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

THE BLACK PRINCE

IRIS MURDOCH

SAMUEL FRENCH

The Black Prince

Iris Murdoch

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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

UNITED KINGDOM & EUROPE
Plays@SamuelFrench-London.co.uk
020-7255-4302

Copyright © 1989 by Iris Murdoch
All Rights Reserved

THE BLACK PRINCE 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.

FOR PRODUCTION ENQUIRIES

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

UNITED KINGDOM AND EUROPE
Plays@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 *THE BLACK PRINCE* 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 *THE BLACK PRINCE* 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

Bradley Pearson, an unsuccessful writer
Francis Marloe, a defrocked doctor
Arnold Baffin, a successful writer
Rachel Baffin, his wife
Julian Baffin, their daughter
Priscilla, Bradley Pearson's sister
Christine, Bradley Pearson's former wife
1st Policeman
2nd Policeman
Policewoman or **3rd Policeman**

The action takes place in the sitting-room of Bradley's flat, the sitting-room of Arnold's house and the sitting-room of Bradley's seaside cottage

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

SCENE 1	Bradley's flat
SCENE 2	Arnold's house
SCENE 3	Bradley's flat
SCENE 4	The same

ACT II

SCENE 1	The same
SCENE 2	The same
SCENE 3	Bradley's flat, Arnold's house
SCENE 4	Bradley's cottage
SCENE 5	The same
SCENE 6	Bradley's flat
SCENE 7	Arnold's house

THE BLACK PRINCE

First presented by Josephine Hart Productions Ltd, at the Aldwych Theatre, London, on 25th April 1989, with the following cast of characters:

Bradley Pearson	Ian McDiarmid
Francis Marloe	John Fortune
Arnold Baffin	Simon Williams
Rachel Baffin	Sarah Badel
Julian Baffin	Abigail Cruttenden
Priscilla	Norma West
Christine	Deborah Morton
1st Policeman	Peter Yapp
2nd Policeman	Christopher Mitchell
Policewoman	Norma Streader

Directed by Stuart Burge
Décor by Ultz
Lighting by Gerry Jenkinson
Music by Ilona Sekacz
Performed by the Stephen Hill Singers

ACT 1

SCENE 1

The sitting-room of Bradley Pearson's flat.

There are suitcases ready for departure. Bradley sings merry songs of liberation (such as "Linden Lea" or "Over The Hills And Far Away"). He lifts the telephone and dials

Bradley Can I have a taxi, please, to go to King's Cross Station? . . . Pearson. You know, Penrose Court. Straight away? . . . Thank you.

The doorbell rings

Bradley goes to the door. He returns with Francis

Who are you?

Francis I'm Francis, your brother-in-law, you know—

Bradley I have no wife, *ergo* no brother-in-law.

Francis She's back!

Bradley Who's back?

Francis Your wife, Christine, my sister, *you* know—

Bradley Christine is no longer my wife. I left her many years ago. Thank God.

Francis She's back from America, she's a widow, she's fearfully rich, don't you want to see her?

Bradley No.

Francis I'm sorry I haven't been around, you see I've been unfrocked.

Bradley I'd forgotten you were a priest. I'm afraid I've got a train to catch. I'm expecting a taxi.

Francis Not a *priest*! I'm a doctor—or I *was*—I've been struck off. Can't you remember me?

Bradley No. (*A sudden thought*). She didn't send you, did she?

Francis No, she's anti-me—don't be cross, Brad.

Bradley Don't call me "Brad"!

Francis Sorry, Brad, you see I need money, and when she comes to see you——

Bradley *What?*

Francis She really cared for you, like she loved you, she'll come.

Bradley No she won't! I'm just leaving for the country.

Francis She's rich now, *you* know, merry widow style.

Bradley I'll be away the whole summer. I'm going to write a *book*.

Francis She'll be after you, she'll want to show off, she'll come to gloat over you.

Bradley "Gloat"? What do you mean "gloat"?

Francis I've always liked you, Bradley, I've always admired you, I've read one of your books.
Bradley I haven't published any books!
Francis I forget its name, it was great—look, I'm in debt up to the neck, and when you see Christine you could——
Bradley No!
Francis With Chris back, it's like a new start, all sins forgiven.

The doorbell rings

Bradley No! Go away!

The telephone rings. Bradley picks it up. He points Francis to go to the door

Francis goes

Hello. Arnold, what's the matter? . . . *What?* . . . Impossible . . . You've killed her!? Don't be silly . . . You can't have killed her, you just can't have . . . Have you called a doctor? No? . . . What happened? . . . All right, I'll come round, I'll come at once . . .

Francis returns

Bradley replaces the receiver

Francis There's a taxi——What's up?
Bradley The wife of a friend of mine has had a serious accident, I'm just going over——
Francis Can I come?
Bradley No.
Francis I'm still a doctor in the eyes of God.
Bradley Yes—all right. Hold the taxi.

Francis goes

Bradley automatically picks up his suitcases, then puts them down

(*As the scene changes*) Arnold Baffin. The famous writer. He always exaggerates. I discovered him, I encouraged him. Now he's a book-a-year man. I'm not envious, I'm just not that kind of scribbler.

Scene 2

The sitting-room in Arnold Baffin's house

The room is in chaos, chairs overturned, books on the floor

Rachel, lying on a sofa, looks dramatically dead, head thrown back, arm drooping to the floor

Bradley Oh my God.
Arnold She was crying and screaming.
Bradley Dr Marloe—Arnold Baffin. He happened to be with me when you rang up about your wife's *accident.*
Francis Are you *the* Arnold Baffin?

Bradley Yes, he is.
Francis I do so admire your books, I've read several of them . . .
Arnold Oh thank you.
Bradley Arnold, just keep calm——
Arnold (*distraught*) She just lies there and doesn't move and I can't bear to look at her——
Bradley Arnold, sit down.

Francis watches with interest. Arnold sits, head in hands. Bradley goes to Rachel, kneels, takes her hand

Rachel, Rachel—it's me—Bradley. Oh dear. Her hand is so cold and——
Arnold (*moaning*) Oh, let her be all right . . .
Bradley Rachel—it's Bradley—she's moving, she's looking at me!

Faint moan from Rachel

Listen, she made a sound.
Arnold (*jumping up*) Oh darling, are you all right?
Bradley Just keep away.
Arnold I'm so sorry—oh my darling——
Bradley Rachel, dear Rachel, don't worry, we'll make you better. (*To Francis*) Look, you take over.

Bradley returns to Arnold. Francis fusses over Rachel, who is showing more signs of life

Arnold Is that chap a medical doctor?
Bradley Yes.
Arnold I thought he might be a doctor of literature. Look, let's have a drink. Oh God, I've been a bloody fool.

With shaking hand Arnold pours out whisky for himself. From now on Arnold begins to recover, perhaps regrets having panicked so soon and invited his friend into this domestic scene

Bradley What happened?
Arnold We had a damn stupid argument about one of my books—she thinks, or says she thinks, they're all about *her*, all caricatures of *her*.
Francis (*coming forward*) First-aid kit? Hot water, basin, towels?
Arnold (*pointing*) Kitchen. Is she OK?
Francis Hope so.

Francis goes

Arnold I thought she was done for. Silly of me to panic. She gets this persecution mania—I said a few things and then we just couldn't stop, she began to scream and I can't *stand* that, and I pushed her and she clawed my face—here, see—and I slapped her and then she sprang on me like a tiger and I picked up this poker just to keep her away, like a barrier between us, I didn't mean to hit her, I mean, I didn't hit her, and then suddenly she was pouring blood——

Francis appears, drying his hands on a towel

Francis Nothing serious—a cut on the head, a lot of bruising, very nasty fall she must have had. I think her nose is OK.
Arnold I'm so grateful——
Francis Bit of concussion and shock. You'd better get your own doctor. (*To Bradley*) She wants to see you, not him.
Arnold Oh my sweetheart, don't be angry with me!
Bradley You two clear off.

Francis and Arnold depart. Francis seizes the whisky bottle as he goes

Bradley goes to Rachel, who has come forward

There, my dear, there now, you'll be all right.

Rachel is a sad sight, blood, black eye. She feels her nose carefully and round her eye. She is not crying now. She speaks in a fierce cold voice, not looking at Bradley

Rachel No I won't be all right.
Bradley Of course you will!
Rachel It's the shame, it's the disgrace—and he invited you round to see it!
Bradley He was shaking like a leaf. He was afraid he'd hurt you.
Rachel Hurt me! He's taken my whole life and blackened it and stolen it and put it into his hateful lying books. *And* he discusses me with other women, everybody loves him and flatters him, he's surrounded by women. Be my witness, I shall never forgive him, never, never, never, not if he were to kneel at my feet for twenty years. If he were drowning I'd watch, I'd *laugh*.
Bradley Rachel, please don't talk in this awful theatrical way. You don't mean it, don't say it! Of course, you'll forgive him!
Rachel I'm just as clever as he is—but I can't work, I can't think, I can't *be* because of him. I've never lived my own life at all, I've always been afraid of him, that's what it comes to. All men despise all women really, all women fear all men really. Men are physically stronger, that's what it comes to. They can end an argument! He's given me a black eye, just like any common drunken lout——
Bradley I'm sure there were faults on both sides.
Rachel I'm a battered wife.
Bradley But you hit him.
Rachel Ach! And he's hit me before! I never told him, but the first time he hit me our marriage came to an end. He has taken away my life and spoilt it, breaking every little piece of it, like breaking every bone in one's body, every little thing ruined and spoilt and *stolen*.
Bradley Rachel, don't talk like this, I won't listen.
Rachel He wouldn't let me take a job. I obeyed him, I've always obeyed him! I haven't any private things. He owns the world. It's all his, his! I won't save him at the end. I'll watch him drown, I'll watch him burn.
Bradley Oh, Rachel——
Rachel And I won't forgive you either for seeing me like this with my face all bruised and my eyes running with tears.

Bradley Rachel you're upsetting me!
Rachel And now you'll go and comfort him and connive with him and tell him all the dreadful things I've said.
Bradley No I won't!
Rachel I fill you with disgust and contempt—a battered whimpering middle-aged woman. Now I'm going upstairs to bed. Just tell Arnold not to come near me. I'll come down later, I'll be as usual, I'll be myself. Myself, ha! (*She starts to go*)
Bradley Don't be cross with me, it's not my fault!

Rachel departs. A distant door slams

Poor old Rachel. And it's not the end of that either. (*He turns to the audience*) My life before it was enlivened by these events had been a quiet one. Some people might call it dull. In fact, if one can use that rather beautiful and pungent word in an almost non-emotive sense, my life had been sublimely dull. A great dull life—spent working as a Tax Inspector. A great Danish philosopher once described the truly virtuous man as "looking like an Inspector of Taxes". More usually, and perhaps this is the point, a taxman is a figure of fun. The profession like that of dentist, invites laughter. But this laughter is, I suspect, uneasy. Both taxman and dentist only too readily image forth the deeper horrors of human life; that we must pay for our pleasures, that our resources are lent, not given, and that our faculties decay even as they grow. My life since—all this (*a gesture*) has been secluded, solitary. I have in my monastic enclosure become more happy, I hope more wise . . . This direct speaking is a kind of relief. It eases some pressure upon the heart, allowing the mind to pass like a light along a series of present moments aware of past images, unaware of what is to come. I am a writer, a serious writer, that is an artist. If someone complains, but you have published nothing! I reply: that is the essence. I am not a blocked writer, I am a perfectionist—a slave of the dark power which alone enables beauty to be truth. In art, as in lives of men, great things are lost because at the crucial moment, when the empowered imagination is poised for its final work, we let go, we think, "that'll do", and we accept the second best. When is that moment? Greatness is to recognize it, to hold it, to extend it (*he gestures*). The most sacred command laid upon any artist is: wait. Writing is like getting married. Don't commit yourself until you are amazed at your luck.

Arnold and Francis return, carrying bottles and glasses

She's gone to bed. She says please leave her alone, she'll be down later.
Arnold God, what a relief. I expect she'll be down for supper. I'll cook her something special.
Bradley All the same it was a serious accident.
Arnold He says she'll recover quickly. Have another drink.
Bradley I haven't had one yet. (*To Francis*) Well, we needn't keep you, thank you for helping.
Arnold Oh, don't go, Doctor!

Bradley (*firmly*) Goodbye.
Arnold I'm so grateful—do I owe you anything?
Bradley You owe him nothing.

Francis is very reluctant to go. He drains his glass. Bradley begins to shepherd him out

Francis Better keep her in bed. (*To Bradley*) About what we said before—when you see Christine——
Bradley I won't.
Francis Here's my address. (*He thrusts it into Bradley's hand*)
Bradley Goodbye, thank you.

Francis departs

Arnold fills his own glass. They continue to drink during the conversation which follows

Do you really think she'll come down to supper?
Arnold Yes, she never sulks for long. These rows aren't real warfare, we love each other. My hand is trembling—look at the way that glass is shaking—it's quite involuntary—isn't it odd?
Bradley You'd better get your own doctor in tomorrow.
Arnold Oh I shall be all right tomorrow. You know I think she was shamming a bit to frighten me.
Bradley Do you mind if I tidy up?

Bradley puts chairs upright, returns books to the bookcase

Arnold We're happily married. I'm not a violent person. But marriage is a long journey. Of course we argue. Every married person is a Jekyll and Hyde really. You know, Rachel is a real nagger. She can go on and on saying the same thing over and over, I mean repeating the same sentence.
Bradley Then she should see a psychiatrist.
Arnold That shows you've no idea! Half an hour later she's singing in the kitchen.
Bradley She said you discussed her with other women. You're not playing around?
Arnold No, I'm a model husband! Why shouldn't I talk to women, I have to have friends, I can't give way on a point like that—it could be a very serious sacrifice—and if a sacrifice would make you mad with resentment you oughtn't to make it!
Bradley Naturally I won't mention this business to anybody.
Arnold (*glancing at Bradley, a bit annoyed*) Oh—well—suit yourself. Why did you chuck that doctor out so quickly? He said he was your friend.
Bradley Did he! Well, he's not!
Arnold He said something about Christine—wasn't that your wife?
Bradley Ex-wife. He's her brother.
Arnold How awfully interesting! Isn't she in America? She married an American. I wish I'd met her.

Bradley She's in London now, she's a rich widow.
Arnold So you'll see her?
Bradley No, why should I? I don't like her.
Arnold Hurt pride?
Bradley Hurt pride! No, *I* left *her.*
Arnold Well, resentment.
Bradley Hatred, my dear Arnold, pure mutual hatred.
Arnold I don't believe in hatred, I think it's terribly rare. I should be dying with curiosity if I were you. So the doctor is her brother——
Bradley He's not a doctor, he was struck off.
Arnold Ex-wife, ex-doctor! What did he do?
Bradley I don't know, I don't like him either.
Arnold You mustn't be so censorious. I rather liked him actually, I asked him to come round and see us.
Bradley Oh no . . .!
Arnold You ought to be interested in people and know details about them, justice demands details. Curiosity is a kind of charity.
Bradley I think curiosity is a kind of malice.
Arnold That's what makes a writer, knowing details.
Bradley It may be your sort of writer, it doesn't make mine!
Arnold Here we go again!
Bradley Malicious sketches and lists of things one happens to have noticed isn't art!
Arnold I never said it was—I don't draw directly from life!
Bradley Your wife thinks so.
Arnold (*dismissive gesture*) Oh . . .!
Bradley Journalistic reportage isn't art, and neither is semi-pornographic romantic fantasy! Art is truth, art is imagination, it's metamorphosis, without that you have either senseless details or egotistic dreams.
Arnold (*raising his voice*) All right!
Bradley Art comes out of endless restraint plus silence.
Arnold If the silence is endless there isn't any art!
Bradley One must wait for what's perfect——
Arnold I publish things without waiting for them to be perfect because I know they'll never be perfect, anything else is hypocrisy—that's what it means to be a professional writer. Why not just think of yourself as someone who very occasionally writes something, who may in the future write something? Why make a life drama out of it?
Bradley Are you suggesting I'm some sort of amateur?
Arnold I know I'm second rate, I live with continual failure, every book is the wreck of a good idea! But there's no point in moaning about it—if you publish a book it must look after itself. I don't think I'd write better if I wrote less, I'd just be less happy.

Bradley grimaces

I enjoy writing, it's a natural function. The alternative is to be like you, finish nothing, publish nothing, have a grudge against the whole world, and feel superior to people who try and fail!

Bradley How clearly you put it, my dear fellow.

Julian enters. She is wearing a track-suit and carrying a cassette player with headphones

Bradley and Arnold exchange signals

Julian Hello Bradley.
Arnold Hello darling. You haven't seen your mother have you? I'll just pop up, she's not well.

Arnold goes

Julian They were quarrelling so I left the house. Have they calmed down?
Bradley Yes of course.
Julian Don't you think they quarrel more than they used to?
Bradley No!
Julian I'm so glad you're here, I want to ask you something. (*She tears up a letter*)
Bradley What are you doing?
Julian It's a love-letter from my ex-boyfriend.
Bradley Have you parted company?
Julian Yes, here goes the last I hope. (*She puts it in the waste-paper basket*) That's better. I want your advice about something.
Bradley What?

Arnold enters

Or is it a secret?
Arnold She's asleep.
Julian I've decided to become a writer, and I want you to help me.

Groans from Bradley and Arnold

Bradley (*pointing to Arnold*) There's the expert!
Julian Fathers can't teach—and anyway I think I'm going to be your kind of writer, not Daddy's kind.
Bradley (*amused*) What is my kind?
Julian The slow kind.

Bradley and Arnold laugh

Julian skips out

Arnold Bradley—we mustn't be enemies, we *mustn't* be—Not just because it's nicer to be at peace, but because we could do serious damage to each other—we know exactly what hurts the other most.
Bradley (*making to go*) I couldn't damage anybody. I just want to get my book written.
Arnold (*getting a book*) By the way, here's my latest novel, with the usual affectionate inscription. Someone told me you were reviewing it?

Bradley, accepting the novel, politely signifies assent

Why don't you come to lunch next week? Rachel would love to see you.

Bradley Would she? Next week I shall be over the hills and far away. I've left the old Tax Office, I'm a free man!

Arnold Of course, that cottage by the sea where you're going to write your great book. Where is it?

Bradley That's a secret! (*To the audience*) I had at various times tried quite hard to reflect rationally upon the value of Arnold's work. I think I objected to him most because he was such a "gabbler". He wrote very carelessly, of course. But the gabble was not just casual and slipshod, it was an aspect of what one might call his "metaphysic". Arnold was always trying, as it were, to take over the world by emptying himself over it like scented bath water.

Scene 3

Bradley's flat

Bradley is on the phone

Bradley Can I have a taxi, please, to go to King's Cross Station? . . . Pearson. You know, Penrose Court. Straight away? . . . Thank you.

The front doorbell rings

Damn!

Bradley goes to the door and admits Priscilla. She walks in, and starts to cry

Priscilla! What's the matter? For God's sake—what is it?

Priscilla I've left my husband.

Bradley Bloody Roger—I'm not surprised. Yes, I am surprised! Don't be silly, you can't have left him, you've had some little tiff—it's the hot weather.

Priscilla My marriage is over, my life is over, I'm dead, I'm dried up, I'm *shrivelled* with misery and grief, years and years of misery and grief.

Bradley Priscilla, I'm terribly sorry, but I am just at this moment leaving London. I've just rung for a taxi.

Priscilla You're my brother, you've got to help me, someone's got to help me. I don't know how a human being can be so unhappy all the time and still be alive (*a sob*). Roger has become a devil, he wants to kill me, he tried to poison me.

Bradley Oh nonsense——

Priscilla Living with someone who hates you drives you mad. He said I was mad and he'd have me certified. I put up with it because there was nothing else to do.

Bradley Priscilla, there *is* nothing else to do! Roger's a very selfish nasty man, but you'll just have to forgive him! You can't leave him, you haven't anywhere else to go.

Priscilla I got rid of the child because he said he couldn't afford it and then I couldn't have another.

Bradley Please, not that old story! Look, I've got a train to catch.

Priscilla I've never felt well since, never. I think I've got cancer. Can I have a drink? I've started drinking. That's another thing he holds against me.

Bradley brings a sherry bottle and glass, pours some. Priscilla takes off her shoes, then her jacket and skirt. Bradley watches with dismay as she begins to settle herself on the sofa

Could you put a rug over me?

Bradley puts a rug over her. Priscilla sips the sherry, then petulantly returns it to Bradley

No, don't touch me, I can't bear to be touched, I feel like a leper, I feel my flesh is rotting. Do I smell terrible? I wish I was a corpse, a dead one not a living one. He cut down my magnolia tree, the garden was *his* garden, the house was *his* house, I gave him my life, I haven't got another one. Oh, I'm so *frightened.*

Bradley (*to the audience*) My parents kept a stationer's shop in Croydon. My sister Priscilla and I slept under the counter. No, of course we didn't, we can't have done—but I remember it all the same. Some people just have rotten lives. Why did God love Jacob and hate Esau? Answer me that one! Take Priscilla for instance. My mother certainly hated Priscilla. Well, she hated me too, but I hated her so it didn't signify. (*To Priscilla*) Priscilla, listen, I'm going away—you can't stay here!

Priscilla Roger hated the sight of me, he said so. And I used to cry in front of him, I'd sit and cry for hours with sheer misery, and he'd just go on reading the paper.

Bradley You make me feel quite sorry for him!

Priscilla Oh I know I've lost my looks——

Bradley As if that mattered!

Priscilla So you think I look horrible? Ach—I made a home for that man, I tried and tried, when he shouted at me I asked him to forgive me! I kept trying to make everything nice for him, to keep the house nice and now I've left it all behind, all my things, my nice *things*, my fur coat, my pearls, my amber necklace, and my little ornaments, the little animals I had, my Chinese vases and the silver looking-glass and the ducks—all my nice things, all gone.

Bradley They're perfectly safe at home!

Priscilla No they're not! There is no home. Please, please, could you go and fetch them. He'll destroy them all out of spite. I'm a fool, I just ran out—I hate Roger, I hate him, I'd like to stick a red-hot knitting-needle into his liver.

Bradley Priscilla!

Priscilla I read it in a detective story. You die slowly in terrible agony.

Bradley Do stop this!

Priscilla You don't understand, you don't see the horror, no wonder you can't write books, you've had an easy life, you've never had this sort of

pain, oh the pain, if you only knew what it's like to be me, to want to spend hours and hours just screaming with pain . . . (*She begins to utter little hysterical moaning cries*)

Bradley Oh shut up! You can't stay here!

Priscilla I'll kill myself—that's best—they'll say she's better dead—she had too much pain—and now it's over—she's dead, she's DEAD.

The doorbell rings

Bradley Oh God, the taxi——

Bradley goes to the door

Priscilla produces a bottle of pills from her handbag and swallows handfuls of them with gulps of sherry

Bradley returns

Now just stop all this——

Priscilla (*calmly*) Don't worry—I've just eaten all my sleeping pills.

Bradley I don't believe you——

Priscilla Eaten them all—see? (*She shows the empty bottle*) Now you can go away. Just leave me alone—and I'll go to sleep—and forget it all—forever—it's the end, it's the end. (*She drops the bottle on the floor and covers her face with the rug*)

Bradley Oh God—Priscilla! (*He rushes to and fro; lifts the telephone; fumbles with telephone directories*) Now you've made me miss my train.

The doorbell rings

Bradley goes out and then returns with Francis

Francis I hope you don't mind my coming.

Bradley No, I don't!

Francis *What?*

Bradley My sister has just taken an overdose of sleeping pills—she's under that rug.

Francis removes the rug and inspects Priscilla who moans slightly

Francis Try to get her sitting up. What did she take? Can you find the bottle?

Bradley It was here just now . . .

During what follows Francis carries on a sort of struggle with Priscilla who is moaning and throwing herself about

Francis Ring up Middlesex Hospital and ask for Casualty. How many did you take? Tell me what you took.

Priscilla gags. The doorbell rings

Arnold and Rachel enter. They are in their best clothes and look like a model pair in an advertisement except that Rachel has a slightly black eye. They stand together and click their heels and salute, smiling at Bradley

Arnold You left the door open so we came in. We thought we'd come and parade ourselves, it's such a lovely warm day. We want to show you how all right we are, and wish you *bon voyage* and the best of luck with the book!

Arnold
Rachel } (*together*) *Bon voyage* and best of luck with the book!

Bradley My sister Priscilla has just attempted suicide.

Exclamations of appalled sympathy

Francis Where's the bottle?
Bradley I've got to find the bottle. (*He starts crawling about the floor*)
Arnold What bottle? We'll help!

They all help

Francis Ring up the hospital!
Bradley Rachel, could you do it? Ring the Middlesex hospital and ask for Casualty and tell them——
Rachel Yes—yes——
Priscilla Help me, help me to die.
Francis You're not going to die.

Rachel seizes the telephone book from Bradley. During the following exchanges her voice continues semi-audibly, sometimes covered by the other speeches. An effect of everyone talking at once

Arnold Francis, my dear old friend, always where the action is!
Rachel Casualty please, yes, urgent.
Priscilla (*in the background*) Help me—help me to die—oh help me to die.
Rachel Someone has taken an overdose of sleeping pills.

Julian enters

Julian What's happened? Dad, what's happened?
Arnold (*searching*) The bottle, the bottle.
Julian (*to Bradley*) Is someone hurt?
Bradley No, yes, my sister, that's my sister. We've got to find the bottle!
Julian Oh dear! What bottle?
Priscilla Can't you please just let me die?
Arnold (*finding the bottle*) Is this it?

Francis comes forward and takes the bottle

Francis Brad! Some salty water.

Bradley goes to fetch it

Rachel I can't hear—(*To the others*) Be quiet! (*Shouting to Bradley*) When did she take them?
Bradley (*off*) Just now.
Rachel Just now. . . . Yes—yes . . .
Priscilla Bradley, you won't leave me, will you, you'll go and get my things——

Rachel Twenty-three Penrose Court—you know—yes . . .
Priscilla I haven't anyone but you, you won't leave me alone, will you . . .
Bradley (*off*) Of course not.
Rachel That's right, we're quite close.
Priscilla I'm so unhappy . . .

Bradley returns with a glass of water

Bradley Stop jumping about, can't you *rest*?
Priscilla *Rest!*
Rachel (*finishing the phone call*) Yes—thank you so much. (*To Francis*) I'm so grateful to you.
Francis (*pleased*) Not at all, it was a pleasure.

The doorbell rings

Rachel It can't be the ambulance already.
Priscilla Don't leave me!
Arnold I'll go.

Arnold and Rachel go out to the front door

Francis returns to Priscilla. Bradley comes forward, holding his head

Julian Bradley, I'm so sorry. Poor Priscilla, oh dear, old age is so awful.
Bradley (*raised eyebrows, curtly*) Yes. Isn't it. (*Distractedly he tidies the scene, picking up Priscilla's skirt and shoes*)
Julian But she'll be all right, won't she?
Bradley Yes, yes.
Julian Bradley, I'm sorry to be a bother, can I ask you something?
Bradley (*distracted*) What?
Julian Could you do something for me?
Bradley Oh God, why does this have to happen!
Julian Could you talk to me a bit about *Hamlet*?
Bradley *Hamlet*?
Julian I don't mean now. What about Tuesday at eleven, here. You see it's my set book for my exam. It's such a *confusing* play—Do you think Gertrude was in league with Claudius to kill the king?
Bradley No.
Julian I thought perhaps she was having an affair with Claudius before the king died?
Bradley No.
Julian You don't think that all women at a certain age feel an urge to commit adultery . . . ?
Bradley No.

Sounds of ambulance

Rachel returns

She helps Francis to get Priscilla to her feet and propel her towards the door

Rachel Ambulance.

Priscilla Nobody loves me, nobody cares about me. My mother hated me, my father hated. They broke my back, they broke my bones.
Bradley God, I hope she'll be all right.
Priscilla (*at the door*) I don't exist, I've never existed. I'm nothing—nothing . . .

Her wails die away outside, as Rachel and Francis lead her out, wrapped in a rug

Bradley Wait a moment, what about her clothes! (*He rushes to Julian carrying Priscilla's jacket, skirt, shoes*)

Julian goes with them. During this confusion, Arnold has returned, unnoticed by Bradley, with Christine. She looks youthful and smart, and speaks with a slight American accent

(*To Arnold*) What's the matter with you? (*Noticing Christine*) Christine!
Christine Bradley—after all these years, the same old Bradley, I thought you might be old and grey, but you're *young*—isn't he young——?

Rachel enters

Rachel Francis has gone with her, she'll be fine. (*She sits on the sofa*)
Christine And poor old Priscilla, I remember Priscilla—oh the poor thing. Isn't it just a cry for help, Rachel?

Julian enters

And this is your lovely daughter. Hi Julian!
Julian Hi.
Bradley (*utterly confused*) But—do you all know each other?
Christine Yes, we do!—We met on the doorstep. Say, I like your friends. (*Indicating Arnold*) I've read all his books, isn't that great? (*To Arnold*) I wrote an essay on you when I was a mature student.
Arnold You must come round and see us.
Rachel Yes, do come!

Arnold and Rachel are thoroughly amused by this scene, so far

Christine I'd love to—I don't have any friends in London now, I don't know anybody except him (*indicating Bradley*) and my delinquent brother—*he* came round to my place yesterday asking for money and now it turns out he's a friend of you—all—it's a small world, that's for sure. Bradley—(*she stares at him with appreciation, head on one side*) well, well, it's like old times . . .
Arnold May we offer Christine a drink? (*He does so, getting glasses from the cupboard and seizing the sherry bottle*)
Julian Bradley, I have to go.
Christine Oh.
Julian Tuesday will be OK, won't it?

Julian exits

Christine Brad, you're all of a tremble!
Bradley (*to Christine*) Will you please leave my house?
Christine Bradley, please don't take that tone. I've been thinking about is all—I come in peace.
Arnold Bradley, relax, you've got to face it, it's got to happen——
Christine It's happening. I'm all of a tremble too. I'm in a state of shock. You know I pictured this meeting a thousand times, I dreamt about it, I thought I'd faint! And now—it's a blessed miracle. Brad, dear, do say something—say something kind and good!
Bradley I have written you a letter. Here it is.

He hands the letter to Christine who reads it

Christine Well, it's not very polite! (*She hands the letter to Arnold*)
Arnold (*reading*) "I do not under *any circumstances wish to see you*. Do not, prompted by curiosity or morbid interest attempt to . . . In the long years of our merciful separation I have forgotten you . . ."
Christine Of course he hasn't! (*She peers at the letter too*)
Arnold (*touching her sleeve and reading on*) "I was relieved to be rid of you, I do not like you. But since your memories of me are doubtless as disagreeable as my memories of you . . ."
Christine But they're not disagreeable, that's what I came to say! You mustn't be scared.
Bradley I am not scared!
Christine Well, you're all sort of excited—isn't he excited?
Arnold (*very amused*) Oh Bradley, what a writer you are, it's a real writer's letter! Listen to this.
Bradley Shut up!
Christine Jesus, I shall get the giggles—I always do when I'm shit scared. (*Indicating Arnold*) You know this man makes me laugh! Oh Lordie!

Arnold is laughing quietly over Bradley's letter. Christine begins to giggle. He and Christine go off into crazy laughter

Rachel (*now uneasy*) Bradley, I'm sorry. Don't worry about Priscilla. Come on, Arnold, we must go too.
Arnold I'm going to stay with Bradley, I think he needs a friend!
Christine I could look after Priscilla. I know all about suicide, My God, I did a course. I'll go see her.
Bradley Oh no you won't.
Christine Don't get so het up, man. Let's talk.
Bradley I refer you to my letter.
Christine (*to Arnold*) You say something to him.

Arnold much amused, makes despairing gestures. Christine laughs. She turns to Bradley

Come now. I'm glad to see you. I thought you'd be glad to see me. I pictured your eyes all warm and smiling. Was I crazy? Maybe it's just that I'm happy now. I get a buzz from the whole world, I love everything. I wake in the morning and I cry Hallelujah! (*Turning to*

Arnold) Am I awful? You see I'm free now, I'm a free lady. Like in Zen when you get enlightenment.

Arnold Satori! I know all about Buddhism.

Christine (*to Arnold*) I guess I went through Zen like a knife through butter. I'm into real philosophy now—Goodness Ethics.

Arnold Aren't all ethics goodness ethics?

Christine (*counting on her fingers*) Oh no—there's Duty Ethics, and Virtue Ethics, and Welfare Ethics—But Goodness Ethics is the new Christianity. God is out, he's right out, he's finished. That leaves Jesus, sort of like Buddha, you can have him for free, no need to believe in all that old stuff. (*She points upward*) It's all here and now! You take Jesus as your Saviour, and Jesus equals Goodness, so you just *love* Goodness, like in Plato!

Rachel Plato!

Arnold That sounds wonderful, we must discuss it, I'm so interested in religion.

Christine (*to Bradley*) He's laughing at me, but it's all true!

Bradley You came here to exhibit your self-satisfaction, your fancy American accent and your money, and now that you have done so will you kindly understand that I do not want to see you.

Christine What's wrong with being rich? It's a quality, it's attractive. Rich people are nicer, they're less nervy, they're serene. Look, I come back here and I come straight to you. Think about that. I'm not an emotional kid looking for kicks. I'm a middle-aged well-balanced woman. I can see into my motivation. I was years in deep analysis back in Illinois. I want real happiness. I want friendship, I want to know all sorts of people, I want to help people. I guess it would help us if we could discuss our marriage, so we could sort of redeem the past.

Bradley You make me sick——

Christine Say, have you been analysed?

Bradley *Analysed?!*

Christine Lie down, relax, and talk about yourself to a nice wise Jew, it's great. That's what you need! (*To Arnold*) Don't you agree?

Bradley And leave my friends alone!

Christine Oh come on, Brad, you don't own your friends. You're getting jealous already! (*To Arnold*) He always was a jealous man. (*To Bradley*) How many books have you published? I thought you'd be a real author by now. We had a literary guy from England to our Writer's Circle, but he hadn't heard of you. Say, it's great to meet Arnold Baffin though. You still in the old Tax Office?

Arnold He's retired.

Christine I've got some dandy tax problems. I thought maybe you'd help me. (*To Arnold*) He never should have been in that office, he ought to have been out seeing the real world, no wonder he can't write. I've seen plenty and I'll see plenty more. I always wanted to be an authoress, I did a course in creative writing and——

Bradley (*pointing to the door*) Will you get out?

Christine Bradley, don't be unkind to me—don't you think I might be a different person now?

Bradley I am not interested in anything you might have become.

Arnold Of course he's interested! Bradley don't be so pompous and vindictive!

Bradley gestures towards the door

Christine All right, buster, if that's the way you want it. I thought maybe we could have some fun together, you and me. I'm a rich woman now, I'm going to be happy and I'm going to make other folks happy. I've been looking at you, Bradley Pearson, and you're not a happy man.

Bradley I may not be happy, but I'm not for sale. Go away I hate you. I just simply hate you.

Christine Bradley, hatred's bad, it's negative.

Bradley points again at the door. Christine makes a wry face and a helpless gesture. She repeats the gesture to Arnold. She waves to Rachel, who is still sitting on the sofa

Bye!

Christine goes out

Arnold galvanized, starts to go after her, then turns back

Arnold Bradley . . .

Bradley regards him grimly

Arnold with a quick glance at Rachel runs out after Christine

Silence while Bradley and Rachel, not looking at each other, breathe deeply

Rachel (*still sitting at the back*) Well, that was an interesting scene.

Bradley Hatred is terrible, it's degrading . . .

Rachel I don't think it's degrading, it's a natural phenomenon. It's a source of energy.

Bradley (*absorbed in his rage and misery*) That woman gets right inside me, it's like swallowing a knife. But no-one seems to want to believe that I really do hate her!

Rachel I believe it. I know hatred.

Bradley She's the only person I hate. Because of her I know about hatred, and I don't like it. Being infuriated with Arnold is something quite different. God, I must calm down! I've written a nasty review of his new novel, I can't decide whether to publish it. (*He takes the review from his pocket and reads*) Listen to this. "Arnold Baffin's new novel provides his many admirers with what they want, the mixture as before. Hero, stockbroker, forty, decides to become a monk, enters monastery. Heroine, sister of Abbot, intense lady returned from East, tries to convert hero to Buddhism. Boring ill-informed discussion of comparative religion." (Oh for a little light relief!) "Abbot" (Christ figure of course) "is killed by immense bronze crucifix falling on his head. Is it an

accident?" etc. etc. (*Skipping*) "Mr Baffin is a fluent prolific writer, this facility, which he mistakes for imagination, is his worst enemy. A good writer needs the courage to destroy and to wait. Judging by his output, Mr Baffin is incapable of either destroying or waiting. Only a genius can afford 'never to blot a line'. We must ask of this book, not whether it is entertaining, but whether it is a work of art. The answer is, alas, no. Naturally the film rights have already been sold."

Rachel (*peering at the review*) It's perfectly horrid, it's spiteful, you can't publish that!

Bradley makes as if to crumple it up, then restores it to his pocket

Actually you're in love with Arnold, everybody is, you're a masochist, you like it when he puts you down.

Bradley I do not!

Rachel He's very fond of you. So is Julian. She admires you because you're so unlike Dad, she says she's been trying to attract your attention for years. I wish you'd see her sometime. She's awfully unhappy, poor child.

Bradley It's an unhappy age, always falling in love. Thank God I'm past it.

Rachel Are you? I see you as all set to fall in love all over again with Christine.

Bradley (*controlled*) Rachel, dear, don't make me *scream*!

Rachel She's awfully clever and attractive. I think Arnold's fallen for her already.

Bradley No!!

Rachel What do you imagine he's doing now? He's sitting with her in some pub, then he'll give her lunch, then they'll go back to her flat, and he'll make her tell him everything about your marriage.

Bradley Let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heavens!

Rachel (*cool, tormenting him*) Arnold makes people talk, he's everybody's father confessor. She'll be dying to tell him the details of how awful it was.

Bradley If Arnold were to . . . with Christine . . .

Rachel I know, you'd kill him. Perhaps we need to *imagine* things like that to stop us actually murdering our nearest and dearest. Calm down, Bradley, remember you're a quiet timid man. It's all in your head.

Bradley I live in my head. (*He suddenly seizes Arnold's new novel which is lying on the table and tears it to pieces*) Sorry.

Rachel (*kicking the pieces away*) Don't worry, I enjoyed that. Really, about Arnold and his women, I'm a bit relieved, it helps me to feel free. Let's have a drink.

Bradley I'm always drinking these days. I don't usually. God, and there's poor Priscilla, I must ring up——

Rachel pours a drink for herself and Bradley

Rachel Bradley, sit down.

They sit side by side

Bradley I thought you might hate the sight of me because I came—you know, on that day . . .

Rachel No, it makes me feel closer to you. I've always wanted to know you better, but I've felt shy. You're a *difficult* man.

Bradley (*gratified*) Am I?

Rachel I imagine it's a long time since you made love to a woman.

Bradley Yes. (*Pregnant pause*) Look, I really must ring the hospital . . .

He is reaching for the telephone when it rings

Yes. . . . (*To Rachel*) It's Francis. Yes, Francis. She's all right, no danger at all? . . . Thank heavens for that. . . . Yes, I'll fetch her bloody things . . . she's made a list, has she! . . . Good! . . . Thank you. . . . I'll be along. (*He replaces the receiver*) I think I'd better—go and see her . . .

Bradley is clearly uncertain about whether he wants to sit down again beside Rachel or to run away to see Priscilla. Rachel firmly pats the sofa and he returns to his seat

Rachel Bradley, I knew she'd be all right. Do you mind if I kiss you? I've always wanted to give you a real kiss, not just a social kiss. (*She kisses him*) Bradley—dear . . .

Bradley Thank you. But—look—I'm a lone wolf——

Rachel I've only kissed you! You *are* racing ahead! Or do you think women of my age have a sudden urge——?

Bradley Like Gertrude. No.

Rachel Who's Gertrude?

Bradley Old flame of mine. I just mean I don't want any muddle.

Rachel You mean like falling in love with *me*?

Bradley (*calmly*) No. It's just that I've got work to do. I've got to be alone. I'm going to write a book I've been waiting all my life to write.

Rachel Don't be so solemn about your book, it won't do it any good! You musn't think of yourself as a writer, like Arnold, you must just write. You need *more life* and that's what I need too. Now hold my hand, that's right, I won't harm you, Bradley, it's all *simple*. I need love, I need more people to love, I need you to love. I think you need me to love. I've been so tired—and motionless—I must move, I must have new feelings. That won't hurt Arnold, he'll be glad—I've become a dull wife. Listen, concentrate, you're good for me, you're the only person with whom I'm not acting a part!

Bradley I'm glad—but——

Rachel We may even have found a key to happiness—one can't really be happy until one's over forty. My dear, don't look like that, I don't mean dramas or adventures or crises, we must just come closer, you must let me love you.

Bradley But do you mean something secret? I don't like secrets.

Rachel No, Arnold will know, everyone will know, that we care for each other a bit specially—but—well—any close friendship is secret too. You do love me a bit, don't you?

Bradley Of course, I always have, but I can't exactly define——
Rachel Don't define! That's the point!
Bradley Rachel, I don't want to feel guilty, it would interfere with my work.
Rachel (*a little laugh*) Oh, you're such a puritan! (*She slips off her jacket*)
Bradley I'm terrified of being tied to anything just now, I've got to write this book and I've got to be *worthy* of it.
Rachel Bradley, I do admire you, you're so much more serious about writing than Arnold is. But why can't you write? It's because you're *repressed*, I mean in a spiritual way.
Bradley In a spiritual way—perhaps—but——
Rachel You need to exercise your freedom, it's getting old and stiff, like mine. More freedom, more love, is what your book needs. (*She removes Bradley's tie*) Now kiss me again, just to prove you can.

Bradley kisses her

Bradley We must know what we're doing. I don't want to behave badly.
Rachel Who says anything about behaving badly?
Bradley (*pulling back a little*) You're not doing this to spite Arnold?
Rachel No. You're not just doing it to spite Christine?
Bradley Don't be crazy. Anyway I'm not doing anything.
Rachel Aren't you?
Bradley Could he have an affair with Christine?
Rachel I don't know, it doesn't matter. On that awful day—when he brought you in—as a witness—I might have hated you. But it's the opposite, I've *decided* it's the opposite. I've known you so long, and now—you've got a special role, like a knight with a charge upon him, my knight, my precious chivalrous knight.
Bradley You mean courtly love?
Rachel Yes.

As the conversation continues Rachel is pulling off Bradley's jacket, undoing the buttons of his shirt. She slips off her blouse

Bradley Rachel, courtly love isn't like this.
Rachel Are you afraid of Arnold?
Bradley Yes.
Rachel You mustn't be. I must see you unafraid. That's what being my knight is about. It will set me free, and it will set you free too. I've always seen you as a free spirit, a holy man, a wise man.
Bradley Well, I think this is most unwise. Moreover, I don't want it! We're both conventional middle-aged people.
Rachel I'm not conventional. That's what I've just discovered.
Bradley Well, I am. I'm pre-permissive. And you are my best friend's wife. Please do not start anything.
Rachel It's started. I do enjoy arguing with you.
Bradley You know where arguments like this end.
Rachel Yes.

They sit apart, staring at each other

Scene 4

Bradley alone. He comes forward to the audience. He is holding a letter from Arnold

During the following reading, Bradley's flat becomes visible

Bradley I received a letter from Arnold. (*Reading*) "My dear Bradley, I have got into a mess and feel I must lay the whole matter before you. Christine and I have fallen in love. I know you don't believe in romantic love, but I assure you it exists. Of course I care for Rachel, but there is such a thing as simply getting tired of someone, our marriage is lifeless, almost a pretence. I have to look elsewhere. Of course I won't abandon Rachel, but I must have Christine too, and if that means running two establishments, well thank God I can afford it. I rely on you to help Rachel through this. Christine too needs something from you, your blessing on our relationship. Do you think you could see her soon and just say it's OK? Please? Arnold."

Julian enters. She carries a copy of Hamlet

(*Surprised*) Julian!

Julian You left the door open. It's terribly hot in here. You've forgotten. I've to come for my *Hamlet* tutorial. You said Tuesday was OK.

Bradley Did I? Oh dear.

Julian How is Priscilla?

Bradley Better. She's coming back here.

Julian Poor old thing, she must be *ages* older than you. Bradley, how nice to see you, you're so good for my nerves. Everybody irritates me like mad except you. Have you a moment?

Bradley Yes, yes.

They sit down opposite to each other at the table

Julian Bradley, this is fun!

Bradley Nothing's happened yet, it may not be fun.

Julian I'll ask questions and you answer—all right? I've got a whole list. (*She waves the list*)

Bradley All right, get on with it. I haven't got all day.

Julian (*reading from the list*) Why did Hamlet delay killing Claudius?

Bradley Because he was a dreamy scrupulous young intellectual who wasn't likely to commit a murder just because he imagined he'd seen a ghost. Next question.

Julian But isn't the ghost a real ghost?

Bradley Yes, but Hamlet doesn't know that.

Julian But there must have been another reason why he delayed, isn't that the point of the play?

Bradley I didn't say there wasn't another reason.

Julian What is it?

Bradley He identifies Claudius with his father.

Julian Oh, so that makes him hesitate because he loves his father and so can't kill Claudius?

Bradley No, he hates his father.
Julian But wouldn't that make him murder Claudius?
Bradley No. After all he didn't murder his father.
Julian I don't see how identifying Claudius with his father makes him not want to kill Claudius.
Bradley He doesn't enjoy hating his father. It makes him feel guilty.
Julian So he's paralysed by guilt? He never says so. He's fearfully priggish and superior. Look how nasty he is to Ophelia.
Bradley That's part of the same thing.
Julian How do you mean?
Bradley He identifies Ophelia with his mother.
Julian But I thought he loved his mother.
Bradley Yes, that's the point.
Julian How do you mean, that's the point?
Bradley He is furious with his mother for committing adultery with his father.
Julian Wait a minute, I'm getting mixed——(*She is trying at intervals to take notes*)
Bradley Claudius is identified with Hamlet's father on the unconscious level.
Julian But you can't commit adultery with your husband, it isn't logical.
Bradley The unconscious mind knows nothing of logic.
Julian You mean Hamlet is jealous? You mean he's in love with his mother?
Bradley That is the general idea. A tediously familiar one, I should have thought.
Julian (*after a pause*) Oh—that.
Bradley That.
Julian I see. (*Scribbling in her notebook*) I say, this is awfully interesting. Why couldn't Ophelia save Hamlet?
Bradley Because, my dear Julian, pure ignorant young girls cannot "save" complicated neurotic over-educated older men from disaster, however much they may kid themselves that they can.
Julian All right, I'm ignorant and young but I do not identify myself with Ophelia!
Bradley Of course not. You identify yourself with Hamlet, everybody does.
Julian I suppose one always identifies with the hero.
Bradley In great works of literature, not necessarily. Do you identify with Macbeth or Lear?
Julian Well no——
Bradley Or with Achilles or Agamemnon or Raskolnikov or Fanny Price or Madame Bovary or——?
Julian Wait, I haven't heard of some of them.
Bradley *Hamlet* is unusual because it is a great work of literature in which everyone identifies with the hero.
Julian Please—I want to catch up with my notes about Hamlet thinking his mother was committing adultery with his father—gosh, it is hot

today—do you mind if I undress a little? (*She kicks off her shoes, pulls up her skirt, takes her jacket off, revealing a dress with narrow shoulder straps*) For this relief much thanks.

Bradley Do you mind if I take my jacket off? You'll see my braces.

Julian How exciting!

Bradley takes off his jacket and unbuttons his shirt a little. As he does so he frowns

Bradley Of course Hamlet is Shakespeare.

Julian Bradley, was Shakespeare homosexual?

Bradley Of course.

Julian Oh I *see* so Hamlet's really in love with Horatio——

Bradley Silence, girl. Life is serious, art is gay. Wittgenstein. Now if the greatest genius elects to be the hero of one of his plays, is this an accident?

Julian No.

Bradley So this must be what the play is about.

Julian What?

Bradley Shakespeare's own identity. When is Shakespeare at his most cryptic?

Julian The Sonnets?

Bradley Shakespeare is at his most complex and secretive when he's talking to himself. How is it that *Hamlet* is his most famous play, the best-known work of literature in the world?

Julian I don't know, you tell me.

Bradley Because Shakespeare by the sheer intensity of his meditation on the problem of his identity has produced a new language, a rhetoric of consciousness. Words are Hamlet's being as they are Shakespeare's.

Julian Words, words, words.

Bradley What work of literature has more quotable lines?

Julian To be or not to be that is the question.

Bradley Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice.

Julian Oh what a rogue and peasant slave am I.

Bradley For at your age the heyday in the blood is tame, it's humble, and waits upon the judgement. (*He is dismayed at happening upon these lines*) Something too much of this.

Julian Oh what a noble mind is here o'erthrown.

Bradley *Hamlet* is a monument of words, Shakespeare's most rhetorical and longest play. See how casually, with what easy grace he lays down the foundations of modern English prose.

Julian "What a piece of work is man"——

Bradley —"how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god!" *Hamlet* is a work endlessly reflecting upon itself, not discursively but in its very substance, a Chinese Box of words as high as the Tower of Babel, a mediatation upon the redemptive role of language. *Hamlet* is words and so is Hamlet. He is as witty as Jesus Christ but whereas Jesus speaks, Hamlet is speech. He is

the tormented, sinful consciousness of man seared by the bright light of art, the god's flayed victim dancing the dance of creation. Shakespeare is prostrating himself before the author of his being, the god of love and art, the black Eros, the Black Prince, before whose countenance the unworthy shrivel like moths at a flame. Self-immolation, pure love, here invent language as if for the first time, changing pain into poetry and orgasms into thoughts. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, *enacts* the purification of words, the deification of speech—we are redeemed because speech itself is ultimately divine——

Julian I played Hamlet once.

Bradley What?

Julian I played Hamlet once, at school, I was sixteen.

She smiles. Bradley staring at her, does not. She giggles

Bradley The show is over.

Julian Please—that was marvellous what you were saying—I want to write it down.

Bradley That stuff won't do for your exam. So you played Hamlet once. Describe your costume.

Julian Oh the usual. All Hamlets wear the same, unless they're in modern dress.

Bradley Do what I ask please.

Julian What . . .?

Bradley Describe your costume.

Julian Well, I wore black tights and black velvet shoes wth silver buckles, and a sort of black slinky jerkin with a low neck and a white silk shirt and a big gold chain and . . . What's the matter, Bradley?

Bradley Nothing.

Julian I enjoyed it ever so much, especially the fight at the end.

Julian poses a little, not looking at Bradley, imagining herself as Hamlet. Bradley stares at her

Bradley Here, thou incestuous murderous damned Dane!

Julian Yes—yes! Look, could you just tell me——

Bradley Enough, enough. How are your parents?

Julian You are a *tease*! They're all right. Dad's out at the library all day scribbling. Mum stays at home and moves the furniture about and broods. It's a pity she never had any education, she's so intelligent.

Bradley Don't be so bloody condescending.

Julian Sorry, that sounded awful, perhaps I'm awful, perhaps all young people are rather awful.

Bradley Lay not that flattering unction to your soul.

Julian I wish someone would write a really long nasty review of one of Dad's books, it might do him good.

Bradley So you want to be a writer.

Julian Yes, but not like that. And I won't call myself Julian Baffin!

Bradley Perhaps you'll be married then—and have—a different name—Julian, I think you'd better go.

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