



by charles L. mee

Phil, The Trucker (Leon Pauli) and Phil's Girl (Akiko Aizawa) slide and slither on a very dry martini stage in the Actors Theatre of Louisville Humana Festival production, Louisville, Ky., March 2001.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT Charles Mee's play *Big Love* will have performed this year at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Long Wharf Theatre (New Haven, Conn.), Goodman Theatre (Chicago), A Contemporary Theatre (Seattle), Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company (Washington, D.C.), with the Rude Mechanicals (Austin, Tex.) and in the Next Wave Festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (Brooklyn, N.Y.). *True Love*, which performed in the Holland Festival in June of 2001, will join the repertory of the Netherlands' national theatre in the fall and will perform at the Flea Theatre in New York City in December 2001. *First Love* opens this month at New York Theatre Workshop. This year, Mee received a Steinberg Citation; a Laura Pels/Pen America Award; an Academy Award for distinction in literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters; the San Francisco Bay Area Critics Circle Best Play award for his play *Summertime*; and the *L.A. Weekly's* award for Production of the Year for *Berlin Circle*.

Charles Mee's work is made possible by the support of Richard B. Fisher and Jeanne Donovan Fisher.

ABOUT THE PLAY The text for *bobrauschenbergamerica* was developed in a workshop with Tali Gai, Jane Comfort, Kathleen Turco-Lyon, Rebecca Brown, Reba Herman, Alec Duffy, Jacki Goldhammer and Carolyn Clark Smith, and incorporates texts from them as well as from Robert Rauschenberg, Fred Becker, Philip Morrison, Walt Whitman, William S. Burroughs, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Allen Ginsberg and Laurie Williams. *bobrauschenbergamerica* premiered at the Actors Theatre of Louisville in the 2001 Humana Festival of New American Plays. It was directed by Anne Bogart and performed by the SITI company, which included Kelly Maurer, Ellen Lauren, Akiko Aizawa, Leon Pauli, J. Ed Araiza, Will Bond, Barney O'Hanlon, Danyon Davis, Gian-Murray Gianino and Jennifer Taher. The production's lighting design was by Brian Scott, scenic and costume design was by James Schuette, sound design was by Darron L. West, properties were by Amahl Lovato, dramaturgy was by Tanya Palmer and stage management was by Elizabeth Moreau. The play will be produced at New York Theatre Workshop in the fall of 2002.

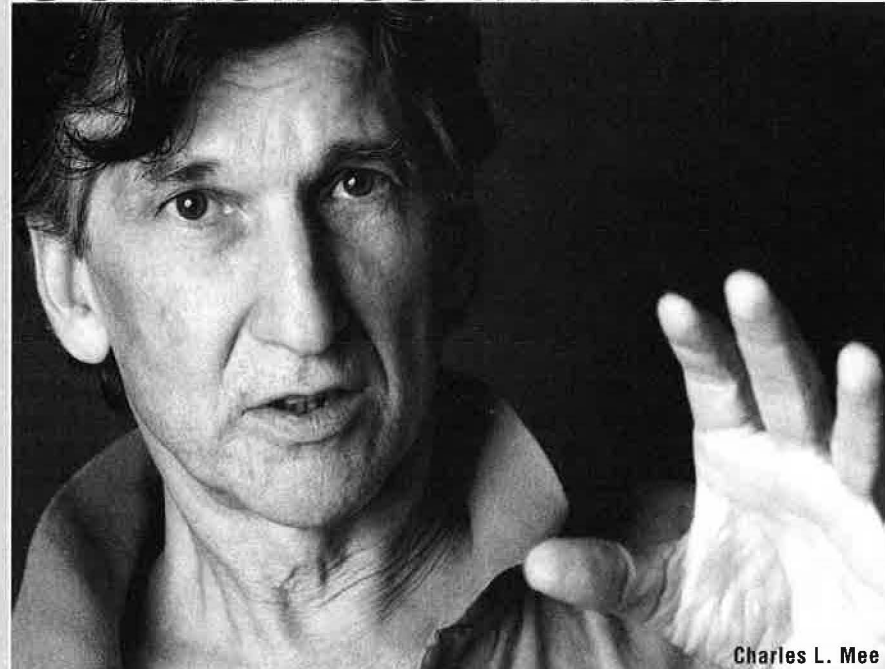
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MUSTARD TRUOG

Combines in Red



Charles L. Mee

BY CELIA WREN

Rauschenberg is famous for his combines, artwork made from assembling seemingly unrelated objects into painting/sculptural collages. Why did you take this artist as your starting point?

What I love about Robert Rauschenberg is that his work seems so open, so democratic, so optimistic, so inclusive, so vigorous, unafraid, free—so much of what we wish being American to be. He makes art by picking stuff up off the street—rejected stuff, junk—and puts those things into paintings and sculptures, saying, “This, too, is beautiful.” So I imagined a piece inspired by the same spirit—an assemblage of disparate stuff that feels like living in America—that notices the dark stuff, the violence and racism and hatreds, as Rauschenberg does, but also notices the light of America. So that the finished piece would feel like life itself.

I’ve been influenced by Rauschenberg for years—my first job was on an art magazine, *Horizon*—so finally I just decided to acknowledge it. Everybody today is a Rauschenbergian, whether they know it or not. You can read the story of the 20th century’s second half as a project to embrace a broader definition of an acceptable human being—a project to be inclusive of races, genders, sexual orientations, tastes, inclinations, and to put those things at the center of art. Rauschenberg was there first. He is who we would like to be as Americans at our best, with this spirit of egalitarianism and openness to life. I’ve been inspired by his spirit

and way of making things—this idea of collage, taking the stuff of the real world and remaking it in your imagination to make shocking and pleasing and disturbing juxtapositions. I’ve always felt that my dramaturg was Max Ernst, whose collages at the beginning of the 20th century took the stuff of the real world and rendered it as hallucination. I like work that is broken and rough-edged and unfinished, because this feels like my life and my body and the real world.

How else does the play address the idea of America?

There are very dark moments and threads in it, the biggest one being the entrance of Bob the pizza boy, who talks about the triple murder he committed. He reflects that strain of unfathomable violence in America. You listen to him speak and think, this is weird and funny, and then, this is horrifying, and then you begin to have sympathy. And you finally conclude that you don’t understand where his violence is coming from. I think human beings remain unfathomable.

Some of the play’s images come from Rauschenberg’s “combines.”

Yes. When I started to work on the play I took a look at some of the recurring images in his pieces—stuffed chickens, cardboard boxes, an astronaut, roller skates. If I thought about these things, whom did I hear talking? I heard chicken jokes and a housewife in slippers talking on a front porch and an astro-

naut talking to Houston. That’s how the play began.

Then the SIT1 company set up a playwriting workshop for me and I asked the participants to see what Rauschenberg’s work made *them* think of and to bring in texts. I spun out an outline of 35 scenes and asked the workshop members to outline another 35 scenes and to stick their texts in. These people did amazing work. At the end of two days I had a mountain of wonderful stuff, but it wasn’t a play. So then I thought: What’s Rauschenberg’s principle of selection? Well, he takes whatever feels *cool* to him. So I went through and took whatever felt cool to me.

Then I thought: How do I keep the audience from feeling hopelessly lost in all the scenes and images? Well, the one story we all know is the love story—boy meets girl, boy gets girl, boy loses girl. So I put in three or four love stories and they stitched the piece together, so there’s forward progress without violating the collage aesthetic. The piece is probably half stuff people brought in and half stuff I wrote. Then we went up to Skidmore and 50 students did composition work based on this script, and I stole some more things.

Like the martini-on-plastic-sheeting scene?

That was Laurie Williams’s idea. Laurie and I lived together for the past five years—she was the love of my life—and I just wrote whatever she told me to write. At Skidmore, somebody did a composition where people put breakfast cereal and milk on a plastic cloth and rolled around in it, and Laurie said, “You should make it martinis, because the SIT1 company loves martinis!” At the SIT1 company, they are major, major martini drinkers.

And the 123-piece marching band?

At one point Anne Bogart said, “If we tour the piece it would be fun to have it open in some way so wherever we go we can include the community.” And I thought, how about including the marching band in each town?

How about the color red?

I am almost a maniac about red. I have red sneakers, a red ski jacket, red crutches, red shirts. I’m afraid I’m going to turn into a crazy person who dresses all in red. I don’t feel secure unless I have something red on. **AT**

SUSAN JOHANN

bobrauschenbergamerica

An empty stage covered by a blank canvas.

A ladder.

The actors come out to remove the ladder and canvas.

[In the Actors Theatre of Louisville production, designed by James Schuette, when the canvas was pulled off stage, an immense American flag was revealed. It covered the entire rear wall and the whole stage floor. There was a screen door in the flag, so that through the door and "behind the flag" was "inside Bob's Mom's house." The flag also had several cutouts that could open suddenly and miraculously—two second-story windows and one large square window, the size of an opening into a barn's hayloft. Actors appeared and disappeared, entered and exited through all these openings, as well as simply walking on and off stage.]

Big Music.

1 TITLE

A chicken slowly descends from the flies on a string.

It has a sign around its neck that says:

bobrauschenbergamerica

2 WHAT I LIKE

A roller skater bursts in with a big, red umbrella, and other characters come out immediately, some with objects. Phil, The Trucker pushes a bathtub on wheels with a lightbulb set in the mass of crunched steel where the showerhead should be, and maybe a ONE WAY sign on the side of the tub. Susan has a stuffed deer on wheels, or maybe a goat with a tire around its stomach. Becker, the filthy, rag-dressed, disheveled, offhand derelict, has a cardboard box. Phil's Girl pushes a baby carriage with a stuffed chicken inside. Wilson has a house window on wheels. Allen crosses the stage carrying a ladder while a voiceover is heard:

VOICEOVER:

What I like to do is...

I start with anything,

*a picture,
these colors;*

I like these colors;

*or I might have an idea about something I'd like to try with a shoe,
or maybe I just feel:
happy.*

*Look,
everything overlaps doesn't it?*

*Is connected some kind of way.
Once you put it all together, it's just obvious.*

*I mean, tie a string to something, and
see where it takes you.*

*The biggest thing is
don't worry about it.*

*You're always gonna be moving somewhere so
don't worry about it.*

See?

*Start working when it's almost too late at night,
when your sense of efficiency is exhausted
and then just,*

let it come on...

*The chicken with the title card disappears and the characters all
exit as the voiceover ends.*

3 BOB'S MOM

Bob's Mom comes out onto the front porch.

The screen door slams shut behind her.

*She talks, while we hear crickets,
and while black and white photos of small-town life in the 1950s
are projected behind her on the wall—
but her talk and the photos don't match up.*

BOB'S MOM:

That's Bob's first birthday party

on the back porch with the morning glories all in bloom

that's Butch East,

Johnnie East,

Susan East,

she just got arrested for drugs,

Billy Kraemer and Alex Cameron.

*And that's Bob with Johnnie East in their canvas swimming pool
when they were about four.*

Johnnie popped that beach ball later that day

and I told Bob I wasn't buying another one.

There's Bob with his dog Jab.

*He used to feed him the cheese sandwiches I made the boys for
lunch. They're under the porch.*

*This is some kind of hut they made in the backyard
out of crates and branches and clothes.*

You can see Bob's feet out the side.

That's Donna Kraemer trying to get in the back.

There are the boys outside Dobson's 5 & 10 cent store.

*They almost died blowing up those balloons—
they're six feet long.*

It's Johnnie East, Bob and Tommy Hoffman.

The Port Arthur Independent ran this picture

on the front page of their second section for the Fourth of July.

Tommy Hoffman got meningitis and died.

That was a real sad day for all of us.

Art

art was not a part of our lives.

*We hear a newspaper boy's bike bell. A newspaper is thrown onto
the stage. Bob's Mom picks it up, waves and goes back inside. The
screen door slams.*

4 OUR TOWN

Becker emerges from his cardboard refrigerator box.

BECKER:

Where I grew up

you could walk to the end of the block

and step right into the countryside

field after field

nobody owned this land so far as we knew.

It had little lakes where we would cut down saplings

and build lean-tos

and camp out

no grownups, just the kids, boys and girls

we had no fear

of anything.
You could just go and go
you didn't know where you were headed
but you were a free person
you'd see where it was you'd been
after you came out of the woods at the end.

5 SETTING OUT

Phil, The Trucker sits up—and is suddenly visible—in his bathtub.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

When I leave home at 5 A.M.,
the Big Dipper is bright over my shoulder
against the dark road we live on.
And it's quiet.
And if there's a moon
it's still up and hovering
over the little lake.
The front range of hills is a dark silhouette
in the background.

In the evening ducks and geese are on the pond
and the fish are standing on their tails.
The quarry I load out of is surrounded by
red monoliths of rock
like sentinels
with flocks of blackbirds perched on top.
When the weather's hot the afternoon sky is blue
and it grows giant cumulus,
which by evening go dark
and shoot the most amazing sideways heli-arcs of fire.

*A bathing beauty, the trucker's girlfriend, enters, sucking the tail
end of a milkshake from a cup. Phil notices her.*

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

Everywhere I go there's something to see.
I don't know how I got so lucky.
But here I am.

A girl on roller skates races across the stage.

*Bob's Mom steps out onto her front porch, shaking out a
dishtowel—as the screen door slams behind her.*

*Faint music,
as though heard on a radio in a truck cab in the night
or through the open window of a house in Kansas,
coming from another house, far distant across the field;
it could be the music of Ibrahim Ferrer,
or another country song.
Bob's Mom goes back inside.*

6 FALLING IN LOVE

Susan enters.

She sees Becker and he sees her. They stop.

SUSAN:

So often we find
we look at someone
and
we are disgusted.

BECKER:

Oh, yes.

SUSAN:

We think, Here is a real dirtball
and we think
if we get too close



Bob's Mom (Kelly Maurer) reminisces about her son in the Actors Theatre of Louisville Humana Festival production, March 2001.

we might catch something.

BECKER:

Yes, we do.

SUSAN:

And yet, as far as we know
we ourselves might be the contagious ones
not knowing what it is we have
but having it even so
without knowing it.

BECKER:

We never know.

SUSAN:

Still, we think
get this fellow away from me
lock him up, put him away
send him to an island
you know, the island of the damned
the island of the rejects
whatever
just get him out of here.
And yet, life twists and turns
sometimes like lightning
you don't know
suddenly you've got cancer
and you are facing death
or in the least likely place
you see someone
and you fall in love
you look at the guy

and you think,
I don't think so
and yet there it is
you don't know why
your friends all say, "Are you crazy?"
"You love him?"

But you love him so much
you just want to knock him down and kiss him.
She runs at Becker,
knocks him down and kisses him madly.

7
THE TRIANGLE

Wilson enters.

WILSON:
Hey, what the hell is going on here?
Do you know who the hell you're kissing?

BECKER:
No. No, I don't.

WILSON:
This is my wife.

SUSAN:
Wife?

WILSON:
Fiancée.

SUSAN:
Fiancée?

WILSON:
My girlfriend.
I mean, I thought we were going steady.
What the hell is this?
I walk/turn my back for one minute
and you're taking up with someone else?
What are you
some sort of biological creature?

SUSAN:
Yes. Yes, I am.

WILSON:
I am from Chicago, Susan.

SUSAN:
I know that, Wilson.

WILSON:
So what do you think that means to me?

SUSAN:
What?

WILSON:
Kissing. What do you think that means?

SUSAN:
I wouldn't have any idea.

WILSON:
You see what's happened these days
nobody can tell you what kissing means!

SUSAN:
I can tell you what it means when I kiss you.
It means good-bye.
(She walks out)

8
MAKING NICE

A lone man, Allen, wearing shower cap and towel,
Appears suddenly in the hayloft window and sings a song to
smooth things over—
The Ink Spots's song, "I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire"—

or something else to distract from the fight
and get everyone's attention moving elsewhere—
and the characters already on stage,
Phil, Phil's Girl, Wilson and Becker, the filthy derelict,
sing backup for Allen. At some point in the song, Susan enters
and joins in the song:

I don't want to set the world on fire
I don't want to set the world on fire
I don't want to set the world on fire
I don't want to set the world on fire
I don't want to set the world on fire
I don't want to set the world on fire
I don't want to set the world on fire
I don't want to set the world on fire
I don't want to set the world on fire

9
ANOTHER LOVER

Another man, Carl, enters and dances to the song,
and after Allen sings,
while the music is still playing,
Allen, the singer, joins Carl, the dancer,
so that they dance together.
Wilson takes over as soloist
when the lyrics pick up again.

NOTE: as the piece goes on, there will be several relationships among the characters contained in dialogue—but also all sorts of relationships are possible without dialogue, in bits of physical actions that occur on the side, and in dances that suggest deeper, more lingering relationships.

At the end of the song, Carl and Allen exit together. During the following scene, the rest of the characters gradually leave Phil and Phil's Girl alone in the tub.

10
THE BATHING BEAUTY

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:
I look at you and I think
if it wouldn't be wrong
I'd like to make love with you on a pool table.
PHIL'S GIRL:
It wouldn't be wrong if you'd let me handcuff you to the pockets.
PHIL, THE TRUCKER:
You could do that.
PHIL'S GIRL:
What I think about is
I'd like to have sex with you in the parking lot
behind the Exxon station
near that diner on the Malibu highway.
You know the one?
PHIL, THE TRUCKER:
Near that road up into the canyon.
PHIL'S GIRL:
That's the one.
PHIL, THE TRUCKER:
That would be pretty public.
PHIL'S GIRL:
I'd like to have the whole world see
you want me so much
you can't wait.

I'd like to have the whole world see
you're not ashamed of me.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

Why would I be ashamed of you?

PHIL'S GIRL:

I feel ashamed myself.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

For what reason?

PHIL'S GIRL:

Who knows?

Every fifteen minutes I feel ashamed of myself at least once.

And humiliated.

For no reason.

It just comes back to me over and over again.

Do you ever feel that way?

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

Every fifteen minutes I feel worried.

PHIL'S GIRL:

Do you feel you want to hurt someone?

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

No.

PHIL'S GIRL:

Do you feel you want to get even?

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

No.

PHIL'S GIRL:

That's good.

Do you feel you want to bite something?

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

I don't think so.

Maybe I feel that.

PHIL'S GIRL:

Do you feel you want to take off all your clothes?

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

No.

I usually don't feel that.

PHIL'S GIRL:

Do you feel you want more money?

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

Oh, sure. Everybody feels that.

BOB'S MOM (*Calls out from offstage*):

Lunch is served!

A big table and several chairs are brought out.

Various people say:

"Oh, thank God."

"I'm famished!"

"Just in time!"

"I wasn't going to last another minute!"

Bob's Mom brings out a roast chicken. The screen door slams.

Chicken picnic lunch is served.

Everyone takes some food and sits in the chairs.

11

TABLE TALK: THE STARS

ALLEN:

The way the stars are, with your naked eyes you can't see much.

SUSAN:

Oh.

No. Unless you know a lot.

ALLEN:

But even looking at the stars,

I would rather say the night sky,

you see two kinds of things...three or four kinds of things.

SUSAN:

You see planets, you see stars, you see meteorites,

you can see aircrafts...

all these things...

ALLEN:

So it's a great show

the way the planets appear and dance around,

we follow it all the time

and we have on our bulletin boards in the back...

and we have a chart of the whole thing,

and people record that stuff...

because we know these motions very well.

It's the foundation probably of qualitative science.

SUSAN:

The early work of people trying to understand...

ALLEN:

First just day and night,

then the seasons

and then the stars and then the planets...

There are different things that go back tens of thousands of years,
older than written history.

SUSAN:

Right.

ALLEN:

There is a great deal more space than time, you know.

SUSAN:

No.

ALLEN:

Yes.

And this is because the signals we can get

all come in at the speed of light...

SUSAN:

That's really fast.

ALLEN:

Yes. And they cover a great distance.

So it doesn't take them much time to cover a lot of distance—

that's how you get more space than time in the universe.

SUSAN:

Right.

Right.

12

TABLE TALK: THE DISPUTE

WILSON:

How could you just suddenly disappear?

SUSAN:

I didn't.

WILSON:

I thought you did.

And I thought you loved me.

SUSAN:

Well, I do love you.

The others exit, embarrassed.

WILSON:

Oh, yes, you love me

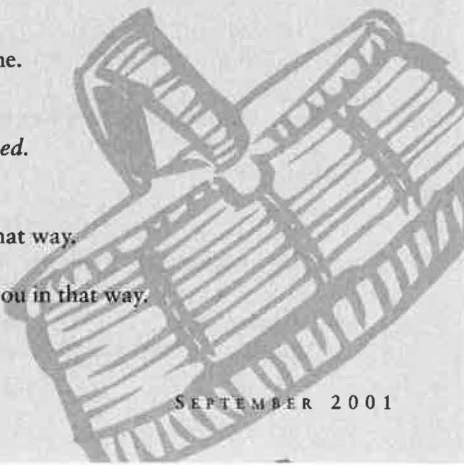
but you don't love me in that way.

SUSAN:

I never pretended to love you in that way.

WILSON:

I can't go on in life



without being loved in that way.

SUSAN:

A lot of people are never loved in that way.

WILSON:

How can you tell

if you are really alive

if you're never loved in that way?

SUSAN:

What do you mean, "in that way"?

WILSON:

Unless I thought you were crazy for me

so crazy for me you couldn't stand it

you just had to kiss me

you just had to knock me down and kiss me

because you couldn't stand it

that you laughed at my jokes

or thought I was so cool

or like said really intelligent things that made you think

maybe not all of those things

but even just any one of them

just one of them...

Silence.

WILSON:

You see what I mean, not even one.

SUSAN:

I'm sorry.

WILSON:

Why did you live with me, then?

SUSAN:

I thought I loved you

but I guess I didn't know what love was.

I liked you in a way

not much

but in some ways

or at least in the ways I thought guys could be likeable

and the rest of it I thought maybe that's just

how guys are

and as time went on maybe it wouldn't matter so much

but then I find it does matter

I can't help myself

some stuff you do

I just can't get over it

and the stuff I liked:

that I thought you were a responsible person

and mature

solid and dependable

all those turned out not to be true at all

so what am I left with?

WILSON:

It's not your fault.

SUSAN:

No, it's not.

WILSON:

Or maybe it is

that you weren't thinking very clearly

or being very focused when you made your choice

and a lot of people were depending on that choice

being really clear

or at least I was.

SUSAN:

I know.

I'm sorry.

WILSON:

Being sorry doesn't cut it somehow.

I know people always say they're sorry

and probably they are

and I don't think it means nothing

I'm sure it means something

and it's essential for people to feel it

and to say it

in order for life to go on at all

and yet

the truth is

it doesn't cut it.

I'm sorry, but it doesn't.

SUSAN:

I'm sorry.

WILSON:

Is that somehow now

supposed to cut it?

13

TABLE TALK: A COUPLE SEEKS ADVICE

Everyone comes back on and starts clearing the table. Allen and Carl present their idea to the others, both interrupting one another and talking simultaneously.

ALLEN:

OK.

I would like to hear opinions or advice on my idea.

CARL:

Well, our idea.

ALLEN:

Our idea.

It's a business really.

CARL:

A new business because...

ALLEN:

...because the catering business is not like a big business.

CARL:

So a year ago we bought a small acreage

we thought: Let's go into a real business for ourselves

have a small business...

ALLEN:

...and we fixed up the chicken coop...

CARL:

...and bought twenty broiler chicks to raise for our own
butchering.

ALLEN:

I have an ample enough coop to raise more chickens for butchering
and also some egg producers.

CARL:

I like this idea because I've always wanted to do something with
farming...

ALLEN:

...but we didn't inherit farmland,

CARL:

...which is usually how you get to be a farmer.

ALLEN:

Well, anyway, how do you find your target market?

CARL:

Advertising would not be hard,

I have a good program on my computer to make flyers and
business cards,

15
GUY TALK

ALLEN:

...but do we have to get a license to maybe sell to local restaurants?

CARL:

Do we have to be monitored by the state since we'd be selling meat?

ALLEN:

We just have the idea
and now we don't know what to do with it...

CARL:

...and also we're nervous about failing

and Allen:

he's afraid if we go into the chicken business
he's going to end up looking like a chicken.

ALLEN:

Well.

I mean, look at Frank Perdue.

CARL:

What do you mean?

ALLEN:

What do you mean, "What do you mean"?

CARL:

You mean he looks like a chicken?

ALLEN:

Well, look at him.

CARL:

I don't think being a chicken farmer
is going to make you look like a chicken, Allen
otherwise plumbers would look like pipes
carpenters would look like sawdust
the president of General Motors would look like a bumper.

ALLEN:

Have you seen the president of General Motors?

*Allen and Carl storm off. Phil, Phil's Girl, Wilson and Becker
exit. Susan climbs into the bathtub. Bob's Mom is left on stage.*

14

TABLE TALK: BOB'S MOM'S GRANDMOTHER

*Bob's Mom talking about family photos in an album, a slide is
projected behind her.*

BOB'S MOM: When I was sixteen my grandmother had to be put
into a home. My grandmother had terrorized my mother and
uncle for so many years it was difficult to feel much in the way of
empathy or compassion or love for her. But I related to her in one
way. We shared a real passion for the color red. My grand-
mother's house was a museum. She collected cut Italian colored
glass decanters and glasses. Each object uniquely shaped. Colors
rich. I valued those objects deeply. I wanted to play with them, to
make new shapes of them, to make new surfaces for them. I
wanted to smash them and see what they looked like as heaps, to
see how light played on their shattered surfaces. My grandmother
always wore a large, rectangular, ruby pendant on a gold chain. I
dreamed of having that one day. Of having that color. When my
grandmother died I asked what became of the ruby. It turned out
she had gone into the home years before and everything was sold
at a yard sale. The objects she collected—beautiful objects—all
discarded. Thrown out. No one wanted them. Cast off. I would
have preferred to smash them against brick walls to see what they
might have become.

Well, art was not a part of our lives.

She goes back inside, the screen door slamming behind her.

*A girl skates through on roller skates. People drift back slowly and
continue to clear away the food from the picnic.*

Phil comes out with a checkerboard.

He sits down beside Susan and they start to play checkers.

As this scene goes on,

people drift to and from the table,

getting up to get something and then not coming back, going inside,

or getting up to get another drink for someone

and then not coming back,

some taking their plates or glasses with them

to continue eating and drinking wherever they stand.

And as the conversation continues,

the others may begin to engage in other activities—

*Allen and Carl both bring out ironing boards and start to do some
ironing in the background;*

Phil's Girl swings in a tire swing;

Becker, the filthy derelict, sets up housekeeping inside his box; etc.

SUSAN:

The woman next door

is having an affair with an orchestra conductor in Cincinnati.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

Does Cincinnati have an orchestra?

SUSAN:

I guess it does.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

Does her husband know?

SUSAN:

He doesn't know.

She just flies off to Cincinnati from time to time

when her husband is away on business

or the conductor comes to Denver.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

How did they meet?

SUSAN:

On an airplane.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

What does she do?

SUSAN:

I don't know.

She flies around a lot.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

Is she a stewardess?

SUSAN:

Oh, right.

She's a stewardess.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

No wonder she can just go wherever she wants.

SUSAN:

Right.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

It's a perfect job if you want to have love affairs.

SUSAN:

Right.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

Do you think all stewardesses are having love affairs?

SUSAN:

Well, most of them probably.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:

Why not?

SUSAN:

Exactly.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:
Would you, if you were a stewardess?

SUSAN:
Yes, I think I would.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:
So would I.

SUSAN:
I have to pee.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:
What?

SUSAN:
I have to pee.
Would you wait here?

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:
Oh. Sure.
She leaves;
everyone stops what they are doing.
They all turn to look and just stand around waiting for her to come back.
We hear a flush from offstage;
finally she returns.

SUSAN:
Times have changed.
Everyone else resumes what they were doing.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:
Since when?

SUSAN:
Since, oh, I don't know.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:
I don't think they have.

SUSAN:
Of course they have.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:
Well, of course they have
in the sense that now you have electric lights and so forth,
the internet
whatnot,
but otherwise I don't think times have changed.

SUSAN:
I think they have.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:
Compared to what?

SUSAN:
My grandmother.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:
You wouldn't know.

SUSAN:
That's true.
I wouldn't know.
Maybe that's what changed.
But in Russia you know
they didn't have love affairs for years
all during the Communists.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:
How do you know?

SUSAN:
There was a study.
They didn't even have sex with their husbands and wives
not much.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:
Why not?

SUSAN:
They didn't feel like it.



The cast acts out Becker's movie; from left to right: Phil, The Trucker (Leon Pauli), Allen (Will Bond), Becker (J. Ed Araiza) and Carl (Barney O'Hanlon, in the bathtub) in the Actors Theatre of Louisville Humana Festival production, March 2001.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER:
Are they having sex now?

SUSAN:
Now! Well, sure. I suppose they are.
You know, things have changed in Russia.

16 BECKER'S MOVIE

Becker climbs out of his box, holding two old license plates, which he uses as the script. He casts the other people in the movie and they do the roles as well as being film crew and audience. The objects around them on the stage become props in the film. Bob's Mom watches from inside the house.

BECKER:
OK. I have an idea for a movie.
I think this could be really great.

(To Allen) You will play Clem, the meteorologist
(To Carl) you will be the billionaire on his deathbed,
the roles are all marked for you in the script.

Ready?
The others answer variously:

"Sure."

"OK."

"Right."

BECKER:
OK. Here it is.

This is a film about a conspiracy to blow up a train carrying nerve gas from the West Coast to the East Coast where it is supposed to be dumped into the Atlantic. Only one FBI man is alert to the danger and he cannot convince his superiors that a conspiracy exists. He is playing a hunch and sometimes he doubts the validity of his intuition. Minutes before countdown he has the evidence he needs.

OK.

The conspirators include a folksy meteorologist, an embittered homosexual, a Chinese cameraman, a lesbian, a Mexican pistolero, a negro castrated in his cradle by rat bites. The time and place for countdown depends of course on prevailing winds and the meteorologist is busy with continual calculations, weather maps, barometer and wind reads, telescopic observation of clouds and birds. There are also instruments of his own invention. He is contemptuous of weather reports.

ALLEN (*As Clem, the meteorologist*): Doesn't know a typhoon from a fart. You see that vulture up yonder? He can tell you more than a room full of weather maps and barometers. The birds know.

BECKER: The conspiracy is financed by a private inheritance. This sum was left to Clem, the meteorologist, by an eccentric billionaire perturbed by overpopulation, air and water pollution and the destruction of wild life.

Now there is a shot of the billionaire speaking on his deathbed.

CARL (*As billionaire, on his deathbed*): Clem, swear to me by everything we both hold sacred that you will use every cent of that money to turn the clock back to 1899 when a silver dollar bought a good meal or a good piece of ass.

BECKER: Cut to conspirators' headquarters in run-down 1920s bungalow. Audrey (*He indicates Susan*), the homosexual is looking through the Telstar. Inside the gate the last cylinders of nerve gas are being loaded into a train. The Telstar lingers lovingly on the ass of a young soldier who is bending over to pick up a cylinder of gas. Mr. Lee the Chinese cameraman takes over at the Telstar. Train doors shut and locked. A gum-chewing MP reading *Sextoons* presses a button. The train moves out.

ALLEN (*As Clem*): You know I love this country. Only thing wrong with it is the folks living there.

BECKER: His face goes black with hate.

ALLEN (*As Clem*): Mother loving stupid asses bible belt cuntsuckers.

BECKER: He smiles and turns to Audrey, Miss Longridge and the spade whose name is Jones.

Phil's Girl becomes Miss Longridge, Wilson becomes Jones and, later, Tio Mate.

ALLEN (*As Clem*): Now you're city folk. You never drank cool spring water on a summer afternoon. You never sat down to fried squirrel and jack salmon with black-eyed peas and wild raspberries. You never sank your hands in the soil and let it run through your fingers.

BECKER: He turns back to the map.

ALLEN (*As Clem*): Yes, sir. We're going to lay down a mighty fine load of fertilizer.

BECKER: He sweeps his hand across the Middle West.

ALLEN (*As Clem*): The trees will grow again, the bison will come back, the wild turkey and the deer.

SUSAN (*As Audrey*): Other people are different from me, and I don't like them.

BECKER: Miss Longridge is looking at the nudes in *Playboy*. Tio Mate, the Mexican pistolero, is cleaning his Smith & Wesson tip-up .44. Jones is taking a fix.

Cut to FBI man pacing up and down in his office.

CARL (*As Rogers, the FBI man*): I tell you I had a dream. I saw that train go up and that gas sweeping up the eastern seaboard.

PHIL'S GIRL (*As Falk, another FBI man*): Are you going to tell the chief about your dream, Joe?

BECKER: Rogers, picking up the phone.

CARL (*As Rogers*): No, but I'm going to ask him for more agents.

BECKER: Cover story for the conspirators is that they are making a documentary film of America. Clem is the director, Lee the cam-

eraman, Audrey the scriptwriter, Miss Longridge the business manager and Tio Mate the studio guard. The film of course is a documentary of America.

In a deserted roadhouse Audrey rapes a young sailor at gunpoint while Lee impassively films the action.

AUDREY: OK. CUT! You can put your clothes on now. And now let's see how fast you can run.

BECKER: Sailor takes off like a rabbit and reaches the top of a hill fifty yards away. Tio Mate draws and aims and fires. Tio Mate can blast a vulture out of the air with his .44.

Miss Longridge rapes two female hitchhikers. And then, stark naked, she kills them with a baseball bat.

They stop at a filling station and honk. Nobody comes, so Jones gets out to fill the tank himself. At this moment, the owner of the filling station, a nigger-killing lawman with six notches on his gun, comes out a side door.

PHIL, THE TRUCKER (*As lawman*): Get away from that pump, boy.

WILSON (*As Jones*): Yassuh, boss.

As Becker speaks the following lines, everyone tries to keep up. Chaos ensues.

BECKER: Jones drenches the lawman with gasoline and sets him on fire.

Jones, who is hooked on junk, leaves a wake of dead druggists.

Audrey is restrained at gun point from mass rape of a boy scout troop.

Tio Mate shoots down an army helicopter.

Clem sounds a word of warning to his impetuous companions.

ALLEN (*As Clem*): Such a thing as too much fun. We're leaving a trail like a herd of elephants.

BECKER:

That's as far as I've gotten so far.

How do you like it?

No one is sure how to respond.

17 LINE DANCING

Suddenly: a line dance.

Midway through the dance, it stops as suddenly as it began, and everyone goes back to their normal lives. Phil's Girl crawls into the tub, Becker climbs back into his box and watches the following scene. Everyone else exits, except for Wilson and Susan, who are left onstage.

18 CRAZY FOR YOU

WILSON (*Confronting Susan*):

So

it turns out

you come to me

to be with me

and then

as soon as you feel reassured that I love you

you go back to your husband

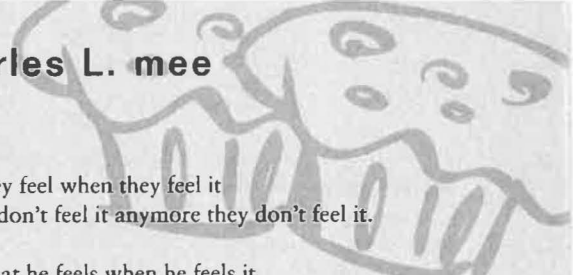
and then if you talk to me on the phone

and I seem to be slipping away from you

if I seem anxious or uncertain

then you come back to me and make love with me

and stay with me



until you know you have me again
I can't help myself loving you
and then you go back to your husband again
so it turns out
the only way I can keep you is by making you feel anxious
keeping you on edge
making you feel I'm about to drop you
so the way to have you
is to reject you
and if I don't reject you
then I don't have you
we are in a relationship that is sick
where you show love by showing aversion
you show aversion by showing love
so that you live a backwards life
and the one person you want to love and cherish
and show how much you care
is the one person you will drive away by doing any of those things
how can we go on like this?
this is insane
this will make us both insane
this is how people go insane!
(He storms out)

19 DESSERT

*Bob's Mom brings out a cake,
sets it down on the picnic table and leaves.
The screen door slams as she comes out and goes back in.
As this next scene goes along,
Susan starts to eat compulsively,
taking pieces of cake or cupcakes from the table—
at first absentmindedly, at a normal cake-eating pace,
and then more and more compulsively,
until she is stuffing it into her mouth.*

BECKER:

I think I know how he feels myself.
I thought you cared for me too.

SUSAN:

I did care for you.
There was something about you
I don't even know what it was that just hit me
I couldn't help myself
but then it turns out
it was like a summer storm
it passed as quickly as it came
and then it was over.

BECKER:

Maybe it wasn't over for me.

SUSAN:

I'm sorry.

BECKER:

I don't think you can just drop someone like that
and just say I'm sorry.

SUSAN:

I didn't just say I'm sorry

I *am* sorry.

BECKER:

This is why some people call women fickle.

SUSAN:

I don't think it has anything to do with being fickle.
How it is for women:

women feel what they feel when they feel it
and then when they don't feel it anymore they don't feel it.
Unlike a man
who won't know what he feels when he feels it
and then later on
he'll realize how he felt
and so he'll talk himself into feeling it again
when he doesn't feel it
because he thinks he should be consistent about the positions he takes
and stick to them
so a man always thinks he feels things he doesn't feel
and so he never really knows how he feels at all.

BECKER:

That could be true.

SUSAN:

Of course it's true.

Pretty soon

you're going to thank God you had such a narrow escape,
you're going to feel lucky I dumped you.

BECKER:

I'm never going to feel that.

SUSAN:

Maybe not.

BECKER:

I think you must be a sort of a tease

or worse

some kind of seducer and dumper kind of person

who is just a loose cannon

cutting a swath through men

leaving them wrecked all around you.

What is that all about?

She speaks, with a mouth full of cake,

eating as she speaks,

with greater and greater animation as she goes on,

till she is yelling through a mouth full of cake.

SUSAN:

Maybe that would be about something

if it were in any way true

but it is not in any way true

I'm a person who is looking for true love

like anyone else

except the difference is

I am trying not to be afraid of my feelings

and censor things

and lie and lie and lie all the time

pretending I feel like this or that

going with some guy because I couldn't be sure anymore

how I felt about him

because he had some things I liked and other things I didn't

and trying to talk myself into not caring about the things I cared about

and caring about the things I didn't care about

because I've done that a lot in the past

so I am trying to let my feelings lead me through life.

And

feelings are feelings

they come and go.

So probably I'm just as disoriented as you are

and left in the lurch

suddenly dropped

or thrown down the stairs

it's not as though this is not a struggle for me too

but the one thing you can be sure of is

if ever I am sure of how I feel
in a way that is the kind of feeling that I know will last
then when that time comes
if it so happens that I do tell you I love you
then you can be sure of it.
Becker and Susan exit.

**20
MARTINIS**

Music.

*Phil's Girl brings out an immense piece of plastic sheeting
which she spreads out on the floor.
She takes a bottle of gin
and pours it out on the sheeting,
then she takes a bottle of vermouth
and waves it over the gin,
then she takes a bottle of olives and pours it out onto the gin;
she begins to slide forward on the gin,
licking it up with her tongue.
Phil enters in a bathing suit
and he joins her,
sliding forward on his stomach
and licking up the martini.*

*Everyone enters and clears the stage.
A girl on roller skates rolls by.
The stage is empty.*

**21
WHY DOES THE CHICKEN
CROSS THE STAGE?**

*A chicken crosses the stage—moving cautiously, stopping and
looking around as he goes, scratching at the ground—maybe while
we hear, as a voiceover, an astronaut talking to Houston base.*

VOICEOVER:

*A man in a chicken suit crosses the stage.
Silence till the chicken is almost off the other side.*

VOICEOVER:

Why does he cross the stage?

**22
THE UNIVERSE**

*Music begins to play. Characters arrive slowly, all of them moving
as if walking on the moon. Allen emerges first, pushing a car door
on wheels. Susan and Phil's Girl are cuddled up inside, while:*

A man (Wilson) practices his golf swing in slow motion and

*A young girl eats candy wrappers or dog biscuits to the awe of her
peers while Allen speaks.*

ALLEN:

*You think that you see what's present...but you don't, you never do...
All you can ever see is the past.
Look in the mirror,
you see a person in the mirror who is younger than you are...
because the light has to go from you to the mirror
and from the mirror to your eye.
So it leaves you, goes to the mirror
and comes back.
So whenever you see yourself,
you see yourself a little earlier.*

*It's actually unimportant. It's nanoseconds.
But the truth is:
all any human being can ever observe is the past.
You never see the present.
And everything you look at is younger than it is right now.
When you look at the universe,
you are looking at a universe that is billions of years younger.
Allen and Susan drift off into space.*

**23
THE LAUNDRY OPERA**

*Carl rides by on a bike. He climbs off the bike, and then laundry
falls from above so that Carl is buried in a pile of laundry. Bob's
Mom comes out and watches him.
Carl dives over and over again into the pile of laundry
while we hear an operatic aria. After a while, Carl exits.*

**24
CLEAN SWEEP**

*Becker, the filthy derelict, as a janitor with a push broom, crosses,
sweeping up the laundry as he exits, and while Bob's Mom speaks
again, with slides of his life in the 1950s projected behind her—the
photos don't match up.*

BOB'S MOM:

*That's Bob and Freddie Martin
dressed up as the Lone Ranger and Hopalong Cassidy.
Look at them in their masks and cowboy hats,
with all those swords and guns and flashlights stuck in their belts.
Two tough little cowboys.
I don't think Hopalong ever wore a mask, actually.*

*This is Bob
and some kind of contraption he made in boy scouts
from hundreds of popsicle sticks.
You can see how he glued the sticks all straight
and organized at the bottom
and then where he got bored.
He started gluing the sticks every which a way
and adding feathers and bottle caps and twigs to it
so it looked like that on top.
He looks pretty pleased with himself,
but I don't think the scoutmaster was.*

*Oh my Lord, that's Bob up on the roof
trying to fix his shortwave radio antenna.
Just after I took that picture the antenna fell over
and touched the power line on the street.
He was smart enough to let go in time,
but the power blew up his radio and burned a hole in his desk.
I think he got more careful about things after that.*

*And here's Bob and Barbara Spangler
at Ethel Howell's Ballroom Dance Class end of the year formal.
Barbara got the Most Polite Student Award that year.
I don't know why Bob didn't get one too.
He certainly was just as polite as she was.
(She leaves)*

**25
THE GALAXY**

*Allen enters with a ladder. He climbs to the top of the ladder and
speaks. During the scene, the other characters come out one by
one and wave at him. He appears to be waving back, but he exists*

in a different time and space, and his gestures are linked to the images he is describing.

ALLEN: This connection between time and space is everything...and you can't interpret or judge easily the way we can around here. That's why we're not sure of many things because we have only one interpretation—the way things look to us here on earth at one particular moment.

What we did: we thought it was, at that point, urgently necessary to do that. But I don't know why that is. In any case, it all happened and it's very hard to see how it could have gone otherwise.

But the place itself was fascinating, especially for a scientist engaged in the work...

It was dangerous...it seemed very responsible, it demanded all our attention, and we worried a great deal about what was happening...

But, meanwhile, it was a beautiful place, a high mountain, eight-thousand feet high, fair weather in New Mexico; in the winter it snowed, in the summer it was hot, never humid. The snow would cover the whole world in two feet of snow overnight and a week later it would be gone...no trace of it...

And when the snow was there you'd poke a hole, you'd look into it and you would see a deep blue color...because of the sky...the shadows are blue against it...for the same reason. The bright blue sky light...the bright blue sky light fills in the shadows and the shadows are intercepting the light from the sun itself. Just that little bright disc.

So behind it, in the shadow, like the earth's shadow, there's a kind of local light that has a blue tinge because the sky has not turned off. At night, the sky is turned off because the sun is what illuminates the sky, illuminates the earth and the sky, the sky is just there and we see the air in the shadow.

So it's the most beautiful place, Los Alamos...It was very grim, you knew the outcome couldn't work at all, that's what we all thought, but we weren't going to give it up.
A newspaper boy's bike bell. Bob's Mom comes out to pick up the newspaper. The other characters come out to admire the stars in silence for a few moments.

26 SQUARE DANCE

A country music song slams into the piece—remember what country music does, how American it is, how it adds, automatically, themes of love, betrayal; a hundred story lines enter the piece with country music?

a country music song
a country music song
a country music song
a country music song
a country music song
a country music song
a country music song
a country music song

CARL:

Square up everyone.

Music starts. Carl does a singing square dance call, the old square dance standard.

CARL:

Four ladies to the center and back to the bar
Four gents center with a right hand star
Opposite ladies for an aleman thar
Back up boys, but not too far
Throw in the clutch, put 'er in low
It's twice around that ring you go
On to the next for a do pass-o
And bring her on home as fast as you go
Down in Arkansas on my knees
I thought I heard a chicken sneeze
I looked around here's what I saw:
A bald-headed maid with a pretty little taw.
The rest of the characters join in on the following verse.

ALL:

Too old, too old
I'm too old to cut the mustard anymore
*The music goes into ecstatic mode—
The square dancers
do flat out clog-stomping
so that they seem to float in the air
and only occasionally it seems the heel of a boot stomps the floor
as they float in ecstasy.*

*As the music continues,
Wilson and Susan have an especially ecstatic dance together.*

27 THE ASSASSINATION

Carl is assassinated. Several shots ring out and he drops dead. Allen catches him and holds him. People stand around staring, then slowly go off, leaving Allen, Carl and Phil on stage.

28 CHICKEN JOKES

Phil tells chicken jokes to distract from the solemnity.

PHIL:

A chicken went into a library
and went up to the circulation desk
and said to the librarian,
"Booooook!
Book! Book! Book!"
So the librarian gave the chicken four books,
and the chicken left
and came back later that day,
put the four books down and said,
"Book! Book!"
So the librarian took back the first four books
and gave the chicken two new books
and the chicken left
and came back later the same day,
put down the two books and said,
"Book! Book! Book!"
So the librarian took back the two books
and gave the chicken three new books
and the chicken left.
But this time the librarian
followed the chicken out of the library
to see what it was doing with these books
since no one could read fast enough

to go through those nine books in a single day.
So the librarian followed the chicken down a dirt road
and right down a path through the woods
and came to a pond
where the chicken was handing the books
one by one
to a frog
who kept saying of one book after another,
"Read it! Read it! Read it!"
Allen carefully places Carl down on the ground, and leaves.
PHIL:
Or:

A chicken and an egg are lying in bed. The chicken is leaning against
the headboard smoking a cigarette, with a satisfied smile on its face.
The egg, looking a bit ticked off, grabs the sheet, rolls over and
says, "Well, I guess we finally answered THAT question!"

What do you call a chicken that wakes you up at the same time
every morning?
An Alarm Cluck!

The sound it makes is tick tock a doodle do.

If you have deviled eggs, what you need is an eggscorcist.

Chickens are the hardest working animals. They work around
the cluck.

Chicken soup is good for you. Unless you're a chicken!

When a chicken is crazy, it's referred to as a cuckoo cluck.

Why didn't the chicken look both ways before she crossed the road?
(Waits for the audience to answer)
Because she was a dumb cluck!
(He exits)

29

WELCOME SPEECH

*Carl, who has been lying on the stage dead, sits up and gives a
speech welcoming everyone to an art opening, while we hear
cement mixers, pounding, banging, clanking, sawing.*

CARL:
OK.
How we put the show together.
First, I want to welcome everyone
I'm glad you could all come tonight.
We don't often get to do a show like this
where we can just put on whatever we like,
figure OK what the hell
let's just do whatever we feel like
and hope you'll enjoy it.
I often feel those of us who are in the museum world
are particularly blessed.
Because we get to explore our feelings
whatever they may be
that's a sort of freedom.
You know, that's how it is to deal with art
because art is made in the freedom of the imagination
with no rules
it's the only human activity like that
where it can do no one any harm

so it is possible to be completely free
and see what it may be that people think and feel
when they are completely free
in a way, what it is to be human when a human being is free
and so art lets us practice freedom
and helps us know what it is to be free
and so what it is to be human.

But still, it often seems to me almost miraculous
how we can put things here in the museum
and ordinary folks,
my mom and dad and my own neighbors
and I, myself,
will come to see things
sometimes things that I, myself, find completely incomprehensible
and really offensive
people will come to our museum
and think, Oh, that's interesting
or, Oh, that's stupid
but they don't really hold it against the show
they just move on and look at something else and think,
Oh that's cool.
And I wonder,
How do we get away with that?
And I think, Well, we are a free people
that's why
and we understand that
in a way maybe other people in the world don't
we like an adventure.
Often we might think,
Well, that's a piece of junk
but that's how this fellow sees the world
and there's a certain pleasure in seeing things from his point
of view.
We are a patient people
no matter what you hear people say
and a tolerant people
and a fearless, open people
that's how it is for us.

I think that's how it is to be an American.

We're all unique.
It's a precious thing to compare ourselves to nothing else.
This is my working attitude.
I don't feel shame in my joy.
(He looks confused)
I started out here knowing what I meant to say
and now I have to say
I don't know what I said.

But I'd just like to welcome you
and let you know
we're all glad to be here with you tonight
to share this with you
and we hope you have a swell evening.
(He leaves)

30

GENERAL APPLAUSE

*Canned applause and bravos from the audience at the twenty-fifth
anniversary John Cage concert at Carnegie Hall, which continues
over the following scene:*

**31
YARD SALE**

*Bob's Mom comes out, puts something down, sets down a cigar box with some change in it, goes back inside.
A guy comes in, looks at something,
Puts some money in the cigar box,
and walks out with it,
and then others enter and do the same—making the activities of a yard sale—
while Phil speaks.*

PHIL:

On the way out of Albany
we stopped at Joe's Eat All You Want restaurant \$1.50.
Just for dessert Steve Paxton had five pieces of pie.
I asked the cashier on the way out,
"How do you manage to keep this place in business?"
"Most people," she said rather sadly,
"Don't eat as much as you people."
Near the Grand Canyon
we found a lodge in a meadow surrounded by a forest
near the north rim of the canyon.
We were so comfortable there.
Fireplaces and good food.
Steak, salad and Irish whiskey.
North of Seattle
we stopped at a place in the middle of the forest
that advertised homemade pies.
Some of us had two pieces.
Blackberry.
While we were there, some other customers came in
and ordered pie.
"I'm sorry, we don't have anymore."

Eat

in any municipal, state or national park is my advice.
Build fires, broil steaks or chickens
roast vegetables in foil with butter, salt and pepper.
Fill a large wooden bowl with salad greens you've collected.
Heavy cream, lime, salt and mushroom catsup,
olive oil, lemon juice, chives or shallots,
potato salad
corn on the cob
ice cream with chocolate sauce
red raspberries.
Ginger ale and beer.
Dark beer.
A big kettle full of chili.
Peanut butter.
Dill pickles.
Rare roast beef, mustard on the side
smoked salmon and cream cheese
A sandwich of beef, ham, lettuce, tomato with Russian dressing.
Garlic.
Whenever anyone mentions they are going to put garlic in a dish
I always hope the cloves will be large.
(He exits)

**32
THE BEATING**

*Allen comes on carrying a square of AstroTurf, a garbage can and a baseball bat. He sets the AstroTurf down carefully, places the garbage can on the AstroTurf, takes out two earplugs and puts them in his ears.
He beats the garbage can with a baseball bat. He exits.*

**33
THE MARCHING BAND**

*A 123-piece local high school marching band
(or else a solo bagpipe player)
enters playing
and marches through the center of the piece and out again.*

Everyone gathers to watch the parade.

**34
THE DARK SIDE**

*Bob, the pizza boy, a character we have not seen before,
enters from where the marching band exited, with a pizza box in his hand.*

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY:

And yet, I think, nonetheless,
forgiveness is possible.

SUSAN:

You do.

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY:

Well, sure.

Really under any circumstances.

Uh, primarily, uh, uh, the, uh, the...

primarily the question is

does man have the power to forgive himself.

And he does.

That's essentially it.

I mean if you forgive yourself,
and you absolve yourself of all, uh,
of all wrongdoing in an incident,
then you're forgiven.

Who cares what other people think, because uh...

SUSAN:

Was this a process you had to go through over a period
of time?

Did you have to think about it?

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY:

Well, no.

Not until I was reading the Aquarian Gospel did I,
did I strike upon,
you know I had almost had ends meet because I had certain
uh, you know,
to-be-or-not-to-be reflections about, of course, what I did.
And uh...

ALLEN:

I'm sorry, what was that?

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY:

Triple murder.

Sister, husband. Sister, husband

and a nephew, my nephew.

And uh, you know, uh, manic depressive.

CARL:

Do you mind my asking what instruments did you use?

What were the instruments?

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY:

It was a knife.

It was a knife.

ALLEN:

A knife?

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY:

Yes.

ALLEN:

So then, the three of them were all...

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY:

Ssssss...

(Points to slitting his throat)

like that.

WILSON:

So, uh,

do you think that as time goes by,
this episode will just become part of your past
or has it already...

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY:

It has already become part of my past.

CARL:

Has already become part of your past.

No sleepless nights? No...

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY: Oh, no. In the first three or four years there
was a couple of nights where I would stay up thinking about how
I did it, you know. And what they said...they told me later there
were something like thirty stab wounds in my sister, but uh, I
remember distinctly I just cut her throat once.

*Becker offers him a chair. Bob, the pizza boy, sits, making himself
at home.*

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY: That was all, you know, and I don't know
where the thirty stab wounds came from. So that might have
been some kind of blackout thing. You know, I was trying to re-
re- uh, re- uh, uh, resurrect the uh, the crime—my initial
steps, etcetera. You know, and uh, and uh, I took, as a matter of
fact, it came right out of the, I was starting the New Testament at
the time, matter of fact I'm about the only person you'll ever
meet that went to, to do a triple murder with a Bible in his, in his
pocket, and, and, listening to a radio. I had delusions of grandeur
with the radio. Uh, I had a red shirt on that was symbolic of, of
some lines in Revelation in the, in the New Testament. Uh, I had
a red motor...as a matter of fact, I think it was chapter six some-
thing, verses three, four or five, or something where, uh it was a
man, it was a man. On a red horse. And, and, a man on a red
horse came out, and uh, and uh, uh, and he was given a knife,
and unto him was given the power to kill and destroy. And I
actually thought I was this person. And I thought that my red
horse was this red Harley Davidson I had. And I wore...it was
just, you know, it was kind of a symbolic type of thing. And, and,
and uh, you know, uh, after the murders I thought the nephew
was, was the, was a new devil or something, you know. This, this
is pretty bizarre now that I think back on it. I thought he was a
new devil and uh, uh. I mean basically I love my sister, there's no
question about that. But at times my sister hadn't come through,
uh, for me. You know and I was in another one of these manic
attacks. And uh, and uh, uh, uh, you know, uh, I was just uh, I
was just you know, I mean I was fed up with all this, you know,
one day they treat me good and then they tell all these other peo-
ple that I was a maniac and watch out for me and etcetera and
like that. And uh, uh, so I went to them that night to tell them I
was all in trouble again, you know, and could they put me up for
the night, you know, and they told me to take a hike and uh, so
uh, believing that I had the power to kill, uh, you know, that was
that for them. You know. I mean when family turns you out,
that's a real blow. You know. But uh, back to the original subject
of forgiveness. If I forgive myself, I'm forgiven. You know that's
essentially the answer. I'm the captain of my own ship. I run my
own ship. Nobody can crawl in my ship unless they get permis-
sion. I just *(He nods)* "over there." You know. "I'm forgiven."

You know. Ha ha. You know. *(Laughs)* It's as simple as that. You
know. You're your own priest, you're your own leader, you're
your own captain. You know. You run your own show, a lot of
people know that.

Who ordered a pizza?

ALLEN:

Oh.

SUSAN:

A pizza.

ALLEN:

I don't think anyone here ordered a pizza.

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY:

Someone ordered a pizza.

I don't go around picking up pizzas
if nobody ordered one.

ALLEN:

I think there's been some mistake.

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY:

I think you are the one who is making a mistake
if you think nobody
is going to pay me for the fucking pizza.

I paid for the pizza.

You know, pizza

is not returnable.

ALLEN:

Right.

I'll pay you for the pizza.

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY:

Plain cheese.

ALLEN:

Right.

Here.

Keep the change.

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY *(Checking the money Allen has given him)*:

Right.

Thanks.

Appreciate it.

Which way did I come in?

*The others all look at one another and then point in the same
direction.*

ALLEN:

Over there.

Right out that way.

BOB, THE PIZZA BOY:

Right.

Thanks again.

*Bob leaves. We hear a newspaper boy's bike bell. Bob's Mom
comes out, takes the pizza, and goes back inside. Everyone
follows her, except Allen, Carl and Phil's Girl.*

35 LOVERS

ALLEN:

You know

I've been thinking about it
and it turns out

I love you.

CARL:

You do?

ALLEN:

Yes.

CARL:
I didn't know that.
ALLEN:
Neither did I
but
I look at you
and I think you're good-natured.
CARL:
Oh, good-natured.
ALLEN:
Yes.
CARL:
You do?
ALLEN:
Yes, I really do.
And I think
if you think a person's agreeable and warmhearted
then I think there's something there you can't explain
that gives you real
delight.
CARL:
Oh.
ALLEN:
I find
you give delight to me.
CARL:
Oh. Well.
That's what I'd hope for more than anything.
ALLEN:
So would I.
CARL:
And you're not sorry about it?
ALLEN:
How do you mean?
CARL:
That you find delight in someone
who doesn't seem to you in any other way
desirable
who doesn't perhaps have those qualities
that you can count on
for, you know, the solid, long-term kind of thing.
ALLEN:
I would just take delight long term.
CARL:
Oh.
So would I.
*Bob's Mom comes out, Allen sees her and follows her
back inside.*

36 FALLING IN LOVE

Carl begins to dance as he talks to Phil's Girl.

CARL:
I think I fell in love with him
and I mean I fell in love with him like
the first time I saw him
I just couldn't stop looking at him
he was a soccer player
and I don't go to soccer games
and I don't like jocks
but I was there because a friend had taken me and bla bla bla
never mind

but I was walking to our seats in the bleachers
and I saw him walking along the sidelines
and I just couldn't take my eyes off him
I was like a cartoon joke
I was looking at him and walking
and I could have walked right into a wall
and I think the reason I fell in love with him
is that he reminded me of a friend from high school
who reminded me of a guy I saw in a movie.
Carl sits down beside Phil's Girl.

37 FIDELITY

PHIL'S GIRL:
When I was nineteen
it seemed to me I shouldn't be tied down to one guy
I loved him
and when we were together we were just with each other
but if I went to Paris, for example,
I thought I should have love affairs because I was nineteen
and I thought he should too
and I told him I was having love affairs and he should too
and I wished he did
both because it would have made me feel less guilty
and also because I would have thought he wasn't such a nerd
if he did,
but he said he only cared for me
and it made me feel like such a bad person.
That's definitely one of the reasons I broke up with him
and then, when we broke up,
he told me he had been having affairs with other women
and then that just tore it
after that, I just thought he was a jerk.
Susan enters, bouncing a ping pong ball. Carl turns to Phil's Girl.
CARL:
Pizza?
*Phil's Girl nods. They both go into the house, leaving
Susan outside.*

38 ETERNAL LOVE

Wilson opens a window and sees Susan.

SUSAN:
You know
I've been thinking about it
and it turns out
I do love you.
WILSON:
You do?
SUSAN:
Yes.
WILSON:
How could that be?
SUSAN:
I look at you
and I think you're sweet.
WILSON:
Oh, sweet.
SUSAN:
And good-natured.
WILSON:
Good-natured.





Allen (Will Bond) lets loose on a garbage can in the Actors Theatre of Louisville Humana Festival production, March 2001.

SUSAN:

Yes.

WILSON:

You do?

SUSAN:

Yes, I really do.

And I think

if you think a person's agreeable and warmhearted
then I think there's something there you can't explain
that gives you real
delight.

WILSON:

Oh.

SUSAN:

I find

you give delight to me.

WILSON:

Oh. Well.

That's what I'd hope for more than anything.

SUSAN:

So would I.

WILSON:

And you're not sorry about it?

SUSAN:

How do you mean?

WILSON:

That you find delight in someone
who doesn't seem to you in any other way
desirable
who doesn't perhaps have those qualities
that you can count on
for, you know, the solid, long-term kind of thing.

SUSAN:

I would just take delight long term.

WILSON:

Oh.

(He runs downstairs and joins Susan outside)

So would I.

39 THE WALTZ

Music starts.

Wilson and Susan do a beautiful Viennese waltz while

Allen speaks.

ALLEN: Well, it depends on what you want to predict...I can predict the death of the sun quite accurately, probably within ten to twenty percent...I don't think I'd be wrong by more than one billion years, plus or minus. You can predict the positions of the planets hundreds of years into the future very accurately because we have studied vectors so much. But if you want to predict what's going to happen two years from now in Haiti you can't say very much—because the human system, that's a very complicated system.

Wilson and Susan continue to dance. Phil and Phil's Girl appear at the windows above them, and throw out ping pong balls like confetti. The music stops suddenly, Wilson and Susan go inside.

40 WHITMAN

As Becker speaks, people wander out of the house and slowly clear the stage.

BECKER:

O take my hand Walt Whitman!

Such gliding wonders! such sights and sounds!

Such join'd unended links, each hook'd to the next,

Each answering all, each sharing the earth with all.

What widens within you, Walt Whitman?

What waves and soils exuding?

What climes? what persons and cities are here?

Who are the infants, some playing, some slumbering?

Who are the girls? who are the married women?

Who are the groups of old men going slowly with their arms
about each other's necks

What rivers are these? what forests and fruits are these?

What are the mountains call'd that rise so high in the mists?

What myriads of dwellings are they fill'd with dwellers?

What do you hear, Walt Whitman?

I hear the workman singing and the farmer's wife singing,

I hear in the distance the sounds of children and of animals early
in the day,

I hear the Spanish dance with castanets in the chestnut shade,
to the rebec and guitar,

I hear fierce French liberty songs,

I hear of the Italian boat sculler the musical recitative of old poems...

What do you see, Walt Whitman?

Who are they you salute, and that one after another salute you?

I see a great round wonder rolling through space,

I see diminute farms, hamlets, ruins, graveyards, jails, factories,
palaces, hovels, huts of barbarians, tents of nomads upon
the surface...

I see the tracks of the railroads of the earth...

I see the filaments of the news of the wars, deaths, losses, gains,
passions, of my race...

I see the site of the old empire of Assyria and that of Persia and
that of India...

I see the battlefields of the earth, grass grows upon them and
blossoms and corn...

I see all the menials of the earth, laboring,
I see all the prisoners in the prisons,
I see the defective human bodies of the earth,
The blind, the deaf and dumb, idiots, hunchbacks, lunatics,
The pirates, thieves, betrayers, murderers, slave-makers of the earth,
The helpless infants, and the helpless old men and women.

I see the male and female everywhere,
I see the serene brotherhood of philosophers,
I see the constructiveness of my race,
I see the results of perseverance and industry of my race,
I see ranks, colors, barbarisms, civilizations, I go among them,

I mix indiscriminately,
And I salute all the inhabitants of the earth.
(He exits)

41 BOB

Late evening.

*Do we hear an operatic aria faintly in the background?
a man singing a love solo.*

BOB'S MOM:

He was a sweet boy.

Of course, he loved his bicycle.

He would float for hours in the canal in an inner tube
and he built a go-cart out of wooden boxes.



Phil, The Trucker (Leon Pauli) and the stuffed chicken listen to musings on art and inspiration in the Actors Theatre of Louisville Humana Festival production, March 2001.

We belonged to the Church of Christ
so, of course, there was
no drinking, no movies, no gambling
not even card-playing for fun,
no kissing before marriage,
no dancing.

You can be sure the Pleasure Pier on Lake Sabine,
which had a dance pavilion,
was definitely off limits.

Everything you did,
if it could possibly be interpreted as an indulgence,
was evil.

That's how it was then.

Everyone was poor those days.

We were a rural people so I knew how to sew.

I could arrange the paper patterns so close together on the fabric
I didn't waste a bit.

I scrubbed all the clothes on a washboard
I planted vegetables and canned them every year
and we raised chickens in the backyard for Sunday dinner.
We had linoleum on the floor in the kitchen.

He was a handsome boy
with a clear, fair complexion.
But he was not full of himself.
He was humble within himself,
and kind to everyone.

You knew he was going to go someplace,
you just didn't know where.

Isn't it something
how he can see the beauty in almost anything!

We were ordinary working people.
Art was not in our world.
We hear a newspaper boy's bike bell.

42 THE LAST DANCE

Nighttime.

Stars in the sky.

Crickets.

*The music of Ibrahim Ferrer (of Buena Vista Social Club fame).
Bob's Mom starts to dance. Becker, the filthy derelict, joins her.
Eventually everyone else enters and dances. They leave in couples.
The last remaining couple is Bob's Mom and Becker, and then
Becker leaves.*

Crickets.

Bob's Mom does a few moves alone on stage and then enters her house.

43 THE FINAL MOMENT

At the end a man's voiceover says:

"OK!

That feels good to me."

END OF PLAY

'Love' Has 2 Faces

Stoppard observes 2 very different approaches to his *Invention*

Tom Stoppard took his seat for *The Invention of Love* like anyone else—third row, just off the aisle—utterly unnoticed by the SRO crowd that had assembled out of love for his work. Stowing his bookbag under the seat and smoothing his ever-unruly mane of wavy brown hair, the playwright settled in right at showtime, eyes darting from spot to spot as set details were pointed out to him by the director.

It was the first Friday in June, just two days before this wistfully sparkling play—about poet A.E. Housman's ardent love of classical literature and closeted passion for an Oxford classmate—would win its Broadway leading men a pair of acting Tonys. But as the house-lights dimmed to an appropriately Stygian gloom for the just-deceased Housman's first line ("I'm dead then; good"), Stoppard was some 200 miles from Manhattan, seeing what Studio

By Bob Mondello

Theatre, a thriving regional stage in Washington, D.C., had wrought from this selfsame script.

Something quite different, as it happened, both in look and interpretation—though from the enthusiastic audience reaction in the two cities, a street observer witnessing only the productions' exiting crowds might well have judged them twins. There have, of course, been other U.S. mountings of the show in the two years since it premiered at San Francisco's American Conservatory Theater; but seldom, with this show or any other, has there been an opportunity to observe in such close proximity, or in so near an approximation of a laboratory setting, how not-for-profit methods differ when commercial considerations enter the picture. Variations here qualify as especially instructive, since the directors of both these mountings—Jack O'Brien in New York and Joy Zinoman in Washington—worked closely with the playwright, consulting him daily during rehearsals.

At Broadway's 906-seat Lyceum Theatre (under the aegis of Lincoln Center Theater), *The Invention of Love* was performed on a wide proscenium stage, with designer Bob Crowley creating a dark, constricted Hades from a layering of cave-like backdrops that could be flown out for flashbacks to Housman's youth. Bronzed architectural miniatures of Edwardian buildings and bridges dropped in from the flies or rolled on from the wings across glassy black flooring to set some of the scenes, while others took place amidst toppled classical statues, or in a fantastical library composed of

laddered, 20-foot-high mountains of books. When Housman and his beloved Moses Jackson attended a D'Oyly Carte performance of Gilbert & Sullivan's *Patience*, the proscenium of the Savoy Theatre was reproduced on a scale just large enough to accommodate a singing, gesturing Oscar Wilde. The effect throughout was of tastefully intricate spectacle, with jewel-like evocations of place and time.

At D.C.'s Studio Theatre, the playwright was about to see those same events playing themselves out in a far more intimate space. By moving two rows of seating to the rear of Studio's comparatively shallow stage, designer Russell Metheny had reconfigured the low-ceilinged, 194-seat thrust house as an in-the-round auditorium in which no patron sat further than 25 feet from the action. The effect was rather like being onstage with the actors at the Lyceum but without all the scenic folderol to block sightlines. Where on Broadway a Volkswagen-sized Parliament building set the scene for bickering media moguls, the D.C. mounting had those same journalists shooting phantom billiards around an elegantly skeletal pool table, complete with the sound (courtesy of designer Gil Thompson) of balls dropping into pockets.

STOPPARD SMILED SLIGHTLY WHEN HE saw Studio's onstage rowboats—which ferry the elder Housman across the River Styx and the younger Housman to picnics on an island he and his college buddies call Hades—moving under their own power. On Broadway, the skiffs were pulled around the stage by Oxford students, barefoot and with trousers rolled up, who were tugging on ropes; at Studio, an understage pulley system guided the boats along tracks, while their turns and surges were cunningly synchronized with the actors' strokes on paddle-less oars.



Intimate *Love*, sans folderol: Tom Story, left, and Ted van Griethuysen as A.E. Housman in youth and old age in Joy Zinoman's Studio Theatre production.