

G-Nome

A Play by Murray Mednick

G-Nome was produced at The Powerhouse Theater by Padua Playwrights in June 2003, under the direction of Guy Zimmerman. The set was designed by Jeffrey Atherton, with original music and sound design by Robert Oriol.

With the following cast:

Jacko: Christopher Allport

Cleo: Lynnda Ferguson

Emile: Murray Mednick

G-Nome continues Mednick's reimagining of the relationship between performers and dramatic texts. Here, the actors shift back and forth between portraying naturalistic characters and addressing the audience directly as choral figures. Mednick purposely omits attributing speech to particular characters in many places—challenging the actor and director (and reader) to interpret the text in his or her own way. In addition to energizing the performances, this dynamic shifting raises intriguing questions about how theater relates to human identity in general—the explicit subject matter of this play.

Characters

Emile

Chorus I

Chorus II

Characters portrayed:

Joe

Betty

Emile's First Wife

Louis

Celia

Primo Levi

Paul Celan

Martin Heidegger

Gisèle Celan's wife.

Saul Schwartz

Scene

A stage. EMILE sits with a photo album.

So so so so so so

I'm looking at a picture of my grandfather
—he's holding my cousin Winnie
wearing a bowler hat.

Winnie is?

No no no no no no.

Louis, Lazer, my grandfather
in California
of all places
He's visiting my Uncle Phil

Also a Gnome

In California, San Diego
San Diego, California.

Correct, right.

So so so so so so

He's holding her and he's got a little smile
He's about five-feet-two

On his face

On his face.

It's not a smile, it's not a grin
It is a gnomonic expression of

Benign.

It is not exactly benign
It is malevolent indifference.

No no no no no no

It is beneficence bestowed
With not exactly a grin

“I'm here but I'm not here
I'm not really here.”

Just like my father, Joe

It's kind of a sly grin
By a little sexual man
Wearing a bowler hat

With his arm around my cousin
Who is maybe three or four.



The picture must have been taken
In 1951 or '52
By my Uncle Phil

(Also a Gnome, like me.)

Like was said
I must have been in the fifth grade

At the time
And here I am now

Again.

So so so so so so

The story is:

He comes to America

From the steppes of Ukraine

From the Ukrainian steppes.

And my grandma

Celia

Came from Pinsk

The legendary Pinsk.



They got on a boat in Odessa.

They all got on a boat

(The whole town got on a boat—

It was a town on the Ukrainian steppes

Tamashbele

Called Tamashbele

Pronounced Tah-mash-bah-leh.)

The whole Jewish town of Tahmashbele

Got on the boat

And sailed for America

A wild and verdant land.

Whoa whoa whoa

Where there was gold

(Gold gold gold)

For a young guy like Louis

to pick up

off the streets.

(And that's where they met,

on the boat

Louis and Celia.)

And here I am again

I was born in 1939

The year the War began

The War against the Jews.
A whole section of the planet
rose up like a blister

(Or like a bloody red rose.)

And I was not safe.

No no no no no no

Not safe in America
Where Louis and Celia were headed
On the boat in 1905
Married to two different people.

No, not to each other.

No.

No, because they died.

Not true
Because one died and one abandoned.

One abandoned ship?

No no no

My Grandma Celia's husband
Abandoned her in Brooklyn

And meanwhile Louis was in Canada
Where his first wife died.

So so so so so

Nobody knows what happened.
She died.
And he took the kid out
Of the wilderness of Canada

In the dead of winter

And the kid survived
And his name was Harry
And Louis brought him to Brooklyn
And he looked up my grandmother
And he courted my grandmother

(This is Louis we're talking about
Here.)

Whom he had met on the boat
Already
He met her already on the boat.

It was a marriage of convenience
As my Uncle Phil calls it.

He had a kid named Harry
And Celia had a kid

Named Saul

Who was a Schwartz.

So these two got together and had eight more kids.

No, nine.

Pause.

(Yeah, eight, eight.

And one of them was my father, Joe,

One of them was my Uncle, Phil.)

But who is Schwartz

What happened to Schwartz?

If Schwartz doesn't take a hike

There's no you am I right?

There's no Emile.

So so so

What happened to Schwartz?

Where did he go, Schwartz?

He's buried in the ground

There's no doubt about that

No doubt about that.

But my half uncle, Saul,

Remains alive in Las Vegas

Saul Schwartz

Alive in Las Vegas.

Maybe I'll go and see him.

Maybe not.

I'll ask him questions about his father

And where he went

Schwartz

And why he left my Grandmother

And anything else he knows

(But I'm not sure if I'll go.)

About the family.

And all the terrifying reproduction

All the terrifying biology

Which led to me,

Now,

Emile.

Pause.

So.

And now.

Pause.

I

I imagine him in Vegas—
He looks like an aging movie star or a gambler
(with a mustache
and a walker, he's ninety-two)

A certain type
Like his father
A ne'er-do-well and a ladies-man
A Schwartz.

(But not an illiterate peasant like my grandfather, Louis
Who was also a ladies-man married five times
Famous in his day for sexual prowess.)

The world is a slaughterhouse
For no reason that has anything to do with us
Except to provide food and fodder

And everything else is an illusion.
Everything you think
And everything you want
Is an illusion.

So. Okay.

So these photographs are calling to me from the other side—
From the Dead
From the other side of the veil of illusion.

Oh oh oh oh oh (*Weeps*)

I blow you a kiss
Winnie and Uncle Phil—
I blow you a kiss.

Oh oh oh oh oh (*Weeps*)

Emile?

What?

Emile?

What?

Stop crying, Emile.

Stops. Pause.

Celia

I blow you a kiss.

I have her picture right here in front of me
Right here.

She's a teenager, a *maidel*, in the hues of the old country
On the steppes of the Ukraine.

(Now I cough and spit
I cough and spit like an old man
Who doesn't give a shit

Who doesn't give a shit.)

And it's true.

And she's got this amazing hairdo

Must have been the fashion of the day

I've never seen anything like it in my life.



And nothing bad has happened to her yet

On the Polish/Ukrainian steppes

(Except for the seasonal pogrom)

And she's not looking into the camera
She's looking at something else
A little sly, a little hysterical
Look in her eyes.

(I don't know what she's looking at
I don't know what she's thinking.)

And she's holding a flower to her breast
With her right hand.
And she's holding some lace
In her left hand.
And her right elbow rests on a book.

It must be the Talmud or the Bible
(At least she could read
The book is there to tell us that
And I can tell you she spoke four languages.)

Her family were horse traders on the Ukrainian steppes.
She is buxom and well-built, wearing a nice blue dress
In the fashion of the day
And the table is a good one and it's polished.

She has a big wide face with oriental eyes
And she's not smiling
And she's not about to smile.

Thick black hair.

And I'm asking myself
Did she love me?
Did she really love me,
Or did I make it all up in my head?

She loved you, Emile,
She loved you very much.

So so so so so so

And don't you forget it.

Who was this guy, Schwartz?

She saved your life and the lives of your brothers and sisters
She is the positive through-line here.

You're right.

Who was Schwartz
Who abandoned Celia
In the East New York section of Brooklyn?

Eh?

If you want to know, go to Vegas.

Say, what?

I say, if you want to know, go to Vegas.

Okay!

Talk to your Uncle Saul, your half uncle, Saul.

I had a fight there.

Where?

In the parking lot. I had a fight in the parking lot in Vegas
(There's *one* parking lot?)

In front of a casino in Las Vegas, Nevada.

I spent two nights in jail there.

(What does this have to do with Schwartz?)

In nineteen and sixty nine, A.D.

(Saul Schwartz.)

I had a lot of fights, like my father, Joe.

(Emile?)

I had some shit in the car. I had some shit in the car.

Say again?

In the glove compartment of the car. I had some smack
and I had some grass.

Jeez, Emile.

I had some smack and I had some grass in the glove compartment of the car.

And they had me cold in the county jail.

But they let me go.

They let me go on a Monday.

It was a fucking miracle because I drove right out of there

Even though

Even though I was holding

Because the minister of St. Mark's Church

On Second Avenue of New York City

And the Rockefeller Foundation,

And the Rockefeller Foundation,

They vouched for me and they bailed me out.

And so I drove to the City of San Diego,

Where it rained for three and a half months

And the police kept an eye on me.

But I was able to cop some Mexican brown.

And I had a very nice time with Janice Lebaud

(God bless you Janice,

I hope you're alive somewhere.)

And there was that fucked up kid

Whoever his name

Whatever his name

He hung himself from the lighting grid,

I can't remember his name.

(Where are we now?

Now we're in a theater here.)

I mean, this photograph was taken in Poland,

On the Polish/Ukrainian steppes.

(But where is he,

Emile?)

And my father, Joe, wasn't born, wasn't thought.

They say he fell out of a tree.



Actually, he fell out of trees and off of buildings.

He was autistic or a retard

Probably.

He never even finished grade school.

He was a wild and reckless boy

He lost half his teeth by the time he was twelve,

But if you look at this photo you can see he was a

handsome guy.

Not a Gnome.

No, he was of average height for an American.

But he was dumb or autistic or retarded

Or brain damaged.

So his brothers and sisters had a little smile

When they said, Joey, they had a little smile,

When they thought, Joey, they smiled.

Knowingly.

The first fight I had was with a black kid on DeKalb Avenue.

That was my first fight.

And I put the other kid in a garbage can.

(Poor blacks and Jews, we all lived together in Brooklyn.)

And then the kid's father comes over and then my father, Joe, came down and they have a big fight right there on Dekalb Avenue in Brooklyn, they're slugging it out.

They must have been startled. Your grandparents, they must have been startled to see black people.

I never thought of that.

African-Americans and immigrant Jews who can't even

Speak the English language and they're living together in the Brooklyn slums.

I'm thinkiing that was maybe the only time my father went into battle, so to speak, on my behalf.

And Italians and Irish. And then the Puerto Ricans.

What was he, twenty-seven years old? Still a street kid, you know? I think it was hard for him. I think he had a hard time in that fight. But he stood there and slugged it out. Then his nose was bleeding and it was a big deal. It must have been a Saturday or Sunday on a late afternoon. I remember the look of the sky over Brooklyn, bright grey, with the street car cable and the black telephone wires and the roofs.

Joe So there's a colored kid in the garbage can, and Emile is banging on the can, and he's crying his head off.

Betty Yeah?

Joe Yeah.

Betty Yeah, so?

Joe He never cries. The kid never cries. What's wrong with him?

Betty Nothing's wrong with him, it's only his father.

Joe His father what?

Betty Just his father.

Joe Just his father, what?

Betty Come on Joe, then what happened?

Joe I went down there, and he's crying his head off, and there's a colored kid in the garbage can.

Betty Come on, Joe.

Joe What?

Betty COME ON, JOE.

Joe I don't know what to tell ya, Betty.

Betty I KNOW YOU DON'T.

Joe My nose is bleeding, okay?

Betty Put your head back.

Joe Okay.

Betty Put your head back.

Joe Okay.

Betty Put your head back more.

Joe I AM. (*Noise from EMILE*)

Betty Emile, shut up!

Joe Leave him alone.

Betty Once in your life, you defend him, once in your life you come to his defense.

Joe Shut up, Betty.

Betty It's about time.

Joe Do you have any cotton, at least? Do you have a rag or something?

Betty Do I look like a nurse to you?

Joe Use the toilet paper.

Betty What?

Joe Use the toilet paper why don't you?

Betty I don't want to waste it.

Joe Are you kidding me?

Betty There's a war on, Joe.

Joe I know that.

Betty There's a war on!

Joe Oh, what do you care?

Betty It's beyond you.

Joe Get a piece of newspaper or something.
Betty You can't even stay in a CC camp for five minutes.
Joe What are you talking about?
Betty In the middle of war, even, you can't stay still!
Joe Oh, shut up.
Betty Stay still now, why don't you?
Joe Pay attention, Betty.
Betty You'll live, Joe.
Joe I know that.
Betty You have a little nosebleed, that's all.
Joe He's got a black eye, that one.
Betty You'll live.
Joe Toe-to-toe we're standing there, belting each other in the head.
Betty Don't cry, Joe.
Joe Who's crying? Not me!
Betty No, because you're such a tough guy, Joe.
Joe Not me!
Betty Poor Joey...

One little moment from a Brooklyn slum in 1945.

So so so so so

Everybody thought they would have a good time in
America
And instead they went nuts
They went bananas
Trading wives
and bigamy was rampant.

Guys would marry one woman in Philadelphia and another one in Boston.

It's amazing the stuff that happened.

“Where are you going?”

I'm not going.

You're going to Philadelphia?

I'm not going to Philadelphia.

Where are you going?

New York City is where I'm going.

When are you coming back, sweetheart?

I'll be back next week.

Next week?

Don't bother me, Missus,
Business is business.

Business!”

So now I hear Louis talking to Celia:

“So, I’m here.

You’re here?

I’m here.

What happened to whatshername?

She died.

She died?

Dead. I buried her in the ground.

(In the cold, cold ground.)

Why? She was such a youngster, she, such a youth.

She gave birth to him, my Harry, in the middle of a blizzard.

Oy.

And Schwartz?

He’s not here, Schwartz.

So goodbye to Schwartz?

Goodbye and good riddance.

And him? Saul?

He's a Schwartz, Saul.

I'll make you a deal.

What?

We'll bring together the Schwartzes and the Brasmans.

Oy.

We'll make one family.

So so so

(Who knows if they even got married?)

Listen

He said

Here we don't need a rabbi.

We have to have a rabbi.

Schwartz, you don't know where he is. My wife, may she rest in peace, I can never find her grave again.

So?

So we'll register, we'll be married."

(My grandfather, the Gnome, believed in registering with the synagogue. He had no observance, he had no practice, but he believed in registering.)

He had a gleam in his eye.
He had that smile.
Neither here nor there
He had a gnomonic dick-like smile

Did Louis "Lazer" Brasman
Father of my father.

They're all buried up there in the Jewish Cemetery of Glen Wild, New York.
My father and grandfather and brother and grandmother,
Who has her picture on her gravestone,
An expression of woe.

OY, VAYZ MIR

She used to say

Woe woe woe woe.

I hate to tell ya what I'm thinking.

(Is he talking to us?)

I hate to tell ya what I'm thinking.

Which is?

There isn't a tradition of happiness.

Say what?

There isn't a tradition of happiness.

Say again?

In the family.

In the family?

There is only the tradition of woe.

So what did they do for a good time?

I hate to tell ya what I'm thinking.

Which is?

I think they thought it was sex.

Oy, vayz mir.

Up in the Catskills: murder, mayhem, and fooling around.

Is that why you're depressed? Emile?

I'm not depressed.

Murder, mayhem, and fooling around?

Emile?

Yes. Wouldn't you?

What?

Be depressed.

Yes!

I was depressed.

(Can you hear me, Joe?)

No!

It could be chemical!

It was chemical!

There you go.

You should take something for it.

I did.

There you go.

What did you take?

I'm not telling you.

Fine.

I will not reveal the names of the chemical or chemicals.

You don't have to.

I'm not.

So then what happened?

I have revealed enough already.

You have.

Typically.

It's true. Reveal, reveal.

I was a heroin addict for goodness sake.

We know.

I'm talking about chemicals!

We know that.

There's no end to the chemicals!

We know all that.

Rivers of chemicals, oceans of chemicals!

It's true.

How could that fucking happen?

Chemicals up the wazoo! (*Laughter*)

So then what happened?

Louis and Celia?

No, George and Harriet.

So so so

So on they proceeded through life.

Say?

On they proceeded through life. (*Chokes*)

Are you all right?

No.

I'll get you some water. (*EMILE stares at audience*)

(I have no idea why I'm choking. Excuse me. I'm sorry.)

(*With water*) Here you go.

Thank you. (*Drinks*) That's good.

Water,

Good.

Water.

I am an ignorant, stupid man.

Oh?

I don't know anything about how you talk to a woman.

Really.

How you're supposed to behave.

No.

And what the proper approach to sex is.

No.

And also, I don't know what money is. I don't know what attitude you're supposed to take, for example, to money. Everyone else seems to know but me. Even though I've read a lot of books and had half a dozen or twenty-four nervous breakdowns.

Say again?

I've said a lot of stupid nasty things in my life and I deeply regret them.

Who are you talking to now?

I'm talking to you and I'm talking to them.

Fine and good.

I said them out of anger and defensiveness and hostility.

So so.

I was hostile to anyone above me and everyone was above me.

So?

Go on.

That's all. *(Pause)* You talk now.

Well.

It's okay to say things because if you say them you're not there anymore.

Sure.

You've advanced. So it's okay to keep talking. It's fine.

Okay.

I pray to G-d that I can make up for all that shit. I really do.

The truth will make you free.

I hope you're right.

I think I am. Right.

For example with my first wife, who was a sexy beauty. I can't remember what it was, but there was some nasty, hostile comment I made.

"I'm sick to my stomach," she said.

I remember the light, in the apartment on Avenue D.

"That was a terrible thing to say, Emile."

Some nasty comment about the middle class. I regretted it immediately and I regret it to this day. Wherever you are, I hope you're happy and I hope you're well. I hope you're happy and I hope you're well.

“You sit there reading all the time and you're stoned. You sit there looking at the book, and looking out the window, and looking at the book—stoned. How can you read? How can you follow what you're reading? You understand what you're reading?”

“I think I do, yes.”

“You want to be a waiter and sell dope for the rest of your life?”

“No.”

“Emile?”

“No.”

“You need to do something, and fast, because you're ruining your life and I'm not going to participate.”

“I will.”

“Go back to school, Emile, or your days around here are numbered.”

“I can’t do that. I can’t go back to school. Go back to school?”

“Why not?”

“I’m a radical hipster who is alienated from society.”

“I see.”

“I’m a poet.”

“Great. Pack your bags and hit the street.”

Passive and terrified. I met her at a party on the Lower East Side. She was wearing a tight green dress. It was 1963. I was a good-looking young poetry writing gnome with latent hostility towards those above me which was just about everybody and she was a couple inches taller, needless to say. And I say now in the most biblical way, I get down my knees, I could not believe or accept my good fortune to this day.

So.

Passive and terrified.

And then nasty

And then paralyzed.

That’s your story, Emile.

Don’t blame Joe and Betty.

Don't blame Grandma and Grandpa.

Don't blame your wife,
Who loves you and helps you.

(There is no blame!)

So let's go on.

Low class Jews in America:

"Make money or die!"

"And what did you do, big shot?"

"I never made a dime."

"So what brings you to the table?"

"I have a wish to be clean,
And purified."

"Then go on a diet, stupid,
Clean the shit out of you,
Your breath stinks."

Ah ah ah ah ah ah!

What's that, amigo?

That is pain, my friend, that is anguish.

You think they want to hear that?

No, I don't think so.

No, definitely not.

I just want to say one more thing.

Isn't clean the same as purified?

I did it all on purpose, which is absolutely amazing—that all could be so artfully arranged for failure! In the fucking Catskills—the grey cold fucking Catskills! Cold! Cold! Cold! Cold!

Okay, calm down.

AND PRIMO LEVI STANDS FACING THE ABYSS.

AND PAUL CELAN.

Calm down.

Okay.

You inherited that hysteria.

I did.

You inherited it on both sides of the family. Hysteria and

insecurity which comes from grief and persecution, okay?

Okay.

Who am I now?

You're asking us?

You're good.

Good.

Thank G-d.

God?

G dash D.

I see.

I spell it like a Jew, because I am.

Good.

I am a Jew.

Good.

I'm glad I'm a Jew.

(Pride. It's the sin of pride.)

And who's the other guy?

Bad.

Nasty little paralyzed motherfucking gnome.

Why? Because he likes sex?

And what is that, but a bit of reproduction?

A bit of reproduction here,

A bit of reproduction there.

So what if he says nasty things to women?

So what is that?

So what?

Because he is dependent on them and afraid of them at the same time—

Vavoom—

He is dependent on them and afraid of them, and he loves them and he hates them.

Amen!

And he loves them and he hates them especially when they yell at him or reject him or yell at him and reject him— then he is out of his mind with fear and loathing, fear of Her and loathing for himself.

Does this remind you of someone?

Eh, what?

I say

Does this sound familiar?

Do you know anyone like this?

Does this remind you of someone?

Yes!

(Aging and resentment

The failing of the body

The putrescence of the corpse.)

AND G-D BLESS PRIMO LEVI AND PAUL CELAN!

Did you hear what I said?

Eh, what?

I said, G-d bless Primo Levi and Paul Celan.

Good. Fine and good.

Finally, at last.

Does this remind you of Joe and Betty?

That's G-d with a dash.

I say, does this remind you of Joe and Betty?

G dash D.

Yes or no?

Oh, yes it does, Oh, yes it does.

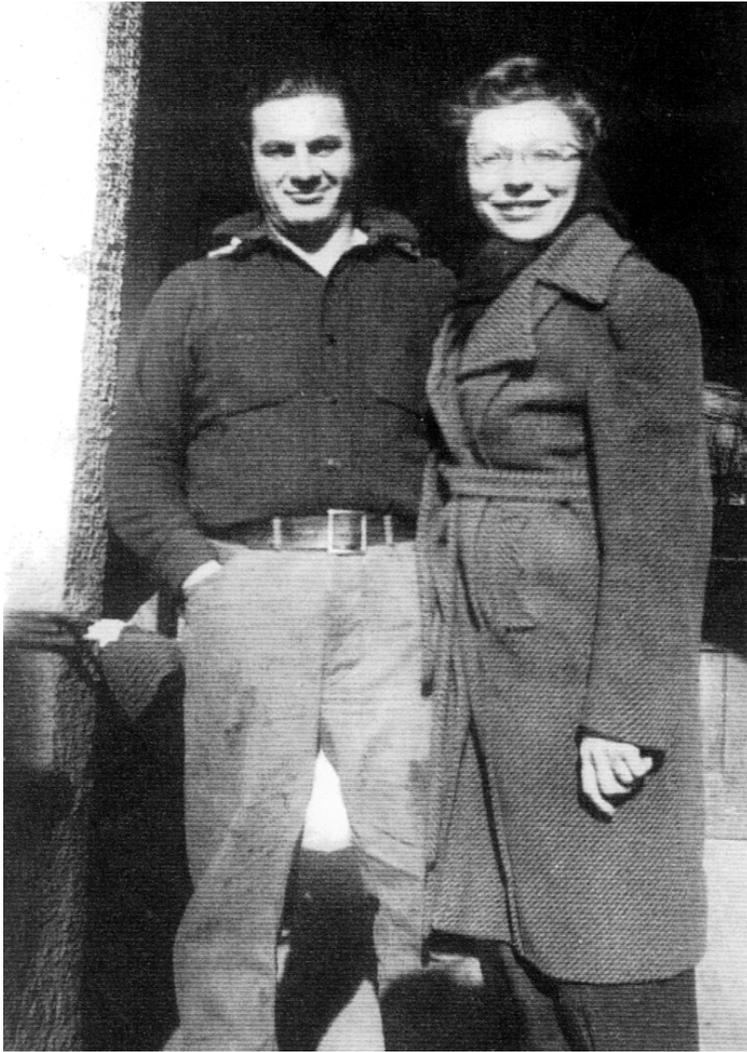
That's how we learn, my friend, that's how we learn

Everything we know.

We learn from them

Our parents.

Joe and Betty.



And there they are right there grimacing into the Camera.
There they are.

I want to scream
I want to break their fucking heads.
They act like no crimes are being committed
The fucking idiots.

(Pause) Calm down.

While they're taking that fucking picture

She's grimacing like a madwoman,
And he—

Is hiding his resentment,

And he—

Is pretending he's not himself,

And he—

Is acting like nothing ever happened—

Anywhere—
To anybody,
Least of all to him.

So.

Fuck him!

And I'm not sorry!
Even though I wept uncontrollably for five minutes
At the mention of his
Name
Joe
I'm not sorry.

And there you are, too,
Emile.



I am the same exact person
I was then
And I know exactly what I was feeling
Which was shame.

SHAME SHAME SHAME

And there I am
I'm playing with Gilbert's hair
And he is annoyed
Now dead in the ground the poor fucking bastard.

Shame on you,
And on us all,
The gnomic idiots,
Coming down from the faithless Louis,

Dead in the ground from the colon cancer
Which was also the killer of
Matinee Joe, my dad.

Dead in the ground together in Glen Wild, New York,
In the cold cold Catskills ground,
Eaten by worms and bugs,
Along with Louis and Celia,

All in the same ground.

C'est la.

It's fucking cold up there
And dead in the winter.

“Dead in the winter”
They used to say.
“And it gets dark early.”
Cold and dark.
You wanna get fuckin' warm
Anyway you can
You wanna get warm.

That sounds like you, Emile.

Yeah. Warmth. Warmth.

And Celia's not looking at the camera.

She's looking at the guy behind the camera.

Whoever the fuck that was
On the Polish/Ukrainian steppes,

Some short little Ukriainian Yid
Gnome she's looking at.

He made a living tearing up people's plumbing and roofs,
Louis did,

(He didn't make a living, pal.)

And he couldn't read a word in any language.
And his kids hated to work with him.
(Because of his temper with the tools
because nobody could tell him anything.)

DON'T TELL ME ANYTHING.

I DON'T WANT TO HEAR IT.

This with a strong Yiddish accent.

LEAVE IT ON THE GROUND AND GO HOME.

He had no patience with his kids.

“Pop had strong hands, the strongest hands
I ever saw,” my father said,
And that was all he said.

So Louis avoided them,

GET AWAY FROM ME.

And he married five times.

(Gittel. Gittel Kanterman.)

Yeah, Gittel, on Belmont Avenue
East New York
With the pushcarts and the Yiddish
Where I rented a room.

Louis took you.

So Louis took you to Brooklyn?

Louis took me on the subway.
He never said a word.
We’re on the subway to Rockaway Avenue.
The IRT,
Two gnomes.

HE WAS LEANING FORWARD, HIS HANDS CLASPED IN FRONT OF
HIM LIKE SOMEBODY WHO KNOWS HOW TO RIDE THE SUBWAY.

Emile?

Emile Yeah?

WE GOT OFF AT ROCKAWAY AVENUE IN EAST NEW YORK AND WALKED UP TO BELMONT AVENUE, OF WHICH I REMEMBER NOTHING.

Emile?

OF THE WALK. I WAS FRIGHTENED.

Louis Emile?

I HAD NO IDEA WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN TO ME, AND THERE WAS NO ONE TO HELP ME.

Louis Emile?

Emile Yeah?

Louis You'll stay with this woman, Gittel, Gussie Kanterman. She's a nice woman who I know very well. You'll have a room in her apartment.

Emile Sure.

Louis It's okay?

Emile Sure.

Louis You'll have a place to sleep, a place to lie down.

Emile Thank you.

Louis A place to sleep, a place to lie down.

SAY SOMETHING ABOUT GITTEL.

Emile Oh, it was cold and dark. Cold and dark in the winter.

NO, ABOUT GITTEL.

Emile She never talked to me and I never saw her and the apartment had a smell. She stayed in her room and she sewed. Her husband, when he was alive, owned the store downstairs. Now she lived alone in her room and I lived alone in mine. My room was dark. It had a bed and a bureau and that's it. Downstairs were the pushcarts. A few blocks west was Rockaway Avenue. To the North was Pitkin. Loew's Pitkin was down the street. Amboy street was in the neighborhood, home of the Amboy Dukes.

Pause.

Emile And that's the last memory I have of him, Louis.

Wait.

Emile So I'll tell you the symptoms of depression, okay.

Okay. What are the symptoms of depression?

Emile I hate cars and people and sound. And if you want to go to hell, go to a discount drugstore in America.

Wait.

Emile TRY THAT SOMETIME, GO INTO A DISCOUNT DRUGSTORE IN AMERICA AND TELL ME YOU'RE NOT IN HELL.

Go.

Emile (*Stepping downstage*) It's a very short distance
Between here and the grave.
There's almost no distance at all.

It's like a very fine veil.

We'll put that on your stone
Along with the double triangle.

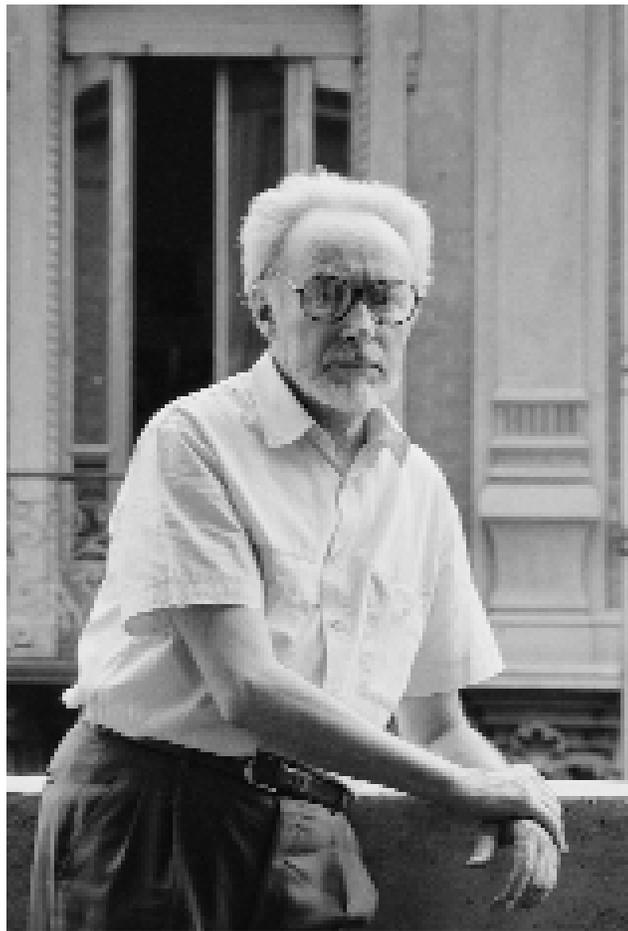
Emile Just don't put me in Glen Wild.

It's almost nothing at all.

PRIMO LEVI STEPS OUT OF HIS APARTMENT.

Emile He comes out of his apartment and onto the stairs.

PRIMO LEVI COMES OUT OF HIS APARTMENT AND APPROACHES
THE STAIRWAY.



Primo No distance at all.

HE SEES: A LONG FALL.

HE HEARS: I CAN'T BEAR THIS ONE MOMENT LONGER. IF I MOVE MY LEGS JUST A BIT, IF I LEAN OVER JUST A BIT, IT'S NO DISTANCE AT ALL.

HE WAS A QUIET LITTLE GUY SOMEWHAT INTIMIDATED BY HIS WIFE.

Primo People seem strange to me, strangely aggressive in their waking sleep, determined to go on living.

I WILL NOT GO SHOPPING ANYMORE. I REFUSE TO SHOP. NO
MORE RITE AID, NO MORE WALGREENS. THAT'S IT FOR ME.

Primo Hostile to one another, in competition with one another,
and disappointed.

In one another.

So so so so

PRIMO MAKES A MOVE.

Primo I wish for solidarity with the Jews,
For redemption of the Jews,
For an understanding of History
And peace in the holy land.

Let that be for me and for you.

Primo Amen.

SO, EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD CONTINUES
AND ON AND ON IT GOES.

BURY ME IN LOS ANGELES IN A JEWISH GRAVE.

“EMILE BRASMAN, COMEDIAN,” ON THE DOUBLE TRIANGLE.

ONE GOES UP, ONE GOES DOWN.

ONE WHAT?

ONE TRIANGLE GOES UP, THE OTHER DOWN.

WHO CARES?

I DON'T.

I DON'T CARE EITHER.

I DON'T.

SO, FINE.

Primo

A tiny bit of spittle forms in the corner of my mouth. Deep wrinkles cluster round my eyes and heavy bags lie beneath them. Lines of worry, bags of grief. What is this thing with feet and arms and two eyes? With holes for eating and shitting. That automatically grows decrepit and useless. In the grip of time, on the edge of a precipice. There we fall and we never return.

WE FALL.

I DON'T GIVE A RAT'S ASS.

ME, NEITHER.

NOT ME.

So, fine.

GREAT.

PRIMO SAYS GOODBYE

BECAUSE IT WASN'T ENOUGH TO HAVE WITNESSED

TO HAVE WITNESSED

WITNESSED THE HORRORS OF LIFE ON EARTH

LIFE ON EARTH

Primo GOODBYE.

Stop!

Emile Why?

Because there's a certain thing called determination.

Louis had it.

Louis had it and you have it.

It's called determination,

Sturdy determination.

You can see it in his face.

Louis Brasman had it,

And you're a Brasman,

So you have it, too.

It's called sturdy determination.

Emile But for what?

Determination for what?

TO SURVIVE.

But he's got that sly look,
He's got that sly and knowing look
Of a peasant Jew from the steppes,
Who knows about animal survival,
And sex.

THAT'S RIGHT!

Unlike Primo, who had his mother and his wife
In the same apartment.

THAT'S RIGHT!

Who more or less ran his life for him.

THAT'S RIGHT!

You have him in you, too,
You have PRIMO,
The quiet gentle Jew and lover of words
Who bore witness.

And then there's another guy,
He doesn't want anything to do with anybody.
He just wants to stay home alone and watch television.

Who?

You.

Me.

You.

Emile Oh.

So, go.

Emile Go?

Go.

There, go into the audience, go on. (*EMILE goes*)

There you go.

Thank you.

Don't bother anybody, don't disturb anybody.

Emile I WON'T.

Don't talk to anybody, don't touch anybody.

Emile I WON'T.

Don't look at anybody, don't wink at anybody.

Emile I WON'T.

You're always winking at people. Especially women. Don't do that anymore.

Emile Okay!

It's social insecurity.

Emile Stop talking to me. I'M NOT ON STAGE.

Get over it.

Give it up.

Drop it.

Let it go.

Surrender.

Emile NOTHING TO IT.

Good.

Fine.

Great.

Mazel tov.

Emile PAUL CELAN.

Yes?

No?

What?

Emile A PLAY. DO A PLAY.

Who?

What?

Where?

When?

Emile PAUL CELAN IN THE BLACK FOREST.

With Heidegger?

With Heidegger?

Emile PAUL CELAN IN THE BLACK FOREST WITH THE GNOMIC NAZI
HEIDEGGER.



Begin.

Emile No, you, you be Paul.

Fine.

Emile Go.

Paul So, you live in a hut? You live in this hut in the forest?

Heidegger I do. Yes. This is where I live.

Paul You are a stupid motherfucker if ever I saw one.

Heidegger Excuse me?

Paul I said you are a stupid, no-account, motherfucker.

Emile STOP.

Why?

What's wrong?

Emile You can't say stupid, no-account motherfucker. Start over.

Sure.

You bet.

Emile Go.

Paul I have come to tell you.

Heidegger Speak.

Paul Of your emptiness and falsehood.

Heidegger I say only what I think. I think what I say.

Paul You have no being.

Heidegger Being speaks German. I speak German.

Paul You are only the squawk of yourself in the dark.

Heidegger I won't hear that.

Paul Yes, you hide somewhere in your head where there is no reality.

Heidegger And you?

Paul I am a true poet.

Heidegger Yes? What makes you so?

Paul I know silence.

Heidegger Silence you know, but me you will never know.

Paul Because you are not.

Heidegger I say I am.

Paul It is a hollow statement, without meaning. Empty words.

Emile STOP.

What is it?

What now?

Emile HE SHOULDN'T SAY I KNOW SILENCE. WHY DOES HE SAY, I KNOW SILENCE? HE SHOULD SAY SOMETHING ELSE THERE.

All right.

Thank you.

Emile START AGAIN.

Well.

Fine and good.

Heidegger I heard you read your poems.

Paul Yes?

Heidegger Something insistent in your voice.

Paul Yes?

Heidegger A bit much, perhaps.

Paul And something else also.

Heidegger What else?

Paul Silence.

Heidegger Are you all right?

Paul Ha, ha, ha.
Heidegger What's wrong with you?
Paul They do experiments on me. You are aware of this.
Doctors.
Heidegger I was aware.
Paul And now?
Heidegger And now?
Paul Are you aware now?
Heidegger Yes. And you?
Paul I'm all right now.
Heidegger Can you think?
Paul I think in poems. I think with poems.

SILENCE.

Heidegger Shall we go for a walk?
Paul The true names of things.
Heidegger In German.
Paul I have saved the soul of the German tongue.
Heidegger We should go for a walk.
Paul Do you think so?
Heidegger Yes, it will help you, brace you.
Paul Oh.

OH OH OH OH OH

Heidegger Nothing to be afraid of.

NO NO NO NO NO

Heidegger Shall we?

Paul Ha, ha. Please, ha ha.

They exit.

(To audience) We'll come back to this when they return from their walk.

Emile REST IN PEACE, PAUL, REST IN PEACE.

PRIMO approaches the stairway.

PRIMO crosses the threshold of his apartment in Turin.

Primo My wife interrupts me when speaking with others, sometimes on the phone, sometimes in my home. She lectures me about my duty and chastises me for my depression. The fact that I am a literary man, well-known to the world, an intellectual, a chemist—these make no impression on her. Nor that I am a survivor and have borne witness—this has no effect on the tension of daily living. My mother also, dying slowly, demands my complete devotion. Outside, on the streets of the city, people seem to be living for no reason at all except for sheer momentum. I'm no longer certain of how to greet them and I have lost touch with the sense of what they are thinking. Elsewhere, Jew-hatred grows unabated by intelligence or remorse, and, in fact, the Muslims have sworn death to us everywhere. What good then—what good is it then—what good...?

PRIMO pauses for an instant, facing the stairs.

Primo They're coming back. Paul Celan and Heidegger are returning from their walk on the cold wet moor, and here they are.

Paul I just have to tell you, sir, most of what you say is bullshit and the rest is empty rhetoric. The German spirit and all that crap.

Heidegger Let me have your coat. Yes. What did you say?

Paul Nothing.

Heidegger Yes, it's cold. Let's make a fire.

HEIDEGGER is pretending that he hasn't heard PAUL CELAN. CELAN is talking out of the side of his mouth. He's a nervous wreck.

Make yourself comfortable, please.

PAUL receives this comment with alarm. He is never comfortable. Outside it is cold and grey and dusk is coming fast.

Paul Thank you.

He says he is frightened. They are deep, deep into the Black Forest, in Heidegger's gnomie hut in the forest.

Heidegger I was very impressed with your knowledge of flora and fauna.

Paul I am a poet.

Heidegger First there are flowers, you see, and everything follows from that.

Paul I beg your pardon? No.

NO NO NO NO NO NO

Heidegger First the flowers, and then the insects to carry the pollen. You see?

Paul Insects. Yes, insects.

Heidegger And then eventually trees, and animals.

Paul Yes, animals.

He can't think of anything else to say. He wants to know about Rector Heidegger's Nazi silence. He wants to be asked forgiveness. He wants to strangle the man and throw him down the well. Instead, he says:

Paul I wrote something in your book.

Heidegger Tell me what you wrote.

Paul "Into the hut-book, looking at the well-star, with a hope for a coming word in the heart. On 25 July, 1967 Paul Celan."

Heidegger Thank you so much.

Paul Please.

Heidegger Are you all right?

Paul Yes, of course.

But of course he's not all right. He feels intimidated and his heart rate is up. Heidegger is a cunning German peasant with a strong stare.

Heidegger You know more than I do.

Paul Yes, it's true.

Heidegger About flora and fauna.

Paul Yes, in five or six languages.

YES YES YES

Paul In German, in English, in Italian, in French, in Hebrew and in Russian.

YES YES YES YES YES

Paul Middle High German. Romanian.

Heidegger Yes, of course.

Paul The naming of things. As they are. Truly.

Heidegger Have you a question?

Paul A question?

Heidegger Have you a question you wish to ask?

He must be joking, this evil philosopher. Why should Paul wish to ask a question? Paul Celan is more intelligent, and more sincere, than Heidegger.

Paul The True Names. THE TRUTH SAY.
Silence.

Silence.

AND PRIMO LEVI STANDS FACING THE ABYSS.

AND PAUL CELAN.

And Paul Celan in the cold and the wet of that stupid hut
in the darkness of the Black Forest of unspeakable horror.

And he has to finish the conversation and get up to leave
and finish the conversation and get up to leave in all sanity
and go back to Paris and the Seine and finish the conversation
and get up to leave in all sanity and go back to Paris and
the Seine where he stands accused.

As if he could bear it.

As if it were bearable.

While Emile drools spittle onto the floor. Emile drools
spittle onto the floor because he's gradually losing control
of his functions and his heart rate is up and he's battling
depression.

Emile So so so so so

EMILE is drooling spittle out of the corner of his mouth.

Emile G-d bless Paul Celan!

Who wrote, soon after:

*ARNICA, EYEBRIGHT, THE
DRINK FROM THE WELL WITH THE*

STAR-DIE ON TOP,

*IN THE
HUT,*

*INTO THE BOOK
WHOSE NAME DID IT TAKE IN
BEFORE MINE?
THE LINE WRITTEN INTO
THIS BOOK ABOUT
A HOPE, TODAY,
FOR A THINKER'S
(UN
DELAYED COMING)
WORD
IN THE HEART.*

I just have to say, Emile.

Emile What?

We're not interested in this kind of thing in America.

Emile Eh, what?
This kind of poetry or this kind of concern.

Emile Say?

We like money and sports over here.

Emile I like money, I like sports.

We like a drama you can understand. That's okay.

Emile I like drama.

We like a funny situation, a snappy line.

Emile So do I, so do I.

We're not into a whole lot of grief here.

Emile Me neither, me neither.

Are you just going to stand there and imitate everything that happens? Is that your modus operandi? Somebody says something and you immediately agree?

Emile No no no no no

That's what you do continually.

Emile Sure.

You're intimidated. You have no mind of your own.

Emile I see that.

Don't agree with me so readily.

Emile I won't.

Thank G-d you're not six feet under. Rejoice!

Emile That's why it's good to be young and run about.

I'm so glad.

Emile I'm so glad I knew Brooklyn alleys and rooftops and wires across the sky and vacant lots and the rumbling subway, and woke up in the country morning with birds singing in the summer of '45.

I'm so glad.

Emile I'm so glad I could play ball and play well and fight hard with my fists.

Very good.

Emile Because there were a lot of sadists and bullies in the neighborhood.

Good, Emile.

Emile I'm so glad—

WHAT HAPPENED TO PAUL?

Emile Paul?

WHAT HAPPENED TO PAUL CELAN?

Emile So so so so

WHAT HAPPENED?

SO HE GOES BACK, HE GOES BACK TO HIS APARTMENT IN PARIS, ON THE FIFTH FLOOR, NEAR THE PONT MIRABEAU, AND TO HIS WIFE, GISÈLE.

Paul What can you expect from people like that? They are always right, always justified.

Gisèle Who, darling? Who are you talking about?

Paul You know.

Gisèle No, I'm not so sure.

Paul The German literary establishment, Gisèle.

Gisèle They're being very nice to you, I thought.

Paul Yes, I'm an alibi for them.

Gisèle I understand, but don't let it ruin your life.

HIS LIFE HAD ALREADY BEEN RUINED, BECAUSE THE GERMANS HAD MURDERED HIS PARENTS. ON THE STEPPES OF THE UKRAINE.

CORRECTO, EXACTO.

FOR NO FUCKING REASON. BUT NOW IT WAS ADDITIONALLY RUINED. IT WAS ADDITIONALLY RUINED BY AN ACCUSER, WHOSE NAME WAS GOLL.

Gisèle Goll?
Paul What can you expect from a name like GOLL?
Gisèle Not much, I don't expect much. You translated him, didn't you?
Paul Yes.
Gisèle You tried to help him.
Paul Yes.
Gisèle And now he turns on you.
Paul Yes.
Gisèle That's how it goes with people.
Paul Yes.
Gisèle Another case of literary envy, literary hysteria.
Paul Yes.
Gisèle Say something else, why don't you.
Paul Yes.
Gisèle Where are you?
Paul My father.
Gisèle You didn't betray your father.
Paul He held my hand through the wire. And then I ran away.
Gisèle What else could you do? (*He weeps*) Paul?

So so so so so

Anyway.

Don't cry, Emile.

What are you crying about?

Emile My dad.

Dad, Dad, Dad

Emile Matinee Joe. He don't know.

JOE takes a stance next to EMILE: arms crossed, feet straight, head up. A tough guy from Brooklyn.

Joe Yeah?



Emile He was restless and he was absent and he was prone to accidents. But I thought he was good-natured, basically, only there was something wrong with his head, and there was something wrong with his sex. So, anyway, I don't think we ever had a single conversation about anything at all. After a while, I felt superior, and he was afraid of me.

What else could you do? (*He weeps*) Emile?

Emile And then I ran away.

What else could you do?

First you didn't finish school, and then you took drugs.

You became a DRUG ADDICT.

Is that correct? Even though the gnome, Louis, brought you to Belmont Avenue so you could have a place to lie down, and go to college, even then you failed.

Well, what did you expect?

I mean, come on.

Emile He didn't say a single fucking word, Louis. Not one.

SO WHAT?

(He has no idea what NORMAL is. He has no idea of NORMAL.)

Emile Are we talking about me again? Are you referring to me?

You know we are, Emile.

And it didn't help Primo, did it?

Emile What didn't?

Drugs, stupid. DRUGS, DRUGS, DRUGS.

So, anyway. It didn't help Primo one bit.

Emile (*As PAUL*) What can you expect from these people?

The drugs didn't help him, and people couldn't help him. So that's it. That's that. You get the impression the sun never shines over there. Don't you? You get that impression, of endless darkness, endless cold? In Europe? In eastern Europe? On the steppes of the Ukraine, where the sun never shines?

So, anyway.

Paul Perhaps I should live alone, darling.

(*Her name is Gisèle. What a beautiful name. Gisèle.*)

Gisèle But how will you take care of yourself? You don't know how to take care of yourself.

Paul I'm hoping for hope.

Gisèle But what do you mean by that? You don't know what you mean by that.

Paul I need to be able to concentrate, to make my poems. Then everything is all right.

Gisèle Nothing is all right. There is only a poem. And still they persecute you. It's not enough that you survived, now they

must torment you.

Paul Then what do you propose?

Gisèle Let's go to America, or to Israel. Let's forget the European project altogether.

Paul I can't do that.

Gisèle Why not?

Paul My language is German.

Gisèle You know many languages. You are a translator.

Paul It is the language of my being.

Gisèle Well, that's fine, it's up to you.

Paul I am writing many poems and they are beyond dispute.

Gisèle Yes, but I can't live with you anymore. So, it's up to you. I can't make you happy, so I'll go.

Paul No no no. I'll try.

Gisèle You can't try. You say you try but it's impossible for you. You live in another world. It's not my world. There is a boundary there, there is a wall. You don't smile through it. You can't see through it. You can't hear. You say strange things.

Paul What can you expect from these people, with their vanity and their jealousy?

Gisèle There, you see. Like that.

Paul I was speaking of the Golls.

Gisèle Yes, but I wasn't, was I?

Paul I mention them as an example.

Gisèle The Golls. Stupid, mean-spirited, conscienceless Yids.

Paul No, because there's so little happiness handed out they didn't get any, so they want some credit, they want some attention.

Gisèle They want what's coming to you.

Paul That's how they are. That's what I mean.

Gisèle Senseless and stupid. You see one of these creepy European intellectuals and you run screaming into the night.

Paul Which ones?

Gisèle You know which ones. Why did you say that? Empty rhetoric, Paul, because you're frightened, and you say things.

Paul I meant which ones, which intellectuals?

Gisèle The ones who accuse you of plagiarism, who find fault, who are never happy about a Jewish genius.

Paul And they don't get the facts right.

Gisèle I know that, Paul.

Paul My parents were not killed at Auschwitz, I do not have a sister.

Gisèle I know that very well.

Paul They were killed in a work camp on the Ukrainian steppes.

Gisèle Yes, I know.

Paul There were many nice Jewish boys in Chernowitz, and I was one of them.

Gisèle Yes. You don't have to tell me that.

Paul I only say it, because—

Gisèle You're intimidated and you can't think. Isn't that so?

CORRECTO, EXACTO.

Paul Well, I don't know.

Gisèle You DO know. I know you know.

Paul I'm sorry.

Gisèle No, you're not sorry. You're getting ready to have a fit. Isn't that so?

Paul No, no, no, no.

Gisèle Yes, it's true. You'll throw chairs. You'll scream and yell.
Well, I'm not going to put up with it.

Paul You're so beautiful it takes my breath away.

Gisèle Just because mankind is so disappointing, and history has no meaning.

Paul Yes?

Gisèle That's no reason not to be nice, not to enjoy yourself and your family.

Paul Did you hear what I said?

Gisèle Yes. And it intimidates you, it paralyzes you, it stops you in your tracks, so you can't make love to me, because I'm too beautiful and rare. Beautiful and rare and flesh and blood, the stuff of life, more and more life. That's what Heidegger was immune to, wasn't it?, the flesh and blood messiness of life, yes, and that's what you're sick of, and I don't blame you, I just don't want to be part of it, so I'm going.

Paul Go.

GO GO GO GO GO GO

Paul I love you.

Gisèle No, you don't. You love words and ideas. You love the German language. That's why you went to that old Nazi in his hut, to verify the words.

Paul I do love you.

Gisèle Yes, but you're broken. They broke you. I know what that means now. You're a broken man.

THEY GAVE THE MOTHERFUCKER SHOCK TREATMENTS.

They gave him electric shocks,
And he had a shrill nervous laugh.

HA HA HA HA

That startled his friends.

Paul “The doctors have much to answer for, every day is a burden, what you call, ‘my own health’ is probably never to be, the damage reaches to the core of my existence... they’ve healed me to pieces!”

FUCKING BARBARIANS!

So so so so, anyway, as I was saying.



Emile

So I'm looking at this photo of Mom and Dad. And they're standing in a doorway in the cold, in the Catskills. They have no home exactly. They are on the verge of homelessness, they're always on the verge of destitution.

HOW COULD THAT ACTUALLY HAPPEN?

There are people who are destitute all over America.

WHY DON'T YOU WRITE ABOUT THAT?

All over America and all over the world.

AND?

And there's nothing to be done.

WHY NOT?

Because people are here to serve the earth. People are here to serve the earth. They are not here to be rich or to be poor, they are here to serve the earth. But of course they're not doing it. That's not what they're doing. They're destroying the earth instead. Stripping it of life, of its air and its water, stripping it bare. So what do you expect? What can you expect from people?

WHO IS THIS PERSON?

Who cares if they're rich? Who cares if they're poor?

NOT ME.

Of course not. Because they're not doing their job. They are destroying nature. They are destroying nature and they die like dogs. They spaz out and they gurgle and they cough up blood. The blood turns black and the bugs eat it. Bugs like we've never seen before, with big mouths.

Emile

So, anyway.

Just drinking up the black blood.

TELL THIS PERSON TO SHUT UP.

Emile As I was saying.

Big mouths with creepy teeth, and they munch and they munch. And they suck the blood up.

THANK YOU.

With, like, straws in their nostrils or something.

I'M LEAVING.

Which is the end of the earth as we know it. *(Pause)* Okay, I'll step offstage for a moment.

GOOD.

And then you can talk, Emile.

GOOD.

So long. *(Exits)*

Emile I'm looking at my parents, at my flesh and blood, and my mother is grinning at the camera, and my father, the street guy, stands stolidly staring straight ahead into the camera also. I don't know who was holding the camera. It's the winter. It looks like winter in the fifties.

WHERE WERE YOU?

Emile Don't know where I was. I was running around with a ball.

WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?

WHAT ARE THEY THINKING?

Emile I don't know.

(Reentering) What's the matter?

IT'S HIM!

What's the matter with him?

HE'S HYSTERICAL.

Leave him alone.

TELL HIM TO STOP CRYING!

I can't do that.

WHY NOT?

It's his prerogative. He can cry if he wants to.

SHUT UP!

Maybe you better go.

I'M GOING.

Go go go go go

I'M GONE. (*Exits*)

Okay. He (*she*) will be back. Don't worry about it.

(*Off*) HE'S NOT WORRIED ABOUT IT.

I just want to say, you know. You know. I hate to use that locution. I'm sorry. Most people don't think about suicide. They don't think about it at all. Maybe teenagers. I don't know, really. Maybe not all teenagers. Anyway, most people, most people just live their lives and they think everything is okay. They have an idea about it and they think it's okay. Is that right?

(*Off*) No!

I think it is. Emile?

Emile Yes, I agree with you.

You all right?

Emile I'm fine.

As I was saying, most people on the Earth are enjoying themselves.

(Off) BULLSHIT!

Emile Yeah, I agree with him *(her)*.

I guess that's not true.

Emile People suffer.

So, as I was saying. Paul had been in the river ten days maybe, floating in the river.

Paul I read: the Open ones carry/ the stone behind their eye,/ it knows you,/ come the Sabbath.

BEAUTIFUL, VERY BEAUTIFUL.

Paul Heidegger was there. I said, "Pay attention, you. You have no attention."

AND HE?

Heidegger Paul Celan is a sick man. He will never recover.

PAUL, IS THERE ANOTHER WORLD?

Paul Yes, the world of poetry, the world of a poem, which I call, "actualized language." This means: there is another

level of reality, touching another quality of attention. Which is what is meant by Being. It is in the Psalms. In the Book of Job. I tried to talk to Heidegger more than once. He didn't understand. He had no understanding. He had no real attention. It was all mental for him. He lacked sorrow, and couldn't help me at all. The world of a poem demands attention. The world of Being demands attention. Attention creates the world.

Primo

And so, and so. I stand. The body impulses. I go and go. I feel myself here, here in the present. I watch myself. I fall. I watch...

And so and so,

This must be the end now.

But no—

(Reentering) Hey! Where's Schwartz?

What happened to Schwartz?

You're still wondering

What happened to Schwartz?

(Who me? Not me!)

Tell! Tell!

So I go up to Vegas to see my uncle Saul

Schwartz,
My half uncle Saul Schwartz.

He's glad to see me
After sixty years or more—
He bought my baby carriage and a layette
When I was born.

“A layette”
Shaking his head
Like it was an unfortunate situation.

So so so
What happened to Schwartz?

Saul I never wanted to know him,
I never wanted to see him,
And she wouldn't talk about him.

(Oh, no!)

Saul But I heard he was a streetcar conductor
In Brooklyn, Schwartz.

WHAT? AND YOU NEVER?

Saul No, I never did.

So so so Why?

Saul I didn't want nothing to do with him. Mama would never mention him. She would only cry. Until I was three I lived in one of those, what do you call them? Like a day care?

Emile Orphanage?

Saul In an orphanage. I remember, Mama would come and slip me candy through the bars.

Emile What happened to Schwartz?

Saul He came from a rich family. He was a Hungarian, from Hungary. Mama was a farm girl, from Pinsk, in Poland. He took her to Hungary to meet his family. They said, What are you doing? You can't marry this poor person, Celia Zabrowski! So he took her to America. And there he left her, in Brooklyn, and then came along Louis, three years later.

Emile How did they get married?

Saul Oh, it was brokered. Here was a woman, a beautiful woman, with a three-year-old, who was me. and she doesn't have a husband, who was Schwartz. And here comes Louis Brasman to Brooklyn, he's an illegal immigrant, he's a widower with my brother, Harry. My half brother, Harry. So, it was arranged. I'll tell you a story. There was a box of letters. Mama used to write to her father, and their next door neighbor there became the Prime Minister of Israel. I can't remember his name now.

Emile Ben Gurion?

Saul No, not him. But her father in Pinsk couldn't read or write, so the neighbor would do it and later he became the Prime Minister, this neighbor. So the government of Israel would like to have those letters. But Mama destroyed them, and she tore up some pictures.

Emile You never saw them?

Saul No, I never did.

(OH, NO!)

Emile I'm sorry.

Saul I'm not sorry. Mama cried a lot over it. She was very emotional. Very bitter. They had an apartment on West End Avenue, after the war.

Emile Schwartz?

Saul Yeah, the family, and I was going to see them.

Emile And did you?

Saul No, I never went.

(OH, NO!)

Emile And Louis?

Saul What?

Emile What was he like?

Soft-spoken UNCLE SAUL shrugs and smiles. He never wants to say a bad word.

Saul He wasn't much help to Mama. He was never home. He was always going someplace.

Emile I heard he liked the ladies.

Saul I think so. And he wore three pairs of pants. So you could never get any money out of him! *(Laughs)*

Emile He was from a town called Tomashbele, in the Ukraine, am I right?

(TO-MOSH-BA-LEH.)

Saul Yes, he had *Lansmen* from there, in the Catskills.

Emile Aha!

Saul Sure. People he knew from that town. *Tomashbele*. He was a very good coppersmith. He made a still, a copper still, you know? He was a bootlegger, he made vodka with that thing. Powerful strong vodka. And he was a very

good dancer. He could dance the Kazaktsky very well.
Your grandfather.

(This is the end now, this must be the End.)

YES. DARK, VERY DARK.

WE HAVE TO LOOK
AT THE HUMAN SITUATION
AS IT IS, AS IT IS

ARMS AND LEGS AND BACK
DISINTEGRATING
AGING AND DEPRESSION

CAPABLE OF ANYTHING
MACHINES

WHERE IS THE GOOD?

SO SO SO SO SO

SO WHERE'S THE GOOD?

IT'S IN YOU, EMILE
EVEN THOUGH, EVEN THOUGH

IT'S HARD TO FIND

IT'S HARD TO FIND.

SPEAK.

Emile Hail Czernowitz, home place of Celan (born Antschel),
and of Aaron Applefeld (born on the same street)! Hail
Turin, founder of Primo—great lineages of Praise—Praise
and Bow.

PRAISE AND BOW

PRAISING AND BOWING NO MATTER WHAT

AT THE MOMENT OF TORTUROUS DEATH
UNDEFEATED

PRAISE G-D, MOTHERFUCKER
THEY CRIED,
PRAISE G-D, YOU PIECE OF SHIT!

THE GREAT LINEAGES OF MASTERS
BLESS THEM ALL
AMEN.

BLACKOUT.

The End