maxomilliary operations” (198), “electrolysis” (198), more “dermabrasion” (203), “vaginoplasty” (223), and an excessive more—a process that Shannon McFarland admits is mutilation. This mutilation (in the historical, misogynistic traditions of suttee, footbinding, infibulation, etc.) means pain, a pain that is actually honored, respected, and even craved for—which shows the level of power in ideological brainwashing. This “mutilation,” as McFarland rightfully dubs it, requires and perpetuates the money/product cycle: beauty aid
product, pain modification, and in general a pharmaceutical ware “house” supply of costly drugs.

In *Invisible Monsters*, Palahniuk mentions Valiums, moisturizer, Darvons, tranquilizers, painkillers, oral estrogens, Percodans, Compazines, Chanel Number Five, Nembutals, Percocets, anti-androgens, Progestons, Transdermal estrogen patches, blusher, eye shadow, Benzedrine, Dexedrine, Quaaludes, Soma, Dialose capsules, Solaquin Forte cream, Demerol, Darvocet-Ns, Darvocet-N 50s, hormones, Provera, Climara, Premarin, whiskey, estradiol, vodka, and ethinyl estradiol. This is a significantly abbreviated list. Even Brandy Alexander is named Brandy Alexander. The result is a capitalistic spiral of addiction economics. If you can hook someone, you can keep them “docile and useful” (Foucault 1645), and you can monetarily exploit them to seemingly inconceivable excess, and monetary exploitation is at the heart of capitalism, as well as at the heart of Palahniuk’s three 1990’s novels.

In the full-length version of *All Saints’ Day*, Palahniuk’s drugs become candy—with the same linking of consumerist consumption and destruction. In the play, NON-TOT has the following monologue:

> Let’s see here, we got peanut butter cups, semisweet chips, brownies, crunchy toffee, your traditional fruit cake, Life Savers, Klondike Bars, Jolly Ranchers, Jelly Bellys, Hershey’s Milk Chocolate Almond Bars, peanut butter cookies, Mr. Goodbar, Mounds, Reese’s Pieces, Kit Kat Bars, Almond Joy, shortbread, kosher chocolates, Krackel, caramel nougat whirls, PayDay, Heath, Fast Break, Gummi Bears, lollipops, bottle caps, Laffy Taffy, Runts, Good ‘N’ Plenty, Tart ‘N’ Tiny, Gobstopper, SweeTARTS, Necco Wafers, candy buttons, cotton candy, whistle pops, licorice, Flavorice, wax fangs, sip-it-sticks, wax lips, Bit-o-Honey, Charleston Chew, candy cigarettes, bubble gum
cigars, Atomic Fireballs, Dots, Sky Bar, peanut brittle, boiled fudge, peppermint sticks, buttered popcorn, truffles, Sour Patch Kids, mints, candy corn, cups of rice, pecan clusters, Rice Krispy Bars, Haiti, Bazooka Gum, Boston Baked Beans, canned goods, Smarties, Pop Rocks, political crisis, Pixy Stix, Jujubes, flour, Chiclets, gingerbread men, biscotti, Lemonheads, Razzles, pretzel baskets, Pez, dates, Oreos, floods, Baby Ruth, canned milk, chocolate chip cookie dough, drought, West Sudan, civil war, Twinkies, displaced in camps, heavy rains, disease, diarrheal illness, Afghanistan, Korea, severe weather conditions, baklava, Certs, Colombia, hot tamales, toasted almonds, drug trade, cheesecake, Bangladesh, M&Ms, monsoons, Nicaragua, Peru, frost and snowfalls, Eskimo Pies, and death (All 69).

These overwhelming listings on the part of Palahniuk and myself are meant to dramatize “what Marx calls ‘the fetishism of commodities’ (“Karl” 762), “object-bondage” (Marx 765). The Laffy Taffy and Baby Ruths of All Saints’ Day become Palahniuk’s “Laurabolin” (Survivor 93) and “barbiturate[s]” (Survivor 133). We ingest not so much food but rather copyrighted products that don’t nourish but make us “docile and capable” (Foucault 1637). A motif throughout Coupland’s Microserfs is the characters discussing the bizarre “Sodium Saccharine [. . .] FD&C Blue No.1” (Coupland 276) ingredients in ‘food.’ In Palahniuk, they don’t even discuss it; they

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6 In another section of the play, NON-TOT has the following monologue, exemplifying the link of consumer over-consumption with death: “1964, a New York woman gives out ant poison to children. She says she did it because she was angry that the kids who were trick-or-treating were too old. (TOT gives a few more pounds. NON-TOT grabs a bucket marked ‘ACID,’ opens the door, and tosses it on TOT. TOT screams in pain, blinded, skin on fire. NON-TOT closes door.) 1974, a boy dies from cyanide put inside a Pixie Stick. Father says he did it to collect insurance. Thought he could get away with it ‘cause quote-unquote, ‘Halloween poisonings happen all the time.’ (TOT lets out a groan of pain. NON-TOT grabs a large machete, goes out, slits TOT’s throat, much blood.) 1982, sixteen people get sick at a Halloween party as part of a copycat crime. The crime being copied—the historical Tylenol poisonings. (NON-TOT cuts off TOT’s hand, holds it up examining it as talks.) 1992, a 34-year-old named Sigrid Bissel from Mount Pleasant, Michigan hands out dozens of tiny pieces of cat feces she had dipped in chocolate. No child reports eating them. Several parents notify police due to smell. Bissel serves no jail time. (NON-TOT goes out, plucks out one of TOT’s eyes.)” (All 18).
just ingest: “eat the green digestive gland called the Tomalley. Eat the copper-based blood that congeals into white gunk. Eat the coral-colored immature egg masses. I eat them all” (Survivor 261). But, whether barbiturate or Baby Ruth, green digestive gland or green antidepressant pill, the end is death or, as the entire stage direction of Scene 10 in the full-length version of All Saints’ Day states, “The world ends.”

Palahniuk exemplifies this house-like destruction, exploitation, and world ending through the change that occurs in the character of Shannon McFarland. McFarland takes a gun to her own face, permanently disfiguring it. A product uses a product to destroy the cycle of exploitation. What we see are people’s penchants for narcissism, solipsism, and the overwhelming drive to be photographed, to have cameras point at us, to be the center of attention, even if that center is corrupt, or perhaps more precisely to use Foucaultian terminology, that panoptic center is *carcerai.*7 Emails become daily voluntary transcriptions of the masses’ thoughts, easily traceable. Corporations send cookies into computer systems to trace the information consumers are interested in. Every phone call a person ever makes is listed in SBC and AT&T computer bases, accessible by the government. Cell phones and automobiles pinpoint Americans whereabouts at all times through triangulation capabilities. Uniformly and consistently, people are on cameras throughout the day—ten, twenty, thirty different cameras in malls, gas stations, squad cars, tracking every

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7 At the Chuck Palahniuk Conference in Postcards from the Future, Palahniuk speaks of his distaste for panoptic existence, stating, ironically with a camera pointed at him, “How does it feel to be at the conference? It feels really creepy. It feels a little self-involved. And so to be the focus of attention
step taken, every move made; this is corporation as stalker, the male gaze has become the corporate gaze, the governmental gaze. One would think that freedom-loving citizens would revolt at such Big Brother-like carceral surveillance, except for one thing: ideology makes people actually crave the carceral. The photogenic/photo-addicted Shannon McFarland and the P.R.-addicted Tender Branson are archetypes of hundreds of thousands of people trying out for reality television shows. ("Seventy thousand people auditioned for the chance to become this year’s national pop music ‘Idol’" [“What” 1]. Factor in all reality television show auditions and all the seasons of these auditions and we would easily be in the hundreds of thousands of people auditioning for reality TV, perhaps even a million.) The ominous Big Brother of Orwell is deceptively enfeebled into Big Brother, a reality television show embedded with carceral ideology—sexploitative onanistic-bureaucratic voyeurism where distinctly prison-like environments are longed for, and leaving that environment by being voted off of it to have to return to the real world is looked at as a sad act rather than as one to be embraced. Palahniuk’s ISA-attacking Survivor, of which the final two pages hijacked passengers are dropped off in Vanuatu, is overshadowed by Survivor: Vanuatu, an ISA-embracing ‘reality’ show also thoroughly embedded with carceral ideology.

The short plays in Incarcerated constantly remind the reader of this “subtle, graduated carceral net” (Foucault 1639). Good Behavior takes place in a prison,
specifically Belleview Prison (with the name Belleview reemphasizing the panoptics of carceral existence). The aptly named character Surreal of 2 Mics is a felon who problematically sees jail life as “Good. Like it’s fuckin’ cool” (28). In Home Schooling, Kraus explains the repercussions of the Nuremberg Laws, saying, “Then, a third step. They were denied their liberty. They were imprisoned. Sent to concentration camps” (Home 4) [emphasis mine]. In Scene 24 of the full-length version of All Saints’ Day, a disembodied character gives the following monologue:

My third pot possession they put me in a cell (laughs) in a basketball court—if that ain’t racist pig bullshit—in a empty high school. Durin’ summer just like a party ‘cause in the County you know ever’body. There musta been eighty ah us in there, took my f’kin’ shoes, and there was a corner—a bunch of us in a corner, of the gym and we were beat-boxin’, fuckin’ ‘round, and started talkin’ weed, growin’ it and where to get the best shit, and how to cut out the middle man and all this shit, all this shit I use to this day, lesson, like a freakin’ lesson. Jail’s a tutorial on how to be a better criminal, how to grow ish that, man, the best shit, I grow the best ish ever now. Didn’t learn a goddamn thing except everything evil. Tha’s jail (All 35).

Prisons/jails/the carceral inescapably hover both on and off-stage like a specter throughout the scenes in the plays in Incarcerated.

Palahniuk also conscientiously reminds the reader of this carceral networking throughout his novels. In Survivor, every time Fertility Hollis talks to her brother, she can hear the click-click in the background of an FBI tape recorder. In Invisible Monsters, Brandy Alexander warns that at the Canadian border the police have microphones listening to people’s conversations in their cars as they are waiting to cross. This effect of a media-centered world of constant surveillance creates—as
Tender Branson explains—a feeling that our “natural habitat” is on television, that reality is not nature but rather nature viewed through camera lens à la Wild Kingdom. What is meaningful is not the Zulu tribesman but rather the tribesman as he is photographed by National Geographic. A resultant posing occurs, an unnaturalness represented as natural, a cycle of people “watching themselves watch themselves watch themselves watch” (Invisible Monsters 119). “There’s no point in doing anything if nobody’s watching” (Survivor 151) [emphasis mine]. In All Saints’ Day’s full-length, TOT and NON-TOT watch themselves on a screen for the entirety of Scene 9. Christocentric terminology speaks of God watching us at all times, capitalistic Christianity speaks of Santa watching us at all times, and rightist Republican sociopolitical thinking speaks in terms of Uncle Sam watching us at all times. (At the Saturday, April 12, 2003 Edinboro University keynote lunch address filmed in the documentary Postcards from the Future: the Chuck Palahniuk Documentary, Palahniuk makes this language explicit, stating, “And we all know that Santa Claus is like the training wheels to God.”) The Ingsok-reminiscently named Patriot Act is a further step in this direction—carceral as norm, father/Father-observation as model.

Ideological State Apparatuses—our radio and television shows⁸, our schools, our families, even our sports—are set up to further these carcerally ideological mind sets; RSAs, or Repressive State Apparatuses, are in place to ensure that ISAs cannot
be toppled. RSAs (e.g. the FBI, CIA, military, police, etc.) protect ISAs primarily through violence or the threat of violence. Police constantly hover throughout the plays in *Incarcerated*: the Gestapo in *Home Schooling*, the police just outside of the prison cell in *Good Behavior*, the "whistle, sound of a hundred soldiers approaching" (*All 54*) of Scene 34 and omnipresent sirens of Scene 36 in *All Saints’ Day*, and Surreal’s warning "You’re gonna get arrested" (218) in 2 *Mics*.

Police constantly hover throughout Palahniuk’s novels as well, but it is noteworthy that this is not where the heart of the violence in his novels lies, i.e. in the expected violence of Repressive State Apparatuses; rather, that violence emerges in a proletarian revolt that attempts to "turn the weapon of ideology against the classes in power" ("Louis" 1491). But unlike the mass revolt of Marxism, it is instead a revolt of the self, and in the acts of Shannon McFarland, Brandy Alexander, and Tender Branson on their selves. (Perhaps one of the more significant differences between *Fight Club* and his 1999 novels *Survivor* and *Invisible Monsters* is that there seems to be a more Marxist revolt in *Fight Club*, the masses actually forming beyond just the revolt of the individual.) Ideology, at its most effective, leaves the person feeling as if "it cannot be changed" ("Karl" 761) (at a basic level, a my-vote-won’t-count mentality); and, in this mind set, one of inevitable defeat, the fight to be able to control anything, especially the body, becomes even more significant.

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8 Palahniuk has been reported to not even own a TV: “The author lives outside the mainstream–on Sauvie’s Island, a crumb of land off the lip of Portland, Oregon. He doesn’t have cable. He doesn’t even have a television. The two local radio stations fade in and out restlessly” ("Invisible Man" 1).
The protagonists in Palahniuk's novels take active steps, often seemingly self-destructive steps, in order to make vital statements on control. Think of them as *extremely* radically pro-choice. Getting a sex change operation that one does not even want, permanently disfiguring one's face with a shotgun blast, and allowing all of the land one's family owns to become a dump site for discarded pornography are not traditional steps for success, but the main characters in Palahniuk's novels are sickened by what the world proclaims to be success. "It was church doctrine that the rest of your life would be the same work. The same being alone. Nothing would change. Every day. This was success" (*Survivor* 191). ISA dictated success is a turn-the-other-cheek mentality of maintaining status quo, thereby ensuring the continuation and strength of capitalistic exploitation and ruling class superiority. Proletarian revolutionary success, on the other hand, is ironically an overturn-the-money-changers'-tables mentality of undermining and ending status quo, of weakening and destroying capitalistic exploitation and ruling class hegemony.

The religious allusion in the last sentence of the preceding paragraph (specifically the Matthew 21:12-17 reference) is being used here with a specific point in mind. We have our radio and television shows, our schools, our families, and our sports, but throughout the greater part of history the strongest Ideological State Apparatus has been that of the Church, an ISA dedicated to control of the self, but notably control of the self as dictated by Church ideology. Interestingly, it is this ISA Palahniuk denounces in *Survivor*. Althusser creates a tautology between Priests and Despots, and in *Survivor* Palahniuk does the same. The attack in *Survivor* is directed
especially at religious ISA control and Palahniuk is no-holds-barred with that attack, creating such a level of satire that it seems part of the broad-reaching atheistic attempts to deconstruct the “banal discourse” (“From” 1506) that is the God myth. Palahniuk is a poetic modern day Feuerbach; where Feuerbach’s *Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit* pointed out Christianity as an inhumane, egoistic religion, Palahniuk seems to make the same claims, but with a slight twist. It is Christians Palahniuk points out as inhumane and egoistic and for Althusser, “Priests or Despots are responsible. They ‘forged’ the Beautiful Lies” (“From” 1499) of outrageous ideologies. Outrageous ideology is littered throughout *Survivor* (although I would argue that “outrageous ideology” is a somewhat redundant term). Palahniuk’s fictional Creedish is a representation of the real life People’s Temple, The Order of the Solar Temple, and Heaven’s Gate mass suicides, as well as the Branch Davidian disaster. In this respect, Palahniuk is perhaps a modern day Althusser, someone interested in the laborious work necessary to reveal class struggle and the excesses of ideological falsity, but Palahniuk does so in a way that is less arduous and more entertaining, though momentous nonetheless. His warning of the all too real dangers of religious ideology in our present day is somewhat matter-of-fact. Religious ideology is used to pressure votes for a certain presidential candidate; religious ideology is used to support pro-war attitudes; religious ideology is used to further ruling class agendas. This is one of the ugly beauties of ideology, its ability to be nonsensical and yet canonical, and to morph as it sees fit, as Orwell demonstrates so
effectively.⁹ (Scenes 14, 17, and 34 in the full-length *All Saints' Day* attack the religious Ideological State Apparatus.)

Althusser goes so far as to make the claim that “ideology has no history” (“From” 1497); ideology is manufactured, “nothingness” (“From” 1496). Althusser’s language has Feuerbachian overtones; God has no history, is manufactured/manmade, is nothing/fake. In *Good Behavior*, falsity is exemplified in the lawyer wishing to teach his client to cry on the stand, to fake his emotions. In *Survivor*, the marriage scene is the epitome of Palahniuk’s fictional attempt to demonstrate ideological nothingness/falsity. (Palahniuk talks extensively about nihilism, especially Kierkegaard’s importance to his own writings, in several interviews he has given.) The bride is an actress, an understudy, who is set to lip-synch her vows, fake putting on a ring, and fake kissing the “husband,” all in front of a packed Superdome audience. Palahniuk’s dramatized mass deception echoes the Marxist criticisms of the culture industry as made by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. Culture industry mass deception is also layered throughout *Invisible Monsters*. In the junkyard fashion photo shoot, Shannon McFarland and Evie Cottrell, dressed in thongs and wearing high heels, climb high on a pile of rusted cars with serrated edges to stand on tiptoe with legs spread apart while holding a chainsaw close to their faces. Ad agency communication ISAs operate on the level of illusion, which corresponds to capitalistic exploitation; rather than simply saying this, Palahniuk, like any good

⁹ Palahniuk’s lecture entitled “The Death of Protest: The Rebirth of Charm—Self-Expression as a Way to Entertain People and Change Their Reality” pays tribute to Orwell’s effectiveness as a novelist.
fiction writer, *shows* it, imagistically.\(^{10}\) And, communication ISAs and religious ISAs are, of course, not mutually exclusive. They work hand in hand and are strengthened by their partnership; Palahniuk demonstrates this partnership throughout. Tender Branson’s Christmas specials and packed stadium appearances, his interviews and media filming satellite feed into his kitchen are extensions of this—the overwhelmingness of communication ISA, the intentional overdose of the carceral that is meant to desensitize one to the carceral.

I ideological State Apparatuses and carceral apparatuses are “mechanisms of normalization” (Foucault 1646) that work in “a multiple network of diverse elements” (Foucault 1647), both founded on the benefits of profit. It is this networking that makes ISAs, in fact, carceral. When the family oversees and questions the person who steps outside of ideological bounds, that is one thing to deal with. But when all ISAs work together, i.e., when communications ISAs create mass media emphasizing ideological thought, and all of the other ISAs work in tandem to ensure that thinking outside of ideology is wrong, dangerous, and even insane, then the ISA/carceral network can feel incontestable. In the final scene of *All Saints’ Day*, TOT says, “I feel like I need to be *fixed*, like I don’t believe in something that the *world* believes” (*All* 75).

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\(^{10}\) What Rockwell does with family (in such pieces as *Freedom from Want*), Palahniuk does with family ideology. What Rembrandt does with icon (in such pieces as *The Resurrection of Christ*), Palahniuk does with iconoclasm. What Warhol does with consumerism (in such pieces as his *Campbell’s Soup* Series), Palahniuk does with advertising communication ISA aesthetic.
The watchfulness of ISA networking secures ideological thinking unquestionably. This panoptic approach ensures docility, especially with carceral networking continuously showing its power (the lawyer in *Good Behavior*, the Other in the final scene of *All Saints’ Day*, the SS in *Home Schooling*). At its most basic level, stepping outside of ideology is stepping outside of capitalism. As soon as the Creedish refuse to pay taxes, Repressive State Apparatuses become interested. The first thing Shannon McFarland does upon leaving the hospital—once she has officially stepped back out into the real world after her resignation from bourgeois life—is steal a turkey, a physicalization of her outsider-ness, her new categorization as member of the lumpenproletariat. Her struggle now will be against those bourgeois elements she was once a part of, those ISAs and RSAs and their carceral threat. In this regard Shannon McFarland parallels the Survivor in *Home Schooling*, Surreal in *2 Mics*, and Teej in *Good Behavior*. All of these protagonists are given their outsidership not necessarily because they are strictly ‘criminals,’ but because their actions were deemed as simply “a departure from the norm” (Foucault 1641). They were operating outside of acceptable consumer culture.

The State embraces the consumer, the spender, the wealthy, those who feed the economic machinery, those who tithe. The carceral/penal ‘embraces’ (if we can call handcuffs and straitjackets an ‘embracing’) the criminal, the non-consumer, the poor, those who undermine capitalism, those outside of institutions (Teej, Surreal, Kraus). Marxism divides people into three classes—the bourgeoisie, the proletariat, and the lumpenproletariat. The latter are the criminals of society, those outside of the
bourgeoisie (property-owners) and the proletariat (workers). Palahniuk loves to pair the bourgeoisie, whom he often heightens to the incredibly rich, against the proletariat, who in the course of his novels become lumpenproletariat.\textsuperscript{11} Palahniuk creates a unity of opposites that pits the ultra-rich against those willing to question the ideological (and who thereby quickly become lumpenproletariat). The “this is another rich house”-ness (\textit{Invisible Monsters} 186) of \textit{Fight Club}, \textit{Invisible Monsters}, and \textit{Survivor} are ranged against the Tyler Durdens, Shannon McFarlands, and Tender Bransons with their penchants for destroying those rich houses with fire and shotgun blasts in \textit{Invisible Monsters}, peeing in their “sweet tomato bisque with cilantro and clams” (\textit{Fight} 79) in \textit{Fight Club}, and destroying their pristine land with porn trash in \textit{Survivor}.

This is Marxist warfare, class struggle on the page, the crux of Palahniuk’s attack.\textsuperscript{12} That attack is meant to create an awakening, a dystopian representation of the inconvenience of modern day convenience. Palahniuk’s stream of mansions with foyers and fireplaces, these ideological symbols of elite disregard for poverty, serve as center stage for Palahniuk’s tragedies. Also at center stage, as well as equally

\textsuperscript{11} According to Marxist theory, “the whole of society must fall apart into the two classes—the property-\textit{owners} and the propertyless \textit{workers}” (Marx 764). Those property-owners are the bourgeoisie. The property-workers are the proletariat. Marx creates a sub-category for the proletariat class identified as the lumpenproletariat who are the criminals of society operating outside of standard capitalism.

\textsuperscript{12} On the commentary to \textit{Fight Club}, Palahniuk states, “A few years ago in Tacoma there were a lot of \textit{e coli} bacteria poisonings at a Jack-in-the-Box and some children were killed. And it really impressed me how we trust our lives with the people that we give absolutely the least respect and the least money to and yet they hold the lives of us and our children in their—literally—in their hands. And these are the people that we want to give minimum wage and abuse. It just—it seemed really odd. That these are the people that hold the most power” (\textit{Fight Club}).
symbolic, are the characters themselves, their bodies having as much symbolic
resonance as the fetus to pro-choice protesters, body as temple, body as house.
Palahniuk’s people exemplify the debilitating effects of the hegemonic control of
capitalism; they demonstrate that control, *show* that control. Shannon’s McFarland’s
face holds as much symbolic weight as the house she occupies at the story’s opening
and close. Both are equally destroyed, yet equally saved, a salvation that comes
through turning away from capitalism, a salvation that interestingly enough is truly at
the heart of Jesus’ teachings—when those teachings are not corrupted with the
ISA/RSA distortion of Republican evangelical carceral distortion (for example, the
ignoring of Jesus’ sell-your-possessions and no-rich-men-in-Heaven theology). This
bodily conscientiousness and symbolization is further illustrated in the gluttonous
pharmaceutical overdosing found in modern culture. Lastly, when the home and the
body are not being controlled by the self, ISAs and RSAs work hand in hand to
ensure that ideology is indisputably in place. All of these elements appear in
Palahniuk’s novels; although working within a shorter form than the novel, these
elements of control, ideology, and incarceration are also reflected in the short plays in
*Incarcerated*.

In many ways, like all good artists, Palahniuk is a teacher, a satirist holding up
a mirror to the worst features of American capitalistic society and all of its horrors.
In Althusserian eyes, the enlightenment Palahniuk provides is heroic. To use
Althusser’s words, “They ‘teach’ against the ideology, the system and the practices in
which they are trapped. They are a kind of hero” (“From” 1495). One such ‘they,’ or
one such ‘hero,’ is Chuck Palahniuk. Inspired by Palahniuk, *Incarcerated: a collection of four plays* attempts to tackle the grand anti-capitalistic, ideologically-warniing themes of Palahniuk within the compact setting of the stage.

Althusser believed that “the only way we can hope to reach a real knowledge of art . . . [is to pay] attention to the ‘basic principles of Marxism’” (“A Letter” 1483). To fully understand Chuck Palahniuk’s writing as a whole, we need only to turn directly to his own words on the subject: In an interview on National Public Radio’s 360, Palahniuk made a reference to Derrida. The interviewer replied, “It all comes down to Jacques Derrida.”

Palahniuk’s reply to the interviewer’s comment was one word: “Foucault.”

My one word reply, if it were not “Palahniuk,” would be “Marx.”
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INCARCERATED: A COLLECTION OF FOUR PLAYS
HOME SCHOOLING
CAST OF CHARACTERS

KRAUS
SURVIVOR
GIRL

TIME

2005.

PLACE

Prague.
HOME SCHOOLING

Scene 1

(Silence, then—Lights up to reveal KRAUS, a table nearby. For KRAUS, the room is hot, wiping his brow occasionally.)

KRAUS

There are no facts. There are facts, but this is not about facts. This is one of the most decisive events of history. All of history. It is not about the Jews. It is about people. Don’t be a student. Be an ally. OK. And this, this is a synagogue. Don’t think of this as a classroom. This is about restitution. This is a very huge agenda. This is contemporary. This is history. There are two types of people. My parents were sent to Auschwitz, separated. Parents were sent to concentration camps, labor camps, for free labor. Parents were sent to concentration camps. Both survived. And my mother never spoke about it. People who are absolutely silent. Speaking raises it from memory. It is not accepting. It is their way to handle it. Not satisfactory. Just cannot. Just cannot. Handle it. Psychology. Inmates. Inmates. I don’t know some names of the camps. Because. So. One type is silent. You see, Steven Spielberg’s recording all memories of these in concentration camps and not only concentration camps. Those in hiding, etcetera. They didn’t speak. There you have a very different type of experience. My father, before the war, was a Czech news agency reporter, successful. And for radio. The Nazi party dismantled Czechoslovakia and he was covering their activities, their he was publishing reports, on them. The Parliament took up against him. He was several times arrested. In 1941, he was very elegantly gotten rid of. He was taken. Him. Then my mother. Then my father’s family. My family. Until 1944, at Terezin. The Red Cross was there, which was a huge propaganda thing. As if the ghetto was a model. Which is not true. The Red Cross—it was in a movie even. And Auschwitz. My father, as I said, was sent to Auschwitz. And they were sending people to death marches, but my father escaped. To Poland. Late March, ’45. And he was able to get some room there from a friend and he wrote every detail. And he came to Prague in ’45, the first ever report on the Holocaust. In Czechoslovakia. It’s not in English. This is the second type. Two types. The first is silent. And the second one is just the opposite. A memento. To warn the world that something—to warn the world that something would never happen again. Elie Wiesel, Pinmo Levi—just facts. If you read it, it’s so expressive. Even he was not able to transmit the experience. He committed suicide. You can’t express, you can’t transmit the experience. You can’t. But at least these people are trying. But it’s not about the Holocaust. It’s not about the Jews. It’s about people. This could have happened to anybody. This is about the
history of human kind... Why is the Holocaust so unique? Why are you so obsessed with it? There are specific features of this event. What is the difference between genocide and a holocaust? The Holocaust. What is the difference between ethnic cleansing, in Yugoslavia? What is the difference?

(Silence.)

Legislation!... It was legislation. Marxist. Definition: “Law is defined by the ruling class, the will of the ruling class.” I’d change that. This is false. I’d change that to the elites. Defined by the elites of the society, and so the elites adapted legislation, not only anti-Semitic legislation, but genocidal legislation. What is the first?... Nuremberg. Nuremberg Laws. The so-called Nuremberg Laws. They had to define. They had to select the people out of the society, to say these people are our enemies. You see, Jews were always forming a society, on the outskirts, but they were not difficult to target. But there there was much more integration. They appeared as German and this was a problem. They looked German. Maybe they were not celebrating Christmas, but they were German and so they needed to be targeted, to be... How many races are there today?... Four. White, black, red, yellow. So—where are the Jews? Are they a race?... No. But the Aryans, the Nazis, they had to pinpoint somebody—the Jews. And... it progressed... Who is a Jew?

(Silence.)

Nuremberg Laws. A Jew is somebody with at least one Jewish relative, and is listed in the Jewish community. According to the Nuremberg Laws. The next step’s the deprivation of civic liberties, of a citizen. Not only basic civic rights, but broader laws. Based on legislation. Then, a third step. They were denied their liberty. They were imprisoned. Sent to concentration camps... Locks on everything, all desk drawers... The Holocaust is not only a mass murder, it is also a mass loot. This is very, very, very important. Everything was confiscated. This is unique. You can’t find it. These people lost everything. From small chains to factories. And to get it back, you have to prove it was yours, that the painting was hanging in your living room. How do you prove this? You cannot prove this. It’s gone. Where is it?... And look at the Holocaust women and children. How were they treated? Women and children were the first to get gassed. Why?

(Silence.)

Women and children are the future... A big difference from slavery. A big difference. The killing of women and children. All. All. All.

SURVIVOR

(Lights reveal SURVIVOR, eighty years old with a thick accent and somewhat broken English, fond of the occasional whisper, sometimes shifts mid-thought and has trouble coming up with the right word, pausing then quickly coming up with the right word. She wears glasses, very simple clothing—e.g. a cheap white
shirt—and jewelry, with a watch on each wrist and two necklaces. The necklaces and watches don’t match.)

Austria. The streets were full of people that were happy that Hitler came there, because they were poor people and because of the economic situation. You know Hitler was here in Austria, so there are deep roots there. When they came, it was my first great disappointment that I had schoolmates that would not talk to me. I wasn’t interesting to them. We moved as quickly as possible in 1936. We had a beautiful garden and they drink the wine there where we moved. We ran away. The SS officers were awful. I had to undress myself. To show my shoes. It was awful. The Nazis, of course. My dad built our house. He was an engineer. My grandmother came there, and refugees. As quickly as it was possible and when something was broken so the little boy started to tremble, because of poverty. And this is my, my point of view, which is different from the official—you see, I saw a piece of paper, a document, of a speech—and history is history—and this Munich Agreement was awful for us, this appeasement. We were not asked. My family had to leave within four days, from Carlsberg to Prague. Many people suffered a lot from the Germans. But revenge is always bad. Always. I believe. My father, he had to go as a soldier, and all this, boats, you know. I studied history and all these boats, they had ninety percent.

KRAUS

Votes.

SURVIVOR

Boats.

KRAUS

Votes.

SURVIVOR

Votes. Ninety percent. How ninety percent? They make it a fairy tale now. And you hear lectures not agreeable to Nazis. There’s a film and then a discussion. There’s the film and then a discussion. Where’s the discussion? They say, “Have wine, snacks, then you can discuss.” Where is the discussion? In fifty, two hundred years, it’ll be different maybe. I would like to tell you, my—you see, I had three times to get in touch with the Gestapo, with the SS. You see, my life is common to the survivors in that I didn’t go to Auschwitz. Heinrich came here. He was an awful man and really hated Jews. Heinrich Himmler. All the Jews have to leave this country. Those rich enough had the chance. But from our country only three hundred thousand, two, three; I don’t know how many. Only a few could leave, a few thousand, some, they—anyhow, according to the Nuremberg Laws the Jews had to live the ways they had to live. Be home at eight o’clock and we lost property and money and in the bank we couldn’t use it. My daddy had no wash anymore. I tried.
I worked voluntarily. I wanted to study medicine in a Jewish hospital. But Heinrich—we had to do exactly what the SS wanted. Also all synagogues were closed and used as storerooms. Thousands, but only two hundred seventy-six came back. First time. Can you imagine? All the rest were exterminated. Imagine. We tried to work, so I stopped working at the hospital and started working with textiles, sorting at the Spanish synagogue. About eighty thousand people went to Terezín and other camps. Sixty thousand went to the east. Three thousand ninety-seven came back. We didn’t know that they were gas chambers. We had no idea. We thought like epidemic and like that. We didn’t know. We moved where every family lived in one flat... I had to sort textiles and it made me awfully sad—

(SURVIVOR’s voice changes, sounding like a little girl. Throughout SURVIVOR’s monologues, whenever she visualizes herself as a girl, she speaks in a little girl’s voice, high and loud, and speaks as if no one else is in the room with her. When she speaks in the present or is reflecting back as a woman in the year 2005 she speaks as an eighty-year-old, soft and normal, and acknowledges that others are in the room. The shift is noticeable, yet KRAUS does not make any response to these shifts.)

—as they were dolls, teddy bears, and for babies, and I cried and they said, “Oh, she’s a sensitive girl.” “Oh, but she’s happy.” They didn’t know. I moved to admin, typing, and they told me about her little boy and it sounded like a spoiled baby. And she was telling me she was going to faint and she said, “Call my little boy.” And she said, “Call him. He’s a lawyer.” So I called this spoiled little boy and I fell in love, because I liked this little boy who was twenty-eight. She called him “a little boy.”

(SURVIVOR’s voice shifts back to that of a woman. The actress who plays SURVIVOR should make subsequent shifts in vocal inflection. These shifts rarely occur mid-sentence. But can occasionally shift from one sentence to the next, but typically this occurs whenever a story is happening in her youth.)

He was with the resistance, you know. And SS on the street called me a Jewish schwein. Even today I don’t use this street. I hate it. I shouldn’t, but it was awful. We have the housekeeper typewriters and those sorts of things. Three Gestapo men came at eleven and didn’t find anything. They emptied the drawers though and behaved like animals and the dog was barking, you know, and he wanted to shoot him, this SS, so I fell to my knees and said, “Please don’t shoot him. He doesn’t belong to me. He belongs to the housekeeper.” So he did not shoot him. Everything in our flat then we gave to a professor of a university at Leipzig. Of course the dog had to stay with housekeeper. The third time they came I told my mom I wanted to marry John. I said I want to live with him. I was in love. My dad was awful against it, but my mommy knew I was in love. One day he had to go to the headquarters of
the Gestapo and he didn’t come back. And this was the resistance. But we were not clear enough. The next day I had to go to the Gestapo headquarters in this house. I had to wait a long time. It made me nervous. A nice man was fitting inside, floodlights in my face. I told them fairy tales. You can’t just be silent. Not a single word was true. He said if you want to see him again, tell him the truth. His life was in your hands. I was in love. I was eighteen. I did not. But I was not tortured. I came back. It was a big organization, a big resistance movement. And so he came home of course. We went to the cemetery. That was the only place he could play with sand. The park, it was “Jews and dogs forbidden.” It was awful for us. We lost our names—numbers I-three-four-seven, I-three-four-eight. We went to Terezin. We got a slice of bread for one day. Of course I was hungry and wanted to eat it all up at once. But there was this woman who had been in prison and she taught us in the morning you have one-third of it, then a small piece for lunch and at night you have to have the biggest piece, otherwise you can’t sleep at night, your stomach growling and you get headache. So you wait. She taught—three hundred—

(Stares at ceiling.)

Three hundred forty-seven. Three hundred forty-eight.

(Pause, lost in thought. Snaps out of it smoothly.)

I liked working at the hospital, because my grandmommy I thought might have die this way and I wanted to help so others won’t die that way. I took them in my arms and took them by the hand and other girls did the same. I couldn’t stay there a lot of times and—

(Remembers!)

Oh! I married under the chupa.

KRAUS

It’s a type of fabric hung over the couple.

SURVIVOR

We left the ghetto and we went to where there was very fertile soil and we grew strawberries and vegetables for the Commander. We were afraid of him. He always shouted at us. But his eyes were smiling. He’d yell, “Here is a chest for the SS and the SS is best!”

(This shift is significant, her most girlish voice of all—)

We had to learn to steal.

(Stands.)

Here we had potatoes, here we had tomatoes, here we had—

(Motions to a spot, doesn’t finish sentence.)

And we had to weed like this!

(Demonstrates. Then sits, smiles, and laughs.)

One day, I—crazy girl—I had a small cabbage and saw a large one and I thought—I took it! And they came and they came rarely, but they came. I was so silly to take this big—We had to—What do you call it?
(Stands at attention.)

KRAUS

Stand at attention.

SURVIVOR

What?

KRAUS

Stand at attention.

SURVIVOR

Stand at attention. And they came and they said, “What is this?” And I was beaten. He said from 4 to 6 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. I had to brush up these rugs . . . I was happy. There was a writing table and a dog that was always with him. It was a shepherd and they were taught if someone escapes to spring on the neck and I was so afraid and I was told if you look at him and don’t show him the back he will listen. So I talked to him. About what? My whole family. I talked and talked and one day he got up, gave me a sniff, a long sniff, and then he went back and it was—oh—I love dogs. So that was—this woman said you have to share everything. Once in ten days we got sugar, one spoonful. I liked sugar. I don’t anymore. I would be too fat. But then all of us gave our sugar and if someone was sick, or going off depressed, it really helps. Ten of us gave him all of our sugar. It really helps. There were four awful people with the Czech police, but the rest were really nice. You know what helped us?

(Pause.)

Poetry. We had to memorize them. I didn’t like it either. But it helped. Poetry. And music. The children’s opera. Culture helped us to hope again, to feel better, and that was a lot. There was a—what is this?

(Motions to show the word she’s trying to say, keeps motioning through the next three sentences.)

I loved this. To do this. And then you have the times.

KRAUS

A phonograph?

SURVIVOR

No. Like this? You go—and then you hear.

KRAUS

A jack-in-the-box?
SURVIVOR
This.

GIRL
A music box.
(Lights reveal GIRL.)

SURVIVOR
Yes, music box. I loved it. Oh, it was beautiful. It was like a fairy tale. I should never forget... And do read. Reading is something that stays in your brains. I always tell my—I always say, “Do read. It will help you”... They told me nobody lived. Not my husband. Not my mother. Nobody. I couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t cry. I couldn’t. It was the worst moment of my life. I had to find something to live. I saw a woman who speaks German and I said, “Come up and help me to go to Prague”...

(SURVIVOR, lost in thought.)
In dresses. From bags to dresses... Lost.
(Breaks out of it.)
They offered me everything. They offered me fur coats. I didn’t want them. They offered me wine. The war was over. They offered me sleep. I slept... They thought I was fourteen. I looked like it. I was—
(Can’t come up with the word. Motions to her body. KRAUS does not have a guess for what she means. She becomes very frustrated, catches herself.)

I can get very angry.
(Silence.)
I lost three children, which I don’t want to talk about, because I will cry.
(This is the only time SURVIVOR looks even faintly teary eyed. Pause.)

Mitzvah.

KRAUS
Mitzvah! This is a mitzvah.
(KRAUS hugs SURVIVOR.)

SURVIVOR
Mitzvah means to do something good... Not to remember is to be on the side of the German Nazis. To remember is to do justice, to remember those that are persecuted. Any persecution, not just Jewish persecution. Any. Including the hungry. In Africa. I give them my—it is to mitzvah.

KRAUS
Well—this is a mitzvah, mother.
This is a mitzvah, matka.

(KRAUS motions for GIRL, his daughter, to join in the hug.)

(The hug breaks apart.)

SURVIVOR
Someone stole my yellow star. I don’t know why.

(Pause.)

The SS.

(SURVIVOR bangs her fist on the table, hard for her age, then sits emotionless. Pause.)

I sing. For you. Would you like?

GIRL
Yes. Yes. Very much.

SURVIVOR
(Sings with a girl’s voice.)
Kdo má právo rád / a kdo se neboji, / je nás kamarád / a smí si s námi hrát!

GIRL
What’s it from?

SURVIVOR
Brundibar. Children’s opera. Lyrics from the opera.

GIRL
What does they mean?

KRAUS
Do. Do they mean.

SURVIVOR
“Who likes justice and who is not afraid. This is my friend and with where I want to live” . . . Rough translation.

GIRL
It’s beautiful.

SURVIVOR
Vnucka, you are. You are, vnucka.

END
GOOD BEHAVIOR
CAST OF CHARACTERS

LAWYER, late 40s, male, dress shirt and tie

TEEJ, 19, male, dressed in proper prison uniform

LEEANN, mid-20s, female, comfortably dressed

PLACE
Bellevue Prison. Only things in room: three cheap chairs and a cheap table—table looks like it’s been through a war. (One location.)

TIME
Present.
GOOD BEHAVIOR

(LAWYER, in a very good mood. There’s a plastic cup of piping hot coffee the LAWYER has on the table in front of them and throughout, the LAWYER takes careful sips, pausing at points to drink and purposefully make added dramatic pauses to what he says, sometimes not even drinking, just using the cup as added emphasis. Some of these are added into the text, but the actor can fill these in when needed. But the cup should be fetishized in this regard for the LAWYER.)

LAWYER
OK, Teej, look at me. Teej. I got a special guest for you, today, OK, Teej, OK.

TEEJ
(Overlaps with last “OK.”)

Lawyer.

LAWYER
No, not a lawyer. No. A lay. A, a, not a lawyer. A special guest.

(LAWYER laughs. During following monologue, LAWYER undoes the buttons on each of his sleeves.)

Here’s the deal. You know I talked to you about the murder, right. ‘Member that? Do you remember when you— Don’t answer me, you remember, I know you do. You remember, that day. Well. I’m not talking about that with you for a purpose, right? We haven’t talked about it, right? Strange? That we haven’t talked about this thing you committed which is a big thing to you, right? Big deal?

(Course it is. Well, I have a special guest for you, for us. Remember when you told me how you cried?)

‘Member? That?

(LAWYER blows on his coffee.)

I don’t cry... You believe me? I don’t cry, do you believe— Well, you should, because there’s only one thing that’d make me cry, Teej. One thing.

(LAWYER shifts in his chair, readjusts his genitals, his knee starts bobbing, shaking up and down.)

Losing. Losin’.

(The knee stops.)
LAWYER

OK! Right! You understand that, right, Teej? Right? ... The “L” word. Do you understand the “L” word?

TEEJ

I boxed.

LAWYER

Yes! Like boxing! You don’t want to lose boxing, right? Did you ever lose boxing? Teej? Teej?

(During following monologue, LAWYER loosens his tie and loosens his collar, adjusts himself in his chair, readjusts his genitals again, shifts, takes a fat wallet out from his back pocket and places it on the table.)

Yeah, you did. Told me, right? ‘K, well, it’s like that for me, Teej. It’s like that with me, with law, with cases, like yours. I don’t lose. Undefeated, right? Basically, right? If I’m a boxer, I’m the one who everybody’s searching for, right, wanting to fight, to beat, right? Me. But they can’t, can’t beat me. Which is why you’re lucky to have me. Because I’m the best.

I don’t lose.

No matter what.

“Due process.”

(Laughs. Stops laughing. Rubs his nose like he wasn’t picking at it, shifts in his chair.)

I’ll be a very happy man, if I die without a loss. None. Even if, like yourself, you did it, right? I know you did. Tha—doesn’t matter. Right? What matters is winning, right? Teej? Right? ‘K, so, what we’re gonna do is bring in this special guest, and, and this lady’s good.

(Grins, winks.)

At what she “does.” Lady, that’s right. Lady, Teeeej. And oh you better thank me, ‘cause, well, you’ll just—you ever seen a woman where, wh-what country has the most beautiful women in the world, Teej? . . . Teej, you hear me?

TEEJ

Africa.
LAWYER
(Laughs.)

Y—Teej, you got, some people got one-liners, you got one-goddamn-worders, that’s what you got. Listen, you ever seen a woman where the second you see her, you know what country she’s from—and then immediately you wanna go to that country! Live in that country! Goddamn immigrate! Type a woman you goddamn kill for. Ha. Well, wait. I’m tellin’ you. I hook you up—How many prisoners in this place got a woman, a single woman—

(Readjusts his genitals.)

She’s not only beautiful, model beautiful—and don’t you get any ideas—but she’s also won a Jeff Award, do you know what that is, Teej, Jeff Award, no? It’s an award that means she’s the best at what she does, like a, like, a belt, the . . . the super-heavy weight belt, of the world, like that.

(LAWYER readjusts his genitals.)

TEEJ

Tyson.

LAWYER
(LAWYER laughs hysterically, grabs TEEJ’s arms and squeezes them.)

Tyson. Mike! Tyson! At what she does. Zackly! Ex-actly!

(To himself.)

Shit.

(TEEJ glances at the wallet on the table. LAWYER glances at wallet on the table. LAWYER’s knee starts shaking again, up and down. LAWYER stretches, fake yawns that becomes a real yawn, and takes the wallet off the table putting it in his front pocket, then LAWYER rests his hand on top of the same pocket on the outside of his pants and pats it a couple of times. TEEJ lifts his hands up, placing them on the table between him and the LAWYER.)

You’re not—? They didn’t, uh, where’s your cuffs?

(TEEJ doesn’t respond.)

You, ooooh, they musta, they musta thought you were fine. Right? You been behaving? Gooood. Good! That means you’re listening, to what we talked about. Good. OK. Good. OK . . . Wait here. Now.

(LAWYER gets up. LAWYER laughs at this, at his getting up, and he leaves the room. TEEJ doesn’t move, same expression, only the very occasional blink while he’s gone. Long pause. From off-stage, barely audible—but their voices growing over the next few
lines as they get closer—we hear LAWYER and LEEANN conversing.)

LEEANN
No, no—it looks like I got it, not the lead, but . . . As a prisoner. It’s funny . . .
(LEEANN and LAWYER share a forced laugh. They stop laughing.)

They took my shoes.

LAWYER
They do that.

LEEANN
They didn’t take yours?

LAWYER
They let you iffffff—mine don’t have laces.
(LAWYER holds out his leg, showing her, unnecessarily pulling up one pant leg to his knee. LEEANN laughs nervously, a very different laugh from LAWYER’s.)

LEEANN
Is this floor a little bit, safe, or?—
(LEEANN is shoeless, wearing pink socks, not pink because they were supposed to be, but white socks recently washed with some new red clothing and turned into an odd pink. LEEANN sees TEEJ for the first time. While he talks LEEANN and LAWYER have a seat.)

LAWYER
OK, Teej. Teej!, you all right? This is Leeann. She’s an actress. Do you know what an actress is? Course you do. She’s here to—

TEEJ
Halle Berry.

LAWYER
(LAWYER laughs as he talks, nodding ‘yes’ repeatedly throughout the following monologue’s opening sentences.)
—to, talk you through things, crying, ‘member, you did that, well, you need to do that again. Your life depends on that. You understand that, Teej. Life depends on crying, your life depends on crying, you have to, like what you did and you did great when you first . . . when I saw you, when you, when you first talked, you were, you were, you were

(Says the word “honest” as if he’s unsure it’s the right word.)

Honest. Well. Anyway, what you did, it’s essential. I need you to honestly tell how you did it, how you shot him, and what that felt like, *and don’t feel that now!* Don’t go there, now. Don’t even think about it. Think about other things. Think about—hangin’ on Madison, right? Front of the liquor store, right? Wally’s, wasn’t that the name? Catfish, the parties, ‘member? ‘K? You do. ‘K, all right, then, all right, well, Leeann . . . your turn. Take over.

**LEEANN**

Hi. I’m—

(Laughs nervously, uncomfortably.)

Uh, umm. In acting there’s a thing called The Method, it’s a method, uhh—

(To LAWYER.)

Can you smoke in here, err can I?

**LAWYER**

(LAWYER shakes head ‘no.’ Pause, then speaks quietly, to LEEANN—)

You—you’re doing fine.

(LAWYER puts his hand on LEEANN’s leg, pats it, holds it there for a second, then gives it one final pat and retracts his hand.)

**LEEANN**

(Pause.)

Stanislavsky is, uh. I had this class where you do scenes and it’s like you’re acting, of course you’re acting, but—

(LEEANN gets serious here, more professional.)

Let me start o—

(LEEANN lets out a big breath.)

If you want to learn how to cry at the drop of a hat you need to tap into memories, painful memories but those painful memories are going to allow you to become this character who really feels. It’s beautiful. It works. I’m—

(Looks at LAWYER, then back at TEEJ.)

Going to teach you how to do it.
LAWYER
We don’t have a lot of time, so in a nutshell.

LEEANN
Sure.

(Laughs uncomfortably.)

But—

(Short pause.)

Is your name Teej? Do you like to be called Teej?

TEEJ
(Pause.)

No.

LEEANN
No?

LAWYER
That’s what he, Teej, that—that’s what you . . .

(To LEEANN—)

Call him that.

LEEANN
(Whispers to LAWYER.)

What is his last name?

LAWYER
Williams. Will-yums.

LEEANN
Mr. Williams, I need you to—

TEEJ
What’s your—

LEEANN
(Overlapping with “your.”)

I’m sorry.

TEEJ
Name. Yours.
LEEANN
(Overlapping with "Yours.")

I'm—I'm Leeann.
(Looks at LAWYER.)

My name, last name is, uh-mm, I'm Leeann Powers.
(Uncomfortable long pause. TEEJ sticks his hand out, holds it there. LEEANN finally puts her hand out, shakes his. TEEJ withdraws his hand, puts that hand for the first time at his chin, fingers by his nose, as if—with subtlety—trying to smell any remnants of her skin on his. TEEJ and LEEANN stare at each other, awkward pause of them staring, with TEEJ putting his hand down and sitting up straight, his chest pushed out a bit so that we see he is muscular, not cowered and disinterested as he'd been sitting previously. TEEJ smiles, again for the first time, and this relaxes LEEANN, who begins again more reassured of herself.)

I need you... to... think about something that's gonna make you feel a little bit or a lot uncomfortable. So, get comfortable first.
(TEEJ doesn't move.)

Fine, if that's good for you, then. And then just go back there in your memory and recall it and feel it and think about it all the smells and the sounds and—

TEEJ
(Overlapping on "and.")

I don't like to.
(Pause. LEEANN looks at the LAWYER. TEEJ speaks at LAWYER.)

No.

LAWYER

No? No!... "No"?... Leeann, just...
(LAWYER motions to the door.)

Just...
(LAWYER escorts LEEANN to the door.)

A second. Just...
(LAWYER closes door gently on LEEANN, turns back to TEEJ. LAWYER's knee starts bobbing again.)

What the—f—are you fucking me?... Are you kidding me, are you fff-. This is not rocket science. This is—this is—you know I was insane to take this case. I thought—you know what? I fuckin' thought, you know, I take this one, win this one, proves I can do anything, I can win anything, because you did it, Teej, you shot that kid, and I'm fucking getting you off for it and I don't give a fuck that you did it! I
could—any asshole—any asshole who passed the goddamn bar should be able to have you hung with both eyes blindfolded, and then you get me and I’m a motherfuck, I’m a motherfuck, I’m the, I’m the goddamn savior of your ass. I’m the—oh!

(Sits back down, calming himself. Breathes.)
It-it doesn’t matter if you “like to”, do, anything, Teej. It’s your life. Life! Do you understand that? This right here makes or breaks whether or not, you, or I—or. I don’t have to say this, you know the consequences, this is, look at this, look at me. This is the most important day of yer life, comin’ up. I coulda got a guy, I coulda got a moron Yale Drama School bucktooth fatass in here, for you. But I got a gorgeous piece of ass and nobody in here is seeing a piece like that. OK? Jesus Christ, I’m treating you like a goddamn fucking king and you’re—I don’t—

(Exhausted.)
You need to listen to this lady and go wherever she wants to take you no matter how much it—

(Pause.)
Hurts.

(Soft knock on the door.)
You got thirty seconds to decide if you... wanna die.

(LAWYER goes to the door, opens it. LEEANN steps in.)

Can I come in?

LEEANN

Course. Have a seat.

LEEANN

(LEEANN sits. Uncomfortable pause.)
Do you think—would it... be possible to have, uh, a moment with just—

LAWYER

With just you two alone.

LEEANN

(Overlapping on “alone.”)
Yeah.

LAWYER

No. Absolutely not. No.

(Laughing the hardest he’s laughed yet.)
Hell no! Oh god, I’m not—you’ve, you’ve seen some TV shows or something, because no—I’m not—

(Laughs one final hard laugh.)

What, whaddayou wanna tell him?

(Motions for LEEANN to go ahead and talk with TEEJ.)

LEEANN

(Pause. Leans in towards TEEJ, whose body posture is completely closed off to LAWYER.)

I just wanted to say, I know I don’t know much about the case, I mean a few things, some things, but I wanted to say that I have a good feeling and I don’t think you did, whatever, I mean, what they’re trying you for. I think that’s the, I mean. Um, if that’s the case, I want to help. I just—I came here to help. I mean, let me tell you that my, um, dad was in jail for a bit, not long but, and he always told me that he didn’t do anything, and, I mean, I believe him. So that proves that sometimes people are incarcerated when they didn’t even do anything. If that’s the case with you, I wanna help. I mean, you’re young and you’re probably smart and, and good-looking and—

(LAWYER, pacing, stops at this point at the door, plays with the doorknob loudly, bored, sighs. LEEANN switches gears, leans in a bit closer, lowers her voice.)

I never, visited, when he was in, and I felt bad, about that, even though he was a, is a prick, I mean, he did, some, to m-, well, he. I thought, thought this would, I mean, I’m playing in a play this prisoner too but I mean I thought this would put—ease—

LAWYER

Can we—We don’t have time—let’s, let’s . . .

(Motions that he just wants to get on with it. LAWYER gives out a frustrated grunt.)

LEEANN

(Takes her time.)

Mr. Williams, close your eyes . . . You have to close your eyes. Please.

(LEEANN puts her hand on TEEJ’s thigh, then looks at the LAWYER, but by the time she looks back at TEEJ his eyes are closed.)

Go back. Go back to when you were a kid. And. And what you’re going to be doing, Mr. Williams, is I need you to imagine one of the worst times of your life. Go there, and see it. Wherever that is for you? . . . Do you see it?
(Just before LEEANN is going to begin again.)

Hm.

LEEANN

Him? Did you say ‘him,’ Teej?

(TEEJ readjusts himself slightly.)

Fine. Who is he—him?

(TEEJ clenches his jaws.)

You’re tapping into anger, and that’s great—that’s good. But we want sadness. There’s a whole range of emotion—.

(LEEANN sighs.)

You can open your eyes now.

(TEEJ does, looks even more angry.)

There’s a whole range of emotion. We have jealousy, and rage, and, ummm, sadness. And, you know, happiness. But we want sadness. When was a time when you were sad?

(TEEJ does not move.)

Everybody has a sad moment from— Close your eyes again, Teej. Imagine your childhood. Relax. Mr. Williams. Go back to your childhood. And I want you to feel what it was like when you were abused—

(LEEANN glances at LAWYER, then back at TEEJ. LEEANN talks to her fingers.)

And everybody has been abused—

(TEEJ opens his eyes. LEEANN looks up.)

You need to close your eyes.

(TEEJ)

(Pause.)

Yours are open.

LEEANN

OK. I can close mine too.

(LEEANN looks at the LAWYER who nods for her to go ahead. LEEANN closes her eyes; TEEJ closes his.)

And I’ll, do this with you. Together. We’ll imagine... go back to when you were a young boy, and—

(Sighs.)

Wherever that is, whenever—

LAWYER

Florida. It was Fort Myers.
LEEANN
Sh. Wherever that is, whenever, that is, and just imagine, a time, when, it was you and your—whoever you grew up with, and it was bad. Your father hit you or—
(Sighs again, louder.)
Your father’s standing above you and he’s mad again and he just hits you hard across the chin and you’re only a little girl—
(Short pause.)
—or a boy—
(TEEJ opens his eyes.)
—and—
(A tear forms in LEEANN’s eye. TEEJ sees this. LEEANN becomes quiet. TEEJ stares at her, stoic but concerned, getting lost in her face, but then TEEJ notices the LAWYER staring at him and gives a quick dirty look at the LAWYER and then closes his eyes again, putting his head down concentrating.)
—and then—
(TEEJ grunts her off, that he doesn’t want her to speak anymore, and LEEANN becomes silent again, nodding quietly to herself, understanding. TEEJ, in the meantime, becomes lost in a scene inside of his head. Time passes like this, the LAWYER quietly observing. LEEANN opens her eyes to see that TEEJ is becoming visibly angered, flexing his arms, eyes closed tight, biting on his teeth, breathing heavily. LEEANN whispers softly—)
Sadness.
(Sadness.)
(A new scene starts in TEEJ’s mind, the saddest memory of his life. LEEANN nods and then almost religiously, with a sense of ritual, closes her eyes again. Time passes like this, TEEJ struggling with a scene only he can see. Forming in his mind, TEEJ is being abused in the harshest ways, back to the most vicious of his lifetime’s memories that keeps building and building internally, the horrors of his youth for the first time allowed to come full force to the front of his mind. Then, at the height of this internal memory, just when tears are about to explode, TEEJ stands up suddenly, his eyes shooting open and he throws the table aside with one hand, tears streaming down his cheeks. The table hits the LAWYER, knocking him over. What
little is left in the coffee cup splashes out, cup falling to the floor. TEEJ pounces on the LAWYER, wrestling him down, and then begins choking the LAWYER with the LAWYER’s necktie, pulling on it, the LAWYER’s legs kicking, until the LAWYER finally drops lifeless to the ground. TEEJ stands over the LAWYER, fist clenched, looking into the LAWYER’s face, TEEJ’s eyes wet. He calms down, continues to stare into the LAWYER’s face. A tear falls from TEEJ’s face and falls on the LAWYER’s cheek. TEEJ wipes it off of him, then TEEJ turns to LEEANN.)

"Why . . . were you crying?"

(TEEJ wipes his face, his eyes, his nose.)

"Who did that?"

(LEEANN looks up at him, speechless, as if she doesn’t understand or want to understand.)

"Your father?"

"Wh— . . ."

(TEEJ rolls up sleeve, what little he has of one.)

"I’ve got out before."

(Breathes.)

"Before I escaped."

(Breathes.)

"I’ll kill him."

(TEEJ rolls up his other sleeve.)

"For you."

(Breathes.)

"Forget everything."

(LEEANN begins crying again, this time fully. TEEJ puts his arm around her, says softly, his voice getting quieter—)

"We forget everything. We can forget everything."

END
2 MICS
"It has been a cold summer in Detroit, and nothing ever happens"

--SirReal, from his poem "A Cold Summer"
CAST OF CHARACTERS

SURREAL, a.k.a. Tony

JOE, a.k.a. M.C. Escher

REN

TIME/PLACE

Now. Kalamazoo, in a car.
2 MICS

(A car. SURREAL sits listening to the end of a gangster rap CD. CD finishes. SURREAL ejects it. The radio station comes on, a Christian station. SURREAL listens to it, lost in thought. JOE knocks on window. SURREAL unlocks door and quickly hits seek to move onto another station.)

SURREAL

What’s up, bitch?

JOE

Nothin’, bitch.

(SURREAL drives, continually hitting seek on radio.)

Listen to this email I got from Ren.

(Reads.)

"just saw detroit band howlin ziblos hugn out um hung out w/em it the adjacent bar BIG er BELL’S and talked w/ em for about an hour. niuce um nice folksd *drunk . was also a hot nor chi er noi chc m noi nope noir chick SIMI in opener band SUFFRAJETT (gamms) and talkded /w her a bit not as ot hot as should be drunke dg dug dug eligah wood as iggy pop my ? to w of londres drunk ugh sireal is eak weak will tell him so drunk cannot move now no more no"

SURREAL

That doesn’t make any sense. Doesn’t make any sense. Just—don’t—I’m thinking . . . Shut the fuck up.

(SURREAL grabs paper with email on it from JOE, crumples it up, throws it on the ground, then turns off the radio. Silence.)

JOE

What’s with you?

SURREAL

I talked to Ren. Look up Picadilly in that piece a shit.

JOE

What shit?
Only piece a shit in the back seat.

Phone book?

Map’s in there.

In the book? In the phone book.


I didn’t see no map.

In the front. No, not the front page, the front area.

What’s the—

Picadilly.

I thought Ren lived on campus?

Moved.

Where?

Pica-fucking-dilly.

That’s a gay name. Well, it don’t matter, ‘cause—
SURREAL
Yeah, well so’s Joseph.

JOE
That’s not my name. That’s not my rap name. Anyway, he’s—

SURREAL
Well, your real name’s fucking Joseph and that’s pretty goddamn gay, so don’t—

JOE
Dick.

SURREAL
Yeah, whatever MC Escher. It’s fuckin’ where he lives, OK. Escher, shit. MC Etch-a-Sketch.

JOE
Who shit in your Wheaties?

SURREAL
Wheaties? What the fuck? Who the fuck eats Wheaties? Look, look the street up, OK? I don’t got all night. And I want that shirt back.

JOE
I got fuckin’ some fresh ass rhymes

Written?

SURREAL

JOE
Nah.

(Points to his head.)

SURREAL
Christ, that means eighty-seven takes again. Write the shit down! Let’s get this shit done.

JOE
It’s Picadilly Court or Street or what? Boulevard?

Jesus Christ, gimme that.
JOE

Jay Z never wrote his shit.

SURREAL

Dude, why the fuck were you lookin’ at the back of it?

(Pulls over.)

JOE

Jay Z memorized the shit.

SURREAL

You were fuckin’ lookin’ at the back of it. Here’s you. Wait—here’s me, “Hey, look at the fuckin’ front of the phone book.” Here’s you—

(Looks at back of the phone book.)

I’m a fuckin’ dumbass, uh, here I am lookin’ at the fuckin’ back of it, ‘cause I’m a dumb-fuck.

JOE

The second I got in the car, you’re goin’ at me.

SURREAL

Don’t call me a bitch.

JOE

W.T.F.?

SURREAL

Hey, you started it.

JOE

When I stepped in here you said “What up, bitch?”

SURREAL

No I didn’t. I didn’t. I said, “What’s up, bitch?” and then you said, “What’s up with you, you bitch.” You don’t gotta say the shit like that. Say the shit like that and you get fuckin’ stabbed. Shiv motherfuck.

JOE

Oh, don’t be pullin’ the jail shit.

SURREAL

I’m just telling you. What it’s like.
JOE
Yeah, but you’re always like. I don’t know, like—

SURREAL
What?

JOE
Like just ‘cause you went to jail, it’s like . . . you don’t gotta—

SURREAL
What?

JOE
Good. Like it’s fuckin’ cool and—

SURREAL
You got a problem with it?

JOE
No, I mean. But it’s not something you should. I mean, don’t go back. That’s all I’m sayin’.

SURREAL
The fuckin’ plan. That’s the fuckin’ plan . . . But—but don’t be always fuckin’—
with the shit—with, you know, “Fuck you, you black motherfucker.”

JOE
What’re you talking about?

SURREAL
Racist. You know, racist.

JOE
You’re white! That’s not a fucking possibility! Christ.

SURREAL
Look, how many motherfuckers are black go jail?

JOE
Yeah, but—
SURREAL
Fuckin’ all of ‘em. So I went. That makes me fuckin’ black, dude. I’m closer to black than I am to white. I’m straight up b-ball, dude. I don’t know shit ‘bout hockey!

JOE
But this doesn’t have anything to do with jail.

SURREAL
That’s ‘cause you never been. And let me tell you, a lotta motherfucks been jail. Lotta genius motherfucks too. 2Pac. Motherfuckin’ Tim Allen. Master P. Jesus Christ. I mean, Jesus was arrested like a motherfuck, dude. Jesus had the five-oh all over his ass, so for me to be on lock-down, that’s like biblical shit. That’s like—

JOE
2Pac wasn’t in jail.

SURREAL
Yeah, motherfuck.

JOE
For what?

SURREAL
Fuckin’—for 2Pac-ing. For fuckin’, dog, he’s 2Pac, that’s what 2Pac does.

JOE
But what was he arrested for?

SURREAL
I don’t fuckin’ know but I tell you one thing the mo’erfuck was arrested.

JOE
But for what?

SURREAL
But for what? Motherfucker! Ask me one more time. Ask me one more time what motherfuckin’ 2Pac got arrested for!

JOE
Calm down.
I ain’t gotta do shit, mother-fuck. I ain’t gotta do shit but borrow two mics.

That’s what I’m talkin’ ‘bout.

From Ren.

Good.

(Pause.)

Ren.

(Pause.)

That name’s like 1973.

No, it’s not.

Yeah, that’s N.W.A. He stoled that shit.

It’s homage.

It’s fuckin’ grand theft pseudonym, bitch. See, I said it right that time. I didn’t say bitch.

Can you just shut the fuck up two seconds while I look this shit up?

(Looks up address.)

Yes, I guess I’m blessed with zest and finesse and in a rhyme fest or rap contest you witness the best. I got a S on my chest, chest like a bulletproof vest ‘cause like the pest from West Loch Ness I confess I molest and mess the rest, ‘cause I’m the guest who’s on a quest to manifest the original rhymes, uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh-uh won’t copy ya?

The new shit?
JOE
Uh! Your hip-hop's sloppy, just gettin' sloppier.
That's right I'll stop ya, rock ya, shock ya,
be all up on top a ya, because I'll rob ya like
a ninja, mob ya like the Mafia, because I'm
Al Capone's clone upon the mic-oh-ro-phone.

SURREAL
Enough.

JOE
Battle me and you will be falling like Rome.

SURREAL
Enough. Enough! Fuck! Check this out.
(Puts tape in, Barry Manilow's "Copa Cabana," and
raps to it like it's gangster rap, turning it up loud, and
being excessively animated, throwing faux gang signs
and crazy head bobbing. By the end, he's gotten JOE
to join in on the choruses, screaming lyrics out the
window. Song ends.)

Shiiiiit. Manilow's the shit. Can't fuck with 'im, boy. Big nose motherfuck. Makes
Scottie Pippen's nose look like midget shit. Fuckin' rhinoceros motherfuck.
Fuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuck.

JOE
Pull over there.

SURREAL

JOE
No, we gotta—

SURREAL

JOE
Trust me. Over there.

SURREAL

JOE
Why?

SURREAL

JOE
Pull. Over. There.

SURREAL

Shit.
Yeah?

Wait.

Fo’ what?

Magic.

Johnson?

Better.

Tricks?

Yeah.

Lucky Charms shit?

Yeah.

Leper-chauns. Fuckin’ lepers. Cons. That’s what a leprechaun is a fuckin’ leper who’ll con your ass. Tricky motherfucker! I’m-a get your pot of gold, bitch. And fuck the gold, dog, I want that motherfuckin’ pot. Smoke that shit.

Don’t.

What?

Just wait.
SURREAL
(Pause.)
That Ireland accent’s fuckin’ stupid.
(Pause. Tries an Irish accent—)
Top o’ the mornin’ to ya. Here’s a four-leaf clover for your breasts.
(Pause.)
Sounds like you’re from fuckin’—
(Tries to come up with the word.)

JOE

Ireland?

SURREAL
No, fuckin’—Nova Scotia.
(SURREAL laughs hysterically at this.)

JOE
Not that funny.

SURREAL
(Does an Indian accent—)
Would you like a Slurpee with that?
(SURREAL finds this even funnier.)

JOE
Just watch.

SURREAL
Huh.

JOE
Watch.

SURREAL
You’re fuckin’ with me, dog.

JOE
Nope.

SURREAL
Magic tricks.
Trick. Singular. A.

Can I ask you something?

No.

JOE

You're not—I mean, if you don't wanna talk about this, don't, but—

SURREAL

Christ.

JOE

You're not—you still doing pot?

SURREAL

Noooooooonoo!

JOE

That's a yes.

(Slum.)

SURREAL

Got that D-12 CD.

JOE

That means you're still doing the shit.

SURREAL

Don't. Jesus.

JOE

You are.

SURREAL

The "shit"? What're you, a vice cop? The "shit." Shit.

JOE

You got two felonies.
SURREAL
I know I’ve got two fucking—I don’t need a reminder. I was—fuckin’ post-it note—the one who spent the night locked up in a bask’ball court.

JOE
Basketball court?

SURREAL
Jail cells were full, so they—look, where’d this come from?

JOE
I heard on Dr. Drew—

Dr. Drew?

SURREAL
Love Line. If you’re doing pot, that means you’re still doing heroin.

That so?

JOE
And if you’re still doing heroin—

SURREAL
That means none a your fuckin’ business.

JOE
I’m just saying—

SURREAL
That’s my shirt. I didn’t say you could keep the motherfucker.

(Long pause.)
This the shittiest magic trick I ever saw. I wanna get two mics, and I don’t wanna fuck the fuck around so fuck this.

(Goes to start up car. JOE stops him.)

I’m not—

(They struggle with keys. SURREAL gets on top of JOE holding him down, half-angrily, half-kidding. REN appears in window behind SURREAL. JOE speaks through struggle, points.)
The trick.

JOE

Yeah, I'll give you a magic trick.

SURREAL

Look.

JOE

(SURREAL turns around. REN's face is pressed to window making goofy face. SURREAL rolls down window.)

REN

Dude!

SURREAL

Idiot.

REN

(Rubs face.)

My face was there!

JOE

Ta-dah. Two mics.

(SURREAL and REN shake hands intricately. REN leans over and flips JOE off.)

SURREAL

Wassup, dork-fuck. Gimme 'em.

REN

Dude, you even uglier than when I saw ya.

SURREAL


REN

How the fuck could a face get uglier?

SURREAL

By screwin’ your mom. Gimme the mics.
REN
Seriously though. Your face, like, you fuck AIDS or something?

SURREAL
What is he doing?

(Gets out of car.)

Gimme the mics.

(Opens trunk.)

Gimme the mics! I’ll put ‘em with the shit in the—don’t you—don’t wave—gimme those—

(SURREAL chases REN around car. They pause, tired. JOE opens car door. They begin running again.)

REN

SURREAL

Get out of that car, Joe.

REN

SURREAL

Stay in the car, Escher.

Get out here.

(REN pushes JOE back in car. SURREAL grabs REN. REN grabs JOE, pulling JOE out of the car. All three struggle. JOE grabs mics from REN. REN pushes SURREAL off of him, picks up JOE, carries JOE and throws JOE in trunk, closing trunk on him.)

What’d you just do?

REN

I trunked ‘em.

(SURREAL laughs ass off.)

He got trunked.

(SURREAL, another laughing fit, stops.)

Sh!

(They both listen, sound of JOE banging on trunk. Both laugh.)

SURREAL

Can you die like that?
We should let ‘im out. (SURREAL shrugs.)

(REN goes off to side of car, pisses. SURREAL sits in car, turns on station, waits. REN finishes. SURREAL turns off radio, opens passenger door for REN. REN gets in. Occasional banging from trunk throughout. SURREAL and REN do a drug deal, SURREAL buying a bag off REN, no words. They handshake. REN leaves. SURREAL shouts to REN as he walks away.)

The mics? (REN points at trunk, bangs on it, flips off trunk. SURREAL pauses, looks at bag, looks through CDs, gets up, goes to trunk, opens it.)

Come on, let’s do this. (SURREAL goes back to door. No movement. Goes back to trunk.)

Come on, dog! OK, yeah yeah, the middle finger, come on. (SURREAL goes back inside, waits, whistles. In a few moments, JOE comes in, slams door. SURREAL continues to whistle.)

Where’s the mics?

JOE

You’re a fucking sellout. (SURREAL laughs.)

Traitor. Arnold.

SURREAL

Oh, come on.

JOE

‘S not funny.

SURREAL

Not laughing.

JOE

You’re a fuck. (Sees bag, picks it up.)

What’s this? You didn’t—you’re a fucker. I didn’t come here to—dude, look at me. What the fuck is your problem?
SURREAL

I don’t have a problem.

JOE

You know what—you do this—every time, any time someone cares about you—you fucking cheated on Susyn because she was in love with you. You’re a fucking dumbass. You need counseling. And a fucking maid.

(At “Susyn,” SURREAL grabs a fast food bag off the floor and throws it hard at JOE. At “dumbass,” SURREAL does the same with more garbage from the floor.)

SURREAL

Pot calling kettle.

JOE

Pot. Yeah, fucking pot. I’m gonna throw this away.

(JOE gets out of car.)

SURREAL

Don’t wave that around.

(JOE waves it around.)

You’re gonna get arrested.

JOE

Yeah well if I do then I guess I’m suddenly as fucking cool as you you fuck and here here’s your shirt that you want so goddamn bad that you have to say it eighty-seven fucking times when you can’t ask me how I’ve been where’s Tina did you guys break up no instead that’s my fucking shirt here’s your fucking shirt!

(Throughout above dialogue, JOE takes off shirt and throws it in SURREAL’s face, so now JOE stands shirtless.)

You know what—you know you told me you loved me once, do you remember this?

SURREAL

Were you drinking the Five Star back there? You’re drunk.

JOE

No, but we were drunk in back of K-mart right before you were gonna take that trip to Six Flags that you never went on. Remember? Ren was with us and then he disappeared and then it was just you and me and I was puking behind and you said you loved me, you said I was your best friend and you loved me and then you know what you did? You punched me in the fucking face.
(JOE throws garbage back at SURREAL.)

That’s how you hug. ‘Cause you’re not normal, you psycho fuck. Because you’re a piece of shit, Tony. A shit piece. And you don’t have to be. You’re talented. You do beats like, you’d be signed right now if you didn’t fucking sit around all day smoking pot and moaning about how everybody steals from you and you’d probably be married to Susyn.

SURREAL

You’re about to get punched in the face again.

JOE

You see. Why? Because I’m saying something as someone who cares about you and doesn’t want you to ruin your life?

SURREAL

Sit down.

JOE

No.

SURREAL

Sit down for Christ sake.

JOE

No. You’re gonna punch me in the face.

SURREAL

I’m not.

JOE

You just told me.

SURREAL

I’m not going to punch you in the face.

(Long pause.)

Actually I might punch you in the face. I might. But sit the fuck down.

(Pause. JOE sits down.)

Close the door.

JOE

You’re going to punch me in the face. Again. ‘Cause you’re a fuck. Because I fucking actually have a heart when it comes to you and I want us to get signed so that
we can get the fuck out of Kalamazoo because this place ends with fucking zoo. That's fucking gay, dude.

(SURREAL laughs.)

SURREAL
No, what's gay is us in my car with your shirt off. This is fucking Brokeback.

(Soil puts it back on.

(Throws shirt at JOE.)

And let's move.

(SURREAL starts up car.)

JOE
Where?

(JOE puts shirt back on backwards.)

SURREAL
I dunno. Don't Ren live in Oshtemo now?

(SURREAL pulls away.)

JOE
That don't—that's the same.

SURREAL
Dog, put the shirt on right. What're you autistic? Jesus Christ, it's a shirt. You need a goddamn manual?

(JOE takes shirt back off.)

JOE
Quit the bitching!

(Pause. JOE fiddles with shirt, finding the front of it.)

SURREAL
So you think I could be signed?

JOE
I don't know.

SURREAL
If I quit smoking pot?

JOE
I don't know.
Well.

That ain't gonna happen.

Put your shirt on.

So it's my shirt now?

Here. Here. Give me the damn thing.

Jesus Christ. Give me the fucking thing.

Good.

You know you're gonna be going through that garbage tonight.

I know.

Fucker.

Fuck you.

Bitch.

How's that for a hug?

You got the new D-12?
(SURREAL puts it in, puts it up loud, drives. JOE looks back. REN is standing, looking at the garbage can and the car driving away. JOE flips REN off. SURREAL and JOE bump their heads in unison to the D-12.)
ALL SAINTS' DAY: a.k.a.

15 Poems about Jeffrey Jones
CHARACTERS

TRICK-OR-TREATER—abbreviated as TOT

NON-TRICK-OR-TREATER—abbreviated as NON-TOT

OTHER

TIME

Whenever the scene demands.

PLACE

Wherever the scene demands.

Production Note: For a minimum of three actors to a maximum of fifty actors (or any number in between, depending upon director’s casting needs). Minimal set—if possible, only a door onstage throughout play. Director should have a blast with the costuming—delving into every corner of the costume shop.
ALL SAINTS’ DAY

Scene 0: Prologue

(Lights appear on the face of a cheap skeleton decoration hanging center stage. Hold light on face. Skeleton recites Lisa Russ Spaar’s poem “Hallowe’en.” OTHER provides the voice—)

OTHER

On the night of skulled gourds, of small, masked demons begging at the door, a man cradles his eldest daughter in the family room. She’s fourteen, she’s dying because she will not eat anymore. The doorbell keeps ringing; his wife gives the sweets away. He rubs the scalp through his girl’s thin hair. She sleeps. He does not know what to do. When the carved pumpkin gutters in the windowglass, his little son races through the room, his black suit printed with bones that glow in the dark. His pillowsack bulges with candy, and he yelps with joy. The father wishes he were young. He’s afraid of the dream she’s burning back to, his dream of her before her birth, so pure, so perfect, with no body to impede her light.

---

Scene 1

TOT

Trick or treat.

(NON-TOT comes to door.)

NON-TOT

It’s not Halloween.

TOT

It is.

NON-TOT

No, it’s not. It’s November.

TOT

It’s the 31st. There’s thirty-one days in October. Hath, you know, hath.

NON-TOT

Yeah, but it’s November.

TOT

It’s, oh forget it, I mean—

NON-TOT

OK.

TOT

Well. Can I have some candy?

NON-TOT

I don’t have any.

TOT

In the whole house?

NON-TOT

No.

TOT

I don’t believe you.
NON-TOT
Look, come back on Halloween and I’ll give you candy.

TOT
But it’s Halloween, today. Right now. When do I come back if not Halloween? Thanksgiving?

Look, I’m done. I’m going in.

TOT
So in other words you want a trick.

NON-TOT
What’s that supposed to mean?

TOT
I’m just sayin’.

NON-TOT
Saying what? Do you want me to call the police?

TOT
And tell them what? I mean, don’t tell them it’s not Halloween because they’re gonna think you’re a nut.

NON-TOT
What did—what did you call me?

TOT
Look, I don’t want to get into it.

NON-TOT
What did you call me?

TOT
Don’t do that. Don’t—Don’t be all a “tough person.” I hate that. That makes me sick.

NON-TOT
I make you sick?
Don’t. See, this is all, it’s gross, just gross. It’s like George W.—

Get off my property.

I will.

Now.

You know, I—

Look, I don’t need this, OK. I’m in the middle of a show right now.

I’m sorry. It’s—it’s Halloween and I’m out trick-or-treating and if you’re so nutty that you can’t even give someone candy.

Nut!—OK, that’s it. Get off my property. Or I can go get my gun.

I knew it. I knew you were NRA. Imperial bullshit.

That is it! Out! Off my fucking property!

Or what? You’ll go get your gun and kill me?

You little punk. You little punks. Ruining this country. You know that?

I’m not cursing. I’m not saying I’m gonna get a gun and kill people.
NON-TOT
Leave me alone. Don’t you see that I got a bum leg and it hurts every time I move, OK, so for me to answer the door is a big deal.

TOT
I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to cause you any, you know, I just wanted some candy. You know, we all have our problems. My father died, September, of a heroin overdose. On Isle Royal. And I’ve been coping with that. So that’s a tough thing. So I thought I’d go get candy and forget things for a bit and didn’t mean to make you—see this is what I hate.

NON-TOT
Who?

TOT
Not you. Not at all. It’s just—like I just wanted some candy! Just candy. And I can’t even do that. On Halloween. And I know you don’t think it’s Halloween, but it is.

NON-TOT
It’s not, you’re wrong.

TOT
Regardless, it’s, OK then, maybe you’re right, maybe I can’t even figure out the god-dang date! I can’t even do that, so now what do I do with myself, when my father is dead and I have no one to relate to, no friends, I can’t make ‘em, you know, because of this, because I can’t do anything right! Nothin’! Not even getting a Tootsie Roll! I can’t even do that!

NON-TOT
Look, if I get you, a Tootsie Roll, which we don’t have, but something, will you take it and leave?

TOT
I’m sorry, I—

NON-TOT
I live alone and I don’t like conversing. I don’t like this. I don’t. I don’t feel comfortable with this. I don’t know if I have any candy, but I have a sneaking suspicion I don’t because I hate candy. Headaches. The sugar rush gives me a splitting migraine that won’t—Only thing I can stand is sugar free gum. OK, so maybe I can look and maybe I’ll have some sugar free gum—
That’s all right.

No! Wait here.

I can go to the next house.

And you’re going to have this conversation again. And again and again. As many houses as you go to. So let me get you the goddamn gum and I’ll—

No. No, no, no!

Why in God’s name not?

Because, I hate—look—

(Rummages in bag. NON-TOT gets impatient.)

Wait!

(Rummages some more.)

I don’t like sugar free gum.

Gees-us!

Here, here, I think, here, this, right—this, this! Yes! Here it is. I have some. Somebody gave me some. See, it’s Halloween, it is, trust me, because here—

(Holds out gum to him.)

You can have it. I don’t want it. Take it. You like it.

How did you get this?

It’s Halloween. I’ve been trick-or-treating.
NON-TOT
No, you haven’t. Don’t you lie.

TOT
I’m not.

NON-TOT
Don’t you lie to me! I know what day it is! I’m—are you trying to say—I’m—

TOT
It’s Halloween—

NON-TOT
(Overlapping.)
Coming to my house and lying! To an old person! Disgusting! Liar! I can’t stand—Out!

But—

NON-TOT
Out!

TOT
(Quietly.)
I’m sorry.

NON-TOT
leaves. NON-TOT watches
him
leave, angry. When TOT is gone, NON-TOT closes
door.

Pause. TOT comes back, creeps up, making sure not
spotted, places bag down, looks to ensure not being
watched, and rummages in bag, takes out gum, and
places it gently in front of the door. Whispers—)

Happy Halloween.

(TOT leaves.)

Scene 2

(Everything mimed, perfectly mirrored—TOT comes to
door; NON-TOT approaches exactly at same time from
other side. Both knock on door at same time, quizzical
Trick or treat.
Who are you?
You’re scaring me.

TOT and NON-TOT
(In unison.)

(They examine each other at the same time, look around at the same time.)

(Pause.)

(Both step back at the same time, step back again at the same time. Both then approach slowly until see them back onstage at the same time. They approach each other very slowly, cautiously, eyeing each other up. They come to the door where they both stand, then they both move by each other being very careful and scared that they do not touch. Once they have passed each other, i.e. their positions have swapped (placed opposite of how they were at the scene’s beginning), they stop and look at each other. They stare, take a step back at same time.)

(They look back at same time, look at each other at same time, smile at same time. The wind blows the door closed. They both look around at same time in wonder, then leave curious at the new world each is about to explore.)

Scene 3

TOT

(The world ends.)

Scene 4

(Lights do not come up for this scene. A flash of lightning, a thud of thunder—both returning
occasionally throughout the scene. TOT approaches in the light from the lightning.)

TOT

Trick or treat.  

(Pause.)

Trick or treat!

NON-TOT

(NON-TOT comes to the door with candle—the only light in the scene, except for the occasional lightning. NON-TOT opens door. Soft nightfall voice—)

Aahhh. Going a-souling, eh? What night. Thick Irish there, you’ve, uh? Well, let’s see if we have a soul cake for you, now shall we? Look like you could catch death in a moment, poor thing with that thin thing. Now, first though, a prayer for the dead, eh. Eh, souler? Some protection from the evils, eh? For a bread cake. St. Columbus Kill. Watch the milk there, for the fairies.

(Sound of banshee in distance. Whispers—)

Hear that, my God. So close. You believe they’re real? Doesn’t matter. Now, be quick about it. For the dead.

TOT

A prayer for the dead only helps the dead.

NON-TOT

For God’s sake, be on with it.

(Banshee cry, closer.)

A prayer and be off!

TOT

(TOT prepares himself.)

We all, verily, bow before God.
We all, verily, yield to God.
We all, verily, patient for Death
We all, verily, die like the rest.
We all, verily—

(Sound of the banshee closer.)

We all, veri—

(Sound of banshee, closer. NON-TOT slams door, places candle down by door, departs.)

Take the spirit of this dear departed
Into the sweetest corners of Heaven.
For you, dear God, have brought us together
And only you, dear God, can tear us apart.

(TOT screams inhuman exactly the same as the banshee so we realize that TOT was/is the banshee. Ghosts appear in background, hover. Candle is blown out by wind. A flash of lightning reveals TOT gone and NON-TOT lying dead.)

Scene 5

(TOT approaches, knocks on door twice.)

NON-TOT

Who’s there?

(NON-TOT opens door.)

TOT

A trick-or-treater.

NON-TOT

A trick-or-treater who?

TOT

A trick-or-treater who . . . um . . . uh . . . uh . . .

(Optional: insertion of rim-shots; TOT or NON-TOT can even be dressed as a drummer and do it himself, perhaps the other dressed as a clown or an accountant.)

NON-TOT

I tried to trick my girlfriend into marrying me by faking that she was pregnant. But it didn’t work though because she wanted to see a test. I showed her my History exam, where on the bottom I’d written, “You are pregnant. Marry me.”

TOT

A fun game to play is while watching Oprah, every time someone cries, you and your friends have to take a hit of acid.

NON-TOT

I think the word “Bubonic Plague” should not begin with “boob.” Because that is misleading. It implies that there may be a treat involved. Instead it should begin with “plague.” Because then you’d know what you are getting into. “The Plague-onic Plague.” Now that’s more like it.
TOT
There are many ways to prove you are insane. But I think the best way is by drawing a little beard on your testicles. And then showing everyone in the restaurant.

NON-TOT
If it really was a circular saw, wouldn’t it cut your hands off?

TOT
If you’re ever scared watching Alfred Hitchcock’s The Birds, it’s OK, just remember that you are a loser. I don’t know about you, but I can kick a bird’s ass. Beak or no beak. When I’m through with it, a hummingbird won’t be humming. It’ll be begging for mercy, for the beating to cease.

NON-TOT
I bet nobody says “Suck my dick” to Dracula.

TOT
I would be suspicious of Jack the Ripper as soon as I heard his last name. Ripper. Because it reminds me of ripping. Like somebody ripping you off.

NON-TOT
A friend of mine was deaf and then he started to go blind, so he was like, “Fuck it.”

TOT
My earliest memory, that’s easy. Day after Halloween and I’m in the tub with Jimmy Bullock from England, English accent, only kid from any country in the whole town and he had the idea we take a bath, so he’s on one side, I’m on the other and there’s a duck in the middle, yellow. And Jimmy pukes. We just got done eating Sweet Tarts and Jolly Ranchers and Milk Duds and then went swimmin’ and he pukes in the tub and it’s floating right there comin’ at me and I’m afraid to get up ‘cause if I do the puke’ll cake on me so I press ’gainst the tub and scream for his ma yelling “maaaa!” even though she’s his and not mine and the puke gets so close I can smell it and so I do it I puke and then it’s his puke and my puke mixed together and he sees this and it makes him puke again so now it’s his puke and my puke and his puke and we’re bathing in it and his mom comes in and asks what we’re doing and he’s crying and stands up and it cakes on him all up and down his body and I see this and he cries harder like acid’s on his skin and so I do the only thing—’cause it’s coming at me—the only smart thing: I go under, I go under like I’m never gonna come up holding my breath like I’ll never see the surface and there’s no way I’ll ever come up again and you know what? . . . I wish I never had.
(TOT and NON-TOT both decide together to hold their breath until both struggle, red-faced. Blackout before they take a breath.)

Scene 6

TOT
(NON-TOT watches TV.)

Trick or treat.

(Never taking eyes off TV, NON-TOT comes to door, gives TOT a candy. TOT leaves. NON-TOT goes back to TV, sits.)

Scene 7

(TOT, in wheelchair, tries to get to door, but can’t. TOT gives up, leaves.)

Scene 8

TOT

Friandises ou bêtise!

(NON-TOT comes to door, gives TOT candy, closes door. TOT takes candy out, turns to go, plucks into mouth. A needle is in the candy. TOT bleeds from mouth, much blood spitting out, goes back to door, pounds on it, pounds pounds, spitting up blood, stops pounding, drooling blood.)

NON-TOT
(From other side of door, said with French accent—)

1964, a New York woman gives out ant poison to children. She says she did it because she was angry that the kids who were trick-or-treating were too old.

(TOT pounds. NON-TOT grabs a bucket marked “ACID,” opens the door, and tosses it on TOT. TOT screams, blinded, skin on fire. NON-TOT closes door.)

1974, a boy dies from cyanide put inside a Pixie Stick. Father says he did it to collect insurance. Thought he could get away with it because quote-unquote, “Halloween poisonings happen all the time.”
1982, sixteen people get sick at a Halloween party as part of a copycat crime. The crime being copied—the historical Tylenol poisonings.

1992, a 34-year-old named Sigrid Bissel from Mount Pleasant, Michigan hands out dozens of tiny pieces of cat feces she had dipped in chocolate. No child reports eating them. Several parents notify police due to smell. Bissel serves no jail time.

(TOT groans. NON-TOT grabs a machete, goes out, slits TOT’s throat, much blood.)

(TON-TOT cuts off TOT’s hand, examines it as talks.)

(TOT goes out, plucks out one of TOT’s eyes, and eats it. Note: optional addition, people in the front row can be ‘plants’; the moment of the eyeball gouge scene, the plants in the first row faint onto the floor.)

Scene 9

TOT

Trick or treat.

(NON-TOT comes to door. They make love.)

Scene 10

TOT

NON-TOT

(NON-TOT comes to door.)

Hi. “High.”

(Laughs a pothead laugh.)

Oh wow, like, a head SDS aquarium Jesus Freak Frisco peace broth with a rap! Like, outta sight, man! Welcome to some far out heavy flower power karma, man, hope you ain’t no square spaced-out uptight paranoid system-lovin’ establishment downer drag hang-up jive turkey draggin’ me down ‘cause I’m-a sock-it-to-you, dig? Re-upped and scored a cop-a stash ah groovy catch-a-buzz blow-yo-mind, cat, that I ain’t gonna bogart, so we can have ourselves a funky psychedelized Be-in Love-in if you’re hip to get turned on to a nifty spiffy rush scene and don’t, like, split. Talkin’ better’n’ a smack attack. Acid wit’out the rain . . . Judgin’ by the stayin’, I, like, think you’re, like, ready to drop out ‘n’, like, get it on. Here’s some anti-fuzz commune candy. Two for me, dude.

(Puts acid in his own mouth.)

And one for all.

(Puts acid on TOT’s tongue.)
Free love. Goodbye to the grief bird.
(They sit back, wait.)

TOT

Nothing.

NON-TOT

I suppose you spot that ever’day—

(NON-TOT points. Now, the director has fun with having the most tripped out scene they can possibly imagine—clouds can appear, a panda can float down and give haiku lessons, the sun rises as a bowling ball, and elephants reinvent love, while NON-TOT sings a full-volume La Bohème operatic aria while miming fishing for tuna, and TOT flies thanks to Peter Pan wiring playing an invisible harpsichord, and more—including the presence of dozens of tiny glowing fairies with names like Roger and the hovering of a Pope. The scene gets light, angelic, heavenly, comedic, then two eyes appear glowing in the background center-stage. Optional continuation of the scene: it shifts for the worse, and the director has fun with enacting a bad trip, absolutely hell on-stage in every way possible, in terms of all five senses, imaginatively and frighteningly. TOT and NON-TOT are carried off by demons to Hell.)

Scene 11

TOT

Trick or treat.

NON-TOT

What’s your favorite candy?

TOT

Lemon sherbet. Or strawberry pie.

NON-TOT

Apple pie! Favorite food?

TOT

Pizza.
Anything my mom makes.

That’s a cop-out.

Steak. Favorite film?

Ever?

Ever.

*Casablanca.* Or *Buffalo ’66.*

Only one! *Red Dawn.* Favorite author.

Madeleine L’Engle and Jack Kerouac!

Only one! Bill O’Reilly. Favorite book.

*A Wrinkle In Time. Visions of Cody* and *1984.*

Can only have one! The correct answer is *The Holy Bible: King James Version.* Favorite song.


“America—”

I also like—

Do not interrupt me!
I was just going to say I also like the Subhumans’ “Subvert City.”

(Overlapping on “Subvert.”)

“America the Beautiful”! Favorite actor.

Meryl Streep, Jeffrey Wright, Ewen Bremner.

One only! John Wayne! Favorite play.

Play? Metamorphoses. Or Dark of the Moon or Temptation.

You can’t do that. If you want any candy, do it right!

Dark of the Moon.

Don’t know it. The correct answer is that theater is irrelevant. Favorite God.

Buddha.

Don’t interrupt! Favorite government.

Matriarchy.

(NON-TOT blows whistle, sound of a hundred soldiers approaching. Flashing searchlights. Patriotic music. Sound of chains, distant tortured screams, then screams from within the audience. NON-TOT confiscates TOT’s bag full of candy, marks it as “EVIDENCE.” Huge overwhelming shadows. TOT raises hands in surrender. All lights on TOT. Sound over loudspeaker, “Higher. Higher!” TOT raises arms higher. Screams,
chains, anthem, soldier noises grow, as do shadows, sounds of futurism.)

Scene 12

(Via dance, TOT and NON-TOT act out a silent trick-or-treat scene, recommended: romantic ballet along the lines of *La Sylphide* and/or *Giselle*.)

Scene 13

OTHER
Why we even botherin'? Let's go Lincoln Park, that's where the lawyers give out the real stuff. Not candy. *Money*. This one guy last year gave out dollar bills! This's piddly shit.

TOT
'Cause this is where we *live*, Bobbie! Forget them auto show Michigan Ave lawyers with Gucci bags. No way. I ain't goin'.

*Come! On!*

TOT
No!

OTHER
Forget it then, I'm leavin'.

(OTHER leaves.)

TOT
(Approaches door.)

Trick or treat.

NON-TOT
(Quick costume change, NON-TOT answers door. Thick Chicago accent—)
I, look, I don't have any—*anything*, all right? I ain't workin' right now. So that means I don't got any candy for you, OK, and that doesn't mean I need a *trick*! One-a you kids, one-a you lousy kids had to—see, there ain't *jobs* right now! No *temp* work! No *maid* work! Understand? You don't have to 'cause you's a *kid*, but when
you’re older, it means something. It means you don’t eat! And you sure don’t have money for no candy! And I got kids. I’d like to take ‘em out trick-or-treating, but I don’t have anybody to watch this place, and guess what, because I ain’t got no candy, one-a you kids had to throw a rock through my window and I don’t have money to fix that, now do I? No! So now what? It’s November! November now. The first. Minutes away. And we’re gonna be in that cold all night, with no heater, because Com Ed turned it off! All ’cause you kids gotta go out and do your stupid things, always gotta be stupid, when my family’s trying to survive. So this isn’t a game and it isn’t funny and it isn’t cute! It’s a family wanting to be left alone. And I have a gun in the house and, no, I’m not going to use it, on kids! But now I have to worry if they’re gonna come in through the window, ’cause it’s broke, and now what? I’m by myself, and I got a five-year-old and a three-year-old and no one, no father, no protector, no one to watch to make sure I don’t get robbed of the little money I do have with these rents! Do you know what I pay? A one-bedroom and my—

TOT
Don’t cry.

NON-TOT
I can do anything I want! You don’t tell—You don’t!

TOT
I’m sorry.

NON-TOT
You’re not—you tell your friends, you tell them what this means! You tell them what I—I’m—I don’t have—I don’t have—I don’t have—

(Breaks down. TOT puts his hand on her shoulder.)

TOT
It’s—I’m sorry.

(TOT gives NON-TOT a hug.)

NON-TOT
(Through sobs.)

Nothing.

TOT
You have two kids. They love you. I’m sure they do.

(TOT looks in pockets for Kleenex, comes up with a piece of paper, hands it to NON-TOT who takes it.)
I can’t do this anymore. This city is just—I—I think I have—it’s—I don’t know—it’s in my family, but—I don’t have medical—I don’t—I’m going—it feels like, I just need someone—to stop—just anyone—someone to be nice—to not—the last time I was robbed—

NON-TOT

You were robbed?

NON-TOT

The last time, they took my TV. I don’t care, but—my kids, you know. I—whatever, my mother says it’s good, they shouldn’t be watching it anyway, but.

TOT

I’m not doing anything tomorrow. I could fix your window.

You’d—do that?

NON-TOT

I’m not doing anything . . . Do you want this candy? For your kids?

No, no. That’s for you. That’s yours.

TOT

I could fix your window. I don’t have the money, but if you—I could save you money. I—do you know what Habitat for Humanity is? I learned—I can fix a window.

(NON-TOT hugs TOT, starts to release TOT, but then pulls TOT back again, hugging tighter, then lets TOT go.)

I should—I’ll come back tomorrow. I know where you live, so you don’t have to give me the address.

NON-TOT

Do you know . . . that everything lies in what you just did. Every good thing that can happen in the world . . . lies in what you just did.

Ah it’s nothin’.
NON-TOT
No. No. It’s everything. Everything in the world.

Scene 14

TOT

Trick-or-treat.  

(TOT knocks on door. NON-TOT comes to door, opens it.)

Trick-or-treat.

(TOT holds bag out. NON-TOT takes a candy from TOT’s bag and puts it in his bowl of candy.)

Whoa-whoa-whoa-whoa-whoa-whoa, hold on hold on hold on. You took one of my candies.

NON-TOT

(Rolls r’s—)

Yez, a tricker-of-a-treater.

TOT

No no no no no no no no no no no. When I say trick-or-treat you are supposed to—

(At “trick-or-treat,” NON-TOT goes for TOT’s bag, wanting to take a candy out of it.)

NON-TOT

Yez, a very merry tricker-of-a-treater.

TOT

(Holding bag away from NON-TOT.)

No no no no no no no no no no no. Wait. Step back. Go back to the door. Yeah, you stand there, me here. You go there. Go back. Good. OK, now—where are you from?

NON-TOT

Yez.

TOT

No, where are you from though?

NON-TOT

Yez.
Do you understand Halloween?

Yez.

On Halloween, we, us, we, *Americans*, we come to your house, *your house*, and you give us things. You give us candy. When we say the phrase—OK, stay there, don’t move, stay there.

Yez.

Now, let’s practice. I will say—the phrase—

Yez.

And you will give me a candy. One. *A* candy. And then I leave, and transaction’s over and you can go back to—whatever it is you do. OK. Are you ready? What’s your name?

Name? Francisco Ignacio Zuloaga.

Francisco.

Francisco Ignacio Zuloaga.

Yes.

Francisco Ignacio Zuloaga.

Francisco. Ignacio.
Ignacio, yez, Ignacio.

Zu-lu-aga.

(NON-TOT claps hysterically, does a little dance.)

Yez! Francisco Ignacio Zuluaga!

Francisco Ignacio Zuluaga, I’m about to say the phrase—

Thee phrase.

Yes, where you are going to give me a candy.

Candy.

Yes.

Yez.

Are you ready?

Yez.

(Holds out bag.)

Trick-or-treat.

(NON-TOT takes entire bag of candy from TOT.)

You took my whole bag of candy.

Yez, a very special tricker-of-a-treater to you as well.
No, you see Francisco—

Francisco.

Yes, Ignacio.

Francisco Ignacio.

Yes, Francisco Ignacio

Zuluaga!

(TOT claps hysterically, does a little dance.)

Yes, is that when I say trick-or-treat—

(DON'T TOT takes hat off of TOT's head.)

Don't do that. Fr—don't do that. Don't. OK, you see. I can't—you're not. When I say trick-or-treat you have to—

(DON'T TOT struggles with TOT, gets his shirt off of him, puts it in his bowl. They stare at each other.)

Don't you say a tricker-of-a-treater.

You're telling me not to say it?

DON'T TOT

Don't you say the tricker-of-a-treater, or I will a tricker-of-a-treater.

'T's that so?

(Gathers composure, grabs his belt tightly to hold onto his pants.)

You are going to say it, I can tell. You like-a this game?
TOT
I am going to say it and you are going to give me my cape back, my hat back, my candy back, and give me a piece of candy from your bowl. A sucker.

NON-TOT
A sucker, yez.

TOT
Then I will go to the next house, with my dignity intact, and continue a holiday tradition that has been part of America since—a long time.

NON-TOT
Go ahead.

(Stare-down.)

TOT
Tr—. Trick. Or. Don’t stand like that. Stand normal. And put the bowl in your hand. Your bowl should be in your hand. With a candy pre-picked out. The lollipop. And I shouldn’t have to hold my belt. Now enough of this. I’m going to say the words, you will dress me, give lollipop, I go. And I would appreciate it, if your face looked—somewhat less enthusiastic.

NON-TOT
I love-a the holiday.

TOT
Yes, well, here we go.

(Takes deep breath.)

Trick-or-treat.

NON-TOT
(NO-NOT picks up TOT, carries him into house, closes door, announces—)

I got uz another one! Get the bowl-a-ready! *A tricker-of-a-treater!* . . . I love-a the holiday.

Scene 15

(Smiling skeleton in background.)
TOT
Trick or treat.

(NON-TOT comes to door.)

NON-TOT
Show your face.

(Takes off mask.)
Ernst. You’re braving the night? Mother, come here, it’s Ernst.
(NON-TOT embraces TOT.)

OTHER
Ernst, how is he?

TOT
Sickly.

NON-TOT
Oh, nonsense, he’s fine, mother.

TOT
I can’t be fine when he’s rising.

NON-TOT
He?

TOT
In power.

OTHER
Oh, Ernst, you look wonderful. Come in.

TOT
No, I’m off. I’m saying my goodbye.

OTHER
Don’t be ridiculous. Come in.

(OTHER leaves to go back inside.)

TOT
You know, you’ve always been good to me, Franz, so I thought that I’d, stop, and, well, I have.
All this talk! Now what “he” were you speaking of?

You know very well.

But say it.

I won’t.

And what do you mean saying your goodbyes?

Be afraid, Franz.

Oh, don’t be sensational.

I feel as though I’m going to burst inside. For the world.

Ernst, would you like some tea? I believe we have some.

Yes, thank you.

(Whispers—)

He’s dangerous.

Dangerous? That’s preposterous, when the good of the country is in mind.

Crazy.

All of this exaggeration is unnecessary. The Weimar government is dangerous—

Democracy is the future. It’s the—
NON-TOT
But we have no idea what the future will be! Let me tell you something, this, all of this, this talk, it’s just talk. Nothing will happen. Nothing ever changes. It’s always Frowin-von-Hutten Strasse Fünfte in Bad Soden. We can think “democracy” and “capitalism,” but it’s always the same and no political change is going to do anything.

TOT
You call whips nothing? People who protested at the meeting were whipped. Truncheons—and—

NON-TOT
Oh!

TOT
The last meeting! Have you ever been whipped?

NON-TOT
There’s no need to get excited.

TOT reveals bruising, scar.

(TOT mimes taking off a jacket. NON-TOT mimes hanging it on a coat rack. Note: I see this scene in particular as best done utilizing mime for all of the props.)

NON-TOT
Give me your coat.

(TOT mimes taking off a jacket. NON-TOT mimes hanging it on a coat rack. Note: I see this scene in particular as best done utilizing mime for all of the props.)

TOT
I’m getting, I’m speaking because I don’t want people to die. People are going to die if he comes to—if we sit back and just allow this to happen.

OTHER
(Surprises TOT, hands him tea as talks.)
Oh, people are not going to die. No one is going to die. My brother, Rudolf, is in the German Worker’s Party, and before that he was suicidal. I don’t like to talk about this in mixed company, but we’re not mixed here now, but Rudy was going to kill himself, to drown himself, and then he found the G.W.P., a brotherhood and now he’s working, he’s involved in publishing Auf gut Deutsch. That’s progress! That’s a life changed.

NON-TOT
And no one is going to die.
But there is no reason to hate the Jews! There is just no reason to—

He doesn’t hate Jews. I find that ridiculous, and personally I am offended.

I didn’t say he hates—

Let her finish.

But I just wanted to say I never said. Your brother—

(Can I finish? . . . Thank you . . . Well, as someone who also finds the Treaty to be repulsive . . . absolutely repulsive . . . It’s unjust to Germany . . . It doesn’t—

But—

(Let her finish!)

Germany . . . we’re not going to give up all of our . . . they want us to give up all of our overseas colonies to the League of Nations . . . And Alsace, you know . . . and admission of the war, of starting the war . . . And reparations! . . . It’s humiliation . . . I’ve suffered enough humiliation in my life . . . My cousin had a Jew who stole—

Oh!

Sh!

A Jew who stole everything he owned. Like a common thief, and I had left—

(I get teary eyed.)

I had left a notebook, with my cousin . . . a very personal notebook, a journal, with photos . . . with memories . . . and, I—
(OTHER clears throat. NON-TOT consoles her. Switches gears—)

Well, let me tell you I have not heard an orator like that in years, like him, so for anyone to say that he’s not someone who can be counted on, I’ve never heard someone speak so proudly of their country in all of my life and I just feel compassion when he speaks.

TOT

One Jewish person stole something from your brother and now all of them have to be banned from civil service, to be banned from the medical professions? All of them? If you worked your whole life to be a doctor and then you can’t do your job, just because you’re Jewish!

NON-TOT

That’s not the point.

TOT

Then what is?

NON-TOT

Look, we were speaking of Wilson before you got here, of Wilson and the so-called “Prize,” so let’s get back to where we were. As Wilson has nothing to do with—

OTHER

Don’t talk. We’ll just go back to . . . things. Have you read the Ernest Poole translation, Ernst?

NON-TOT

A cognac?

TOT

No. I’m sorry. I have to go. Thank you for the tea.

(Hands it to OTHER. TOT takes coat off rack, puts it on.)

NON-TOT

I’ll escort you out.

(They walk out. TOT feels a chill go through his body.)

The weather’s changed.
TOT
It’s not the weather.  
(Turns to NON-TOT.)

I feel bad, sick, like there’s an infection in the world and it’s inside me. I shouldn’t have said anything.

(TOT looks to see if anyone’s around.)

But honestly don’t you worry, Franz? Doesn’t it keep you awake all night every night at least a little bit, a tug at 3 a.m. that breaks you out of any sleep and has you examining dark immovable walls in silent rooms with nothing to—? An ache that says maybe this is the end, an end where this all could go very awfully wrong? And that when it does, it will only happen again and again and again and we will never learn, because we’re all so—

(An all-pervading silence. Whispers—)

Silent.

(“Normal” speaking voice.)

I feel like I need to be fixed, like I don’t believe in something that the world believes.

NON-TOT

Not the world.

TOT

But Germany.

NON-TOT

It’s important to stand behind our country . . . In there, Ernst, in there, you rose your voice to a lady, to my mother. And you did it more than once, in her home . . . You can’t do that. You mustn’t. Ever again. There’s really nothing more important in my eyes than you keep that in mind should you ever come here again.

TOT

Nothing? Nothing more important?

NON-TOT

No. Nothing.

TOT

Well.

(Pause.)

Then I guess . . . we’re finished.

(NON-TOT tips his head to TOT. TOT heads out into the night. NON-TOT watches. The sound of cold wind that blows the smiling skeleton in the background down onto the ground. Very faintly, a flicker, in the distance,
somewhere between where TOT left and NON-TOT stands, preferably on the same spot where the smiling skeleton hung, shows an image of Auschwitz, of the Holocaust, skeleton images in their real manner, sad and historical. Then it is gone in the blink of an eye. This image should appear the second that NON-TOT turns to go back into the house, so that if NON-TOT had stayed looking a moment more, the image would have been perhaps seen, noticed, and not missed. Fade to black, except for one sole light shining on the skeleton lying on the ground, the skull especially, its facial expression. From all around comes the soft, haunting, long sound of "sh." Fade to black, hold black.)