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SF PERUSALS

Hello Out There

A One Act Play

by William Saroyan

A Samuel French Acting Edition



SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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HELLO OUT THERE

A drama in one act by William Saroyan. Produced by Eddie Dowling at the Belasco Theatre, September 29, 1942.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(3 Males; 2 Females)

THE YOUNG GAMBLER.....*Eddie Dowling*
THE GIRL ..... *Julie Haydon*
THE HUSBAND ..... *John Farrell*
ANOTHER MAN ..... *Farrell Pelly*
THE WIFE ..... *Ann Driscoll*

Scene a little jailhouse in Matador, Texas.

Staged by Eddie Dowling; settings and costumes by Watson Barratt; lighting by Feder.

HELLO OUT THERE

STORY OF THE PLAY

Hello Out There tells about the bad luck of an itinerant gambler who is arrested and jailed in a small Texas town, charged with rape. The charge is a lie, but the only one who hears his call for justice and understanding is a young girl who cooks for the jail. The gambler gives all his money to the girl before a mob breaks into the jail and the lying woman's husband shoots him.

Hello Out There

A One-Act Play

This play was written early in August, 1941. It was produced at the Lobero Theatre in Santa Barbara on Wednesday, the 10th of September, 1941, as the curtain-raiser to George Bernard Shaw's *The Devil's Disciple.*

Before this play was written I had spent almost four months loafing. When I came home from New York after having produced and directed *The Beautiful People* I decided not to work for a while and if possible to get out in the sun. I hadn't gotten out in the sun in years. I hadn't had any time to get out in it. I had always planned to get out, but I had always had the bad luck of getting a story or a play going just when I wanted to quit work and start loafing, and I had always stayed with the story or play until it had been written. Then I had planned to rush right out and get in the sun, only to run headlong into another story or play, and I had always gone to work and written this one, too. That is the only way I have ever been able to take care of anything that wanted to be written. Beginning any time of the day or night I have gone to work and written it—all at once if possible, but if not, as soon as possible. I have never given myself time to sit down and not have anything else on my mind.

I am as excited about writing as I was when I was a kid, but I have not yet been able to write anything ex-

pressly for the purpose of making money. This is so because I am an amateur. I have given away any number of pieces especially written on specific themes, but I have written these pieces because the themes have been challenging and because I have not been able to resist them. Furthermore, I have never had any limitations imposed on my writing other than my own. Every new piece I see in a magazine makes me happy, and every new book that comes from the presses is something to behold with wonder, awe and amazement. I shall probably never get over the delight of writing and being published.

Even so, a good deal of my interest is away from writing, and for over ten years now I have been planning to spend a winter somewhere in the woods, camping and hunting, but have not done so; I have planned to spend a year driving all over America slowly, with especial interest in out-of-the-way towns, but have never done so; I have planned to take a leisurely trip around the world, and have never done so; I have planned to go back to work on a vineyard for a winter, and have never done so; I have planned to read all the books I have always wanted to read, and have never done so; I have planned to study the works of every composer of the world, the music of all the people of the world, and the songs of all the folk of the world, and I have never done so; I have planned to take a year out to learn from actual painting how to paint, and I have never done so; I have planned to learn to read and write Armenian, and perhaps translate the works of my favourite Armenian writers, and have never done so; I have wanted to buy an expensive microscope and study the forms of the smallest of things, and have never done so; I have planned to perfect my new theatre—a globe device with the basic colours and forms capable of creating an inexhaustibly varied drama of objects and colours and relationships, accompanied by their related sounds—and have never done so; I have planned to walk from San Francisco to Mexico City, and have never done so; I have planned to ride a bicycle

from San Francisco to New York, by way of El Paso, New Orleans, Jacksonville, and Oceana, and have never done so; I have planned to marry the most beautiful woman in the world and bring up a family, and have never done so; I have never met her—how could I do so? I have planned to read the Bible and the books of all other religions, and have never done so; and I have planned to buy a hundred acres of fertile land with a stream running through it, have the house I have always wanted built on it, and on the land plant as many kinds of trees as I can get hold of, and watch them grow, and I have never done it.

I have also planned to get out in the sun and get rid of the urban pallor which has become my normal complexion, and until this summer I have not done so. But this summer I managed to make it. Of course I was temporarily side-tracked in this ambition by the writing of the play *Jim Dandy*, by the reading and correcting of manuscript and proofs of two books, by a simultaneous hunger for loafing in San Francisco dives, and by cards, horses, and dice. But finally I got away and went to Fresno and got out in the sun.

During the four months since my return from New York I have gone to Fresno four times—the shortest visit being a three-day visit, and the longest being a one-month one. Gradually the pallor gave way to a fairly deep tan, but nothing like the tan of Young Corbett, with whom I went fishing a number of times at Mendota and Friant.

Young Corbett runs the best saloon in my home town. The sun is very close to the earth in Fresno, its rays very direct and penetrating, the heat very great and magnificent, but if you expose yourself to all this suddenly, you are apt to be cooked. I know, because that is what happened to me every day until Corbett explained that you had to rub yourself with a mixture composed of two parts olive oil and one part vinegar. After that, instead of getting cooked every day and not being able to sleep all night and having the skin peel off after a week or so, taking the colour with it and

bringing out a fresh layer of pallor, the sun-colour moved in slower and deeper and stayed there. I still have some of this colour, although it is beginning to fade, and now winter is coming. But I got out into the sun, just as I had planned, and I had a lot of fun watching Corbett try to catch a fish, which he never did. Later, though, he got a big one off the coast of Santa Cruz, and to prove it he had the photograph printed in the papers. I hadn't talked to Corbett since we had sold the *Fresno Evening Herald* together, along about twenty-five years ago, when Buzz Martin was our boss and pal, Mr. York in charge of street sales, and Mayor Toomey, a big, easy-going man who made a special trip to the sand-lot at Kern and L Streets to give an informal talk to the newsboys of the town. This man, Mayor Toomey, is the first important man in the world I didn't dislike on sight. He came to the sand-lot, the kids all gathered around, and he stood there and talked to them. He didn't make a speech and he didn't say anything momentous, but his coming down that way, bothering with a gang of hoodlums, made me like him and remember him as a great man. Maybe he wasn't really great, but as I *remember* it he was. I don't think Corbett remembered me as well as I remembered him, but after loafing around together a while it was practically the same as in the old days. After having been the best fighter of his time in his division, I found him great-hearted, easy-going, boyishly eager about fishing and getting out to the country, full of high spirits, a fair singer of popular ballads, and a good drinking companion. I had found few places as pleasant to loaf around in, anywhere in the world, as my home town, no bar with a better atmosphere than Young Corbett's, and no company more pleasant than his.

By the end of July I figured it was time for me to go back to San Francisco. After I got home this play was one of the first things I wrote.

Now, having a play on the same bill with a play by the one and only, the good and great, the impish and noble, the man and superman, George Bernard Shaw,

is for me an honour, and I think a most fitting thing. While I have never read *The Devil's Disciple*, and while the only play of Shaw's I have ever seen has been *Saint Joan*—and I saw that from the last row of the gallery from whence it was a pageant and not a play, since I could hear nothing said—I have long known of Mr. Shaw, read his plays and prefaces, and loved him. I admire heroic effort. Accomplishment I love. What I am about to say is no invention, and I am putting it down for whatever it may be worth to the historian of literature and for the student of influences of men on men, and because it is true and must therefore be made known. As a boy, charging pell-mell through literature, reading everything I could lay hands on in the Public Library of Fresno, I found many men to whom I felt deeply grateful—especially Guy de Maupassant, Jack London, and H. L. Mencken—but the first man to whom I felt definitely related was George Bernard Shaw. This is a presumptuous or fatuous thing to mention, perhaps, but even so it must be mentioned.

I myself, as a person, have been influenced by many writers and many things, and my writing has felt the impact of the writing of many writers, some relatively unknown and unimportant, some downright bad. But probably the greatest influence of them all when an influence is most effective—when the man being influenced is nowhere near being solid in his own right—has been the influence of the great tall man with the white beard, the lively eyes, the swift wit and the impish chuckle. I have read Schopenhauer at the age of twelve with no bewilderment and no contempt of his contempt for the world and its strange inhabitant, and no contempt for the strange inhabitant himself. I have read writing without regard for the name or quality of the writer—just writing, just print, just books. I have read Mark Twain and Walt Whitman. I have read the Russians, Chekhov, Andreyev, and Gorki. I have read Sherwood Anderson and Carl Sandburg, Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway. I have read Ibsen and Oscar Wilde. I have read *Poetry Magazine* and any of the

little magazines I have been able to find in the second-hand book-stores of Fresno. I have read anything and everything—Ambrose Bierce and Bret Harte, and books in French and German and Spanish without being able to understand a word of it, simply because they were books and because something was being said, even if it was in a language I did not know. I have read books about the behaviour of mobs—*The Mob* by Le Bon, if I remember rightly, was one—about crime in children, and about genius in them, about the greatest bodies of things, and about the littlest of them. I have been fascinated by it all, grateful for it all, grateful for the sheer majesty of the existence of ideas, stories, fables, and paper and ink and print and books to hold them all together for a man to take aside and examine alone. But the man I liked most and the man who seemed to remind me of myself—of what I really was and would surely become—was George Bernard Shaw.

When, at the age of eighteen, I was night manager of the Postal Telegraph office at 21 Taylor Street in San Francisco I remember having been asked by the clerk there, a man named Clifford, who the hell I thought I was. And I remember replying very simply and earnestly somewhat as follows: If you have ever heard of George Bernard Shaw, if you have ever read his plays or prefaces, you will know what I mean when I tell you that I am that man by another name.

Who is *he?* I remember the clerk asking.

George Bernard Shaw, I replied, is the tonic of the Christian peoples of the world. He is health, wisdom, and comedy, and that's what I am, too.

How do you figure? the clerk said.

Don't bother me, I said. I'm night manager of this office and when I tell you something it's final.

H. L. Mencken's *Prejudices* and George Jean Nathan's suave and lively spoofing had a fine effect on me, too. I liked the men who were most like bad boys, having fun all the time, playing pranks, talking out of turn, acting up, making fun of fools and frauds, ridiculing the pompous and phoney, howling with laughter or sit-

ting by after ruining the works and being dead-pan and innocent about the whole thing—and beyond all this being very wise and very serious, and knowing how to write—knowing that you couldn't be serious and dull at the same time and still be effective. Mencken's stuff made me bust out laughing in the Public Library. Sometimes it even made me jump up out of my chair and walk around the place whispering things at people I didn't know.

This is not the place or time, however, for me to go into detail about the men and writing and ideas which have influenced my life and writing.

All I know is that it is right for a one-act play by William Saroyan to serve as curtain-raiser to a play by George Bernard Shaw. To show you the importance of this, the inevitability of it in fact, let me reveal how, finally, this event came to be, and how close it came not to be. Let me reveal the series of accidental and fortuitous events—all of them always closer to not taking place than to taking place—which finally, one by one, resulted in this most appropriate and inevitable circumstance.

When I stepped out of the sun of Fresno and came home to the room of San Francisco, although I felt the time was ripe for the writing of something good, nothing presented itself to me. Therefore, I made no effort, but spent my time loafing, playing pin-ball games for hours, sitting around in little bars, listening to juke-box music, drinking and talking. After three days of this I sat down one night at two o'clock in the morning with the intention of typing a title and a few ideas I didn't want to forget. But I did not get up until I had written this play. I had been drinking a good deal, but I was not drunk. There are nights of such drinking. Instead of getting drunk a man gets sober. He gets very sober. That was how it was that night. I didn't know at the time that I had a play to write, but I must have had it to write, because I wrote it.

The very writing of the play was an accident, even if it was an inevitable one. Of course we all know that

accidents are compelled. I know this from having read in my Public Library days an essay about the mystical behaviour of Hindus, and from having watched this matter carefully, and considered it from one year to another. I know accidents are avoidable. Even when I was the fastest messenger in Fresno, and the one who took the most chances, I had very few accidents, and these were only mild. I was once forced to knock down a brewery horse by butting it with my head because I was going too fast and couldn't stop and the horse was blocking the alley down which I was racing. While racing down the alley I had reasoned that if somebody stepped out into my path I would have no trouble going through with no harm to him or to myself; if an automobile crossed this path I would pace my speed to swerve around it and go on my way; if something immovable blocked my way I would lift the whole front part of the bicycle, fall backwards, and probably hurt my back but not be instantly killed; and if something moving slowly appeared in my way and I could not pace around it I would—at this point, while I was going about twenty miles an hour, a brewery horse appeared and completely blocked the alley, moving much too slowly. My head butted the horse in the side, the horse exhaled, its front feet buckled and it went down. I was a little scared—especially of the horse, which was very big—but I wasn't hurt.

There were some other accidents. Chains broke on me a couple of times while I was sprinting and sprawled me out on the pavement. A cop intentionally caught my arm at the elbow as I shot through between him and a truck, spinning me around and almost ruining my bicycle. And a couple of bad drivers ran into me from behind and knocked me off my bicycle. Each of the accidents could have been avoided. I know it. The one involving the horse could have been avoided but only if I was willing to agree not to speed, and I wasn't. The chains that broke had been weak and should have been attended to. The cop was a dog anyway; I knew it, and I could have avoided the accident by not challenging him

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