SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

This sample is an *excerpt* from a Samuel French title.

This sample is for perusal only and may not be used for performance purposes.

You may not download, print, or distribute this excerpt.

We highly recommend purchasing a copy of the title before considering for performance.

For more information about licensing or about purchasing a play or musical, please visit our website.

www.samuelfrench.com
www.samuelfrench.co.uk

SF PERUSALS

Outrage

Itamar Moses

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

SAMUELFRENCH.COM
SAMUELFRENCH-LONDON.CO.UK

Copyright © 2008 by Itamar Moses
All Rights Reserved

OUTRAGE is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, the British Commonwealth, including Canada, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including professional and amateur stage productions, recitation, lecturing, public reading, motion picture, radio broadcasting, television and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved.

ISBN 978-0-573-65145-8

www.SamuelFrench.com
www.SamuelFrench-London.co.uk

FOR PRODUCTION ENQUIRIES

UNITED STATES AND CANADA
Info@SamuelFrench.com
1-866-598-8449

UNITED KINGDOM AND EUROPE
Theatre@SamuelFrench-London.co.uk
020-7255-4302

Each title is subject to availability from Samuel French, depending upon country of performance. Please be aware that *OUTRAGE* may not be licensed by Samuel French in your territory. Professional and amateur producers should contact the nearest Samuel French office or licensing partner to verify availability.

CAUTION: Professional and amateur producers are hereby warned that *OUTRAGE* is subject to a licensing fee. Publication of this play(s) does not imply availability for performance. Both amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised to apply to Samuel French before starting rehearsals, advertising, or booking a theatre. A licensing fee must be paid whether the title(s) is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged. Professional/Stock licensing fees are quoted upon application to Samuel French.

No one shall make any changes in this title(s) for the purpose of production. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, now known or yet to be invented, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, videotaping, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher. No one shall upload this title(s), or part of this title(s), to any social media websites.

For all enquiries regarding motion picture, television, and other media rights, please contact Samuel French.

MUSIC USE NOTE

Licensees are solely responsible for obtaining formal written permission from copyright owners to use copyrighted music in the performance of this play and are strongly cautioned to do so. If no such permission is obtained by the licensee, then the licensee must use only original music that the licensee owns and controls. Licensees are solely responsible and liable for all music clearances and shall indemnify the copyright owners of the play(s) and their licensing agent, Samuel French, against any costs, expenses, losses and liabilities arising from the use of music by licensees. Please contact the appropriate music licensing authority in your territory for the rights to any incidental music.

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

If you have obtained performance rights to this title, please refer to your licensing agreement for important billing and credit requirements.

CHARACTERS

STEVEN, a graduate student at a New England University, late twenties.

LAURA, an undergraduate actress at the same University, twenties.

DANIEL RIVNINE, an English professor, late thirties.

EUGENE LOMAX, a Classics professor, early sixties.

ADRIANA KALE, the Dean of the University, forties.

BRETT, a computer science graduate student, and computing assistant, twenties.

BERTOLT BRECHT, the German playwright (b. 1898 - d. 1956).

THE VOICE, is the conduit between Brecht and the world outside his door. He is critic Walter Benjamin, at times, and historian and critic Eric Bentley, at other times.

DOMENICO "MENOCCHIO" SCANDELLA, an Italian miller from the village of Montereale (b. 1532 - d. 1599), forties-fifties.

STEFANO DECANO, is a young Italian priest.

ODORICO VORAI, is another.

GALILEO GALILEI, the Italian astronomer (b. 1564 - d. 1642).

SOCRATES, the Athenian philosopher and social gadfly (b. 468 B.C. - d. 399 B.C.). He is seventy.

PLATO, the young disciple of Socrates, and philosopher in his own right (b. 427 B.C. - d. 347 B.C.), twenties-thirties.

POLITES INTERLOCUTOR AFFIRMAE, is a devoted and agreeable disciple.

THE ORACLE AT DELPHI, is the Oracle at Delphi, ageless.

ARISTOPHANES, the Athenian playwright, older than Agathon.

AGATHON, is another Athenian playwright, younger than Aristophanes.

ALCIBIADES, is a stunningly handsome and charming young man, twenties.

ARISTOTLE, the Athenian philosopher and student of Plato's Academy (b. 384 B.C. - d. 322 B.C.). He appears in his precocious youth.

ALSO: Various **GRAD STUDENTS**. Various **CRITICS**. **CHORUS** of judges.

In terms of DOUBLING, this is the arrangement preferred by the author:

1. **SOCRATES**
2. **MENOCCHIO**
3. **BRECHT** and **GALILEO**
4. **STEVEN** and **ARISTOTLE**
5. **LOMAX** and **ARISTOPHANES**
6. **RIVNINE** and **AGATHON**
7. **BRETT** and **ALCIBIADES** and **VORAI**
8. **POLITES** and **STEFANO** and **THE VOICE**
9. **KALE** and **THE ORACLE**
10. **LAURA** and **PLATO**

The ensemble also shares, variously, the **GRAD STUDENTS** in Act One, and the **CRITICS** in Act Two.

The **CHORUS** ought to be grandiose, thrilling, and somewhat scary. For whatever reason, this seems to be easier to accomplish with live actors speaking in unison. Recorded sounds and fancy effects seem to diminish the impact and render it silly. Of course, the script undercuts the chorus with humor of its own, but we ought to have a real sense of danger, from a powerful force sitting in judgement, when the chorus is present.

The **VOICE**, though "behind a door", ought to be visible on stage, perhaps in shadow or silhouette. The point is simply that, in Brecht's scenes, the characters speak "out" even when speaking "to" each other, as part of the conscious theatricality of that world in particular. (This also contributes to the impact of the moment when, at last, the **VOICE** "enters" and Brecht speaks directly to him.) Also, we can always tell whether the **VOICE** is Benjamin or Bentley by his accent: Benjamin is German; Bentley, British.

Almost all QUICK CHANGES are covered by sufficient text. By contrast, Agathon and Aristophanes must become Rivnine and Lomax almost instantaneously near the end of the first act. Perhaps they wear their present day costumes for this brief Greek interlude; in any case, treat this as part of an ever-thinning membrane between these two eras in particular, just as Steven stumbles repeatedly into Athens, then enters it more fully as Aristotle near the end, and just as Laura eventually

walks directly into Greece, becoming Plato, and Alcibiades walks out of Greece, as Brett.

In terms of DESIGN, the set benefits from being variable and abstract, with many surfaces and playing spaces, and whatever "realistic" desks, chairs, and so on, are absolutely necessary to render the multiple settings. Klara Zieglerova's set at Portland Center Stage was symmetrical and ordered: three levels, joined by a single enormous circular staircase. Mimi Lien's set at the Wilma Theatre was precisely the opposite, taking as a jumping off point the line: "It's like a bomb exploded in the center of history and we're stranded in the debris." Her set was asymmetrical and chaotic dominated by a single ivory tower in the center. Both approaches were very effective. Perhaps someday a production will use both, one for each act. One final thought about the set: multiple levels are not, strictly speaking, a necessity, but it does help if it is possible for characters to "ascend" at times, say to a precipice, so that Brecht and Rivnine can head for their respective windows, or so that there can be accessible vertical space through which to drop objects, and so on. The play's final moments, especially, benefit from Rivnine being able to ascend stairs during Lomax and the Oracle's final speeches.

ACT ONE

Brecht's Prologue

(*An empty stage. A man enters, from behind the audience, dressed in the manner of a German intellectual from the 1930s. He carries a briefcase.*)

BRECHT. Hello. How is everybody tonight? Good? Aha.

(*Pause.*)

BRECHT. I see. Excuse me. I have something. Just a moment.

(**BRECHT** *puts the briefcase on the ground and opens it. He takes out a large placard with a length of twine running through it.*)

BRECHT. They assured me that you would know who I was. From the glasses, perhaps. Or the slight accent, which is supposed to indicate that I'm speaking German.

But I wanted to be absolutely sure. Otherwise what's the point?

(**BRECHT** *puts the twine around his neck. The placard hangs at his stomach. It says, in large clear letters: "BERTOLT BRECHT."*)

BRECHT. Is it clearer now? Good. Let's begin:

Tonight there will be a play. I didn't write it, more's

the pity. But I am *in* it. Which is very lucky, because there will be at least *one* person on stage who cares about making this a worthwhile experience for you, the audience.

This play is a play about people who try to make the world a better place. As a result, rather a lot of those people are going to get killed. They die at every performance, and return, next time, to try again. And these deaths before your eyes, they will upset you.

That's not prediction, it's an order: (*Shouted.*) They will! Upset! You!

(*Mildly.*) Socrates is here. And he gets killed.

The Italian miller Domenico Scandella, called Menocchio, is here, too. I know. I have never heard of him either. But he's here, and he dies.

I am here. And I am forced, in fear of my life, to flee Nazi Germany. But I don't get killed. I have to survive until the end, you see, to deliver an epilogue.

Also here is a young professor by the name of Daniel Rivnine. And, although he is fictional, his death might upset you most of all.

Which isn't to say that he dies. He may not. The element of surprise is, after all, important.

(*Throughout, as* **BRECHT** *has been talking, distantly, faintly, shadowy figures have been gathering in the background, a few at a time, until, by this point, ten indistinct figures are ranged around the stage, behind him. Their arrival has been accompanied by a slowly swelling, deep sound, a thrum or a rumble, that even now is quite subtle. At this point, he acknowledges their presence. Under what follows, the rumble swells.*)

BRECHT. Ah. You've noticed them. Yes. But don't worry. They're here, like you, as observers. To watch the performance.

(*A beat, then:*) Enough from me. The play is about to begin.

(**BRECHT** *begins to back towards darkness. There is the distant sound, far away, of five-hundred voices calling a name. The name is almost not possible to make out, but perhaps it is: "Socrates!"*)

BRECHT. So don't close your eyes. Don't turn away.

(*The sound, likewise far away, of five-hundred voices calling: "Domenico Scandella!"*)

BRECHT. For it will go on. Whether you're watching or not.

(*The sound, far away, of five-hundred voices calling: "Bertolt Brecht!"* **BRECHT** *stands on the brink of darkness. Arms expansive, embracing the audience.*)

(*One of the figures steps forward, out of darkness. A young man,* **STEVEN**, *visible just long enough to be heard saying:*)

STEVEN. Outrage.

BRECHT. *ACT ONE!*

(*Blackout.*)

Menocchio's Theory

(*A Renaissance Italian miller appears:* **DOMENICO "MENOCCHIO" SCANDELLA**.)

MENOCCH. In the beginning, the world was nothing. And then: the water of the sea whipped into a foam and coagulated. Like a cheese.

(*He produces a segment of cheese from inside his cloak.*)

MENOCCH. Inside the cheese were born a great number of worms, and these worms became angels, of which the most powerful and wise was God.

(*He throws his cheese into the darkness.*)

(*Blackout.*)

An Athenian Freeze

(*Lights up on* **STEVEN**. *He is gazing upwards.*)

(*Lights up on an Ancient Greek tableau: an old man reclines in an absurd pose of pontification, flanked by two young men, one writing on a scroll, the other playing a harp. All three are in togas, and surrounded by grapes, amphorae, wreaths, and so on.*)

(*Suddenly,* **MENOCCHIO'S** *cheese flies past.*)

(**STEVEN** *ducks and dodges, nearly stumbling, to avoid it. Regaining his equilibrium, he looks around wildly for the source. Seeing no one, he walks off.*)

(*Blackout.*)

New England, 1999

(*Lights up on Lomax's office.* **EUGENE LOMAX** *is seated at his desk, paging through a thick document. Also here is* **DEAN ADRIANA KALE**, *who stands, facing him.*)

KALE. Forty. Million. Dollars.

LOMAX. I'll be god damned. (*He skims.*) New computers, new software, new *buildings*…to put them in, I suppose…tech support, ethernet…

(*He looks up.*) Ha. "Ethernet." As though these people know what aether *is*. The Greeks, you know, *invented* aether.

KALE. Yes, I know.

LOMAX. Well, *Dean* Kale. It's a lucky thing you're in charge now.

KALE. What do you mean?

LOMAX. It's funny, we always used to *say*: "When *we* run things…" Years ago, you remember? How we'd *rescue* the place. With a chuckle, yes, but part of me always *knew* –

KALE. What do you mean, "It's lucky – "

LOMAX. Because. It will be that much easier to do the right thing.

KALE. What's that?

LOMAX. My committee will vote to turn it down.

KALE. What?

LOMAX. So! How's the family? Your husband, your son?

KALE. They're both fine. Eugene –

LOMAX. Good. That's good.

KALE. I'm sorry: turn it down?

LOMAX. Yes.

KALE. You want us to turn down the Wallace Grant?

LOMAX. Yes.

KALE. You want us to turn down forty million dollars from Gabriel Wallace?

LOMAX. The *amount* is incidental, Adriana, the point –

KALE. I don't think it's incidental at all. It's enough money to change everything.

LOMAX. Exactly!

KALE. What?

LOMAX. I'm sorry: is it not clear to you what this is?

KALE. Yes. A powerful alumnus has made us a very, very generous offer.

LOMAX. Ah: "They weave its ribs with sawed-off beams of fir, pretending that it is an offering. Then, in the dark sides of the beast, they stuff their soldiers in its belly, deep." Vergil. The Aeneid.

KALE. Yes. Book Two.

LOMAX. The Greeks, you know, invented the Trojan horse.

KALE. Eugene, why must everything have some secret, sinister motivation?

LOMAX. I ask myself that question all the time.

KALE. Very funny.

LOMAX. It's not funny at all. This is the first step towards a hostile takeover.

KALE. It's an *opportunity*! We can attract top-notch faculty, we're projecting a jump in applications –

LOMAX. Of *course*. But in which *fields* are these wonderful things happening?

KALE. In Computer Science, in Physics, at *first*, yes, but –

LOMAX. *So this will affect what we teach.* Until one day, we're nothing but a factory, turning out employees for Gabriel Wallace's company.

KALE. *Or.* The stature this brings to a few departments spreads to others. Look, where do you think I learned about leadership?

LOMAX. Oh. Flattery.

KALE. Yes, in *your* seminars. Pericles! Alexander! Unite factions! Improve infrastructure, so the populace can thrive! Running the known world requires diplomacy.

LOMAX. But *first* you have to conquer it with an army.

KALE. Jesus. Why do you have to be such an absolutist?

LOMAX. When Alexander was faced with the impossible knot of Gordia, he cut it in half with his sword.

KALE. Yes, it's a hell of a story. Of course, the stories about Alexander being reasonable and flexible are less exciting, so nobody wrote them down.

LOMAX. He was flexible when it was the only way to win. Not when he was afraid of offending an acne-plagued multimillionaire. Alexander was a visionary.

KALE. Maybe so is Gabriel Wallace.

LOMAX. You think so? He's got awfully thick glasses for a visionary. (*Beat.*) And I am not an absolutist. I'm just deeply uncomfortable with relativism. And it looks to me like your model is not Pericles, but Alcibiades.

KALE. So now I'm a traitor? They're only *tools.* Tools are neutral. There's nothing to be afraid of.

LOMAX. Really? What about his proposal to turn us into a police state?

KALE. (*Wearily.*) What?

LOMAX. This, this key-card system. Electronic doo-dads

programmed to open all the doors on campus. But did you notice that they'll also allow the campus police to keep a record of who opens which doors, at what times?

KALE. In case a card is stolen! I think it's very sensible to include in his gift some extra security.

LOMAX. That's exactly what the Romans thought. "We need the army to protect the Republic. Wait, is that Julius, wading across the Rubicon?"

KALE. Electronic key cards don't have ambitions. Caesar did.

LOMAX. "Maybe so does Gabriel Wallace." Adriana, this is invasive. Things change. All right. But *we* decide *when* and *how*.

KALE. No, Eugene. *I* decide.

LOMAX. Yes. (*Pause.*) You know, I'd just barely gotten used to you not being my student anymore. This might take longer. (*Pause.*) Anyway, the Disbursement Committee still follows *my* lead. And you won't be there tonight.

KALE. Yes, but I'll see the transcript.

LOMAX. Do you remember, what was it, six years ago, that old woman gave us all that money to build a cathedral, and we built a library that looked like a cathedral from the outside, and drove her past it in a car?

KALE. That was a unique situation. Don't abuse your authority to advance your personal agenda.

LOMAX. Who's personal agenda should I abuse my authority to advance?

KALE. You know what I mean. Don't go bullying your way into the china shop. I need you on my team.

LOMAX. You're mixing metaphors.

KALE. What?

LOMAX. You don't want a bull on your team. Unless he's the mascot.

KALE. I'll make a note. Are you finished?

LOMAX. No. But when I am, it seems *you*, of all people, may be the cause. I always said you should have done your dissertation with *me*, instead of skipping ahead to the seventeenth century. It gave you strange, progressive ideas.

KALE. Eugene: "It is right that we seek out a foreign kingdom. Stop your quarrel. It is not my own free will that leads to Italy."

LOMAX. What?

KALE. Book Four. After Aeneas *grows up* a little, he realizes that the future is inevitable, and he'd better make his peace with it.

LOMAX. (*Beat.*) That is *totally* out of context. Aeneas is *using* his trip to Italy as an excuse to break up with his *girlfriend*. Did I not teach you to employ textual sources *responsibly*? (*Pause.*) Addy…

KALE. Don't call me that.

LOMAX. All right. The committee won't turn it down. I promise.

KALE. Thank you.

LOMAX. By the way, who's this new kid you just appointed?

KALE. Daniel Rivnine? Oh, you'll like him. You should meet him first. Say hello.

LOMAX. I'll meet him this evening.

KALE. No, go make him feel welcome. Play nice.

LOMAX. He's junior faculty, yes? Fifth floor office? No elevator? I don't think so.

KALE. (*Turning to go.*) I will pick my battles.

(**BRECHT** *appears, unseen. He is holding a dismantled telescope. During the following, he begins to assemble it.*)

LOMAX. Tools are *not* neutral, Adriana. They have *purpose.* I have never used a gun to clean my ear. Though I am now considering it.

And they make us *lazy.* "Spell-checking" has not eliminated the inability to spell. So forgive me for wondering how we might more egregiously coddle these young minds. Honestly, why don't we just reclassify stupidity as a learning disability, and wave them all through!

So when a Ph.D. candidate stands before me, babbling incomprehensibly, not qualified to *spell* Literature, let alone be dubbed a doctor of it, I think of primitive man, a sharpened rock his only tool, slaughtering a ravenous tiger. And then I imagine the tiger devouring this idiotic student. Who is, of course, defenseless. Having had all of his sharpened rocks stripped away, by years and years of *progress.*

That's a metaphor. You seem to need reminding.

KALE. Eugene –

LOMAX. What?

KALE. That's an allegory.

(**KALE** *goes. Blackout on Lomax's office.*)

(*Lights up on a table in a café.* **STEVEN** *is seated here.* **LAURA**, *twenty, sits opposite, finishing up a small meal.*)

STEVEN. You have to do it.

LAURA. I don't want to.

STEVEN. I get that. But you have to.

LAURA. That's fascist. And it sucks.

STEVEN. It's *not* fascist. It's an intractable rule that must be obeyed. (*Beat.*) Everybody has to do a final essay for the course.

LAURA. Not me.

STEVEN. Well. Then. (*Gravely.*) I may have to fail you.

LAURA. (*Casually.*) Go ahead.

STEVEN. Wow, that…That threat's really supposed to carry a lot more weight.

LAURA. You think I give a shit about grades? I have *passions.* The only reason *anybody* takes this stupid Western Civ survey course is because it's required. This is not my major.

STEVEN. Wait, I thought this *was* your major.

LAURA. Sure, back at the *beginning* of the *semester,* 'cause I heard this professor was the greatest thing in the whole entire history of, well, of History. But it wasn't *me.* And I have to be true to myself.

STEVEN. What's your major now?

LAURA. Acting.

STEVEN. Ah.

LAURA. Yeah. It rocks. The chair? Professor Marcus? Is the *best.* We are so on the same wavelength that he's always finishing my sentences. With ideas I haven't even *thought* of. With *him* I feel like I have a chance to create something very unique.

STEVEN. That's impossible, actually.

LAURA. See, that's exactly the galling attitude I'm talking

about.

STEVEN. No: a thing can't be "very" unique, it's either –

LAURA. I want to do work that is *extremely* unique. *You* want me to write an *essay.*

STEVEN. I wish I could help you. Obviously, I… (*Pause. Then, carefully:*) I can't allow our personal relationship to –

LAURA. That's a convenient excuse. The *real* issue is you're so *beholden* to the system that any kind of subversive behavior makes you uncomfortable.

STEVEN. I am not…beholden –

LAURA. Oh you so are. So I'll go over your head. I'll go to the professor.

STEVEN. All right. *Go* to the professor. But don't waste time complaining about having to write an essay. Tell him you have the perfect topic *already.*

LAURA. But I –

STEVEN. *And,* while you're talking, take a look around his office at his *bookshelves.* Because what's on his bookshelves?

LAURA. Books?

STEVEN. *His* books. Books he *owns.* Books he *likes.* Write down a few titles, and tell him *that's* your bibliography. Be sure to select totally at random, so that the list of books makes no obvious sense. *That* means you're performing *highly* original scholarship. And then, as you get him talking about them, he will unwittingly reveal to you how the books connect. Just fellow his lead, and voila! Essay topic!

LAURA. (*Beat.*) What the hell is wrong with you?

STEVEN. What.

LAURA. If I wanted just *any* topic, I'd make one up myself.

STEVEN. No, no, no, this works *much* better than making one up yourself. Preparation is a trap. A hundred pages in, the professor has a fight with his wife, or something, decides he hates your essay, and you're screwed. Who wins? The slacker. "Thank god," he says, "that I was *lying* about having a hundred pages." (*Beat.*) Oh, it *might* help to prepare, like, a dossier on the professor? Find out everything you can about him before the meeting? You can probably get somebody from U.C.A. to do the research *for* you, those computer guys'll do anything –

LAURA. *Why?*

STEVEN. I guess they just like the challenge?

LAURA. No: what kind of a person would *do* something like that?

STEVEN. Well, yeah, no, I mean, I guess it is kind of… extreme.

LAURA. (*Beat.*) You know what? I think I've got my topic!

STEVEN. Oh!

LAURA. Well more of a…project, actually.

STEVEN. Good. What is it?

LAURA. I'll surprise you. But, thanks, this was very helpful.

STEVEN. I'm…glad.

LAURA. (*She stands.*) Want to go to a party this weekend? You need a costume.

STEVEN. Why?

LAURA. Because it's a costume party. (*Handing it over:*) Here. I have a flyer.

STEVEN. No, I mean…We've *talked* about this: as long as we

keep it… But: a *public* party, I…I think it would appear grossly inappropriate.

LAURA. So the fact that your behavior already *is* grossly inappropriate is fine so long as it doesn't appear that way.

STEVEN. Yes.

LAURA. Steven, people could care less about T.A.s…*fraternizing*, or whatever.

STEVEN. You mean they could *not* care less. And they *could*. I'd lose my job.

LAURA. The semester's practically *over*, so for all intensive purposes –

STEVEN. Oh my god. You're doing it on *purpose*. (*Beat.*) I don't have a costume.

LAURA. Fine. What are you doing right now?

STEVEN. Oh, uh: actually I, uh… I have a meeting with a potential thesis adviser.

LAURA. Do you have a pen?

STEVEN. What? Of course I have a *pen*.

LAURA. Why? "Preparation is a trap." "Just follow his lead."

STEVEN. Laura –

LAURA. Professor Marcus says that being a yes-man is the worst of all crimes. And pretty much all the drama majors agree with him.

(**LAURA** *goes, leaving behind an apple.* **BRETT**, *twenties, approaches the table.*)

BRETT. Hey.

STEVEN. Oh. Hey, Brett.

BRETT. Who was that?

STEVEN. Oh: that's my protégé. (*Beat.*) Do you have it?

(**BRETT** *produces a folder overflowing with documents and drops it on the table.*)

BRETT. One dossier. As requested.

STEVEN. Looks…thorough.

BRETT. Oh, yeah, what do you take me for? E-mail archive, collected publications, every mention in the campus paper –

STEVEN. You're probably wondering why I need all this.

BRETT. Uh: not really.

STEVEN. Okay. So: what are the highlights?

(**BRETT** *opens the folder. Lights up on Rivnine's office. Bookcases, a desk with a computer.* **RIVNINE** *is here, gazing out his window. He goes to his desk, and sits.*)

BRETT. His name is Daniel Rivnine.

STEVEN. Uh: yeah.

BRETT. He's a Milton scholar.

STEVEN. Doesn't he teach a course entirely on Milton? Called "Milton"?

BRETT. He likes having a good view.

STEVEN. What?

BRETT. His office is on the fifth floor of Horton Parker Hall. There's no elevators in that building.

STEVEN. Maybe he likes exercise.

BRETT. He's married for reasons that are unclear.

STEVEN. Not because he loves his wife?

BRETT. Rumor has it, it's to help him get tenure. To make him seem more…settled? I mean: they don't have any

kids. Also –

STEVEN. Uh, you know what? Thanks, I'll…peruse it on my own.

BRETT. Okay. (*He turns to go.*)

STEVEN. Oh, hey, anything in here about what his favorite *books* are?

BRETT. I don't… I mean: not specifically, no. But I can –

STEVEN. Doesn't matter. I'll be fine.

(**BRETT** *goes.* **RIVNINE** *pulls a cardboard box from beneath his desk, goes to his bookshelves, and begins tossing his books into the box. By the end of the scene,* **RIVNINE** *has packed all but three of his books.* **STEVEN** *remains, studying the folder.* **KALE** *enters Rivnine's office.*)

KALE. Professor Rivnine.

RIVNINE. Dean Kale! To what do I owe the honor?

KALE. To the stairs.

RIVNINE. What?

KALE. I wanted to see if you had any *questions*: about the committee, about… Sometimes new members are made to feel –

(**LOMAX** *enters, behind* **KALE**.)

LOMAX. Daniel Rivnine, is it?

RIVNINE. Oh! Hello. Yes.

KALE. And *other* times –

LOMAX. I'm Eugene Lomax.

RIVNINE. I know who you are, Professor Lomax. It's nice to… In fact, I didn't expect to meet you until this evening.

LOMAX. Well I like to make people feel welcome.

KALE. Yes. So. I'll leave you boys to talk. (*To* **RIVNINE**.) If he gives you a hard time, you come to me.

LOMAX. I certainly will.

KALE. Very funny.

(**KALE** *goes.*)

LOMAX. Going somewhere?

RIVNINE. What? Oh, just: new office.

LOMAX. Ah yes: those are the perks.

RIVNINE. What?

LOMAX. You're on my committee now. Excited?

RIVNINE. I don't know. I mean, I just look at this as sort of a, you know, a –

LOMAX. No. I don't know.

RIVNINE. A formality. We're all required to do *some* administrative… I figured I'd just get it out of…so I can concentrate on…

LOMAX. On what?

RIVNINE. On my students.

LOMAX. Ah. Them.

RIVNINE. I'm sorry to disappoint you. That I'm not exactly *zealous.*

LOMAX. No, no, no, I was just wondering…I mean, there's plenty of committees, Daniel. Endless. Why Funding Disbursement?

RIVNINE. I just asked Dean Kale to put me wherever there was a spot available.

LOMAX. And, until now, you've avoided administrative work all together?

RIVNINE. Well, I've only been here two, two and a half years, so –

LOMAX. At rise: The Woods! Enter: Babe!

RIVNINE. Pardon?

LOMAX. Complete. *Anyway*: before tonight's vote, you should have a look at this.

(**LOMAX** *drops the Wallace Proposal on* **RIVNINE'S** *desk with a thump.*)

RIVNINE. I have appointments this afternoon.

LOMAX. It's ten o'clock in the morning.

RIVNINE. And I'm lecturing tomorrow. "Paradise Lost."

LOMAX. We're meeting *today.*

RIVNINE. I like to *rehearse*, on stage, in advance. To get at the purity of the ideas, before they're warped by the fact that, you know: people are listening.

LOMAX. All right, but surely, before this evening –

RIVNINE. And there's this thing with my wife –

LOMAX. But in case you *do* find the time –

RIVNINE. I'd rather not abscond with your copy.

LOMAX. This is *your* copy. Look, my intent is not to unduly influence –

RIVNINE. I'm sure it's not. Look: You've been Chairing this committee how long?

LOMAX. I prefer not to think about it.

RIVNINE. Exactly. So I'm just planning to…follow your lead

LOMAX. I see. (*Pause.*) Well. It's a unique situation, actually. Unique.

RIVNINE. How so?

LOMAX. This donor wants us to spend the money on very particular things. But what he's suggesting is…unacceptable. So we have to find a way to use it instead on something more *appropriate* for this University's mission.

RIVNINE. Sounds very reasonable. Look, like I said, I just want to teach. And dispense with this chore as painlessly as I can.

LOMAX. All right. (*He turns to go, then hesitates.*) Rehearsing your lectures, I admire that, I remember when *I*…

But recently, increasingly, I find that I am faced with a kind of…laziness, an almost *aggressive* apathy among the students. And that my energies are more effectively directed here. And that, finally, what seems a chore, these days, is not dealing with *this*, but rather…dealing with *them*.

RIVNINE. Many of them are brilliant.

LOMAX. That doesn't mean they're not idiots.

RIVNINE. They're wonderful students.

LOMAX. They're charming young people. Which is not the same thing. It's an easy mistake to make. In the beginning.

RIVNINE. Well. That is, of course, where I am.

LOMAX. Delicately put. I appreciate that. And, look: need we always agree?

RIVNINE. Oh: the best way to destroy another professor is to agree with him. It diminishes the importance of everything he has to say.

LOMAX. Then let us always disagree. So long as we always vote the same way.

RIVNINE. The very heart of Democracy.

(*They shake hands.*)

LOMAX. Yes! The Greeks, you know, invented Democracy.

(**STEVEN** *stands. He picks up the apple.*)

(*Blackout.*)

(**BRECHT** *comes forward, gazing through the telescope out at the audience.*)

BRECHT. It's research. For my new play.

Hot-worked metal. Glass curved like shells from the shore. An electrical pulse: mind, eye, machine.

And my eyes…I see…the end of earth…and the beginning…and…

(**BRECHT** *turns his gaze towards the Greek frieze, and vanishes.*)

Athens, B.C

(*Lights up on the Athenian frieze. The men come to life, as though animated by* **BRECHT'S** *telescopic gaze. The young man with the harp,* **POLITES INTERLOCUTOR AFFIRMAE**, *begins to strum. The young man with the scroll,* **PLATO**, *wets his writing implement against his tongue. The old man,* **SOCRATES**, *leans back into a more comfortable position on the couch.* **PLATO** *writes frantically whenever anyone speaks.*)

SOCRATES. Polites! You visited the marketplace today, did you not?

POLITES. Yes, Socrates!

SOCRATES. And there was talk of me among the citizens, is that not so?

POLITES. Indeed there was, Socrates, yes!

SOCRATES. And they discussed, did they not, the most recent and momentous news?

POLITES. I do not see how things could be otherwise, Socrates. And so it must be as you say.

SOCRATES. And what did you hear?

POLITES. (*Beat.*) By Zeus' thunderbolt, Socrates, I do not know!

SOCRATES. Is it true that there has been a call for my arrest and imprisonment?

POLITES. By Hera's wrath, so there has!

SOCRATES. And what is the charge against me?

POLITES. By Poseidon's kelp-laden trident, Socrates, I do not know!

SOCRATES. Do they contend that I have corrupted the

young, by encouraging them to question commonly held beliefs?

POLITES. Yes, Socrates!

SOCRATES. But the necessity of my inquiries only grows in the face of this resistance, and I have vowed to speak out, thus inspiring others to *think* for themselves! (*Beat.*) Right?

POLITES. To dispute you on this point, as on any other, would be to place myself very deeply into the nebulous folds of error, Socrates.

SOCRATES. I'm so glad that you agree, Polites Interlocutor Affirmae. (*Pause.*) But…tell me…Did you happen to learn at what time, or on what day, the arrest is to take place?

POLITES. By the vice-like twin threats of Scylla and Charybdis, I do not know!

SOCRATES. What time is it now, Polites?

POLITES. By Chronos, I do not know.

SOCRATES. There is a *window*, if you recall, not far from where you are standing, is there not?

POLITES. (*Amazed.*) By the glittering breastplate of brow-borne Athena, so there is!

SOCRATES. Can you look through it?

POLITES. So I can!

SOCRATES. And where is the sun?

POLITES. It is near setting, Socrates. By the red-flaming chariot of Apollo.

SOCRATES. (*Quietly.*) Safe then. For another day. Unless they come by night.

POLITES. To say that you are correct is to raise the standard

for rectitude, Socrates.

SOCRATES. That wasn't a question, Polites.

POLITES. How very true.

SOCRATES. Are you still staring at the sun?

POLITES. Yes.

SOCRATES. And are you blind, Polites?

POLITES. Oh yes.

SOCRATES. And so you have learned several things, have you not?

POLITES. By the ruined clops-eye of Polyphemus, so I have.

SOCRATES. My aim is not to teach you, but to teach you how little you know.

POLITES. Yes, Socrates! Each day under your tutelage, I know less and less!

SOCRATES. Then you are approaching wisdom.

(*To* **PLATO**.) Did you get all that?

(**PLATO** *nods, massaging his hands.*)

(**STEVEN** *enters from below, tired from climbing several flights of stairs, surveys the room: togas, amphorae, ancient garb. The others look at him.*)

SOCRATES. A messenger!

POLITES. By the feathered ankles of Hermes, so it is!

SOCRATES. See what he has brought us!

(**PLATO** *approaches* **STEVEN**.)

STEVEN. Hello. (*Pause.*) Is this… (*He leans back to check the door.*) I'm sorry, I must be on the wrong floor. (*Pause.*) Is this the classics department? (*Pause.*) Listen, I need

a pen, could I borrow…that?

(**PLATO** *nods, and hands over his stylus.* **STEVEN** *holds out the party flyer.*)

STEVEN. Thanks, um…Here. It's a…costume party. Costumes. (*Pause.*) Uh…Thanks.

(**STEVEN** *leaves.* **PLATO** *hands the flyer to* **SOCRATES**.)

SOCRATES. An invitation! Agathon, the playwright, is hosting a Symposium tonight:

"Wine. No women. And song."

Tempting. But…I suppose that I should not brave the streets tonight, what with so many seeking me out, enraged.

POLITES. I concur wholeheartedly, Socrates!

SOCRATES. On the other hand…Alcibiades is a close friend of Agathon's, is he not?

POLITES. He is, Socrates, yes.

SOCRATES. Then perhaps I ought to go after all.

POLITES. I see no course of action save the one you describe.

SOCRATES. Very well. Plato! My wreath and my good toga! We are going to a party!

And, Plato? Bring something to write with!

(**SOCRATES** *strolls out, followed by* **POLITES**. **PLATO** *searches his pockets.*)

(*Blackout.*)

New England, 1999

(*Lights up on* **GRAD STUDENT #1**, *who stands ready to address the audience.*)

GS1. Hi. My name is Simon Peck. I'm a Ph.D. candidate in Art History. My thesis is an analysis of crayon drawings from a colony of autistic children in Tangier in the late 1920s. And the myriad things these drawings can teach us.

It's called *Little Rain Men*. The sub-title is: *The Crayon Art of the Tangier Colony and the Myriad Things These Drawings Can Teach Us*. Because I wanted my goals to be clear. To you guys.

Okay: Here goes:

(*Blackout.*)

(*Lights up on Rivnine's office. Several sealed boxes are on the floor by the desk. The bookshelves are empty, with the exception of three books lying on their sides at the edge of one shelf.* **STEVEN** *stands looking at this, in disbelief. Sitting at his desk, looking at his computer, is* **RIVNINE**. *Hovering over his shoulder is* **BRETT**.)

BRETT. So when you click –

RIVNINE. On…on the…I have to click –

BRETT. Twice, remember, you have to double-click.

RIVNINE. (*He tries.*) Right. (*Pause.*) Why isn't it –

BRETT. Faster, you…You're not just clicking twice, you're *double*-clicking.

RIVNINE. I'm familiar with the semantic distinction, I just –

BRETT. *There* you go.

RIVNINE. Oh my. There I go. (*To* **STEVEN**.) I'm so sorry about this. I'm having a bit of computer trouble. I should have been ready for you.

STEVEN. (*Looking at the shelves.*) It's fine. I'm not quite… ready for you.

RIVNINE. Steven, is it?

STEVEN. Yes. Right. Yes.

RIVNINE. Professor Rivnine.

STEVEN. I know.

RIVNINE. Oh, and this is –

BRETT. Brett. Hi.

STEVEN. Hi.

BRETT. This won't take long. (*To* **RIVNINE**.) Careful!

RIVNINE. What, why, what, what?

BRETT. We're in a sensitive area. You don't want to erase your entire memory.

RIVNINE. You'd be surprised.

(*Meanwhile,* **STEVEN** *has gone to the shelves. He writes down the titles of the three remaining books, and then sits, just in time for* **RIVNINE** *to turn back to him with:*)

RIVNINE. There's these departmental web pages, for reading lists, discussion threads, little biographies for each professor, and they're supposed to make everything work faster, but they keep crashing my computer.

BRETT. Hey, the *reason* they crash is not design flaws, okay? You think I *want* the sites to look like ass, and freeze all the time? Maybe you ought to think about this frustrating experience when you're voting on that big donation.

RIVNINE. What?

BRETT. Never mind. (*The computer.*) Hey! You're all set. You may now partake of the sweet milk of the motherboard.

RIVNINE. Thank you. For your help.

BRETT. My pleasure. Remember: double-click. Different than just clicking twice.

(**BRETT** *exits. Pause.* **STEVEN** *fidgets uncomfortably.*)

RIVNINE. Steven. Alone at last. So: what have you brought me?

(*Blackout.*)

Montereale, 16th Century

(*Lights up on a young Italian Renaissance priest. This is* **STEFANO DECANO**. *He addresses the audience.*)

STEFANO. My sermon is nearly at an end. And thus, as always…Time for a joke! Once, a man came to Rome, and approached four citizens on the street. One was a merchant, one a pirate, one a scientist, and one a priest. The man said to them, "Pardon me, but can I ask you a question? What is the reason for the high price of Bibles?" All four of the men looked confused. The merchant said, "What do you mean, 'high price'?" The scientist said, "What are 'bibles'?" The pirate said, "What does this mean, 'pardon me'?" And the priest, he said, "What is a question?"

(*Lights up on* **MENOCCHIO**, *at a simple wooden table, building a model: pulleys, levers, wheels, weights, gears, playing cards, etc. Several books are stacked nearby.* **STEFANO** *turns into the scene.*)

STEFANO. Menocchio.

MENOCCH. Hello, Stefano!

STEFANO. You were not at my sermon today.

MENOCCH. Yes, I apologize. But I was, as you can see, otherwise engaged.

STEFANO. A new model. What is it?

MENOCCH. It's not finished. Give me time.

I am glad you are here, Stefano, for I have been meaning to ask you: Who do you suppose *wrote* the Bible? Most people now contend, do they not, that it was God, but I have been reading it, and I wonder –

STEFANO. Sadly, I am not at liberty to engage in our customary spirited debate.

MENOCCH. How unusual. You are ordinarily a generous listener, for a priest.

STEFANO. I was disappointed by your absence this morning.

MENOCCH. Yes, I do regret missing this week's joke. After all, one can only hear a competent delivery from *you*, as the joke is invariably *bastardized* and *ruined* by everyone who attempts to interpret it second-hand. But there will be a new joke next week, I trust? I hope so. The bible, you see, contains only very old ones.

STEFANO. Yes, I…My friend, I have an important matter to discuss with you.

MENOCCH. And *I* have an important matter to discuss with *you*:

STEFANO. Menocchio –

MENOCCH. Most people contend, do they not, that God is all-powerful, and all-knowing, and has been so *always*, but –

STEFANO. But you wonder, yes, Menocchio, you have told me before –

MENOCCH. And I have had, just today, a new thought, Stefano. What if God was at first as an infant in the womb: without understanding or even life. And he, like us, over time, began to live, and grow, and understand?

STEFANO. (*Intrigued.*) Well, I…(*Beat.*) No, Menocchio, you must calm yourself, I –

MENOCCH. Yes! God, the sightless worm, wriggling out of the cheese!

STEFANO. I am leaving Montereale.

MENOCCH. (*Pause.*) What? Leaving?

STEFANO. It is…not of my own accord. (*Pause.*) You know, of course, that this is not a village of the devout. My superiors have determined that this place requires the guidance of a firm hand, a vigilant eye. A priest less progressive than myself.

MENOCCH. Stefano, no one could accuse you of being progressive. In six years I have observed no progress in your opinions whatsoever. I will vouch for that, on your behalf, if you like. I've long dreamed of addressing the Holy Office, discussing my theories directly with them –

STEFANO. In this matter you are not, I'm afraid, the ideal character witness.

MENOCCH. (*Beat.*) Is this *my* fault?

STEFANO. It's mine. You are not the only resident of this village who remains unmoved by my work here. You are only my most spectacular failure.

MENOCCH. And the Holy Office is angry.

STEFANO. The cure, they tell me, will be direct and swift.

MENOCCH. How do they propose to cure us?

STEFANO. His name is Odorico Vorai. He arrives from Rome in two days. And he is…unlike me. When faced with…blasphemy…Vorai will not hesitate to turn the matter over to the Inquisition.

MENOCCH. But, Stefano, as you say, we are a *village* of failures. They cannot take us all away.

STEFANO. They will take only you. The others are blessed with a profound lack of imagination, and can muster only inattentiveness, not heresy. This will keep them safe, for *apathy*, you see, is not a crime. But you…Your

wish to stand before the Holy Office could very well come true. Think of your wife, your daughter…

MENOCCH. What must I do?

STEFANO. You must not speak about your ideas. You must stop building models. You must attend his sermons.

MENOCCH. Well, of *course* I will attend the sermons, I –

STEFANO. Vorai does not tell jokes.

MENOCCH. None? Really. (*Pause.*) I cannot discuss *any* of my ideas?

STEFANO. Is there anything on which you and the church agree?

MENOCCH. I don't know. I suppose…Our worlds spring from the same premise. That, in the beginning, there was nothing.

STEFANO. Excellent.

MENOCCH. Although, frankly, Stefano, I fail to see how even God could create where there is nothing to begin with. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that in the beginning there was a kind of *chaos*, an unformed milky substance, like cheese prior to coagulation!

STEFANO. You *must* not phrase it in such colorful –

MENOCCH. On the other hand! Far to the East, I'm told, they have an entirely different philosophy which, at the risk of redundancy, I will call "Eastern." *There*, it seems, beginnings and endings merge into a kind of eternal continuum, rendering History both cyclical *and* linear.

STEFANO. Enough! Menocchio, I cannot protect you anymore! Promise me you'll *try*, if not for your sake, then for mine. So that I might sleep more soundly.

MENOCCH. (*Pause.*) I'll try, Stefano.

STEFANO. Thank you. (*Pause.*) You missed an excellent joke, today. One I'd never told before in my sermon, for fear of repercussions.

MENOCCH. My interest is piqued.

STEFANO. I have a theory, in fact, that the only worthwhile jokes aren't jokes at all. (*Beat.*) I am beginning to sound like you, Menocchio. I think it is time for me to go.

MENOCCH. No, stay a while. Tell me your joke, while I complete my model.

STEFANO. I cannot. (*Pause.*) What will it be, when it is finished?

MENOCCH. Beautiful, Signore Decano. It will be beautiful.

It will have wheels in motion. The rise and fall of organic matter, in the form of sweet fruit and sharp cheese. Paper aflame, star bright. A dozen mice in the agony of birth. It will sway with the wind, and the soil underneath will boil with worms, and its perpetual motion will rock all of Italy. But most of all: it will be beautiful. For this is a model of our universe, Stefano. For this is the universe.

(*Blackout.*)

New England, 1999

(*Lights up on* **GRAD STUDENT #2**, *who addresses the audience:*)

GS2. My name is Lars Ericksen. I'm a Ph.D. candidate in African-American studies. My thesis asserts that jazz has it's roots in the traveling musicians of Medieval Europe.

It's tentatively entitled *Minstrel Show.*

(*Amending.*) That's not supposed to be offensive or anything. It's tentative, like I said, I'm not married to it. I mean, it's not etched in stone. Obviously.

Oh God, can I start over?

(*Blackout.*)

(*Lights up on Rivnine's office, where* **STEVEN** *sits across from* **RIVNINE**.)

STEVEN. So…ah. Yeah. So. Um. (*Rescued!*) Hey, what "donation"?

RIVNINE. Excuse me?

STEVEN. That guy, um, Brett. He said something about a big donation?

RIVNINE. He's referring to an anonymous gift.

STEVEN. Ah. From whom?

RIVNINE. What?

STEVEN. No, I know, *anonymous*, but aren't you on the committee, that, um –

RIVNINE. How did you know that?

STEVEN. Know what?

RIVNINE. That I'm on the disbursement committee. I

haven't even been to my first meeting. Nobody really knows yet that I'm even involved.

STEVEN. Then why are you telling me?

RIVNINE. I'm obviously very confused. Let's move on.

STEVEN. Of course. So: this committee. What's it like?

RIVNINE. I meant let's move on to you.

STEVEN. *I* don't know what it's like. You're the one on the committee.

RIVNINE. Well, Steven, I *imagine* that like any entity that's supposed to transcend politics, it's highly political. Everyone voting party line, as it were. (*Beat.*) But this is *your* time. Wow me.

STEVEN. "Wow" you?

RIVNINE. I'm very busy. If you want to convince me to take you on, I'm going to need to hear something very unusual.

STEVEN. You just might.

RIVNINE. Well then.

STEVEN. I couldn't help noticing that your bookshelves are pretty much empty.

RIVNINE. Yes.

STEVEN. It's just that everything's in boxes.

RIVNINE. That's because I'm changing offices. I mean, fifth floor? No elevator? Who'd want this?

STEVEN. Well there's the, uh…exercise.

RIVNINE. What?

STEVEN. You're leaving a few books behind.

RIVNINE. Yes. Don't want them anymore.

STEVEN. I see.

(**STEVEN** *crumples up his 'bibliography' and stuffs it into his bag.*)

RIVNINE. Listen, I'm lecturing, and I also have an appointment at the hospital, so if we could –

STEVEN. The hospital? Is everything all right?

RIVNINE. It's my wife.

STEVEN. Oh no.

RIVNINE. She's not ill, she's pregnant.

STEVEN. Your wife is pregnant.

RIVNINE. Yes.

STEVEN. Congratulations. Is it a boy or a girl?

RIVNINE. A girl.

STEVEN. Do you have a name?

RIVNINE. We haven't…What the hell is going on here?

STEVEN. What do you mean?

RIVNINE. You're very good at this, Steven.

STEVEN. What, good? Good at what? (*As though he mis-heard:*) What?

RIVNINE. Usually, it's clumsier. What are you doing, exactly? Working out final thoughts in your head while asking inane question to keep me occupied?

STEVEN. Not exactly.

RIVNINE. What, then? You forgot to bring a pen?

STEVEN. Of course not.

RIVNINE. So what is it? Do you just have *nothing?* You simply decided to come to the meeting with nothing at all prepared, is that it? (*Pause.*) Is that *it*? You actually have nothing? (*Long pause. Then, evenly:*) You're fucking kidding me.

STEVEN. Yeah, well.

RIVNINE. (*Lighting up.*) *Nothing*? Really nothing?

STEVEN. Yes.

RIVNINE. Wow.

STEVEN. (*Standing.*) So maybe I should just –

RIVNINE. No, stay, stay. (*Pause.*) You have no idea what to write about.

STEVEN. That's correct.

RIVNINE. And you came here anyway.

STEVEN. Yes.

RIVNINE. All right then. Now we're getting somewhere.

STEVEN. What?

RIVNINE. Well, did you hear it? I actually said "wow." So I guess you're over the first hurdle. Let's move on.

STEVEN. Oh. (*Pause. He sits.*) Uh…to where?

RIVNINE. Yes. Right. What happens now?

(*Blackout. There is the sound of frantic typing.*)

Germany, 1933

(*Lights up on* **BRECHT**, *seated at a plain wooden desk, working on a black typewriter. Books and papers are piled around him.*)

BRECHT. (*To the audience.*) Now: a scene for me.

(**BRECHT** *resumes typing. There is a violent pounding on a nearby door.*)

BRECHT. Hello?

(*The pounding stops. A* **VOICE** *speaks from behind the door. The actor is perhaps visible in silhouette, or dim light, and has a German accent.*)

VOICE. Herr Brecht?

BRECHT. Yes?

VOICE. I've just come from the premiere of your new play, Herr Brecht.

BRECHT. Really? It seems implausible that I'd have been here writing while that was going on.

VOICE. (*Pause.*) What?

BRECHT. Never mind. How was it received?

VOICE. It wasn't. The play was interrupted.

BRECHT. By whom?

VOICE. By the Nazis, Herr Brecht.

BRECHT. Why are you calling me Herr Brecht?

VOICE. What? That's…it's…isn't that your name?

BRECHT. Brecht is my name, yes. But we're having a conversation in English.

VOICE. I don't –

BRECHT. "Herr" is the only German word you're using! Is this supposed to make the people think that we're speaking German? You're not fooling anyone. And don't say it was the *premiere* of my new play, I'd have *been* there. You are shattering the reality of the scene!

VOICE. No, *you* are shattering the reality of the scene, by calling attention to these insignificant errors!

BRECHT. No, you are!

VOICE. No, you! (*Beat.*) Wait, *I* see what you're trying to do.

BRECHT. What's that?

VOICE. You are transforming the apparatus of bourgeois culture! After all, revolutionary content requires revolutionary forms.

BRECHT. (*To the audience.*) This is my friend Walter Benjamin, with whom I haunt the cafés of Berlin.

VOICE. Hello.

BRECHT. We're in Germany. It's 1933. Which means that we *are* speaking German, and also that if the Nazis want to disrupt my plays, they have the right.

(*To* **VOICE**.) What gives the Nazis the right to disrupt my plays?

VOICE. Bertolt, they are thinly veiled allegories condemning the government. Your stated goal is to destroy the German people.

BRECHT. When did I state such a goal?

VOICE. No, *they* have stated that it is your goal.

BRECHT. But it is not true! I am a devout communist! It is the people I protect!

VOICE. Nevertheless, there is talk of placing a price on your head.

BRECHT. Where?

VOICE. Among the policemen waiting downstairs.

BRECHT. Excuse me?

VOICE. I don't think that excusing you is what they have in mind, Herr Brecht. Indeed: the only reason I dared interrupt your writing was to suggest that you leave for your evening walk through the window tonight. And perhaps also that you walk all the way to Prague, or to Zurich, and not come back. They have the power to alter history, Bertolt. I think that not even the dead will be safe from this enemy if he wins.

(**BRECHT** *loads his belongings into his briefcase, and heads for the window.*)

BRECHT. Will you follow me, Walter?

VOICE. As soon as I can.

BRECHT. Then I'll see you on the other side of the border, my friend.

VOICE. What shall I tell them?

BRECHT. (*Opening the window.*) Tell them I am at work on a simple historical character study.

VOICE. Is that so?

BRECHT. (*One leg out the window.*) Yes. And that hopefully they will not interpret it as a thinly veiled allegory.

VOICE. We can only count on their indulgence. What, pray tell, is it called?

BRECHT. (*The other leg out the window.*) It's called: "The Life of Galileo."

(**BRECHT** *disappears out the window.*)

(*Blackout.*)

New England, 1999

(*Lights up on* **GRAD STUDENT #3**.)

GS3. Hi, my name is Paula Gretchen Sanders, and I'm a graduate student in Economics. My dissertation is a predictive study of the likely effects of the legalization of prostitution on the American economy. My goal is to determine whether or not prostitution's regulation by the federal government can provide useful revenue for social programs.

My dissertation is entitled: *Bitch, That's My Corner.*

(*Lights up on Rivnine's office.* **RIVNINE** *and* **STEVEN** *are both laughing hysterically. The laughter dies down. A beat.*)

RIVNINE. Nothing!

(*They both burst into renewed hysterics, which gradually die down to amused sighs.*)

STEVEN. You know, actually, I expected you to be… angrier…about this.

RIVNINE. I'm not a judge, Steven, I'm a scholar. Like you.

(*A beat. More laughter.* **RIVNINE** *clears his throat and takes control.*)

RIVNINE. No, this is great. You could write about *anything.* What would you like to write about?

STEVEN. Um. Milton?

RIVNINE. Oh dear God no.

STEVEN. I…I mean –

RIVNINE. If I have to advise one more thesis on Milton –

STEVEN. No, I…Not Milton.

RIVNINE. You're coming very close to wrecking this. Listen: what do *you* want to write about?

STEVEN. I don't know.

RIVNINE. How about this: what do you want your thesis to *do*?

STEVEN. I don't know. "Change the world"?

RIVNINE. All right. How does one do that?

STEVEN. I don't know. But rarely, I think, by writing an essay.

RIVNINE. Then by doing what?

STEVEN. I don't know.

RIVNINE. Could writing an essay help you find out?

STEVEN. Why are you helping me so much?

RIVNINE. I like you. I like that you came here totally unprepared.

STEVEN. Um. Why?

RIVNINE. It's not often that a student surprises me. That's very important.

STEVEN. I assumed you'd think I was wasting your time.

RIVNINE. Steven, scholarship has *always* been about reverse reasoning. Students writing essays, if they're smart, learn to write the introduction *last*. You've taken it to a…refreshing extreme, but the principle is the same. I think you came here like this because you're not willing to commit yourself to anything that doesn't interest you.

STEVEN. No no. *Nothing* interests me.

RIVNINE. Even better! Tell me about that.

STEVEN. I chose Humanities because it sounded awfully

broad. But it turns out to be less all-inclusive than the name suggests.

RIVNINE. Oh, but you can do whatever you want! Ideally, the Humanities isn't so much a discipline as it is a lack thereof.

STEVEN. Then perhaps it does not exist here in its ideal form.

RIVNINE. What does that mean?

STEVEN. Well, there's an authority on every subject, and straying too far outside of what they already have to say is sort of…forbidden. It's…There's pressure to vote party line. As it were.

RIVNINE. Huh. (*Pause.*) It's a shame if that's what we're teaching you. New ideas come *from* the students. When they come at all.

STEVEN. Well, then why –

RIVNINE. "Why, then, was this forbid?"

STEVEN. Yes. What?

RIVNINE. "Why but to awe. Why but to keep ye low and ignorant, his worshippers."

STEVEN. Excuse me?

RIVNINE. So, of *course* you become apathetic, of *course* you feel your only recourse is just to sail through, trying to fulfill your requirements as painlessly as…

STEVEN. Professor Rivnine?

(**RIVNINE** *has taken his copy of the Wallace Proposal out of his desk, and tucked it under his arm, as he stands and prepares to go.*)

RIVNINE. Call me Daniel.

STEVEN. Daniel?

RIVNINE. I've had a thought.

STEVEN. What is it?

RIVNINE. I'll be your adviser.

STEVEN. It's brilliant.

RIVNINE. That wasn't the thought.

STEVEN. Ah.

RIVNINE. I think this might work best if the advising duties were…shared. Do you know anything about Professor Eugene Lomax?

STEVEN. Yes. That's why I'm meeting with *you*.

RIVNINE. When you have a topic, talk to him. Ask him to co-advise your essay. Tell him I sent you. Now, unfortunately, I have another appointment.

STEVEN. Right. Which comes first? The committee or your wife?

RIVNINE. Actually, I'm hoping I won't have to choose.

STEVEN. No, I –

RIVNINE. That was a joke.

STEVEN. (*Awkwardly.*) Ahaha…ha.

RIVNINE. (*He heads for the door.*) You can have those leftover books, by the way.

STEVEN. Oh, yes. The ones you don't like.

RIVNINE. I don't think I said that. Which ones are they?

STEVEN. *The Apology of Socrates* by Plato…

…*The Cheese and The Worms* by Carlo Ginzburg…

…and *The Life of Galileo* by Bertolt Brecht.

RIVNINE. No, they're some of my favorites. I bought brand new editions. Take them.

(*On his way out,* **RIVNINE** *stops by his window.*)

FINISH READING THIS SCRIPT

Visit our website to purchase the full script or to explore other titles.

www.samuelfrench.com
www.samuelfrench.co.uk

To stay up to date on all that we are doing, follow us on social media:



*Titles for licensing are subject to availability depending on your territory.

SF PERUSALS