

HOW I WORKED IT WITH THE BUSH
A Metapolemlcal Travesty

by
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1960

- first student-written
play ever produced
at the Loeb Drama Center, Harvard University
- Loeb Experimental Theatre
- December 1960
- directed by author
- designed by Andrew De Shong

CHARACTERS

Subdeacon

Brother (a monastic)

Prostitute

Roué I

Roué II

Lover

Mistress

(The waiting-room of a deserted railway station, uniformly lit in dark purple. A pentagonal bench, right-center. (p. 1)

The SUBDEACON enters from the right, followed by the BROTHER (a monastic). The SUBDEACON wears a black suit and a black hat; he is nervous, takes halting steps across the stage, and stares anxiously around him. The BROTHER, tonsured, wears a brown cassock with a rope-belt, and wooden sandals. He carries on his back an enormous trunk, staggers beneath the weight of it.

When the SUBDEACON is about a third of the way from right to left, he suddenly turns to the BROTHER, puts out his hands as if to take the trunk; the BROTHER looks relieved and pleased, but at the last moment the SUBDEACON turns abruptly away and continues his meandering. This action, as the two men continue across the stage, is twice repeated. Each time the SUBDEACON comes closer to actually taking the trunk. The second repeat, he gets as far as touching it, but instantly lets go.)

SUBDEACON

Not just yet.

(He throws himself down on the bench.)

BROTHER

(With difficulty putting down the trunk.)

"Not just yet?". How can you say that, "Not just yet?"

SUBDEACON

Because I've a child's faith in...

BROTHER

In time?

SUBDEACON

I was going to say...Well, yes, in time, for want of a better. In Time the Father, who belongs to the same lost generation as God the Father. There is the generation of sons and the generation of fathers - that's all. Some dotage is to be expected.

BROTHER

But hardly to be relied upon. I would never rely upon the good offices of time.

SUBDEACON

Allowance will be made, I am sure of it. I am sure the structure can give a little. Look: there's two parties; transactions must be arranged at the convenience of each.

BROTHER

Is that how they put it in the seminaries these days? In my time, we didn't care a damn for tropes. Rigor and abstraction, that was the ticket. We were all in love with the SUMMA, fondling her, proposition by proposition...

SUBDEACON

What a filthy image!

BROTHER

From the depths of my immeasurable patience, might I suggest you learn to judge images by their doctrinal precision?

SUBDEACON

Shorn of the theological crap, our faith is the loveliest of faiths. But nobody does His will any more. I am going to do His will.

BROTHER

The which, how to discern?

SUBDEACON

Where there's a Will, there's a Way.

BROTHER

Now you're talking my language!

SUBDEACON

I want nothing to do with language. I am profoundly interested in keeping my mouth shut. Such is faith - of a kind.

BROTHER

Well, and a sloppy kind.

SUBDEACON

Why will you make the Lord out such a fussbudget?

BROTHER

That's just the trouble. There's sure to be some divergence of opinion. In this case, a consensus is of no use, so what do you do? It's best to acquire fluency in the disputed areas. Now, in this matter of time...

SUBDEACON

Don't you dare. You're only a man, and my vocation can't possibly concern you. Leave go...!

BROTHER

Who said anything about your vocation? Who the hell gets the point of your vocation? I have some notes on the temporal process...

SUBDEACON

He'll do it my way. After all, why not? He must be perfectly indifferent to the whole question. I must have it so, and what would He care?

BROTHER

The temporal process with regard to its bearing upon problems of soteriology...

SUBDEACON

Doctrine and chalice - these do principally offend. How so? Because the upward bent will not be hurried. So anxious is my church to focus the image that she care not to crack the lens. But I say, give the reed experience of the holocaust. I say that. Howso? Since I am loyal in excess of their understanding...

BROTHER

(shouting to be heard)

Time!' Time!' Time! I have some remarks on time...

SUBDEACON

Well, Thy will be done up to a point.

BROTHER

(breathing hard, and with grotesque emphasis)

Subjectivity. That is the point I would stress. Disparity; even disparity. Time, one of a series of...percepts. With absolutely no relevance for Him. Absolutely none. But for us, a worthy symbol by which the breath caught in the doorway...imports...imports...

(suddenly coming off it)

Oh, hell, look, I've a bag of my own, you know.

(He takes from the folds of his cassock a tiny but exact model of the trunk.)

SUBDEACON

The obvious question.

BROTHER

I admit to shrinkage. But there is such a thing as
 pacing. As timing. It comes back to that, of course.
 You simply cannot understand if you have not done the
 prerequisite work in Time. When God feels like fiddling
 with Man, He takes a seat in Time ^{like a solicitor in The Exchange.} That's how it's done.
 I'm sorry.

SUBDEACON

Need I accept...?

BROTHER

Embryo priest, what need you not accept? However, I will
 contrive an exemplum: The train for Heavenly City leaves
 in seventeen minutes. I wonder if you grasp the sig-
 nificance of that.

SUBDEACON

(all business)

Exegetical? Or hermeneutical?

BROTHER

Tropological.

SUBDEACON

But I thought...

BROTHER

Young man, I am not at present hearing confession!

SUBDEACON

Well, then...seventeen: God's laws are ten, his prohib-
 itions seven. As ten and seven are joined in seventeen, so
 good and evil are confounded upon this difficult passage.

BROTHER

Just so! Well, then, how reject time when there are such lessons to be got, eh?

SUBDEACON

Conviction is part of my job. Well, give it here, the trunk...

(The BROTHER begins to take up the trunk, but the SUBDEACON, impatient, crosses over and takes hold of it. With an intense physical effort, he finally lifts it an inch or so off the ground. Exactly at this moment, the stage comes alive; the stage becomes brightly lit, maudlin music is heard, crowds of people mill around.)

SUBDEACON

(straining to hold the trunk in position)

What in God's name is this?

BROTHER

In God's name - and I quote exactly -- "the winsome intrusion."

(The crowd scene becomes a frenzy. At its very height, the SUBDEACON drops the trunk, falls exhausted beside it. The music stops; the crowd disperses as quickly as it formed.)

VOICE OF THE DISPATCHER

Now departing at Track Nine, the 1:13 local for Heavenly City, the Fille-de-joie.

(roar of a train)

BROTHER

My customary moment of withdrawal. I wish to hell I could stay on. It gets more interesting each time. Dominus tecum.

(He makes the sign of the cross over the SUBDEACON, withdraws in no great hurry to the up-left corner of the stage, whence he watches what follows.)

(Enter the PROSTITUTE, wearing a black leotard with matching tights. The whole time she is on stage her body writhes and contorts and tempts in a paroxysm of sensuality. Her face, however, is completely expressionless, takes no part in the doings of her body, and indeed seems unaware of them. Her head appears serenely to float above her limbs and torso.)

PROSTITUTE

The task no schoolman has encompassed nor poet presumed to undertake, I have fulfilled. Pro rata. Thought and ecstasy beat their heads against either side of a stone wall, and I meanwhile, mistress of regeneration, possess that to which they aspire. I do not pretend to understand, nor is the enclafed heart to my purpose. Your artists, your gentlemen of system must too often to their knees in the servants' quarters. And with what object? To know. What is "to know"? It is a preliminary along the way to control. I will none of steps and stages! O, what care I, who clasp the reins? So that the power obeys, I shall not meddle in his private interests. The force upon grass and stars I engage by the hour. He may muck about as he list between summonses.

SUBDEACON

Your line's temptation? We are not amused. I'm fairly expert at it myself.

PROSTITUTE

Temptation? I should think not! The ~~man~~^{man} does his own tempting. I'm just a convenience.

SUBDEACON

By God, there's a perspicuous whore! I feel I can talk to you. Here, give me a breast or something to finger; I get nervous talking unless I have something to do with my hands.

PROSTITUTE

Don't act familiar! Insult me and you insult the energy I'm privileged most vestally to preserve.

SUBDEACON

I shall often appear to be speaking against this or that; in fact, I speak only against myself.

(reaches into his pocket, pulls out a rosary and begins running the beads through his fingers.)

Well, here's beads to play with. The body must not be allowed to lag. Mens profana in corpore profano.

PROSTITUTE

I have accosted you...

SUBDEACON

Oh, I know why you've accosted me! You are a woman of little faith.

(PROSTITUTE begins to protest)

In your own affairs, I mean. I shouldn't expect you to bother with mine. I've got the habit of mastery now, but you're still dazzled by yours, and in need of daily affirmation...stop that wiggling.

(The PROSTITUTE, unaware that she is wiggling, is unaware that she is being addressed. Pause.)

SUBDEACON

(to himself)

Oh, I see. That way.

(to PROSTITUTE)

I sympathize, because our positions bear comparison. But as I've chosen the opposite extravagance...

PROSTITUTE

Well, what with your being so wrapped up in death and such... There is a great gulf implied.

SUBDEACON

Oh, but we've much in common! For one thing, we have each plucked the rose of power without scratches from the thorn of understanding. Item, we can neither of us really believe our good luck. Item, we are both creators - you, of man; I, in my humble way, of God. Many points of comparison, I appeal to you, then, as an authority: is it good sense to combine similar strains?

PROSTITUTE

The obvious question.

SUBDEACON

Because I wanted to give away life. That seemed rather a sensible thing to do with life.

PROSTITUTE

Now, by all I hold dear, you speak heresy!

SUBDEACON

And by a great deal you do not hold dear.

PROSTITUTE

I will refute ^{you} dialectically.
^

SUBDEACON

Why trouble yourself? I'm perfectly willing to admit my opinions are ill-considered. In fact, I'm willing to admit almost anything about my opinions except that they're wrong.

PROSTITUTE

No, it's best done with dialectic. A girl can't be too careful.

SUBDEACON

I suppose that's understandable.

PROSTITUTE

(a little anxiously)

I hope you don't think I'm being unfeminine.

SUBDEACON

How, woman, when you are the dialectic?

PROSTITUTE

Well, to get on with it...

BROTHER

(as if presenting a vaudeville act)

"The Socratic Tart", or, "Virtue Deflected".

PROSTITUTE

(to SUBDEACON)

Answer me this: Would a man do wisely to exchange the greater for the lesser?

SUBDEACON

Well, now, you know, that depends...

PROSTITUTE

Come on, play the game.

SUBDEACON

O. K., Xanthippe. No, a man would not do wisely to exchange the greater for the lesser.

PROSTITUTE

For what are you exchanging life?

SUBDEACON

For - how does one put it? - "beatitude".

~~PROSTITUTE~~

PROSTITUTE

Would I correctly infer, therefore, that you consider this beatitude to be a greater good than life?

SUBDEACON

Yes, that's right.

(enthusiastically)

I like this!

PROSTITUTE

But tell me, has every man this beatitude?

SUBDEACON

Oh, no! There's a question! Has every man beatitude?

(He chuckles complacently.)

PROSTITUTE

But some men do?

SUBDEACON

Yes, some, a few.

(enthusiastically)

Isn't this exciting?

PROSTITUTE

And these few, are they continually in a state of beatitude?

SUBDEACON

How's that?

PROSTITUTE

I mean, have they moments of wavering?

SUBDEACON

Oh, well, you know, they're only human.

PROSTITUTE

Then sin does figure in their lives, however negligibly?

SUBDEACON

Yes, I suppose so.

PROSTITUTE

Then their lives, and by extension, all lives might be said to consist of beatitude and evil in varying proportions?

SUBDEACON

And there's an enormous variation. Would you suppose...

PROSTITUTE

Then beatitude, however large it loom in a man's life, is only a part of life?

SUBDEACON

Well, yes...

PROSTITUTE

And is not the whole greater than the part?

SUBDEACON

Usually, yes...

PROSTITUTE

But was not our premise the folly of exchanging greater for lesser?

SUBDEACON

(at last catching on)

Oh, of course..!

PROSTITUTE

PROSTITUTE

Consequently, it is folly to exchange the whole, life, for that which is only a part of life; beatitude, Q. E. D.

SUBDEACON

(genuinely impressed-with the argument)

That's good!

(a brief pause; to PROSTITUTE)

I say, could you give me a hand with this trunk?

PROSTITUTE

(embarrassed)

Well, no, I'm afraid not...

BROTHER

Oh, let the bitch get horny on her own time!

(Enter the TWO ROUES, in animated conversation. They catch sight of and begin to eye the PROSTITUTE. At once, from the neck down, she becomes motionless; but at the same time her face loosens and she begins to make eyes at the ROUES. Rigid as an automaton, except for her thoroughly wanton expressions, she exits. The ROUES begin to follow her, think better of it; they resume their conversation.)

ROUE I

Then I said to him, "Me, in love with Julietta? Hum! She's old enough to be my mistress!"

ROUE II

Now, Gaspard, you were most attentive last autumn...

ROUE I

Attentive, yes. But amoureux? Nôh.

ROUE II

That night at Lady Elissa Pig's...?

ROUE I

Well, chastity is as intelligent as starvation. But what has that to do with love? My whole life, I have loved one woman...

ROUE II

Amelia...

ROUE I

Do not speak her name with such insouciance!

ROUE II

Alas, it has never been my privilege to love like that. I remember how moved you were at her death. For three whole months, you wore your fly at half-mast.

ROUE I

It was love at first lust. Such a woman! One autumn afternoon we were rowing across Lake Como, I devouring her every glance, she perusing the memoirs of the Esterhazy family cutler. Suddenly looking up from her book, she said,

"Gaspard, do you know what books are?" "Tell me, dear heart", I replied. "Books," she sighed, "are life without the trouble."

BROTHER

Sighs we doubt ever got sighed.

ROUE II

Such a woman!

ROUE I

For the most part, melancholy. But there were gay moments, too, instants of throbbing delight. I remember once - it was a rather drear evening in autumn - she came to visit me. As a joke, I decided to receive her myself. Taking her card on a tray, I asked, "Whom shall I say is calling?" She thought for a moment, and then her eyes lit up. "I don't know", she said absently. "Whom do you suppose he would like to see?"

(Both ROUES laugh heartily.)

SUBDEACON

I don't get it. I don't see the joke.

(with deep anxiety)

I don't see the joke!

ROUE I

My friend, only lovers delight in the fancy of lovers.

SUBDEACON

(to himself, in a horrified whisper)

I don't see the joke!

ROUE II

You must take it with a grain of soul.

SUBDEACON

What in the world could you mean by that?

ROUE II

Sensibilité.

ROUE I

Bon courage.

ROUE II

Honnêteté.

ROUE I

Savoir-vivre.

SUBDEACON

To the devil with your tarnished approximations!

ROUE I

Boy, we speak out of long experience.

SUBDEACON

Are decades of shadow sufficient preparation for the experience of light?

ROUE I

We are not wholly ignorant. We've come by bits and scraps of illumination. For example, we know how to plan for the weekend.

SUBDEACON

You plan for the weekend; I, for eternity.

ROUE II

And what is eternity? Just the longest weekend yet.

SUBDEACON

You can't make people see it that way! We have a sense of what's beyond and to come...

ROUE I

Perhaps, having so long neglected the world, you forget what men are.

SUBDEACON

Perhaps, having so long frequented the world, you forget what men may be.

ROUE I

It's men have forgotten, if ever they knew. Mankind has new interests and new friends. Humanity turns upon its own axis; or rather, the involution hints at a center, but that's only a trick of the heart.

SUBDEACON

And do you like it that way?

ROUE I

(savoring the strange expression)

"Like it that way?"

(pause)

Not noticeably.

ROUE II

But then the world, such as it is, is all we have left.

SUBDEACON

One shot of Bourbon may be all you have left: it's not enough to mix a Manhattan.

ROUE I

(admiringly)

Clever boy.

SUBDEACON

I had dialectics from a drab.

ROUE I

You couldn't do better.

SUBDEACON

She also taught me, unawares, the vanity of human wishes. Of course, that was more of a confirmation...

ROUE I

All's vanity, alas, or shall be by the end of the season.

SUBDEACON

That had better not be so.

ROUE I

What's your line?

SUBDEACON

I do eternal verities.

ROUE II

Eternal verities have the misfortune to be inexpressible.

ROUE I

But when you consider that everyone knows them...

SUBDEACON

Oh, now there I think I'm supposed to take issue!

ROUE I

Why, who don't know 'em?

SUBDEACON

Gentlemen, I have no wish to offend...

BROTHER

remarked Judas to the assembly...

SUBDEACON

...but your own words reflect - well, as it were, a sort of innocence...

(The two ROUES laugh heartily.)

SUBDEACON

Well, better to say it out, then - an ignorance of the divine purpose. For though all things under the sun be vain...

ROUE I

Amelia was vain - and with such cause!

SUBDEACON

I mean vain, "senseless". Yet, gentlemen, the ends of the Lord are not so.

(Both ROUES begin to interrupt.)

SUBDEACON

(almost fiercely)

Creature, you're on your way back to the dust; so put away your chief vanity, and presume to no defense.

ROUE II

What have you better? Always leave men alone unless you've something better.

SUBDEACON

The consolations of my faith...

ROUE II

Your faith! We know our limitations, but as to His Eminence -

(which he pronounces "Immanence")

where's the improvement? We, at least, have strength enough to endure without the approbation of the peanut gallery. Why can't he?

ROUE I

You say, "Blessed be the Lord." I ask, "By whom?" and "To what end?"

ROUE II

By creatures He has thrown together from dirt?

ROUE I

So He keep His good spirits, like a great lady who pays to be told how nice she looks?

ROUE II

Scorned be the Lord upon your terms.

ROUE I

Let His name be consigned to group-psychology texts, under the appropriate rubric.

ROUE II

Come, let us snub the hanged Deity who bungled an easy job.

ROUE I

With harp and psaltery defame Him who surely might have arranged things otherwise.

ROUE II

My soul doth analyze the Lord.

ROUE I

He is weighed in the balance, and found a little pathetic.

(exit the two ROUES, staunchly, arm in arm.)

BROTHER

Fidei defensor!

SUBDEACON

That I have not the strength of my convictions proves my convictions no less strong.

BROTHER

This has the ring of a right answer.

SUBDEACON

It is the right answer!

BROTHER

The right answer is, of several wrong answers, the one which shows the deepest concern for style. Good and evil are two sides of a coin: It's all in the flip. You might try your hand at some of those yourself.

SUBDEACON

The obvious question.

BROTHER

Because it is lovely there. We are deeply timid men, anxious to stash away peace against a stonier time. So that it grows lovely there. So that if the worst happen to us, if hell happen to us, some peace has been most surely and clearly ours.

SUBDEACON

Is that accurate? Does hell "happen" to you?

BROTHER

Nó...thoughtless...Hell is no state of mind, nor person, nor event, nor symbol. Hell is a place underground with fire and devils. You happen to hell; hell has it own problems.

ROUE I

(sticking his head in as if he were a perfect stranger)

Pardon me, could you tell me how long until the train leaves for Heavenly City?

BROTHER

One hour and thirty-three minutes.

ROUE I

Thanks awfully.

(disappears)

BROTHER

How would you say you're doing?

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

BUEDEMAN

I can't tell yet. I'm sure as ever of my vocation, but as to the terms of employment...

VOICE OF THE DISPATCHER

Now departing at track eight: the day-by-day express for Heavenly City, the Amour Toujours.

(the roar of a train. Enter the LOVER and MISTRESS, separate, on edge. Each, for the whole time he is on stage, fights back an amused grin. The tone of the scene should be primarily derisive. The two characters show no affection for, or even concern with, one another, but at irregular intervals - indicated below - they violently fly into each others arms, and just as violently separate, like clashing rocks.)

MISTRESS

Good evening, lover.

LOVER

Lover - good evening.

(pause)

Julietta, I have loved you as far back as I can remember.

MISTRESS

Don't be ridiculous, Arnold; ~~you've~~ ^{you've} only known me three weeks.

LOVER

That's as far back as I can remember.

MISTRESS

What higher proof of your devotion than the extravagance of your protestations? My own!

(no embrace)

When shall we marry?

LOVER

Marry? No...I don't think I could marry a girl with false hair.

MISTRESS

Why ever not?

(embrac business)

LOVER

It's so...inorganic.

MISTRESS

Pish and tush!

LOVER

No, it is! I mean, a wigged lover is one thing, but a wigged spouse...

MISTRESS

It's a lovely wig, not at all one of your five-dollar jobs. It's made of real hair. In fact, it's made of my hair.

LOVER

The obvious, if indelicate question.

MISTRESS

To save on hairwash, don't you know.

(repeat embrace business)

LOVER

Do you keep it on a nail? At night, I mean.

MISTRESS

Yes, on a nail, usually. Some nights, I just throw it

down on a chair. It's so lovely to throw your hose and your wig down on a chair, and settle into a hot bath.

LOVER

But, Julietta, confound it, I just hate having to put in nails, especially when the flat's not one's own. No: I won't do it!' I will not dirty those nice walls!' It's no use your asking.

MISTRESS

Well, dear, I think I could bring myself to leave it on a doorknob. The first few weeks would be hard, but what sort of woman is she who will not sacrifice for the man she loves?

LOVER

Julietta, Heaven has blessed us and all obstacles recede from our path. Honey, be mine. We will make it work. I too, will make sacrifices. To begin with, I shall take vows of chastity.

MISTRESS

My dear love!

(no embrace - handshake)

SUBDEACON

What do you know about sacrifice? The sacrifice of the world's heart you disdain, and meanwhile you tidy the altar for satirical pollutions.

MISTRESS

He doesn't understand love the way we do.

SUBDEACON

No, heaven be praised, He does not. Love - what is your love but a strained eclecticism on the texts of lust and interest? You do for the other that he will do for you, and that the sooner the better.

LOVER

How could you say, whose heart is unafame?

SUBDEACON

Rent with the forked bolt of sacrifice, I blaze like meadow-grass. His blood, his dear life's blood - blood, nails, thorns...

(helpfully)

You know.

LOVER

I think not.

SUBDEACON

Suffering. Descriptive details. Awestruck suffering.

LOVER

Come: He had nowhere to go but down.

SUBDEACON

And no incitement thither! None but the sweet and perfect imperfection - what else should I call it? What would I mean by a wish or a need?

LOVER

And so left us to settle this most usurious of accounts. He just couldn't get the idea. You pick the sense, I say

that. One doesn't get the hang of man by wearing flesh and blood. Can I know the horrors of Elba by putting on a cocked hat and sticking my hand in my shirt?

SUBDEACON

All that a man feels and does, he felt and did. He had the human experience.

LOVER

But we are the human experience!

SUBDEACON

(at a loss)

He didn't have to. It wasn't like a punishment.

MISTRESS

Well, why did he, then? Think of the fright he must have given every one.

(to LOVER)

You'll never take unnecessary risks, will you, Ar...

SUBDEACON

Woman, woman, it was for you he suffered.

MISTRESS

Let that be a lesson to you, Arnold, not to get mixed up with other women.

SUBDEACON

I mean for you, and your lover, and me, and

(glancing uncertainly at the BROTHER)

I think for him, too.

LOVER

That's such a strange idea, God suffering for me. It's precisely the other way round! I'm going through all He'd have to bother with if He hadn't me to push it off on. And what He's missing!

SUBDEACON

How can you say so? Where such love abides...

LOVER

But then there's the question of power. He has so many interests to look after.

MISTRESS

I'm glad you see, Arnold, it's no good spreading yourself too thin.

LOVER

(to SUBDEACON: warming to the subject)

I've always thought theology would work better with a nasty God. Or else one of each. That way, the elect could rest easy and the others would have something worth the cursing.

SUBDEACON

Might I recommend a series of pamphlets on soteriology...

MISTRESS

What's that? It sounds like the study of sots.

BROTHER

Why - so it is!

MISTRESS

(catching sight of the BROTHER)

Oh! A monk. Do you marry people?

LOVER

Now, Julietta, I want to think...

MISTRESS

Think, think! Men do too much of that. Less thought, more lust, more babies - that's the royal to...the royal road to...

BROTHER

I'm not authorized. Perhaps the Subdeacon...

SUBDEACON

He wants to think. And I want to think. No, I don't want to think, but affairs have chivied me into reflection. So pack up all of you, and leave me in siege.

(LOVER and MISTRESS repeat embrace business, exit.)

BROTHER

I, also?

SUBDEACON

(with passion)

Oh, pre-eminently you!

(exit BROTHER)

SUBDEACON

No change of heart will be conceded. Vocation means a call, and called I most surely am. To what, and how, and through which pains - my clarity's gone a journey and likes it so well she may never return. My response shall be in kind. But first, let's ~~have another try at that trunk.~~

in vain
(he tries [^] to lift the trunk)

That settles it.

(shouting)

Monk: come and get it!

(enter BROTHER)

I don't think I care to be a priest.

BROTHER

Does a man "care" to serve God? Grace has got to get you
by the throat.

SUBDEACON

You know what I mean.

BROTHER

The Lord, through mercy...

SUBDEACON

I beg your pardon; I'd forgot.. My opposition is so easily
included. I speak against the Church and she takes me on in
the capacity of Ancient Foe. She plays in a fairy circle
around the whole mob of thinkers and thoughts.

BROTHER

You're getting the idea. Let us therefore retain the context
against which all variant readings must be examined.

SUBDEACON

Meaning theology.

BROTHER

Meaning Christ alive!'

(pause)

Meaning theology.

SUBDEACON

A game, that's all it is; something to keep busy the curious. If you cannot give them something to know, give them something to do. Do you know why you've done so well with Christ? Because you have made his worship appear at once the most philosophically respectable of religions and the most morally respectable of philosophies.

BROTHER

Only understand, my son...

SUBDEACON

You leave off that sonship talk. I've had enough of it - in several senses.

BROTHER

Never, never, O Lord, are we permitted to finish our sentence. Is this the new chastisement You've been working on?

SUBDEACON

Show calm, can't you? Must Christian speech always end in a pious scream?

BROTHER

You wouldn't believe my compassion for souls gone into the Valley. I, too, have experienced the delusive freshness of decay...

SUBDEACON

Again the great tactic: pity shall effect the inclusion. There's no working free from such holds. It just isn't up to me.

BROTHER

Well, then, if you cared for proofs...

SUBDEACON

It's so unfair!' You don't fit into my vision. Just the pigheads, complacent in all but their imagery, whereas I am essential to you. Or at least, an interesting example...

BROTHER

Is there anything I can do, Lord? Any suggestions?

SUBDEACON

Might I make a suggestion?

BROTHER

No, by all that's holy! Other arrangements have been made, other, other! It's out of your hands, as it should be, as it must be, as it really ought to be.

SUBDEACON

Then what may I do? I must do.

BROTHER

Sit still.

SUBDEACON

How, when the chair keeps being pulled from under me? I am grateful for affection properly bestowed, but to be the love-object of a plenipotential sadist...

BROTHER

It is no use! Flay, and love runs from the sores; beat, and love rises in the welts. Come, throw off the trivia of personality, and join in the feast.

(The BROTHER puts on his hood, which has been hanging behind his head, as he speaks the last sentence. The hood bears a strong resemblance to the hawk's head on statues of Egyptian gods.)

SUBDEACON

I see now as I must see. No longer do I hang amazed betwixt the windy Devil and the cliff faces of love. I'm risin up another way: cold water and a fine view of the desert.

BROTHER

I warn you, he's a Marxist lover.

SUBDEACON

I'm all ability and no need.

BROTHER

The unloved must needs be full of his own praise.

SUBDEACON

Oh, praise! How you do talk! Modesty is not one of my virtuess. It is one of my vices.

BROTHER

I shall exhaust you with opportunities...

SUBDEACON

The anticipated technique. Stab at faith; she twists the knife, draws it, cleans and kisses it, and returns it with her blessing. In a while, you lose heart. A personalized limbo!

BROTHER

I would have you understand...

SUBDEACON

Do not make me understand. I have various means to understand and I think, perhaps prematurely, that I've reached a little beyond all of them. So you and your Sponsor, get away. Don't try and foul it up. I won't have that!

BROTHER

(suddenly, calmly, simply)

Why are you mad at God?

SUBDEACON

I'm not mad at Him, Poor Thing. I'm terribly sorry for Him! There's a whole wealth of life He must go without. The poor Omniscient, no wonder He's gone sour on everything. Master the psychology of humor, and you're a deadpan from that moment. He has no one to chat with, no one against whom to measure His superiority, except beings to whom He stands in the same relation as madman to hallucination. Worst of all, no occasion of folly...

BROTHER

These are human pleasures...

SUBDEACON

Exactly, just so! Kinds of feeling which we have found to be very interesting, and of which He is absolutely incapable.

BROTHER

Why should He feel the need...

SUBDEACON

Well, He turned man there for a while, didn't He? It was clumsily handled: He succeeded only in founding a sect whose members go out of their way to live as inexpertly as He did. I once adored the imprecision, but now, through the efforts of a whore, two hedonists, and a brace of lovers on the lifelong make, I have acquired some proficiency in scorn. Scorn, the energy in sap, sinews, and intelligence. Scorn, that makes life so easy to get a grip on.

(shouting)

All return!

(The PROSTITUTE, ROUES I and II, LOVER and MISTRESS return.)

PROSTITUTE

What is it, and indicate the process.

ROUES I and II

Heard or felt?

Wished or seen?

Red or black?

Or in-between?

LOVER

Make no decision without consulting the Eternal Feminine.

(to MISTRESS)

I got it right?

MISTRESS

Yes, dear.

SUBDEACON

Ladies and gentleman, I have decided not to enter the priesthood. Instead, I shall go to Heavenly City and learn a trade. In this wise, I shall prove a valuable addition to my community. Moreover, I think that God, child-despot though he be of an unstable republic, will understand.

BROTHER

(morosely)

I wouldn't count on it.

(He exits, slamming the door behind him.)

SUBDEACON

I'm sure He's in a position to understand. Which is all the baggage I'll be needing just now. And, ladies and gentlemen, since it is you who have initiated my resolve, Thanks, or Damn you, or something of the sort. Now if someone would have the kindness to tell me...

MISTRESS

In three hours and fifty-two minutes. Or maybe it's a million years. I forget. The schedule changes after Labor Day.

SUBDEACON

Thank you kindly. Listen! Do you not hear the train's roar?

(There is no train's roar.)

Well, who knows but in God's scant time...

PROSTITUTE

I recommend exhaustive analysis culminating in precipitate
whimsey.

LOVER

I don't have to say it again, do I?

MISTRESS

No, dear.

ROUES I and II

(singing)

I don't care if the sun don't shine.

So I missed matins? I'll catch complins.

ROUE I

I first saw Amelia in church. Was it the autumn of '07?

I can't think why not.

SUBDEACON

Well, I see you all approve so far as in you lies...

VOICE OF THE DISPATCHER

Now departing at track thirteen, the eleven o'clock local
for Heavenly City, the Plus-ca-change.

SUBDEACON

There! Have I every thing?

(With each of the next four words, he touches
himself in the appropriate places thus unconsciously
crossing himself.)

Spectacles, testacles, wallet, cigars.

(Suddenly the trunk catches his eye. He
appears deeply disturbed.)

Oh, I'd forgot...

PROSTITUTE, ROUES I and II, LOVER,
MISTRESS

~~PROSTITUTE~~

(aggressively)

The obvious question.

SUBDEACON

(hesitates a moment; then, passionately)

The obvious answer!

(He picks up the trunk as if it were made of paper - and it had better be - , raises it above his head in both hands, collapses it like a paper bag. He holds his ecstatic position for a moment; the other are delighted. Suddenly the deafening roar of a train is heard. He throws down the crumpled trunk, laughs hysterically, runs out to make his train.)

QUICK CURTAIN