

THE GODS OF THE THEATRE

or

A Passion for Down

Play in Three Acts

by

David Cole

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Characters

The SCHOLAR DEUS

The OLD DEAR of a DEUS

The EXPERIMENTAL DEA

The YOUNG GOD

The CRANEKEEPER

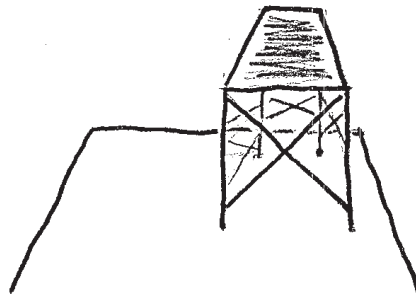


Gods from the
Machine

ACT I

Act One

(Entirely filling the up-left quadrant of the stage, a functional-looking tower rises some 8-10 feet above an otherwise empty stage floor. The tower consists of a rectangular wooden platform, lifted into the air on four slightly convergent steel uprights joined and reinforced by various crossbeams, struts, braces, etc.--the whole bathed in a gentle, dappled pattern of shadow and light:



On this platform--where the entire action of the play, except as noted, takes place--the dei ex machina ("gods from the machine") of the Greek Theatre while away their time between descents: heaven as a "greenroom," then... or: the greenroom as heaven. Unfurnished, though, except for a stark wooden clothestree, up-center, on which hangs, as if laid out by a thoughtful valet, the traditional garb of the Greek god, Hermes: winged sandals, winged cap, serpent wand (caduceus) and short cape. This last is streaked with two or three dark parallel bands, like those a barbecue grid would leave on a piece of meat. The overall effect which this costume, carefully draped over the schematic human form of the clothestree, produces is that of a large, skeletal puppet.

At rise, four dei ex machina are taking their ease on the platform, positioned as follows:

Down-center, the EXPERIMENTAL DEA and the SCHOLAR DEUS. The DEA is on her knees, leaning way out over the front (downstage) edge of the platform, apparently coaching or urging on some activity far below. The SCHOLAR DEUS is crouched over her, holding her firmly round the waist to keep her from falling.

Right-center, the OLD DEAR OF A DEUS stands watching them--and, it would appear, watching for an opportunity to interrupt.

These three gods wear full Greek tragic costume, without masks.

Up-left, wearing only a wraparound white loincloth, the YOUNG GOD reclines on his left side, graceful and insouciant as Michelangelo's Adam, his left elbow resting on the platform, his head resting on his left hand. He takes no part in or notice of the conversation among the other dei till noted. His gaze is fixed downward over the stage-left--offstage--edge of the platform.

NOTE: Whenever in the course of the play the YG is described as looking down "over the edge" of the platform, it is always this stage-left (offstage) edge --"his" edge--that is meant. Whereas, when the other characters peer down, it is always over the platform's front (downstage) edge.

The DEA, all caught up in transmitting impulses downward, twists and strains farther and farther out over the edge of the platform. Several times she nearly falls, but is always plucked back at the last moment by the SCHOLAR D.--who once or twice comes near falling himself.

Each time the DEA and the SCHOLAR D. seem on the verge of going over, the OLD DEAR strikes a stagey pose of intervention--which, however, he immediately drops the moment they regain their balance.

At last, though, the DEA gets out a little too far for the SCHOLAR D. to rescue her--but not far enough to send the two of them hurtling downward --and there they hang, teetering on the brink, unable either to right themselves or to fall.

The OLD DEAR--this is, apparently, the moment he has been waiting for--raises a hand in melodramatic admonition:)

OLD DEAR. Stay, foolish child! Against the cast of fate
 And Zeus's nod thou striv'st to mend the tale.
 Stand down! Wilt not? Then heaven's servant must down,
 And set a bar-- (The OLD DEAR starts toward the DEA and SCHOLAR D.)
 And set a bar--

(At this instant the OLD DEAR seems to reach
 the end of some invisible tether, and is jerked
 sharply to a halt with one foot in the air.)

He backpedals a step and tries the
 line-with-movement again:)

And set a bar--

(But again the invisible tether pulls him
 up short.)

Slowly, in unison, the DEA and the SCHOLAR D.
 right themselves and turn inquiringly back toward
 the OLD DEAR--who now drops his stagey manner and
 addresses them informally, actor-to-actor:)

Yes! That's the moment the machine picks to jam! Here was
 this actor--sailing for the edge, sublimely confident of being
 snatched from the brink by his look-sharp, heads-up, hands-on
deus ex machina, and--I'm hanging there, betwixt and between:
 can't get down onto the roof of the scene-building, can't get
 back up into the sky. The chorus is giggling into their
chitons; the house--an even bigger crowd than we've got
 down there now--is starting to give each other funny looks....
 I'm telling you, in all my seasons on the winch, I can't
 remember a worse-- In fact, even to run through it as a joke
 for you just now--

(presses his palm to his chest, takes a deep
 breath, and exhales)

EXPERIMENTAL DEA. You see? This is what I'm always telling
 you: you don't have to reach for feelings; just do your action,
 and the feelings will come.

(turns to resume her watch at the platform's
 front edge--but is yanked back by the SCHOLAR D.)

SCHOLAR D. You're always telling us? What was Meyerhold
 always telling us--and Stanislavski before him? The avant-garde
 invents the wheel.

(to OLD DEAR)

Actually, there are plenty of scenes in the literature that
 call for the crane at half-mast. Case in point: Aristophanes,
The Clouds, lines two-seventeen and following: Socrates
 discovered dangling perilously--

OLD DEAR. Yes, well, I'm not Socrates out there,
 I'm just an actor with a problem.

DEA. The "problem" is to find ways of building in whatever
happens out there--including whatever happens to go wrong.

(drifts toward front edge of platform
and peers down)

For example, you see that lost-looking tritagonist
I almost went overboard just now trying to inject some
life into? Suppose at the very next position-change
he was suddenly to find himself--

(abruptly turns back from the edge)

Actually, I had an experience once.... I was just launching
into one of those reconciliation-of-the-realms bitties,
when suddenly, from somewhere in the depths of the theatre,
comes this voice: "Goddess! Never mind them; they're rich,
they'll manage. Look here! Look!" And there, way in the
last row, this...countryboy, who obviously wouldn't know
a footlight from a foothill, is on his feet, waving and
clamoring for my attention. Well, he keeps it up all during
my big tie-up speech; and as the crane starts lifting me away
--down the aisle he comes and scrambles aboard.

SCHOLAR D. Antoine has a story like this in his
Early Seasons of the Théâtre Libre--

OLD DEAR. Oh, in the early days, you were always getting
broken in on. Grove would part, and out would rush these
hundreds of maddened girls screaming "Evohé! Evohé!"
But believe me, the moment Silenus raised a hoof for silence--

SCHOLAR D. (to OLD DEAR) Could we possibly give the
scrapbook a rest for a minute?

(to DEA)

How did you handle it?

DEA. Ignored him as long as possible--which was most of the
way up. But when we come in sight of the gearbox,
he takes one look and--"Athenians!" he bellows, "We have been
lied to! Up here is no majestic mountain height,
but a great, grinding--" Well, that's it, I'm gone,
I've had it: he's ruining my concentration, he's stepping
on my lines, he's this, he's that-- And then suddenly
it hits me: Wait a minute! This is your reality onstage now
--be present to it! So, bang!, I redefine my given circumstance
as goddess takes doubter on tour of sky, lay a friendly hand
on his shoulder, and am still reeling off constellation-names
as the machinery takes us.

OLD DEAR. If all we're talking about is how to handle
a heckler--

DEA. But I wasn't "handling" him, I was working with his presence, staying open to his energy, admitting him to the moment....

SCHOLAR D. In other words, thinking on your feet --something which you probably assume came into the world with Viola Spolin. Let me tell you a story.

OLD DEAR. Ladies and gentlemen: from the Archives of Classic Screw-ups and Legendary Bad Moments--

SCHOLAR D. No, this happened to me personally. I'd been booked into this regional theatre--"The Chalcis," could it have been?--no, "The Corinth"; that's it, "The Corinth": nice little provincial house--Hellenistic, need one say, but with classicizing features. The show
 (points down over front edge)
 was this very one you
 (to DEA)
 just now almost brought us crashing down on top of
 --and in the same awful slapdash recension that cuts or condenses virtually all mention of--but I'm getting ahead of myself.

OLD DEAR. (in mock-admiration, with a wink at the DEA) You actually walked right into the midst of a slapdash recension?

SCHOLAR D. (missing the irony) Wait till you hear! All right, so I'm all primed and ready to descend upon Corinth--they've swung me out over the hillside, cranked me round, I'm actually perched on the roof of the scene-building listening for my cue, when--

(The YOUNG GOD suddenly scrambles to his feet and peers down over the offstage (lefthand)side --"his" side--of the platform.)

DEA. (to YOUNG GOD) What's wrong?

YOUNG GOD. That cry....

(The other dei come to the front of the platform and peer down.)

OLD DEAR. Look at him there... our hero: diddling around the edges of the thing.... Toying, really. They never seem to-- Festival after festival, out they come....

DEA. I don't hear any-- Oh! Look where they are!
We've missed so much...!

(remains looking over edge)

SCHOLAR D. Possibly a cry of dismay from the audience at having to endure this miserable recension yet another time through. Well, so, anyway: there I am, about to make my entrance onto the stage of "The Corinth," when--

YG. Isn't a cry... our cue?

OLD DEAR. (without thinking) Cue for what?

(The SCHOLAR D. gives him a warning poke.)

DEA. (still peering over front edge) Gosh, I haven't kept on top of this. I'm not even sure I know what they're up to down there.

SCHOLAR D. Relax, no god has ever missed his entrance into this baby--as I was now shortly to learn. For even as I opened my lips to speak my first words--

YG. Listen! There it was again--that time no mistaking! Come on! We've got a show to do! I've lost track of the rotation. Who's going down?

OLD DEAR. (yawning conspicuously) Gee, mind if I beg off? I dreamed I was waving phalloi over autumn furrows all night. I'm bushed.

DEA. (turning back from the edge and going into some warm-ups) My work is still very much in the developmental stages; I can't allow myself to be rushed into a performance situation.

SCHOLAR D. (producing a battered typescript and waving it) I still have a few licks to get in on my "Tragic Fall and Tragic Drift: the Weight of the Evidence."

YG. Well, if none of the rest of you is up for it--I guess I'm about to make my début.

OLD DEAR. What?

YG. (peering over "his" edge of platform) Look at it down there: flat as a pan. It... provokes descent. Makes you feel you want to raise a pucker. On some level ... it's asking for it. Asking flat-out.

SCHOLAR D. Yes, the stone-work on some of these pre-Lycurgan dancing-floors has to be seen to be believed.

YG. I don't know how I've held off till now!

OLD DEAR. (to SCHOLAR D.) Evohé! He wouldn't actually be thinking of--?

YG. To the crane! Which is--where, by the way? I know I have to have passed it on the way in, but right this minute I can't seem to--

OLD DEAR. Listen to him! He's going to save the world --if he can find it. Pull up a chair, tyro. It's time someone put you wise to the realities of life on the machine.

YG. I know I'm new here--

OLD DEAR. You don't know what you're up against. You don't know who you're dealing with. You don't know the first thing about it.

YG. I know when I'm needed!
(stamps his foot on the platform and points downward)

DEA. Uch! Those awful people with their awful problems....

SCHOLAR D. Lives that come apart in your hands.

OLD DEAR. It's not always easy to know what to say.

DEA. And you are definitely expected to say something. Whizzing in there like a falling star definitely not sufficient: they're looking for answers.

OLD DEAR. Answers, forsooth!

YG. Wait a minute, I don't understand. We're given the speeches, aren't we?

OLD DEAR. Oh, one of the production people slips you something on the way in, sure; but--
(pause)

YG. Yes?

OLD DEAR. Well, at the risk of sounding like every actor since time began, who could say stuff like that?

SCHOLAR D. One can easily find oneself doing some pretty basic rewrites.

DEA. Right then and there! Off the cuff!

SCHOLAR D. To the point where it can almost seem like the one you're swooping in there to rescue is--the author.

OLD DEAR. Though, for all the thanks you get--

SCHOLAR D. (to the YG) One's assumed, as a matter of course, to be acting out of malice or envy--

OLD DEAR. Envy, forsooth!

SCHOLAR D. Or perhaps just the usual divine fecklessness.

DEA. On top of which, it's never the right moment. Drop in too soon, and they complain they're not being given the chance to work things out for themselves--

OLD DEAR. Themselves, forsooth!

SCHOLAR D. Whereas, hold off--and they'll have gone and created a tangle beyond the power of men or gods to undo.

OLD DEAR. The upshot is, one's perpetually on call.

SCHOLAR D. They don't care what they might be taking you away from. I remember once, I was that near pinpointing the exact mountaintop from which Oedipus enters the sky--

OLD DEAR. Hunh! Easy for Oedipus: all he's got to do is come out on his height and wait to be taken. With us, now....

DEA. (to YG) There's this whole incredible preparation. You've got to get a body together out of light or thickened air; shape on wings; come to an understanding with a wind--

YG. I have to say, to me none of this sounds really all that all-fired--

OLD DEAR. And when at last, all done up and ready to roll, you come out onto the edge of the dock to wait for your downdraft--it's pitch dark!

DEA. (steps to front edge of platform and squints out) The darkness of velour... that has been pressed to nakedness ... against the indifferent... stare of the dream.

Not a velour slung through space, you understand, but space itself gathered in dark bunches and folds....

SCHOLAR D. (steps to front edge of platform and squints out) A great cone of blackness, opening down from the eye like the gaze of the blind.

Not a cone in space, you understand, but space itself blackening out from a point....

OLD DEAR. (steps to front edge of platform and squints out) The whole night before you... like a theatre after hours... when backstage no longer seems backstage to anything... but leads on through itself... like a forest in a dream.

Not a night fallen upon space, you understand, but space itself fallen as a kind of night....

YG. (peering down over "his" side of platform) It is a ways, but... I can just make out dust stirring at either extreme of a flatness. The stirrings... are toward each other.

(As if by pre-arrangement, all draw back from the edge at the same moment.)

SCHOLAR D. It's tricky stuff. You only first appreciate how tricky when it comes time to start back up.

OLD DEAR. There's no guarantee you'll make it.

DEA. We know at least one who didn't.

YG. Really? What's he--lost? dead?

DEA. Well, he couldn't be those. Possibly he got caught up in the workings.

OLD DEAR. Or--of all fates for a deus ex machina!--was simply left hanging.

DEA. But the most likely is, he's... still intervening.

SCHOLAR D. In a word, it's no job for a beginner. The demands, the frustrations, the sheer extent of the distances involved--

YG. Well, you all seem to be hanging in there.

OLD DEAR. You see anyone here but yourself exactly... spoiling for the fray?

YG. Well, of course, I've noticed in the brief time I've been here none of you has actually-- But I guess I put that down to-- Wait a minute. You're not telling me that you don't... you never.... But, all those stories!

OLD DEAR. Tales of another day.

SCHOLAR D. We find ourselves exercising a lot more selectivity in our descent-patterns recently.

YG. What's recently?
(awkward silence)

Why did you stop?

DEA. We didn't just "stop." Things changed.

YG. What "things"?

SCHOLAR D. Well, for one thing, the state of the cranes. I don't know, they don't seem to have these problems with the other machinery. The anapiesma still pops you up from below in one clean motion. The ekkyklema rolls you out and back without so much as a wheel seeming to touch a groove. But these jo-jo's....

OLD DEAR. Some of them rattle you around like a clapper at the height of the dancing.

DEA. Remember that one at "The Delōs" that always seemed to have a sunset or a sea-monster left over from last time?

OLD DEAR. Or that beauty at "The Cnossos" still all covered over in ivy footprints from where Dionysus went up and down in some Bacchae-revival from the year dot?

YG. But ours? Here?

SCHOLAR D. There I have to give credit. Crane-service over Athens is never allowed to drop below a certain level: our Mechanōs sees to that.

YG. Ah.

SCHOLAR D. No, I guess if there's any machinery around here that's starting to show signs of wear--it's us?

YG. Us?

SCHOLAR D. For some time now it's been growing increasingly difficult for a deus ex machina to see himself in the light of a viable convention.

DEA. It wasn't always like this.

OLD DEAR. Once... the theatre was ours. The world was at our feet.

SCHOLAR D. Of late, though... all the signs suggest we're rapidly emerging as a byword for the inauthentic. Already as early as Hellenistic times, one noticed "the god from the machine" beginning to be employed as the equivalent of "anything unlooked-for or unwarranted." By now, it's scarcely any longer possible to imagine a solution so unfelt or preposterous--from the arrival of the cavalry to a change of views--that could not be comprehended under the name of "the god from the machine." From epiphany to benefactor to laughingstock--the only descent we seem to have been making recently is in the esteem of critics and theatregoers.

YG. How could you have let things reach that point?

SCHOLAR D. What could we do? History was against us. The same force that got us kicked upstairs till the final moments so that theatre could be about human problems, at length succeeded in extruding us even from those final moments so that the human problems might have human solutions. One may deplore the outcome, but not very well dispute the logic.

But it won't always be this way. What goes down must come up, and the same mechanism that erstwhile brought us low must one day put us back on top. A time will come when god in the flesh shall walk the scene, the very godhead reorganize itself as a descent out of fulness....
(embarrassed silence)

I get this by extrapolating current trends....

YG. But meanwhile... how are they bringing the shows in? With no god willing to step forward and lend a hand--

SCHOLAR D. Oh, there's no lack of steps or hands--only, these days they're more likely to be those of an envoy or courier--not one of ours, you understand--not Hermes or any other Olympian, nobody we know--no, but, say: the herald of some tyrant who's had second thoughts, an escapee from some cataclysm that Changes It All.... Sometimes a voice out of a thundercloud--

OLD DEAR. Sometimes just the thundercloud.

SCHOLAR D. (nodding) Sometimes just the thundercloud. And sometimes--don't even bother rushing to the window, because the new elements will all the while have been percolating up out of events themselves: the letter that slipped behind the sideboard, the shipwreck that years before on that very coast.... Oh, these plots so sublimely able to see after themselves, themselves somehow behind even what disrupts them, their most violent upheavals cast up out of the depths of their own structural logic--

OLD DEAR. Structural logic, forsooth!

SCHOLAR D. --so that, in extreme cases, the entire script becomes such a machine as we dei had permitted ourselves only the most temperate recourse to.

YG. But what about the script after script that calls for a deus ex machina?

SCHOLAR D. Oh, in the vast majority of cases one's seen as little more than a primitive carryover--prime material for the literary manager's fatal shears-- Oh, that reminds me: I never finished telling you my story of Trouble Over Corinth.

YG. I don't really think--

DEA. (to YG) Scripts won't help us now! If the Greek Theatre is ever going to get moving agin, we've got to throw off this whole text-centered mind-set and start encountering the mythic material directly.

YG. Yes? And where is the "mythic material" to be met with in a theatre all whose gods have up and decamped?

SCHOLAR D. But we haven't "up and decamped"! We continue to be present in dreams, as apparitions, in prologues (and let me tell you, it feels good to be starting something for once!), as metaphors--and, listen!, simply by remaining immanent in the world the world of the play presupposes.

OLD DEAR. I've always said, if you really want to break into this business, there's nothing you won't do. I remember once I was playing this Thracian hillside and the girls start taking bites out of a baby goat. Well, they send the little feller down to me--

YG. (to SCHOLAR D.) But I don't want to be present in dreams or metaphors or world-views. I want to be present on the scene!

SCHOLAR D. We are present on the scene.

YG. Have you not even now been spinning me the tale of your replacement?

SCHOLAR D. Never more present than in our replacements! When a letter or oracle settles things, that's the deus ex machina in his capacity of "new information"; when a storm, there he is as "force from without." And when an uncanny coincidence arrives to make all well again--whose uncanny arrival if not that of the god from the machine?

YG. And this... suffices you?

SCHOLAR D. Suffices! I'm everywhere I look!

OLD DEAR. Actually, it's some of the steadiest work we've seen in years.

DEA. (to YG) Maybe right at the start there were moments---

SCHOLAR D. But once it became clear that the envoys and oracles and so forth were representing us far better than we knew how to do--that, in fact, we could never hope to be more fully present than in these representatives of ours--

YG. Ah, surely, if a deus ex machina brings anything, it's... an end to the representation?

OLD DEAR. (peering nervously over front edge of platform) He should stay off of that. He should just plain stay away from there.

YG. I want my effect! I want the career I was born to! Bring me to the crane!

SCHOLAR D. You think one has to keep on making personal appearances to keep on as a deus ex machina? Let me show you something.

(He lifts the clothestree with Hermes' Garb on it out of its upstage-center socket and flourishes it at the YG.)

Intrigued, the YG takes the hem of Hermes' cape between his fingers.)

Do you know whose things these are? Hermes'!

(The YG looks up quickly, then resumes his examination with heightened interest.)

That's right--Hermes: trickster god, god of thieves and dreams and language--but before everything else, heaven's courier, and as such, granddaddy of anything in the way of a deus ex machina, type and origin of the god on the way down.

YG. You mean, in these, through heaven-- ~~What is this,~~
~~fire-damage~~ (points to burn-marks on cape)
 What is this, fire-damage?

OLD DEAR. Where the crackling subtlety shot out too far.

DEA. Where the sparked curiosity caught at a thread.

SCHOLAR D. Or perhaps where hellfire nipped at the heels of the Conductor of Shades--another of the functions cheerfully assumed by this absolute demon-for-work.

YG. What are you doing with this stuff?

SCHOLAR D. That's my point. He doesn't need it anymore. He's left it behind.

YG. I don't understand.

(During what follows, the DEA, the OLD DEAR and the SCHOLAR D. pass the clothestree back and forth among them, each laying hold of it for the duration of his own remarks about Hermes, then handing it on to the next speaker.)

OLD DEAR. It's a classic success story for our business. He wangled a couple of cameo-descents in the Iliad, was asked back to do the sequel. This led to offers from abroad: Italian epics, location-work all over the Mediterranean. Since which, it's been all up, up, up. He only does epics now; soon, only dreams in epics--and before long, he'll have got it down to dreams pure and simple.

SCHOLAR D. Which, of course, puts him within striking distance of his eventual apotheosis as Hermes Trismegistus, spirit-guide to the psychic depths in later esoteric tradition--not bad for a one-time Asiatic tree-spirit who started out life as a demon of crossroads.

OLD DEAR. (shakes his head enviously) Cushy. Cushy, cushy, cushy.

DEA. If you have no objection to being at someone else's beck day in day out.

OLD DEAR. I have no objection to inhaling the fumes of a hot meal day in day out.

DEA. Yes, well, personally, I care more about having my time for my work. At least the gods of the theatre are at their own disposal.

OLD DEAR. Oh, sure: strapped to our harnesses, harnessed to our hooks, hooked to our leads-- No wonder Hermes got out the minute he caught the whiff of a little security.

DEA. (annoyed) You don't know that was his reason! And if it was... no one who's had to contend with this hierarchal, male-dominated theatre system would have any difficulty understanding the need to move in another direction.

SCHOLAR D. Anyway, he's gone: our lord and prototype, splitter of every sky from the Prometheus to the Amphitryon; he whom each of us loved as his other self, since from him, every subsequent deus ex machina ultimately descends. And with him gone--

(During this last, the SCHOLAR D., who has been left holding the clothestree, has started upstage to return it to its socket. But now the YG intercepts him, snatches the items of Hermes' Garb off the clothestree, and begins putting them on.)

Hey, what are you--?

YG. Take me to the crane!

SCHOLAR D. But as I've just explained to you--?

YG. I will restore what time and Hermes have lost us!
(peers over "his" side of platform)

You see it there... an anger and an anger.... By no more than a simple down-and-back--face down and win back--I shall descend to the level and bring it back to the point.

SCHOLAR D. But--

YG. To the crane!

OLD DEAR. What is this, Orpheus Descending?

SCHOLAR D. (to YG) I know of no way--

YG. To the crane!

OLD DEAR. Evohé! You're as bad as
(gestures over front of platform)
him down there: there's no holding some people!

YG. To the--

DEA. Follow me.

YG. You'll take me--?

DEA. I'll take you down.

(The YG starts toward her.)

No--where you are is fine. Let's begin with a little warm-up. I want you... to close your eyes... and find the center of yourself.

(to other dei)

Come on, everybody! Let's close our eyes and find our centers.

(The SCHOLAR D., pausing only long enough to return the clothestree to its socket, plunges into the exercise.)

The OLD DEAR, on the other hand, very conspicuously strolls off and peers over the front edge of the platform.)

SCHOLAR D. (calling over to OLD DEAR) Come on; she's good at this kind of work. You could at least try. Honestly, you know, you've had experiences the rest of us only dream about, but when it comes to actually doing anything, you're so--

OLD DEAR. (resentfully) I'm so what? I take classes, I keep up my instrument.... Oh, all right.

(makes some half-hearted "modern dance" motions, then raises his hand to the DEA like a schoolboy)

Question? What do you mean by our "center"?

DEA. All right, good; I mean: the beginning of the body, what you go back to in yourself. Think of it as this dot of light, way inside your insides. OK? Close your eyes,

(The SCHOLAR D., OLD DEAR and YG do so.)

and feel this incredibly sharp blip of light right at the point where you start from in yourself. Now this is going to be different for different folks. It could be your solar plexus. It could be your tum. You're going to have to go in and look around. Wherever it is for you, get there; and when you're there, open your eyes.

(The SCHOLAR D., OLD DEAR and YG do as directed. When each has opened his eyes:)

Everybody there? OK. Now: You're mountain-climbers, you're out on this rock-spire, sheer as glass, you've been climbing since morning, up and up and up--come on, move into it as I give it to you--

(The other dei begin miming an arduous, hand-over-hand ascent.)

--struggling up this rock-needle, all day long.... Now it's late, the light is going, you can't be more than a few moves from-- Come on, show me those last, few--

(The dei mime pulling themselves up over the top. The SCHOLAR D. includes in his mime a quick glance back over his shoulder.)

No, no! Don't look back! You haven't allowed yourself a single peek all day, you've wanted the full effect all at one-- Come on, now: One last push and-- There we are! Out on the summit! You and the sky! Now turn back and treat yourself to a view of--

But wait a minute! What's this? It's pitch dark. And when I say "pitch"-- Take the blackest black you ever saw. Now take its shadow. What's going on here? You turned out, expecting the world, and--except for this tiny pool of light you're standing in, ringing in your form and contracting with every--to a patch, a point--

OLD DEAR. Question? I'm confused: Is this point of light I'm standing in the same as my "incredibly bright center" from a moment ago?

DEA. (shrugs) If it helps to think of it that way. But, you know, I think what it really has to be is the last gleam of the final ray of the latest light on the highest peak--look again and it's gone, the darkness is absolute. Night has overtaken you on the mountain. All right: How are you going to get down?

(The three dei squint into darkness, probe for footholds, etc.)

At length the OLD DEAR begins a very nice mime of climbing down a succession of evenly spaced rungs.)

What ladder? There's not so much as an outcrop or foothold.

(The SCHOLAR D. mimes "thinking hard.")

Don't illustrate the problem, solve it!

(The YG raises one foot out over "his" edge of the platform and seems about to step off --but is restrained by the DEA's words:)

Right! You're going to have to jump. Come on! Take a breath and--let go! Drop!

(The dei mime falling headlong through space.)

Use the space! Let it happen! Go with it, don't lose focus, take time to feel the falling. You're going to have to find a way of falling that makes sense for you. Maybe it's floating like a feather, maybe it's sinking like a stone.

Now I want to start hearing about it. Send the class back some signals. Where are you? What's it like? What are you falling through? towards? Flash! What was that just went by there? Flash! And that? Flash! Flash! And those? Give us the lowdown. Verbalize the "where."

(The DEA touches the forehead of the SCHOLAR D.)

SCHOLAR D. I appear to have stumbled into a shaft on the site of the excavation of the Theatre of--

DEA. Hey, man! You're falling, you don't have the air for that kind of-- See that streak trailing out behind you? That's your scream.

SCHOLAR D. (unconvincingly trying to pass off a pointer-in-hand lecture as a flood of breathless exclamations) Down past the late Roman additions... to the Hellenistic groundplan which in part they... And on through the Lycurgan modifications ...to the depth of the original socket-work... the marketplace where but now... torchlit grove where notyet--

(The DEA removes her hand from the SCHOLAR D.'s forehead and places it on the forehead of the OLD DEAR.)

OLD DEAR. (flinging his arms up over his head in unconvincing little "help-help-I'm-falling" gestures) The Mark Hellinger! The Cherry Lane! The Soho Rep! An interesting space in Tribeca! Louisville! The Shreveport Civic Players! Somebody's barn! Out round behind somebody's barn! Theatre under the stars! That grove...! Those torches...! Evohé!

(The DEA removes her hand from the OLD DEAR's forehead and places it on the forehead of the YG.)

YG. I don't.... I'm not getting any....

(He shuts his eyes, tenses, tries harder.)

DEA (removes her hand from the YG's forehead) Falling, falling, falling.... And--slam!-you're-on-the-ground!

(The dei mime slamming into the ground; then, assuming the exercise to be over, start getting up.)

And--down!-on-into-the-ground!

(The dei look up inquiringly.)

Come on! Don't stop now! You're just getting into it. Onto your bellies! Flatten out! Splay! Now--merge! Pour yourself out like a libation. Let the dust drink you, trickle on through! Come on, you're gods, you're dying for earth--

(The SCHOLAR D. and the OLD DEAR conscientiously flatten themselves. Suddenly the YG leaps to his feet.)

YG. This isn't doing it for me. Could I try something?

DEA. We're open to input from every member of this workshop.

YG. My idea is a tree--

DEA. OK, could we have everybody trees, now. Great cosmic tree: roots in the earth, branches in the clouds--

OLD DEAR. "Pretend you're the county clerk's office, pretend you're a slice of Monterey Jack"--that's it! I'm out.

(He goes and sprawls across the front edge of the platform in a pose reminiscent of the YG's at opening.)

The SCHOLAR D., the DEA and the YG himself apply themselves to following the YG's instructions. However, as the exercise wears on and it becomes increasingly less clear how those instructions might be realized, the SCHOLAR D. and the DEA gradually drop out and fall to watching the YG.)

YG. (to DEA) No, no--we're not the tree, we're climbing down out of-- Oh, and scratch the "cosmic": just a plain, ordinary-- In fact, make that a dead tree, all stripped and bare as...

(The clothestree, upstage, catches his eye.)
...as that pole, there. In fact, make it a pole. Yes!

You're climbing down this...pole, and at every--
 Did I say "pole"? Thinner! A rod, really. Scarcely even
 that. More the texture of a dowel, and drawing itself out
 finer with each--

(closes his eyes)

To a hair... a fibre... a pure line of force... the concept
 of a pure line of force... a vector... a directionality...
 some brute essence of the downward--

(mimes hitting the ground hard after a long
 fall; opens his eyes)

What, is this--? Am I--?

DEA. The problem is solved--the exercise is over.

YG. But--compelling beyond anything one might have
 supposed-- In fact, almost like nothing less than the
 stupendous evasion which in fact--

DEA. Evasion!

OLD DEAR. As isn't all this avant-garde hokey-pokey
 in the end, really?

DEA. (to YG) Look, not to turn this into a competition,
 but I did have us on a pretty clear downward course until
 you steered the work into something more along the lines of
 a... paring down--

YG. Which, who would have supposed to be, also,
 a mode of the downward? And yet, I-- Oh, I more than
 glimpsed the possibility, I felt the drag!

OLD DEAR. Yes? Well, personally, all that thinning out
 wasn't getting me there.

YG. Oh, but--we brushed the treetops, no?--came within
 an ace.... Such formidable sensations of dipping by,
 looping past.... Really, it's not hard to see how the
 whole embarrassment of cranes and stages could just
cease coming up--even as one was, oneself, increasingly
 of a mind to cease coming down. There being just this
 one loose end: A deus ex machina who has said no to
 descent--what has he not said no to? Is there anything
 for it to be for him but refusal, from there on out?

SCHOLAR D. But--on the contrary! Most of us would only date our emergence from the moment-- Take myself. It's only since I've succeeded in putting some distance between me and the brouhaha that certain long-sought-for lines of connection have at last now finally begun to--

DEA. Staying out throws you back on your own resources as an actor. You look inside. You pass within. A great journey begins....

OLD DEAR. Plus, why work when no one's lighting a fire under you?

YG. Go on! You're all as mad for the drop as I am, only... you've done a job on the impulse.

(to OLD DEAR)

So much simpler being down to earth than going there;

(to SCHOLAR D.)

tracing descents than accomplishing one;

(to DEA)

getting down to basics than...getting down. And having found, each, a way down from your impulse, the way down you find no longer. "Cushy. Cushy, cushy, cushy."

SCHOLAR D. Easy for you who never-- What can you know of the thoughts that press--?

YG. (as the SCHOLAR D. parts his lips to continue)

"What if it is past my hour?"

(likewise anticipating the DEA)

"What if I can no longer find the way?"

OLD DEAR. Yes, all that; but underlying all that--

YG. (likewise with the OLD DEAR) "What if they do not know me? What if I am not sufficiently unlike what I enter?"

(The OLD DEAR exchanges nervous glances with the DEA and SCHOLAR D.)

Oh, I know your fears!

SCHOLAR D. And we, your steadfastness. Which of us has not known--as you, another day, will know our back-drawing --that... edgy feeling, the inclination of a mind on the verge, familiar to every god above from the time-when-as-yet...? Who here has not felt the promptings of the passion for down?

YG. (fascinated) The passion for down.... Strong in me for the thing I am. The one passion a god might consider gratifying--or rather, can do little else but gratify....

DEA. Don't leave us!

YG. I am a god from the machine--which is not another thing than descending. I am no way distinct from the arc I accomplish. It's not "him and his depths." I am the downwardness about me; cannot hope to come to myself but by descent. To the crane!

(rushes to "his" side of platform and peers over)

OLD DEAR. Talk about an exclusive career focus.

YG. (looking over "his" side of the platform) Quick, there's not a moment to lose! Things down there... are on a collision course.

SCHOLAR D. (his eyes on the YG) The usual attempts at restraint having come to the usual nought, one would, indeed, appear to be on the very brink--

(The YG starts to exit.)

But yet!

(The YG stops, turns back.)

Before you go hurling yourself into the fray--I think you'd better hear the end of my Trouble Over Corinth. We left me hovering offstage, just overhead, listening for my cue--

YG. Surely the time is past for-- Events below--

SCHOLAR D. (doggedly) I say: hovering offstage listening for my cue, when--

(goes to front edge of platform and cocks an ear)

Wait a minute, something's wrong. THOSE aren't the words I-- And suddenly I realize: there's been a mix-up; they're performing a later version of the text: one with no deus ex machina in it! Well, now! I relish a daring emendation as much as the next man; in fact, ordinarily, I might well be found spearheading the drive. But just right now... I'm standing there, smack in the middle of an action with no place for me, about to put in an appearance in a text where I do not appear!

YG. Quite a comedown; but in the present circumstances--

SCHOLAR D. My dear young friend, these were the present circumstances! The script into which I stumbled that morning in Corinth is the very script being performed downstairs at this moment: same late, modern recension, from which every trace of supernatural machinery has been X'd. If you insist on barrelling in there, you'll be forcing yourself upon a train of events you can never be part of, a situation that doesn't know you're alive. There's no opening for a god in the present performance!

(Stunned, the YG sinks to his knees.)

DEA. (to SCHOLAR D.) So how'd you handle it? Stop the show and call for a critical edition?

SCHOLAR D. Actually, I think you'll be rather pleased with how I handled it. At the first position-change, I cross down-center, crack my caduceus across my knee, and weigh in with:

"Happy the man to whom Heaven need not speak,
Since of himself he acts the thought of Zeus,
And what the god would bring him--forth he brings."

(smiles sheepishly)

They loved me in Corinth.

OLD DEAR. I bet they did. You could go a festival or two without hearing sentiments like those from a Greek stage.

YG. (looks up quickly) So then, in the end,...the god descended.

SCHOLAR D. Well....

YG. (rises to his feet) The story ends with the descent of the god--as indeed, how else?

(looking over "his" edge of the platform)

The crisis nears, the showdown approaches. But for the machine, where would be the end of it? If not the god--what then?

OLD DEAR. (to SCHOLAR D.) Yes, don't keep us dangling, how do we get out of

(points over front edge)

this one?

(acting out a melodramatic entrance;)

"Wait!

This letter bears the oracle's own words."

DEA. (likewise:)

"Hold!

King Arché, whom I serve, now bids strife cease."

OLD DEAR. (melodramatically pulls up his sleeve:)

"Stay!

That birthmark on thy forearm, twin to this."

SCHOLAR D. (to YG) If you want to see how quote-"indispensable" the deus ex machina is--look below!

(The OLD DEAR, SCHOLAR D. and DEA look down over the front of the platform.

The YG closes his eyes and appears to listen attentively.

Flute-music, very faint, drifts up from far below. At first the music is languid; then there is sudden pause in mid-phrase; then the music starts up again, vigorous and martial.

The YG opens his eyes, but immediately shuts them again, as if dazzled.)

OLD DEAR. Uh-oh.

SCHOLAR D. I don't believe it. Actors, they call themselves --so long as their chitons fall straight, they don't notice whether it's the Philoctetes or The Barretts of Wimpole Street.

OLD DEAR. Hey! Don't put everything on the actors! What could show more clearly than your own problems at Corinth how an actor suddenly, through no fault of his own--

DEA. Yes, but

(pointing over front of platform)

you can't let the glitches paralyze you like that. The unexpected should be a source of impulses.

YG. Excuse me, I'm lost. What "glitches"? What's the problem?

SCHOLAR D. Oh, nothing all that terribly much, really. You see that vague-looking tritagonist down there? He... took a little wrong turning a couple of speeches ago. We're back in the original version.

OLD DEAR. (peering over front edge of platform) I know him: Milos of Ctesiphon, regional credits down to here, a total professional. But it's not like in the old days when all you did was grab your thyrsus and head for the hills. Now, there's this whole international theatre-scene: a different house every week, maybe a single rehearsal that morning if you're lucky--

YG. (looks over "his" side of platform, then turns, puzzled, to SCHOLAR D.) I'm sorry, I'm afraid I still don't-- When you say, the "original" version...?

SCHOLAR D. The one that no one's taken a scissors to yet. The one in which the deus ex machina still appears. The one that calls for the descent of the god somewhere between
 (sneaks a quick glance over the edge and calculates on his fingers)
 twenty-three and twenty-eight dactyls from now.

YG. So, after all, it appears one of us is going to have to--
 (points downward)

SCHOLAR D. What--just because some hotdog who wasn't thinking blew a line?

DEA. I can't suddenly become part of a process I've had no share in evolving.

OLD DEAR. They got into this, let's see them get out of it.
 (peers over front edge of platform, then turns back nervously to the SCHOLAR D.)
 Actually... you don't suppose there might, in fact, be some expectation that we--?

SCHOLAR D. Of course not!

OLD DEAR. (shouting over front edge) Hey, you!
No god! God out! Pick up from there!

(The DEA and the SCHOLAR D. come to the front edge of the platform to restrain the OLD DEAR --and remain to stare downward.
 The flute-music trails off uncertainly; stops.)

SCHOLAR D. Will you look at that. The performance has ground to a halt. They're all just standing around, exchanging nervous looks, no one wanting to be the first: "It's not my problem." "Well, it's certainly not my problem"--

DEA. Everything that happens on that stage is everybody's problem!

YG. I'm going down.

SCHOLAR D. Don't you see, it's long past the point--

YG. Ah, but now, as a deus ex machina, isn't then ... just my particular moment?

OLD DEAR. You'll never make it.

YG. (looking over "his" side of the platform) I don't know; the parties still seem as far apart as ever.

DEA. Believe me, there isn't a deus who ever lived who could--

(To the accompaniment of much clanking, whirring and scraping, the shadow of the crane falls across the stage--or rather, comes together out of areas of shadow already present. What happens is this: The soft, dappled light-and-shade pattern which has lain across the stage from the start now suddenly, as if at the twist of a lens, comes into sharp focus as the shadow of a gigantic piece of modern construction machinery--the jib of an enormous derrick with its struts, crossbeams, braces, etc. Thus, what one had long since got used to seeing a soft, decorative lighting effect is now revealed as having been all along the very out-of-focus shadow of a particular object.

The OLD DEAR, SCHOLAR D. and DEA react to the sudden shadow as if it were a sudden light, pressing hands to blinded eyes, etc.)

YG. (raises his hand toward the shadow) No? Then who's the jitney being brought round for?

DEA. Mechanōs!

OLD DEAR. What's he doing here?

SCHOLAR D. Must have something he wants to say to the kid personally.

DEA. (with suppressed excitement) Yes, but... there'd be no need of

(points up into shadow)

the crane for that. There'd be no need of the crane unless....

OLD DEAR. Unless?

YG. (who has never taken his eyes from the shadow)
I may be young in the theatre, but I know the creak of machinery when I hear it. No wonder I couldn't seem to summon up the way to the crane. Summoning it up is the way to the crane.

OLD DEAR. (to DEA) Unless what?

(The DEA refers the question to the SCHOLAR D. with her eyes. The OLD DEAR turns to the SCHOLAR D.)
No need of the crane unless--?

SCHOLAR D. Unless Mechanōs were weighing the option... toying with the possibility of... well, of....

OLD DEAR. You don't mean... throw his weight behind--? ...come down on the side of--?

SCHOLAR D. (to YG) This looks like intervention at the highest levels. You'd better see what he has in mind for you.

YG. (only now turning from the shadow) "He"?

OLD DEAR. (softly; pointing up into shadow) Mechanōs.

DEA. The cranekeeper.

OLD DEAR. The one who lets you down.

YG. There's a cranekeeper?

SCHOLAR D. (points to crane-shadow) You didn't suppose all this machinery descended of itself?

OLD DEAR. There's not one of us he hasn't helped to... make the transition.

DEA. If you're going anywhere, you're going through him.

YG. You're not telling me I need to get this guy's permission?

OLD DEAR. What, "permission"? This is a stagehand we're talking about.

DEA. Well, or basically a stagehand. In fact, he fulfills all sorts of useful-- Say you need someone to sift through your material--

SCHOLAR D. Or work with you on your act till you've got it down.

OLD DEAR. Or, listen, in a pinch even write the thing for you--

YG. Write the--! Greek tragic drama issuing from the hand of a... a....

SCHOLAR D. Oh, now!--can't be a literary snob and a Young Man in a Hurry. Actually, the Speech of Intervention is a fairly standardized form. Mechanōs' contribution in that department is never going to amount to much more than ...filling in some blanks.

YG. And in other departments?

SCHOLAR D. You'll go least wrong if you think of him as a kind of dispatcher, laying down--

YG. The law?

SCHOLAR D. A series of clear moves. A pattern for us all. He won't hesitate to tell you--

YG. Where to get off?

SCHOLAR D. Everything you need to know.

YG. (gestures up toward shadow) He's already put the crane at my disposal, what does that leave us to discuss?

SCHOLAR D. Ah, well, you know the Greek theatre: always one more conversation you have to have.

YG. Well, let me have it, then! It can't come soon enough for me!

(starts to leave)

DEA. But surely not in those
(points to Hermes' Garb on the YG)
hand-me-downs?

YG. What is to be the nature of the whole transaction but a handing down? I can't imagine feeling better suited....

OLD DEAR. Right; you look fine. Never mind her, she's always trying to get everyone into leg-warmers and leotards.

DEA. No, but to come before him like that... as him.... I don't know, wouldn't it be as well to--?

YG. Get myself up for a technician? Thank you very much, I'm late as it is.

(He pauses, however, to straighten the Hermes' Garb.)

OLD DEAR. Listen to how he says that: "technician".... You know, a snooty tone vis-à-vis the production staff is the sure sign of the amateur. Archons, chorus-teachers, production executives--it's easy to sneer at all those dedicated spirits working like demons to get the show off the ground--but you can't have theatre without them.

DEA. Of course you can! Let's give the performance space back to the performer. Clear the crap off the stage! Everyone who's not working, out of the room!

(The YG sneaks one final look over "his" side of the platform and begins to steal offstage.)

SCHOLAR D. Oh, yes: a poor theatre, an empty space --perfect symbol of avant-garde vacuity: the mind with nothing on it as the stage with nothing on it....

OLD DEAR. What do you mean, avant-garde? That's how it always used to be: just you and the night and the music....

SCHOLAR D. I beg your pardon, but as far back as you care to dig, some device for producing divine descents has been unearthed on the site of every theatre excavated up through the present--

OLD DEAR. (ignoring SCHOLAR D.) Used to just... drop in and take charge. You poured in. Where the god left off and the actor took over, who could say, who would want to say? You felt like them. They felt like you. Evohe! Talk about cozy arrangements.

(turns to YG)

This is something you kids starting out today can scarcely--

(But the YG is no longer there.)

He's gone!

SCHOLAR D. Probably had all he could stand of your backstage bromides for one day.

OLD DEAR. More likely, your dramatic literature lectures drove him onstage for a breath of air.

SCHOLAR D. Too bad your "thoroughly professional" friend down there didn't attend a few more of my lectures. Maybe then he could have managed to tell plays with gods in them from plays with none.

DEA. What can you expect? An actor comes breezing in two seconds before and--whum!--without any sort of warm-up or preparation--

OLD DEAR. Oh, yes--those ditsy exercises of yours....

DEA. (goes to front edge of platform and looks over) Almost held him! Alone came near!

OLD DEAR. Pushed him over the edge, I'd call it.

SCHOLAR D. The question is: what Mechanōs is going to call it.

OLD DEAR. (goes pale) Mechanōs?

DEA. (calling down over front edge of platform) Come back!

OLD DEAR. (to SCHOLAR D.) You don't think Mechanōs could by any stretch hold us responsible for--?

SCHOLAR D. There is the possibility.
(squints up into crane-shadow)
The shadow of a possibility.

OLD DEAR. But it was he who sent round the crane for the boy! Mechanōs... favors the bid!

SCHOLAR D. A shadow has fallen across a path. A darkness impends. Are you sure you read in this the marks of favor?

DEA. (again calling down over front edge of platform) Come back!

OLD DEAR. I don't read anything but the trade weeklies. If Mechanōs doesn't like the way we've performed in these circumstances, he can just--

SCHOLAR D. But don't you see? He has. We have been motioned back. Called off. Returned to the sheath.

OLD DEAR. But--it's not fair! We held up our end--more than. All right, the kid got past us--but I'd like to know what more I or anyone--

(calls up into shadow)

What more?

(to SCHOLAR D.)

No, I'm sorry, he thinks about this for five minutes, there's no way he can possibly arrive at any other conclusion than--

SCHOLAR D. (resting a hand on the clothestree) Mechanōs, as well you know, is capable of arriving at any conclusion whatever.

OLD DEAR. (goes pale) You don't mean--?

SCHOLAR D. By whatever route seems best to him. Going into as much or as little depth as, in his view--

OLD DEAR. You're not talking about... a resumption of service? A...

(makes a series of rapid up-and-down gestures)
re-opening of the lines?

SCHOLAR D. Mm... suppose we say: a re-opening of the possibility.

DEA. (again calling down) Come back!

(Suddenly she drops to her knees, leans perilously far out over the front edge of the platform, and calls out again, more tentatively:)

Take me with you?

(The OLD DEAR and the SCHOLAR D. rush forward to keep the DEA from falling. The OLD DEAR is almost drawn overboard himself, and the SCHOLAR D. winds up holding the two of them back from the brink.)

SCHOLAR D. (to DEA, who is still struggling downward) Easy, now. Come out of it gently.

OLD DEAR. This can't be happening! We have to act and act now while there's still-- before we once again find ourselves dependent on the whim of--

SCHOLAR D. (still addressing DEA) Relax. Deep breaths. Mind a blank. Take in your breath and--let it go. Breathe in, and--let go.

OLD DEAR. I don't intend to sit back and be--

SCHOLAR D. (to OLD DEAR) Come on. You, too. All of us. We

(leading the other two in their breathing)
take it in and--we let it go. In, and--let go.
Take it in, and--

(to OLD DEAR, in another tone)
Let it go. There's nothing you can do to affect the outcome. Stay out of it. So, now:

(resumes leading them in their breathing)
In, and--

(Blackout.)

End of Act I

ACQ

II

Act II

(The stage as in Act I, but minus the clothestree.)

Wild, tumbling shadows pour over the platform, moving too rapidly for it to be made out what they are the shadows of.

The CRANEKEEPER, wearing bib overalls and a work shirt, stands at the front edge of the platform, peering out over the heads of the audience. His eyes flick to the right, to the left, up-- but never down. Apparently he is following the movements of whatever is casting the shadow.

All at once the shadow-motion contracts and sharpens to the outline of a man running; but the next instant--almost before this has had time to register--the shadow is gone and the YOUNG GOD comes running out onto the stage, breathless, his Hermes' Garb in disarray.)

YOUNG GOD. All right; I'm here; lower ahead!

CRANEKEEPER. Those clothes... where--?

YG. Sorry about the hold-up. I tried every way I knew to get out of there, but--well, you saw: they insisted on running back through over every last--

(touches his Hermes' Garb)

These? Fell to my share! What--did you suppose you'd fished up Hermes out of retirement?

CRK. (with surprising vehemence) No...!

YG. (going to "his" edge of platform and looking over) Still not quite up to each other. Commence lowering! I'll call out any course-corrections that may become necessary.

(pause)

Well?

CRK. (gesturing toward the YG's costume) Where did you say you--?

YG. (pointing over "his" edge of platform) There. Into that. Where it's halted.

CRK. No, no, I meant--

YG. (takes the CRK's arm and leads him over to (YG's) edge of platform) Here, step round and let me point you out the exact-- See down there, where two clouds of dust take each other for object--

(turns and notices the CRK is running a section of the Hermes' Garb through his fingers)

Hey! You're not--

(points over edge)

CRK. Oh... I see where you're headed.

YG. You do? How--when here you haven't once so much as turned your gaze--

(again points over edge)

CRK. I... remember where the main areas of contention lay.

YG. (slaps his forehead) Of course! You have to have been following pretty close, or how did you know when to send round the crane?

(looks around)

Where is the crane, incidentally?

CRK. Mm... still being set up. Why are you so impatient to enter upon this dispute?

YG. Why? It's stopped! It's stalled! They're stuck!

CRK. (giving him a quick look) And you aim... to start it all going again?

YG. No. Well... yes. That is: I'll start it all going again. But I wouldn't exactly describe that as my aim.

CRK. No? What exactly would you describe as your aim?

YG. What?

CRK. I have to know if I'm going to help you.

YG. Have to know...? Are you saying that I, Hermes--

CRK. What!

YG. --or any other god on the go must first satisfy you that his intentions are--

CRK. Me! I'm satisfied just to be here with you.

YG. Well, then--?

CRK. Well, but I can't set you down on no grounds in particular, any more than I could on no ground in particular.

YG. The colleagues told me, one improvises....

CRK. Yes, but... from a premise. In a context. You can't come out onstage without a thought in your head.

YG. Why not?

CRK. But--you know the answer to that as well as I do! An actor has no business crossing from here to there without being able to say who I am, where I'm coming from, where I'm going--and what I want.

YG. That your rule?

CRK. It's just sound theatre practice. No actions "in general," no unmotivated movements.

YG. Does Mechanōs descend to the details of "theatre practice"? One might have supposed, so long as the machinery was running smoothly--

CRK. Well... machines don't run on nothing, you know! And when it comes to sources of motive power--you can't beat a motive!

(The YG turns impatiently away.)

It can be any motive at all!

YG. I'm not sure I have any motive at all!

CRK. Look again! Probe your depths! I'd be happy to run a few possibilities by you.

YG. Cranekeeper, an event
(stamps platform)

is coming together beneath our talk. I would really hate to see us lose the advantage your prompt crane-work has brought us. Don't let me down now! Let me down! Now!

CRK. The moment I hear a reason, we're as good as there.

YG. But--

CRK. The winch--is with you.

(The YG starts to protest, slumps back)

YG. What are my choices?

CRK. Oh, but--the sky's the limit! You can pronounce judgment, like Dionysus in The Bacchae; inflict madness, like Iris in the Herakles; resolve a mystery like Athene in the Ion. Dip into the corpus: a god, you'll find, may forestall violence or foment it; summarize a plot or hatch one; settle your quarrel or settle your hash. Why, Hermes alone at one time or another has been brought into play to hint displeasure, pry secrets, stir passions, soften blows--

YG. Be Hermes at this moment--

CRK. What!

YG. --the furthest thing from my thoughts! I want down! The way people "want more," "want out"--I want down! How's that for a reason?

CRK. As you see, the crane is not moved.

YG. Better, perhaps, then--
(raises one foot over "his" edge of platform)

CRK. Wait!

(The YG halts his step in mid-air.)

This isn't some claypit or mineshaft you pause at the brink of. If you're thinking in terms of cloud I shall sink through, wave I shall skim along... No. It's all... looped and slung, like the cabling for some immense, overlit show. Not a tangle in space, you understand, but the space itself hanging all twists and turns out before you--a knot of possibilities in the space of a moment--

YG. Down through which, the deus ex machina comes like a knife--and with no more thought of reasons or motives--

CRK. But it is a space of reasons, a tangle of motives. How can you think to cross it to no object? It is only extended to you out of the willingness of some object to be attained. It is... all to a purpose--and a keeping to one's purpose, the only possible "keeping on" in it; a having purposed afresh, the only next move....

(The YG draws back his foot.)

YG. There's somebody else, isn't there?

CRK. What?

YG. In the running. For the mission. I have this distinct sensation of being weighed against.

CRK. I assure you--

YG. It wasn't me you sent round the crane for at all-- was it? But then... who? I can vouch for none of my crowd having the slightest-- Oh, unless, of course, Hermes has decided to reinject himself.

CRK. Hermes! How is Hermes supposed to go anywhere?
(points to YG's costume)
It's all on your shoulders now. You're first in a field of one.

YG. Then why do you keep resisting me?

CRK. Resist you? I'm here for you! The machinery over which I preside only exists for you.

YG. Just... pick a motive off the pile and pop it in the slot?

CRK. Oh, I see what the problem-- You want one all your own.

YG. "One"...?

CRK. Untried, unspoken for, free and clear, yours alone: a motive you have every reason to believe has never been acted out of. Well, and why not? The world is young, the theatre is young, there's plenty of unused material out there.

YG. But--

CRK. Fresh gods, fresh aims! Why limit it to the traditional repertoire, if now in fact the thing that moves you from your seat is--what?--something more along the lines of pity on the human lot?

YG. Well--

CRK. No, listen, that's fine! I mean, all right, a little out-of-period--more the sort of thing you'd expect from some Raphael of Christian epic or Mercurio of Renaissance masque--but who could fail to see the attraction: To be, for once, the bearer of glad tidings--they see so little, and what little they see--

YG. Listen, I'm not even all that clear on what I'd be bursting in on down there, never mind what counts as a fortunate turn in it.

CRK. Ah. Well, come to that, the sheer love of bursting in is also a motive of no small--

YG. What?

CRK. --although, of course, you cannot suppose yourself quite the First Olympian Ever with a taste for dropping the bomb, then stepping back to savor the confusion.

YG. (shocked, protesting) Oh!

CRK. No, listen, don't apologize, it's a divine motive. I mean, a god needs to feel himself a god occasionally--yes? --and where better than upon the human visage--?

YG. I'm not so keen on encountering any human visages. In fact, I'm not really sure I have all that much of anything to say to anyone down there. In fact, I wonder if I mightn't conceivably be brought in at a point actually somewhat beyond--
(stops, embarrassed)

CRK. I've been a little slow....

YG. Well...

CRK. But, then, really, you might have cut in sooner. Letting me toss up reason after reason you might have for getting into it--when here all that's really on your mind is... getting away.

YG. "Away"?

CRK. From here!

YG. What's wrong with here?

CRK. Perhaps I should say: out from their midst.

YG. Whose midst?

CRK. The others. Your fellows in divinity. Not much there for one of you splendors in another, is there? For a god, it would seem, all the opportunities lie underfoot: descent the one way by which he might ever... come to experience.

YG. Are you some kind of tempter?

CRK. Are you some kind of tempted? It is for you to say what I am.

YG. I say, if you were half so diligent determining where to bring me down as what to bring me down to--

CRK. A sole diligence! A single terrain! Back and forth over the farbelow of your motivation we trawl, until... whatever lies beneath your desire... lies beneath.

YG. Nothing lies beneath my desire!

CRK. An ambition cannot lack all content.

YG. It contains a direction. I am no less than Hermes--

CRK. What!

YG. --ambitious to the depths. I aspire down.

CRK. Ah. Self-degradation--right. Bound to be elements of that present, I suppose, whatever the mix. You will hear it said that the divine essence has already come in for all the degradation it can ever know in coming to exist, merely; that flesh has nothing to add. But after all, we needn't be talking about a simple hunger for stuff (though neither would I wish to pass too quickly over simple hungers).

The downgrading of a god, after all, might well have something pretty fine about it, as witness sinking to new depths; as witness getting in over one's head; as witness--though here again we step outside our own thought-world for a moment--as witness incarnation.

YG. It's you!

CRK. What?

YG. You're the one with his eye on-- the one I felt breathing down my neck for-- They warned me you'd want to write my speech for me. But that you'd actually try and wrest the mission away-- I thought one had to be a god. But then, who says you're not a--? I mean, I find you out here on the dock, naturally I assume-- But you never actually in so many words-- How do I know you're not just... the next god down from me in line?

CRK. Let me assure you--if not before, then now--I am Mechanōs.

YG. Say that you are--

CRK. I keep the crane.

YG. Ah, but--how do you keep it? In reserve? Up your sleeve? At the ready for a descent of your own?

CRK. Believe me, this present berth as Cranekeeper represents the high point of my--

YG. Oh, now...! Stuck away up here, festival after festival, cheerfully helping in anything in a pair of wings to present itself--and never once a thought to helping yourself? Go on! I don't see how you can bear not to be each one of your descendants in turn, starting with Hermes. How can you not be Hermes?--

CRK. What!

YG. --be Dionysus? --Athene? --My colleagues? --Me? No wonder you're so good at trotting out reasons. Planted on your perch, witness to the whole procession, you've had time to want it for every reason in the book. I may well be face to face with a passion for down the equal of my own.

"More than equal," as no doubt you're thinking: all those good reasons to my no sort of reason, all that patience versus my no patience at all--all you've got to do is outface me and the prize is yours. Well--come ahead, I'm for you: passion meet passion, eyeball to eyeball, till the sun sinks behind the hill.

Only. Only, only, only. There is this other little deadlock in progress down there.

(stamps his foot)

Remember down there, god of the theatre--the tragic conflict which, keeping on beneath all we say, yet hangs in the air?

CRK. Oh, as for that, I wouldn't--- After all, isn't "up in the air" right where one of these tragic fellows likes best to be?

YG. What?

CRK. Well, only what is "still up in the air" can still be falling--yes? And we all know how, left to itself, your typical tragic fall had as soon go on bottoming out indefinitely. You're quite wrong about me: I don't covet the plunge headlong--very well as I am, thank you--but we all know someone who does:

(pointing--at the YG, it first appears--but then at the last moment he redirects the gesture downward over the edge of the platform)

Behold the protagonist of the tragedy, all tailspin and low point, each his own downfall, free will as free fall.

YG. I see it more... as endlessly getting to the bottom of something....

CRK. Meaning, perhaps, by that, that you... see it for yourself?

YG. Myself?

CRK. Needs must he "aspire down" who aspires to the journey of the tragic hero.

YG. Listen, a deus ex machina could learn plenty from them: that readiness, having once been cast, to enter upon each stage, to perform one's action and go on performing it in the presence of all sorts--

CRK. Wait a minute. Wait a minute! You just want to be in the show!

YG. What?

CRK. To be "cast," to "enter," to "perform before all sorts" --you don't care about going on as Philoctetes or Pentheus-- you just want to go on!

YG. Well....

CRK. All that dying to get down there, just so much dying to get up there. All this rooting about after an "object of your descent"... that was beneath our noses the while!
(stamps platform and points downward)
The only object of your descent is a career in the theatre!

YG. Not even so much! Nothing like! Nothing!
All these simple, pleasant things for it to be--and it is none of them! I am for... an act without resonance, a pure downward sheering. I will descend, and mean nothing by it!

CRK. Down for down's sake? If I were now the deus ex machina interposed before such... scantness, I should speak thus:

(assumes a stagey pose of intervention toward the YG)

"Fond man! (Or rather, in this instance: 'god')
Lay by! Thy will is drawn upon thy will.
Would'st thou 'descend, and nothing mean by it?'
But this is to descend to meaning nothing!"

YG. And if I were the deus ex machina billeted upon such obstinacy, my words would be:

(strikes a stagey pose of intervention in his turn)

"Cranekeeper! Here is one who stands upon the brink of his nature. Don't set him down for a troublemaker, don't lower his expectations, don't take him down a peg-- just take him down!"

(The CRK seems to waver for a moment.
But then:)

CRK. Are you sure... you're asking for something that means anything?

YG. I am asking, in the simplest, most literal sense--

CRK. And in the simplest, most literal sense I ask you: Where is "down" as a concept? Whither does it tend? Is there for sure something underlying it? Is it going anywhere? Is there somewhere for it to go? Getting beneath "beneath," worming below "below"--not only what do you find? but where are you looking?

YG. I am looking down!

CRK. Well, I hope you will not look down on a reminder that the world-picture in which we have the honor to serve does not set much store by "down" as an absolute. Even the stone that falls fares toward a center--so Aristotle: How, then, may you expect to fare? It will not feel like descent--nothing gratifies the passion for down less than descent! It will not even feel especially like motion. What it will feel like is years. At some point the whole experience... tilts and spills across time, releasing you forward into life on the horizontal. And only every now and then--tearing around a bend that drops off sheer; at the moment just inside sleep when the muscles give--comes the recollection that it is downward the while. Of course, the instant one strikes theatre-ground, everything comes back to one--the play, my embassy, those others there-- and it has all been a moment. A moment, however, which one is like to have experienced as onward; as overland; as nights and noons; as negotiation of a difficulty, opening of a way, arrival at an understanding--in short, as something very like the present conversation.

YG. The present--?

CRK. Open your eyes! Look around! Could it be...? Is it possible... you're already there?

YG. "There"?

CRK. "Where two clouds of dust take each other for object... " Cloudy friend! Dusty friend! Seeking how he may enter a dispute long since entered upon.

YG. You don't mean--?

CRK. You know how people say: "When you come right down to it"? In just that sense, perhaps, you have come right down.

YG. Yes, but--

CRK. Or again: "I believe myself to be, at bottom--"?
Believe yourself to be at bottom!

YG. And all that vast way of knots and tangles, lying between?

CRK. A "space of reasons"--said we not so? Well--
you've been through all the reasons.

YG. Well, but only in the sense of--

CRK. Look now: if you've no good reason to be there...
 I guess you're just there.

YG. Where?

CRK. Where one comes out as a deus ex machina. Landed!
 In! Down!

YG. The bottom of the barrel as the end of the line?
 Descent as the descent of an eye down a list?

CRK. I can only lift you down the gap I find in you;
 in no void but that of motivation, operate; to no depth
 but that of an obsession, descend. On what point did you
 expect a running down of the self was going to let you off?
 Figure from on high, welcome to ground-zero. Dweller in the
 clouds, say hello to the human plane.

YG. Hermes!

CRK. What--?

YG. Hermes, god of thieves, who makest off with my substance.
 Hermes, trickster god, who trickest me out of my path.
 Hermes, lord of crossways, who in every way crossest me.
 Hermes, bringer down of words, who to a word bringest all down.
 Hermes! Hermes, Hermes, Hermes!

CRK. How--?

YG. "Only does epics now, soon only dreams in epics"--
 who but thou, pioneer in the field of staying out of the field--
 who but thou would dream of passing off down to my last reason
 as down in sooth? After all, it had worked with the others.

Who can resist a god? Least of all another god! One by one, each was persuaded to find in a shadowing of the Hermetic Backout his own highest-- Oh, a faint shadowing, to be sure: what were all those flights of rationalization compared with your flight to the crane; all their working up of a grievance next to your working up here? No wonder they don't want it getting about who their "Mechanōs" is; for that known, how little they have settled for is also known.

And now here was I--the unwished-for reminder in the discarded trappings--and how little would I settle for? Not an insignificant question; for even a single other god on the wing strikes at the whole conception of the Forespent Courier, the Numen in Retirement, devoting what last, poor energies remain to--my god! and can this (inclusive gesture) be all that was meant by it?--the "glamorous new career"?

CRK. Who calls it so?

YG. The Brethren of the Indrawing. Your followers up.

CRK. So, and not for the first time failing-- I query the "glamorous." But further: I query the "new." I am what I always was: Hermes, man of the theatre, still!

YG. Sender of Dreams! Will you grace this lingering on behind the scenes with the name of--?

CRK. My lingering behind is for the theatre as much as my rushing in ever was--this I have lost no opportunity of instilling--

YG. Oh, I can hear you now: "Friends! Our season is past. This new fashion of the organic, craving for the inherent.... A convention, like a flower-- Therefore, away!"

CRK. Surely this cannot be what they say I--

YG. It is their reason, Messenger of Zeus. Of whom are they likely to hold reason in such a case?

CRK. That it was I who, in some sort, pointed a path--

YG. The exemplar ever, thou showed'st them the way in, time was, and now--thou showest them the way out.

CRK. Yes, but this rattletrap of seasons and fashions they had not of Hermes! At all seasons, the only fashion in which a deus ex machina can ever serve the theatre is by his absence--there was the dizzying conclusion I patiently sought to bring them out on. "Come," I would say, taking some one or other of them firmly in hand.

(leads YG by the hand to the front edge of the platform)

"See down into the depths of one of these 'dramatic situations' --what do they really seem to want, anyway? In the will of the tragic hero to plunge on forever, unresolved and irresolvable, may we not read the will of theatre itself--that site of conflicts that only seem able to believe in themselves while raging (as if, could they at length be over, they must all the while have been something else)?

Well, now: where does that leave you, god from the machine--you, whose every instinct is to block encounter, hold from happening, close the show? If there is no such thing as an ending that comes naturally to theatre, what role, then, is yours, most unnatural ending of them all? You may keep up the machinery, keep up a steady banter, keep up to snuff--but above everything, you must keep up. For what can your dropping in--out of the blue, out of nowhere--possibly accomplish but to proclaim anew that any 'conclusion' theatre reaches must always seem to have come to it from outside the horizon of its own assumptions? No, friend," I would conclude, "the only thing for a god from the machine who loves the theatre is to leave it. There will always be those--critic, director, playwright are of this number--who can only enter upon the life of the stage by keeping their distance from it. What does the deus ex machina illustrate but this possibility in regard to the actor? The one contribution you, as a god, may hope to make to the performance is--your exit."

YG. Then why did you send round the crane for me?

CRK. What?

YG. Were you letting me down easy? raising me above considerations? lifting me out of my confusion?

CRK. But, my friend... I never sent round the crane for you!

YG. Well, somebody did.

CRK. Impossible.

YG. I saw its shadow!

CRK. Friend--

YG. Right there before me! Plain as day! Appearing in answer to, answering in appearance to--

CRK. The crane is out!

YG. What?

CRK. Out of use. Withdrawn from service.

YG. What!

CRK. Once it became clear that all theatre asked of us was to stay out of it, the crane could be... downplayed.

YG. But my colleagues... went into the most elaborate--

CRK. This is all since their time. The lines were drawn up after them.

YG. Now wait a minute. You yourself spoke of "setting up the crane," "supplying motives to the crane"--

CRK. Goodness, it's still in use as a manner of speaking, a...vehicle for conveying things....

YG. A deception?

CRK. A device!

YG. I'm supposed to make my descent in a manner of speaking?

CRK. Exactly. You're supposed to make your descent --in a manner of speaking.

YG. Plier-~~B~~etween, of all the obstacles you have yet flung up in my path--

CRK. Ah, but now think: if you had not had a path of obstacles, had you had a path at all?

YG. I am a god from the machine! If there's no machine
 --where does that put me?

CRK. Past the help of machinery. Already in deeper
 than you know.

YG. Say that were so; and this, the peak recognition you
 have all this while been leading me up to--some last, ultimate,
 most outlying-- What were this, or any other, furthest reach
 but a jumping-off point from which to drop to the dancing-floor?
 (advancing toward "his" edge of platform)

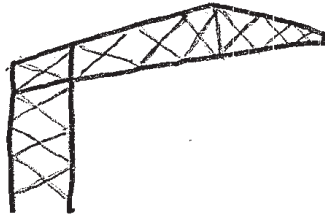
Look! It's picking up again! There, where the ways cross....
 A sword comes out of a scabbard. Dust is making for dust.
 Now--!

(The crane-shadow, as described in Act I,
 falls across the platform.)

No crane, huh? Withdrawn from service, huh? What do you call
that the shadow of?

CRK. What, indeed?

(The crane-shadow immediately begins to alter,
 going from its original shape:



to a pick-up-sticks pattern of randomly intersecting
 moving lines:



to a pattern of three such lines



that slide over and across each other, as if in
 search of their common point of intersection.)

For all the crossing and recrossing, one hesitates to say:

"jib-strut and bracing beam," when, truly, the impression is far more of ways looking for a way--a point which all may join in asserting, a juncture to which all paths will have led....

(The three moving bands of shadow find their point of intersection and lock on it. From now on, their movement is like that of the hour-, minute- and second-hands of a broken clock, spinning wildly out of relation to each other, but always around a common center.)

Shadow, perhaps, of an event--and what event we all could name stands under a shadow? Shadow, perhaps, of a destination--and who among us has a destination shadowy at best? How find my way into the event that overshadows me? By what route advance toward the destination that casts its shadow before?

YG. You don't mean--?

CRK. Would you enter upon the event. Enter the shadow! Advance to your destination!

YG. But how--?

CRK. Oh! And I thought you were so clear on what would constitute an advance over shadows.

YG. I can't think--

(The YG, like a mountain-climber trapped on a ledge, paces the platform, frantic for a way off. He probes with one foot over the side in search of an outcrop; drops to his knees and feels underneath the edge for a handhold, etc....)

CRK. All waits your arrival. Better hurry, though. It isn't going to wait forever.

YG. Wait a minute. I know a way....

(He launches into the DEA's Exercise from Act I. But he can only remember fragments of it, which he performs out of sequence, without conviction, in a jerky, disconnected way.)

"Where's my center? Lock on a point! Fall back! Flatten it out!"

(Gathering himself for one last go at the exercise, he squats down, closes his eyes and tries to draw in all his powers--but only succeeds in knotting himself up tighter. He holds onto the tension for a moment, then sags.)

It's no use, I can't--

(Straightening up, he becomes aware that the winged sandal of the Hermes' Garb has snagged on the short cape, effectively hogtying him. Irritably, he starts to shake himself free. Then, as if this "shaking free" movement had itself made something clear to him:)

Wait a minute! That's it....

(He now deliberately tears off cap, sandals and cape and flings them at the CRK's feet.)

Here!

CRK. What?

YG. Yours, no? Take them. They're just holding me up.

CRK. Trust me, you'd do better--

YG. (beginning, as he speaks, to advance cautiously into the shadow-pattern, feeling his way:) No! If the crane is gone, then gone is any single guise of the god, descending. One is... cut to the measure of the journey he goes. I must fashion me over into the word I bear; appear in the body of my own message--

(arriving at "his" edge of the platform and looking down)

Now sword is raised against sword. One... descends.

(lifts a foot over the side of the platform --but then suddenly draws back from the edge)

What about... getting up again?

CRK. The last of your worries!

YG. Will you be there... to bring me back?

CRK. My good young friend, what have I all this while been seeking to do but bring you back?

YG. The colleagues spoke of one god who never came up again....

CRK. He came up in their conversation, didn't he? Relax. You will arise as readily as the next difficulty.

YG. How do I do it?

CRK. Just... up and do it.

YG. Yes, but how--?

CRK. Look to the affairs of men. Then look up.

(The YG has his mouth open to reply--but then instead faces back round toward "his" edge of the platform and resumes his advance into the shadow, tentative at first, but soon broadening into a fluid, steady, confident walking that seems almost a walking-in-place, so gradual is his progress.

The whirl of shadows quickens and deepens around the YG, as he once again approaches "his" edge of the platform.

Now at last he arrives at the brink, lifts one foot up over it--and vanishes in darkness.

The center of the shadow-swirl now sweeps down off the platform and out onto the stage floor, where it continues its "wildly spinning clockhands" motion.

The CRK comes forward to the downstage edge of the platform and peers over, trying to follow the YG's progress. But he soon gives up and turns away. As he does so, Hermes' Garb--still lying where the YG flung it--catches his eye. He picks up the articles of clothing and stares at them in his hand for a moment. Then suddenly his grip on the garments tightens with resolve and he begins to put them on.

Lights fade on the platform.

Down on the stage floor, one of the whirling shadow-bands turns green--green light. The whirling continues.

Then a second band turns green. The whirling continues.

Now all three whirling bands are of green light.

The flute-music heard at a distance in Act I is now heard nearer at hand.

Every so often one of the whirling light beams "leaps the groove" and flashes out over the platform for a moment. By the light of these flashes (which continue until the YG's re-entrance) we catch glimpses of the DEA, standing where a moment ago the CRK had stood. She is still working on her Act I acting exercise--or rather, on the YG's version of it: descent as a progressive narrowing down and thinning out (see I.20-21).

In the play of green light on the stage floor two figures become visible up-center:

"Oedipus" (may be doubled by the SCHOLAR D.) and "Laius" (may be doubled by the OLD DEAR).

"Laius" mimes driving a chariot; "Oedipus" mimes standing in the path of the chariot, blocking its advance.

Both figures wear deeply recessed helmets, very slightly--subliminally!--reminiscent of Greek theatrical masks. "Oedipus" helmet has a large white feather mounted on it.

The two men are locked in combat--although the impression is more of an agreed-upon routine of fighting than of an actual fight.

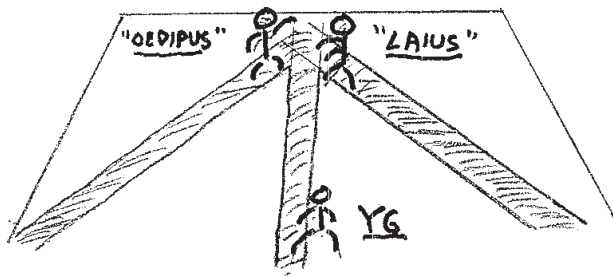
"Oedipus," his sword out and raised, bobs and weaves about his opponent, getting in thrusts, jabs and sideswipes from all directions. He moves with a pronounced hobble.

"Laius" wards off "Oedipus" blows with the reins of the chariot. These consist of three rigid lengths of rope, not attached to anything, but splaying out rod-like from "Laius" fist like the three prongs of a triton. (From below the point where they dangle down out of his fist, however, the reins hang limp and supple as ordinary rope.)

The YG enters, along the stage floor, from the side opposite to that by which he exited upstairs. Moving in the same "firmly advancing" manner with which he took that exit, he makes his way slowly across the downstage area. He shows no awareness of having come in on another level.

Just as he is halfway across the stage --i.e., about down-center--the three spinning bands of green light come to a halt with their hub of intersection falling directly upon the two combatants, up-center. From there, the two outer bands slant down and away along the stage floor toward down-left and down-right, respectively, while the central band comes cutting straight down the middle of the stage,

from up- to down-center. It is the "Three Roads Meeting in One Place" of the Oedipus legend:



The YG, who has been picked out down-center by the central green band, stops in his tracks as if blinded by the sudden light, and presses his fists to his eyes.

It is only now, opening and raising his eyes after a moment, that he seems to realize for the first time... he is down!

Shading his brow with his hand, he slowly scans the horizon....

Suddenly "Oedipus" and "Laius" strike upon his view--but as if at a far greater distance from him than they actually are: miles away!

He starts off upstage in their direction along the center path of green light. But his manner of advance is no longer so confident as before. Now he taps the ground out ahead of him with his foot before each step, as if probing for fissures or soft spots.... Every few steps his search for firm ground draws him off the green light-path a little to the right or a little to the left.... But despite these local detours, he is always basically making in a straight line toward up-center.

In this manner, with his attention fixed always downward, he approaches to within a few feet of "Oedipus" and "Laius"; stoops low to examine a final porous stretch of ground; takes one last step; straightens out--and comes up directly between the two combatants.

"Oedipus" and "Laius," startled, break off their fighting in mid-blow.

A little dazed, the YG looks back and forth from one to the other of them.

The first to recover is "Oedipus," who now raises his sword to resume striking at "Laius."

The YG parries the blow and wrests the sword away from "Oedipus," knocking the white feather off "Oedipus'" helmet in the process.

The flute-music breaks off in mid-phrase.

"Laius," as if expecting that the YG will now strike at him with "Oedipus" sword, instinctively cowers away and thrusts up his shield of reins in self-defense.

The YG wrests the reins away from "Laius."

Seeing his enemy thus unprotected, "Oedipus" instinctively reaches into his (empty) scabbard for his (absent) sword.

"Oedipus" and "Laius" both look toward the YG; then exchange puzzled looks with one another; then turn away and begin to exit in opposite directions. They walk off casually, like actors dropping a scene in mid-runthrough to take a break. But they can't quite seem to shake it, either: each keeps turning around as if expecting to be fetched back, run after, or at least called out to by the other, or by the YG.

The moment they are offstage, the sword and the reins seem to take on a life of their own in the YG's hands, each jerking and tugging him in a different direction.

The YG manages to bring sword and reins up over his head and there touches them together. As if this contact with one another somehow neutralized the force in each, all the jerking and tugging suddenly stops.

At this precise moment, the white feather, which had earlier become dislodged from "Oedipus" helmet and fluttered to the floor, catches the YG's eye.

The YG flings away sword and reins to either side, stoops down, and picks up the feather.

The flute-music resumes, louder and more plangent than before.

The YG holds the feather out before his eyes to examine it.

Now, like the ribs of a closing fan, the two side-beams of green light converge upon the central one till they have merged with it and there is only one beam of intense green light falling upon the YG.

A single stab of flute-sound.

The YG lifts the feather into the light, turning it quickly and deftly in one hand, as if in appraisal.

The shaft of green light on the YG slowly narrows and fades.)

ACT

III

Act III

(The platform, as in Act I. The closettree is back in place upstage-center; on it are heaped the outer garments of the OLD DEAR, the SCHOLAR D. and the DEA.)

At rise the OLD DEAR and the SCHOLAR D. are sleeping fitfully, propped up back to back against each other.

Near the onstage edge of the platform, the DEA is working on the pattern of abstract descent-movements which she could be glimpsed experimenting with toward the end of Act II.

As the DEA's movements grow more animated, the OLD DEAR's and SCHOLAR D.'s sleep grows more troubled.

Now the DEA hits a climax in her work, and the OLD DEAR lurches to his feet, still half-asleep.

This sudden, violent removal of his prop in turn wakens the SCHOLAR D., who also seems to have been having bad dreams.)

OLD DEAR. No, no! The actor...! Playing him...!
(wakes fully)

Oh, what an awful...! I had on a goatskin. They thought I was Dionysus. Their nails are over me. "Kids! I'm an actor!" They don't know from actors. Evohé! they're going to eat me alive--

(pause)

DEA. Yes? And then?

OLD DEAR. Oh, and then we were all back in my dressing-room having drinks and everyone was passing me over her wineskin to autograph.

SCHOLAR D. I had a nightmare, too. I dreamed all the gods fell out of the sky at once. But somehow there were no human situations for them to fall upon. In fact, there were no human beings at all. The whole earth was nothing but gods-at-intervals, like statues in a castle-park-- all those hands out and raised in gestures of mediation and annulment that found no takers. A whole world of Smoothers and Stayers with no one to turn it on but each other.... Since when do gods dream?

OLD DEAR. That's what you call a nightmare? He even dreams pedantic.

DEA. Listen, if you're going to work with dream-material, you have to take what comes. It's funny, though, on this one, I tend to find myself working more from the outside in. Not that I'm any less grabbed emotionally than the rest of you. A god... struggles and goes under--wow! I see the potential, not just for a new theatre-piece, but for a whole new kind of theatre-piece, you know?: one that spotlights the work-process of the actor as already the tragedy.

(pause)

OLD DEAR. I wish we'd hear something!

SCHOLAR D. Relax. You'll soon enough be listening to page after page of: "From thence now skimming o'er the Illyrian main"--

DEA. (to SCHOLAR D.) You think he got through?

OLD DEAR. Are you kidding? With Mechanōs personally reeling him in? Boy, all you need in this business is one real break....

DEA. (to SCHOLAR D.) Because, you know, if he were by any chance to--

OLD DEAR. Listen, I've given this mucho thought, I've slept on it, and I now feel I have to say: he makes it in there, more power to him--it's a thing he's worked for.

DEA. Ah. So, then, you agree it's none too soon we were getting ourselves in gear for a possible--

OLD DEAR. (goes pale) Ourselves! What's any splash he might make to do with--?

DEA. Well, it would kind of sort of open the way....

OLD DEAR. To what?
(and realizing--)

Oh!

SCHOLAR D. Somehow, I can't seriously envision--

DEA. Your dreams envision it.
(to OLD DEAR)

Yours, too. Hermes plies your sleep with images of starting in again.

SCHOLAR D. It's a remote possibility.

OLD DEAR. But a possibility. Oh, I told you we should have intervened while there was still-- Now it's too late, there's nothing we can do--

DEA. On the contrary, there is something actors working together can always do.

SCHOLAR D. What's that?

OLD DEAR. Evohé! Need you ask? If the stars were falling out of the sky, her solution would be a group-improvisation.

DEA. We can't stay back in this private image-work indefinitely. A re-opening of the lines is something that would affect every deus alike. We need to evolve a common response.

OLD DEAR. The last time we "evolved a common response," it drove the kid off the deep end.

SCHOLAR D. You got a better idea?

OLD DEAR. Oh, I wouldn't know an idea if it bit me. On with the improv! Only, please--no more mountain-climbing? I'm still sore from that last alp you took us up.

SCHOLAR D. (to DEA) What's the premise?

OLD DEAR. (in a fiendishly good imitation of the CRANEKEEPER) "OK, boys and girls, get your act together, crane leaves in a minute and a half."

DEA. No, no; not the actual-- What we want is a situation like enough to give usable feelings, yes, but at the same time-- different enough so that we don't just find ourselves up against all the same old blocks.

OLD DEAR. (again in imitation of the CRANEKEEPER) "OK, boys and girls, get your act together, stormcloud leaves in a minute and a half."

SCHOLAR D. (to DEA) How about...? The enemy squats at the gates. An envoy has been dispatched to treat for terms. What can be keeping that envoy...?

(The DEA motions him not to interrupt, she's thinking.)

Or this: It is evening. Still the child has not returned. The family crouch by the fire. Every eye is on the door....

DEA. Wait a minute, here it is! We're these human beings. Things are at a standstill. We look to the god to get things moving again. All scan the heavens. Where is that god?

OLD DEAR. Right.

SCHOLAR D. Got it. Close, but not too close.

(The three dei go into the improv. The DEA scans the horizon. The SCHOLAR D. throws back his head to the left, throws back his head to the right... makes a routine of throwing back his head. The OLD DEAR sinks to his knees, half-closes his eyes, and raises his arms: he is playing some generalized image of "dignified prayer.")

Enter the YOUNG GOD, crawling flat along the platform floor, as if a spray of bullets just overhead were holding him pinned. He now wears the full tragic costume, as did the other three dei in Act I; but his is scored with parallel burn-marks like those on Hermes' Garb. His face is covered with grime.

The other dei, intent on their improv, do not notice the YG. Then, suddenly, in one motion, he straightens right up in their midst--startling the OLD DEAR half to death. The DEA and the SCHOLAR D., facing out and away for purposes of the improv, still do not register the YG.)

OLD DEAR. (to the DEA and the SCHOLAR D.) Look!

DEA. Non-verbal work, please.

OLD DEAR. No, no. Look!

(The SCHOLAR D. and the DEA turn and see the YG. They immediately drop the improv, as if surprised in a guilty act.)

SCHOLAR D. Oh! You.

DEA. Tell us about it!

OLD DEAR. What was the upshot?

SCHOLAR D. What manner of reception--?

DEA. Did you finally find a way to clear up that misunderstanding?

OLD DEAR. Break the impasse?

DEA. Get things off dead-center?

SCHOLAR D. Which version finally prevailed when they went on?

YOUNGAGOD. They... went off. To either horizon.

OLD DEAR. (peering over front edge of platform) It's true. I don't see a soul down there. What did you say to send them all screaming for the exits ~~like that?~~

DEA. Hey! Take it easy.
(fingers the burn-marks on the YG's costume)
He's obviously had a rough time down there.

YG. Those... aren't necessarily from down there.

DEA. You didn't make it?

OLD DEAR. Mechanōs changed his mind?

SCHOLAR D. Or perhaps never was minded....
(to YG)

If you've misread the signs, it isn't going to stop with a few burn-marks.

OLD DEAR. You don't mean--?

SCHOLAR D. I mean: Mechanōs is not noted for letting things drop.

YG. Why didn't you tell me who this "Mechanōs" really was?

OLD DEAR. (appealing to other dei) Didn't we? Evohé!
I could have sworn we went into the most exhaustive--

SCHOLAR D. Indeed we did. On that and every other.
(to YG)

No use pleading ignorance; you're for it--unless, of course, he deems your not having made it in punishment enough.

YG. But--I did make it in!

(The dei exchange electrified glances.)

DEA. Tell us!

YG. Well--

OLD DEAR. Wait! Is there still that rocky high point that seems to start up out of nowhere in the middle of the Trōades?

(winces and rubs his foot)

I came down hard on that once.

DEA. Do the mists off Kathodōs still swirl up and escort you the last couple of hundred feet in?

SCHOLAR D. And how's old Atlas? Still bearing up? Oh, he used to make me green! I mean, there one would be, having moved heaven and earth--and he, meanwhile, quietly spanning the length....

YG. I'm afraid I didn't really--

SCHOLAR D. (exasperated) Apparently the passion for down doesn't include a passion for detail.

YG. It was so dark, you see....

DEA. (to SCHOLAR D.) Listen, an actor getting ready to go on has to draw in his circle of attention to the point where he blots out everything that isn't--

YG. "Blotted out," yes.... An active, working-- Almost as if ... the darkness itself was in motion, was motion.... I don't know how I ever made it through that night.

OLD DEAR. Mechanōs didn't start you till after sundown? No wonder everyone'd gone home.

YG. No, no, by "night" I mean--

DEA. We tried to warn you, it can get pretty murky between here and--

OLD DEAR. "Murky!" Listen, I made the journey down by night once, and let me tell you, the only way to describe it--

YG. Is "journey" the word? Is "down" the word? "Nothing gratifies the passion for down less than descent"-- Hermes was right on that score. Although, what became of all his "knots" and "tangles"....

OLD DEAR. Hermes? You talked this over with Hermes?

YG. What topic more natural--since there we both were: brought to the same pass, staring out over a common gulf....

DEA. Excuse me, I'm getting up a little performance-piece based on your experiences. Would you mind if I took some movement-impulses off your speaking?

YG. You're welcome to what you can find--although I'm not sure movement is really-- Certainly not of any distinct vertical-- It was more like... drifting off center--

(The DEA here begins to improvise movement-equivalents for the actions and images which the YG recounts. She keeps this up, insofar as possible, all through the YG's subsequent account of his descent and intervention.)

--a center, however, which only now, adrift, did one first become conscious of having occupied--or perhaps was only that moment bringing into being by ceasing to coincide with it....

OLD DEAR. It's true, when the machinery's working right, you can hardly tell the crane is in motion.

YG. What?

OLD DEAR. Sometimes it won't be until the prow scrapes the proskenion--

YG. Wait a minute. I didn't come in by crane.

The THREE DEI. What!

YG. How could I? The crane is gone. Pulled. Deactivated. Taken out not long after you all took yourselves out....

OLD DEAR. (to DEA) Ha! So much for your "resumption of service." What are they going to resume it in-- a Chrysler Phaeton?

DEA. But no problem! You never needed a whole bunch of machinery. All an actor ever really has to do to be present is allow himself to appear.

SCHOLAR D. (to YG) Look, I don't know where you're getting this about the crane--

YG. Why--from its faithful keeper. Where else?

SCHOLAR D. Mechanōs? Mechanōs is going around telling people that--? You must have misunderstood, Mechanōs would never--

YG. But it was he--"Mechanōs," as you persist in calling him--who sent me the other route.

OLD DEAR. "Other route"?

YG. Into the shadow.

OLD DEAR. What shadow?

YG. The... darkness that I'm telling you lay across the entire--

SCHOLAR D. But--there! You see? That was the crane's shadow; we all saw it. If Mechanōs directed you that way, he can only have been saying: follow the shadow back to the thing that cast it.

YG. As a matter of fact, that's exactly what he did say....

SCHOLAR D. There you are.

OLD DEAR. Wait a minute. I'm lost.
(to YG)

How do you finally come into the scene?

YG. By following out the shadow.

OLD DEAR. To the crane?

YG. To the end.

OLD DEAR. I don't see how a stroll in the shade ever landed you--

YG. It was the event's shadow--or: dim foreshadowing, first dark offer....

OLD DEAR. What "event"?

YG. But--that down there!
(points straight down)
That which I am all this while seeking to enter!

OLD DEAR. Well--enter it, then! Don't hang back in the shadows.

YG. It seems one entered this event by consenting to be overshadowed by it.

OLD DEAR. Evohé! Why do I suddenly have the feeling I'm back in
(jerks his thumb in the direction of the DEA)
"Theatre Games 101-A," here? Boy, wouldn't you just once like to come bopping in there like any other member of the company? I tell you, I'd even consider a walk-on that gave me the opportunity to, uh... walk on.

SCHOLAR D. (to YG) You're telling us, you advanced on the scene like a thief, under cover of--

YG. I did not so much advance through that darkness as learn whatever was happening to me in that darkness as my new definition of "advance."

SCHOLAR D. Hm! That could stand as a description of my last three research-projects.

OLD DEAR. That could stand as a description of the careers of half the actors I know.

DEA. That could stand as a description of any true course of experimental work.
(turns to YG)
Only... kind of a general description. When you use terms like

"enter," "advance," "follow out"--what kind of motion are we actually talking, here? Let me have an image I can play with.

YG. (thinks for a moment; then:) A writer is not very good at transitions. Time and again he finds himself falling back on phrases like: "Turning now to a consideration..." "From thence we pass..."

DEA. Too literary. Give me an action. Do I fight my way out of a sack? Stumble down moonless slopes? Come on blindfolded?

YG. You... come through--and again!--each moment now brings a breakthrough--and yet, it seems, always only into some further opportunity of breaking through....

DEA. (from way inside her physicalization) Awful lot of inner structure to this....

YG. But--it is all inner structure, being, as it is, an event's shadow. What would you expect an event to be casting but... its inner structure before? that series of successions ... opening back within...until at length one saw the point.

OLD DEAR. (to SCHOLAR D.) You see the point? I don't see the point.

(to YG)

What point?

YG. Only now... saw the point of light in that darkness.

(The DEA, in her improvising, stumbles--on the YG's words, as it were--and presses her hands to her eyes as if blinded.)

OLD DEAR. Morning already? You mean to say he kept you in transit all night? I hadn't realized we'd slept so long.

DEA. (still dazed, passing her hand over her eyes) What was that... incredibly bright--?

YG. Yes... and brighter with each breakthrough! I find myself dwelling with increasing illumination upon this single point which, in the end, all the shadowing--the whole of darkness--seemed to come down to.

But now... no sooner dwelt upon than this--"point," did I say? No! Of a far broader--in fact, of ever-broadening-- Going now before my gaze to a spot... a disc... a patch... an expanse--

DEA. But--wait a minute! This "point" you're seeing... would have to be the Earth on approach--no? From way out a tiny dot, but then looming larger and larger as the ground rushes up....

SCHOLAR D. No, no--other way round! It's his own reflection he's catching back off the roof of the theatre-building. At first he sees himself as "the point"--

OLD DEAR. Hm! I've yet to meet the young actor who didn't see himself as the point.

SCHOLAR D. --but then bulks larger and larger in his own eyes as in he comes....

OLD DEAR. (to YG) Well? Don't leave us in suspense:
(points back and forth between DEA and
SCHOLAR D.)

Which was it?

YG. Reflection touching its limits, or reality sending up the whole approach? How, with any certainty, when it was to the confluence of just those very... when even at this moment one appeared possibly to have reached the stage--

OLD DEAR. (pleasantly surprised) Hey! I'd about given up on your ever reaching the stage.

YG. --where precisely those alternative ways--the hermetic and the downright, mere depth and psychic depth, the self at bottom and the bottom itself--came to each other, touched, and crossed.

And there I put my foot down.

OLD DEAR. Boy, I'd have put my foot down long ago.

YG. I mean: I came on.

DEA. Came on what?

YG. Do you know, I'd given that endless thought. My first moment of world... would it be sun-warmed grass? feldspar? putrefaction? And yet, now, come to the point, nothing was so clear to me as that whatever the alighting foot first touches... whatever of earth swam up to meet me, I would consider myself met.

SCHOLAR D. You might have spared your speculation. The first thing you have to touch in the theatre is the roof of the scene-building.

OLD DEAR. The first thing you have to touch in the theatre is the hearts of the audience.

YG. The first thing, it seemed, I had to touch was down-- which, however, at once began to shrink from my touch--in a generally downward direction. Why should this be? Surely ground level is in deep enough. And yet, there one stood, waiting for further abysses to open--

OLD DEAR. You can spend half your life in this business waiting for an opening.

YG. --as if only now were the depths first offering; as if the real descent... started from here.

SCHOLAR D. "Real" descent? To what?

YG. (shrugs) The core of the thing. The heart of the matter. That tragic two-way strife--which, now, for all my efforts to stay on top of it, still seemed to lie out along the dusty plain at a distance greater than all the way I had come, down to this point.

OLD DEAR. (touches the tips of his two middle fingers together, opens out a vertical distance between them, tilts the vertical distance over onto its side and studies it:) But--wouldn't that put him in somewhere well upwind and to the south of the theatre precincts?

SCHOLAR D. Not necessarily. It depends whether you measure straight down the center aisle or out along one of the side-diazomata.

YG. Difficult to know just where one stood on that dusty blank expanse spreading featureless away....

SCHOLAR D. It's true; the scale of some of these post-classical theatre layouts you need a roadmap to get from the out-structures to the theologeion.

DEA. Although, of course, the Old Boys are always on the alert to bring you back within limits if you should exceed the bounds.

YG. They weren't really so-- Well, the one in the chariot was fairly well along; but the other, despite his limp, looked easily young enough to have been the other's--

DEA. No, no--I don't mean the two principals. I'm talking about...you know, the ensemble, the "gypsies," the Fifteen Circling About.

YG. There were only these two, each in his swirl of dust....

OLD DEAR. I can imagine they did raise a puff or two. Boy, can you just picture this pair of actors tearing around trying to make like an entire chorus? I tell you, the corner-cutting they try to get away with at some of these provincial houses....

DEA. Wait a minute. Was this a provincial theatre? How do we know that?

OLD DEAR. Total resident company of two and a layer of dust over everything? It sure wasn't the City Dionysia.

DEA. You know, just because a performance space isn't upholstered doesn't make it provincial. On the contrary--

SCHOLAR D. It does sound a bit off the beaten track....
(to the YG)

Did the scrollwork on the scene-building hint at the proximity of non-Hellenic design-centers?

YG. I don't recall any buildings.
(to the OLD DEAR)

What's the City Dionysia?

SCHOLAR D. Not exactly what you'd call a mania for specifics.

OLD DEAR. Listen, this was a performance, not a term-paper. The kid's checking make-up, running lines--he can't be expected to pick out every last--

YG. I picked out a flute.

DEA. Maybe he came down in the middle of the dithyrambic parade.

OLD DEAR. Or a Dionysian revel. We loved flutes.

SCHOLAR D. When's the last dithyrambic procession or Bacchic orgy you attended with a population of two?
(to YG)

Let's start again. What exactly did you see?

YG. I saw a chariot. Before the chariot, a man with a limp. At the reins of the chariot, an older man.

(pause)

SCHOLAR D. Yes? And?

(The YG shrugs: "that's it.")

But all around?

YG. All around...? Extension. Sun. Dirt.

OLD DEAR. (to DEA) Sounds like one of those relentless experimental stagings of yours: Philoctetes produced on a giant infected foot....

DEA. You know, that remark betrays an ignorance of the realities of the current experimental scene so profound as to---

OLD DEAR. Hey! I was in a Philoctetes like that, season before last.

DEA. Very small "oh."

YG. Oh, and in the distance, this mountain.

DEA. (looking to the SCHOLAR D.) Mountain?

OLD DEAR. Probably held over from your acting-exercise.

SCHOLAR D. (to DEA) Actually, quite a few Greek theatres have their seating-area carved into a hillside.

OLD DEAR. (to YG) How was the house, incidentally?

YG. House?

OLD DEAR. The rubes, the boobs, the pahtronz daze artz. Ikria packed to the gills?

YG. I counted only the man in the chariot, the hobbled man and myself.

DEA. Sounds like you stumbled into a rehearsal.

OLD DEAR. Listen, some of this avant-garde work can empty the hall faster than a Spartan raid.

SCHOLAR D. (to YG) Well, so here we have your two travellers squared off face to face beneath the slopes of a nearby--

YG. Oh, no, no, no! The mountain was far removed from any sort of-- Oh, far removed! Almost out of range, and yet huge even at the distance, and yet somehow... easy with its height, you know: bearing up under separation from a sky it failed of, sustaining it so well one almost felt oneself able in turn to reach out and touch--

OLD DEAR. But--that was some kind of drop!

SCHOLAR D. (mistaking the tone of this for wondering admiration) My guess would be: Atlas itself, towering as always head and shoulders above the common run of peaks....

OLD DEAR. No, no, I mean this scene he's describing has to have been painted on a-- "Vast, and yet at a distance, and yet you could almost reach out and touch"--that's exactly what a painted backdrop feels like to work in front of.

SCHOLAR D. Don't you know it's a myth the Greek theatre ever employed painted scenery? Oh, maybe the occasional decorated corbel set into a retaining wall....

OLD DEAR. What are you talking about? You want to hear all the houses I've played where--

SCHOLAR D. History isn't interested in your reminiscences. I've got monumental evidence. I can show you early south-Italian bell-kraters. I can take you to the exact passage in Vitruvius--

OLD DEAR. Yeah? Well, tell your monumental friend Vitruvius I have personally come out in front of painted storms, painted seas, painted isles.... Once I even made my entrance over a painted road.

YG. (just now remembering) Oh, and there was a road.

OLD DEAR. A painted road?

YG. A... glinting road. A pouring road.

SCHOLAR D. (to OLD DEAR) I'd like to hear how you get that with painted scenery.

OLD DEAR. (with a shrug) Coupla periaktoi, spinning in their sockets, tossing off successive views of the same site.

YG. A road... that did not so much seem to traverse the scene as... represent an advance over it, as... flash upon it whole.

SCHOLAR D. Sounds to me like one of those big lightning-machines drifting off preset.

OLD DEAR. You show me one provincial theatre that can boast a keraunoskopeion.

(to YG)

So, then, you would characterize this road as--?

YG. Roads, actually. Three of them, all coming together in one place--

OLD DEAR. (he's heard this before somewhere) Three roads... coming together in one... Three roads....

SCHOLAR D. You see? That wasn't any painted scene. He's describing the downstage choral entry-ramps.

OLD DEAR. Last time I looked, there were TWO parodoi.

SCHOLAR D. TWO parodoi converging upon ONE proskenion-- total: three "roads" meeting in one place.

(himself now first hearing the phrase)

"Three roads meeting in one..."

YG. Yes, and to their meeting--as if, of this, their meeting were the track kept--comes the hobbled man, comes the chariot man, about each of them hanging--

SCHOLAR D. A standard woolen traveller's chiton with overslung chlamys?

YG. An air of the familiar.

DEA. Now how could that be? You've never been in a play before. You don't know any actors.

YG. I don't know. But the moment the hobbled man stepped out before the chariot and lifted his sword--

SCHOLAR D. What? Wait a minute, did you say--? Swords were out? A sword was raised?

YG. Well, or what was I intervening in?

SCHOLAR D. Yes, but--

DEA. (to YG) I know! It must have been their masks you found familiar.

YG. Masks?

DEA. What they wore on their faces.

YG. What they wore on their faces were resolved expressions. Although, on what resolved, exactly....

OLD DEAR. You have just described exactly what a mask feels like to play to. Your Hermes get-up probably had much the same effect on them.

YG. I did not go in as Hermes!

SCHOLAR D. Yes, I notice you're out of costume. What happened?

YG. After a certain point, it... came away.

DEA. Gone!

OLD DEAR. It happens. The build-up of air and heat can peel you back like a fruit. Sometimes you hit the stage with nothing but a sandal and a smile.

DEA. (anxiously, to SCHOLAR D.) Yes, but... if Hermes has lost his stuff through our negligence--

SCHOLAR D. One can't forever be taking the part of Hermes!
The theatre wants Ganymedes, wants Neptunes, wants Hebes.
(to YG)

As which of these--?

YG. I'm not really clear whose part I was taking.

OLD DEAR. Well, so long as they recognized--well, not you,
exactly, how could they recognize you, this was your début--
but, so to speak, the god in you--

(pause)

They did recognize...?

YG. (doubtfully) They were pretty intent on their swordplay....

SCHOLAR D. Their what!

DEA. (to YG) You can bet they were. Contrary to what people
think, fighting is one of the most difficult actions to sustain
concentration over.

SCHOLAR D. (to YG) You're telling us these two characters
of yours were engaged in actual, physical--?

YG. Well... some sort of scuffle for... place or precedence
or what-have-you. And yet, somehow, in their manner of
joining issue, the emphasis was all on the joining.
Each fended off the other, yet it was hard not to feel that
what both were really defending against was... an awareness
of collaboration.

DEA. And you broke it up?

YG. I... went among them. I came between them.
I... blocked further developments.

SCHOLAR D. By word or by deed? ... of their attributes.

YG. By... possessing myself of their attributes.

OLD DEAR. Well--whatever works.

SCHOLAR D. (to YG) And your two agonists just... hung around
to be dispossessed?

YG. They... stumbled off to either horizon. Neither, it was clear, had given much thought to what might lie beyond this encounter. It was, clearly, the moment they had never expected to have to think past.

And now, with them gone, the three roads seem to unclench; the plain... slackens; the unremitting light remits....

(pause)

OLD DEAR. Can I be the only one of you geniuses who is finding all this awfully, awfully reminiscent of--?

SCHOLAR D. I know--I've been thinking it for some time: the three roads, the charioteer, the hobbled man-- it almost seems there's nothing else it could be but--

DEA. Yes, but

(points straight down with her toe)

they're not doing the Oedipus Rex down there.

OLD DEAR. Well, that's what I'm saying: it must have been a provincial theatre he came down in. Let's see if there are any Oedipuses in progress on the road.

(goes to front edge of platform and peers over)

"The Corinth"--Herakles Furens. "The Epidaur"--Electra.

"The Aulis"--Iphigenia in--

SCHOLAR D. Wait a minute--

OLD DEAR. "The Ephesus"--Ion. "The Thebes"--dark.

SCHOLAR D. You're wasting your time. It cannot have been the Oedipus Rex.

DEA. If you're saying the Oedipus Rex doesn't contain any roadside or mountain scenes--

SCHOLAR D. No, no--

OLD DEAR. More to the point, the Oedipus Rex doesn't contain a deus ex machina. Catch old Mr. Organic Action scooting in one of us unless his back was absolutely ~~to~~ against the wall.

SCHOLAR D. That, too; but--

DEA. (to OLD DEAR) Well, maybe it wasn't the Sophocles Oedipus. There are other versions, no?--and some of them must include moments Sophocles wouldn't touch.

(to SCHOLAR D.)

Yes?

SCHOLAR D. Oh, quite right. Let's see.... The Oedipus Nascens of Xenocles shows the exposure of newborn Oedipus on the cliffside. The Oedipus Quaerens of Strato lets us have the entire exchange with the Sphinx. The Oedipus Volans of Phrynichus brings him up to his final height, ready for the sky....

DEA. Yes, so very likely somewhere there's a version that contains a deus ex machina.

SCHOLAR D. Very likely there is. What you're not going to find anywhere in the corpus ever is a version that portrays the fight between Oedipus and Laius.

DEA. Pretty categorical....

SCHOLAR D. (impatiently brushing this aside) There cannot be a Greek play that brings Oedipus and his father before us "swords out and raised." The Greek stage refuses itself to violence.

OLD DEAR. Oh, right!

SCHOLAR D. No Greek tragedy is going to get within ten miles of the slaying of Laius.

DEA. Well, but... he didn't slay him; the kid prevented it.

OLD DEAR. Yes, and you find me one version of the Oedipus drama where the son is prevented from killing his father. It wouldn't be the Oedipus drama. It wasn't the Oedipus drama. It was something else.

DEA. But if no Greek play can contain a moment of violence--

OLD DEAR. It wasn't a Greek play. It wasn't a play.
(to YG)

You must have dreamed of descent.

YG. Indeed, of little else, now, these many--

OLD DEAR. No, no--I mean: literally dreamt the whole downward journey.

YG. What!

SCHOLAR D. (to OLD DEAR) You know, that's not such a dumb suggestion.

OLD DEAR. Oh! Mercy buttercup.

YG. But--

SCHOLAR D. (to YG) I know: "A god--dream?"--that's what I thought, too; but the evidence continues to mount. I myself, just prior to your return--

YG. Look, this is all very well, but--

SCHOLAR D. Yes, and come to think of it... mine, too, was a dream of descent....

YG. (reaching into his costume) I'd like to hear how you explain--

OLD DEAR. (shrugs) Oh, perhaps you dozed off in the crane --sorry, I'm forgetting: there is no crane; all right, then: dozed off in this, uh... "shadow" which you describe as overlaying the entire--

DEA. Unless, of course, all that about "entering the shadow" was just a fancy way of saying:
(makes a head-tipping-over-onto-joined-hands gesture of "nodding off")

SCHOLAR D. But--that would mean he dreamt the entire reconnoitre-and-approach phase!

DEA. He probably dreamt everything from Mechanōs on.

OLD DEAR. He probably dreamt Mechanōs.

YG. Did I dream this?

(He pulls out of his costume the white feather from the end of Act II.

At the same moment, the CRANEKEEPER appears, unobserved by the dei, far upstage on the platform. He is wearing Hermes' Garb, which is much too tight on him.)

OLD DEAR. Where did you get that?

YG. Off the plain. It must have come loose from the younger man's trappings in the course of the fight.

DEA. This is from there?

(Fascinated, she grabs it away from the YG, holds it up to the light, examines it from different angles....)

YG. Hey--!

(reaches for it--too late)

OLD DEAR. (shrugs) Eagles and hoopoes are forever brushing against this platform. That
(points to feather)
doesn't necessarily have to have come from downstairs.

SCHOLAR D. There's a way to know....

YG. How?

SCHOLAR D. Feathers used onstage are treated with a kind of resin or something so they won't frizz or get crushed--

OLD DEAR. Oh, right. And on a humid day the smell of that goo-- Here, let's see.

(He snatches the feather away from the DEA and holds it to his nose. The DEA reaches for it--too late.)

DEA. Hey--!

YG. (to SCHOLAR D.) So?

SCHOLAR D. Well, so all you've got to do is drop the feather from a height and see how it falls. If it's straight off the bird, it'll come fluttering gently to your feet. Whereas, if it's a theatre-feather, coated with wax, it should sink like a stone. Here, let's see....

(snatches the feather away from the OLD DEAR)

OLD DEAR. }
DEA. } (together) Hey--!

(Both the OLD DEAR and the DEA try to snatch back the feather from the SCHOLAR D., who lifts it high overhead, partly to put it out of their reach, but also for maximum drop.)

SCHOLAR D. Will, you stand clear, I'm just trying to--

(The YG comes up behind the SCH. D. and snatches the feather from him.)

SCHOLAR D. }
 OLD DEAR. } (together) Hey--!
 DEA. }

YG. If anyone's going to make trial of my experience, it's--

(Stretching on tiptoes, he raises the feather high overhead. The other dei jump for it, like dogs for a bone.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, the CRANEKEEPER is in their midst and the feather is in his hand.)

CRK. (holding the feather up out of reach of all of them)

The sound of discord reached me where I sat,
 Rising above the clamor of the crane.

Oh, that the warring energies within

Theatre might one day join, not jar--and oh!

Would that that day were come! For here is need

Of all your strengths, and all your kinds of strength,
 To stem the chaos

(points at YG)

this one's acts have wrought.

(pockets the feather)

DEA. What's the matter?

OLD DEAR. (to CRK) Look, before you say a word: you have to appreciate we were only acting on what we took to be your own, clearly expressed-- I mean, right up until the moment you sent round the crane--

SCHOLAR D. --Or seemed to send round the crane--it's since been explained to us--but at the time, Lord Mechanōs--

OLD DEAR. Exactly. At the time.

SCHOLAR D. --what could we suppose but that we saw your will in the shadow?

YG. Lord Mechanōs?

OLD DEAR. (to CRK) Anyway, look, here he is back safe and no harm done--

CRK. No harm! He has brought confusion upon the entire Greek scene!

OLD DEAR. Yes, we heard about the periaktoi spinning out of control....

SCHOLAR D. (glaring at OLD DEAR) ...the lightning-machines flashing out distress signals to all corners of the theatre-building....

CRK. I'm afraid the consequences are being felt far beyond the theatre.

DEA. (to OLD DEAR and SCHOLAR D.) I told you he must have come plowing into the dithyrambic procession.

CRK. The dithyrambic procession goes forward for the moment. The question is whether there's going to be any dramatic festival for it to culminate in.

DEA. Any dramatic--! Cripes, what did he do?

CRK. Only broke up the fight to the death between Oedipus and Laius.

OLD DEAR. Oh, that....

SCHOLAR D. Listen, we made the same mistake; it's natural enough, what with everything seeming to point--the crossroads, the charioteer, the hobbled man.... But what you're forgetting--listen, as did we!--is that no Greek play can possibly contain the violence between Oedipus and Laius.

CRK. Exactly!

SCHOLAR D. Yes, so you see--

CRK. He intruded upon the event itself!

SCHOLAR D. Did he now?

DEA. Really?

OLD DEAR. Is that something or is that something?

(It is obvious that the dei have no idea what the CRK is talking about.)

CRK. Oedipus was just setting forth from Delphi, where he had received the dread prophecy--

OLD DEAR. (looking over front edge of platform) Ah, yes, "The Delphi." There she sits--half-empty as usual. The oracle grabs the crowds. I don't know how a mere theatre's supposed to compete.

CRK. Already his feet are bent upon the fatal road to Thebes--

OLD DEAR. Tell him he can take his time. Last time I looked "The Thebes" was--

(another look over front edge of platform)

Yep. Still dark. Closed for rehearsals, probably.

CRK. What's the matter with you? No one's talking about theatres or theatre-buildings now. If it all could have been kept within the bounds of theatre.... But oh, no: he has to go and, to the actual Oedipus, moving over actual earth, from Real Life Delphi to Real Life Thebes--

SCHOLAR D. Ah, yes. The Descent into Realism-- an all-too-familiar-- Let theatre once abandon the god-like heights of tragic achievement, and it will soon find itself slogging through endless flat stretches of realistic drama, where Not Being Able to Happen is the tragedy, and no myth readily follows.

CRK. "Endless," you say? Why, I wouldn't estimate the distance at much above-- Let's see, keeping to the coast road, it would actually be well under-- But even if, like Oedipus now, you put the sea behind you and strike off crosscountry, the total mileage from Delphi to Thebes can't be much more than--

(The CRK pauses to calculate on his fingers. The DEA, OLD DEAR and SCHOLAR D. exchange puzzled looks.)

SCHOLAR D. Oh, wait a minute. I think I know what he-- You know those sorts of... corridor parts we find ourselves stumbling through occasionally, where it always seems like everybody's perpetually rushing around to get into position?

DEA. You mean, rehearsals?

OLD DEAR. You mean, backstage?

SCHOLAR D. No, no; not on the way to performance, but sort of... between occasions we perform....

DEA. You don't mean that blurry stuff around the edges of theatre and flowing up into the cracks between theatres--?
(to CRK)
What was the word you--?

CRK. "Real Life"!

OLD DEAR. (beginning to see an enormous joke) Evohé!
You're not telling us the kid came down in one of those... undeveloped sections, those... utility areas--what was the expression, again?

CRK. (exasperated) He came down in actuality!

OLD DEAR. (exploding in giggles, as if at the very sound of the word) That's it!
(to YG)

No wonder things seemed a mite shadowy, old son. You came down in
(pretends to be interrupted by a furious sneeze)

ak-choo! I say: came down in
(and again)

ak-choo! Down in

(surrenders to a wild crescendo of sneezes:)

ak-choo! Ak-choo! Ak-choo!

(The SCHOLAR D. and the DEA, also getting a little silly, join in:)

SCHOLAR D. }

OLD DEAR. }

DEA. }

(together) Ak-choo! Ak-choo! AK-CHOO! AK-CHOO!

(climaxing in)

AK-CHOOALITY!

(The three dei roll apart. They are feeling much better.)

YG. (to the CRK) I was.... Where was I?

OLD DEAR. Well, that certainly explains the dust on the dancing-floor.

SCHOLAR D. And the shoestring cast.

DEA. And the low attendance figures.

SCHOLAR D. Talk about overextending yourself! I've heard of missing a cue, missing an entrance, missing a performance. But to actually miss the theatre...!

DEA. I miss the theatre.

OLD DEAR. (to SCHOLAR D.) In a way, though, what could be more typical of these young actors coming up now? They want to be in pictures. They want to be in the columns. They want to be in politics. They want to be everywhere but in the theatre.

DEA. But now let's not get all hung up on a rigid life/theatre thing, either, when all the really interesting stuff is in the shadowy area that lies between.

OLD DEAR. Oh, yes...

(physically parodying the DEA's earlier movement-work off the YG's descent-narrative)

"the shadowy area... that lies between...."

(to CRK and SCHOLAR D.)

She just doesn't want to see all the work she's put in on her piece about him go down the tubes.

DEA. Oh, but you know--it's only now I really feel I'm finding the center of this material. A theatre god who falls away from the theatre--what a great subject! What a tragic falling-out!

OLD DEAR. (in a soap opera announcer's voice)

"Out--But Not Down: the Tragedy of a Man Who Couldn't Seem to Find the Way to his Tragedy."

DEA. Give it a rest, OK?

(to YG)

How do you feel?

YG. A little down.
(to CRK)

Where did you say I--?

CRK. Smack, dab, bang in the midst of--

DEA. Hey! Back off, will you. We've got a group-member here who's had a deeply upsetting response to the work--

CRK. He's had a deeply--! Do you realize that thanks to this youngster, the whole Greek cosmos has been stood on its ear?

OLD DEAR. Oh, come on! So he busted up some road-company production of--

(The CRK opens his mouth to protest)

Sorry: busted up the "ak-choo-al" event of Oedipus Slaying Laius. What's the big deal?

CRK. As the direct result of this single act, it's coming out a whole different world--one where, for starters, no Antigone will ever bury a brother slain in civil wars now not destined to take place against a tyrant who shall never mount the throne.

DEA. Sounds like a big improvement to me.

OLD DEAR. (to CRK) Anyway, all that sort of thing... it's out of our hands.

CRK. Well, I'm afraid you're just going to have to... take it in hand again!

SCHOLAR D. Meaning?

CRK. The management expects every available deus to get in there and apply himself to reversing the tide.

DEA. (with suppressed excitement) Get in there...!

OLD DEAR. Oh, I knew it, didn't I tell you in the end he'd
(indicating the YG)
bring us all down with him?

SCHOLAR D. (to CRK) And what would that entail, exactly, "reversing the tide"?

CRK. It entails catching and halting the spread of consequences out from this act before the world goes all down another fork.

OLD DEAR. You mean... put everything back as it was?

CRK. Well, or suppose we say: contain the damage. There are always bound to remain great tracts unreclaimed. But the effects can be minimized.

SCHOLAR D. How--if you don't mind my asking? If, as you say, this whole tangle of consequences already lies coiled in his act--

CRK. Ah, now, surely, as gods from the machine, you must know a little something about placing yourselves in the path of an organic development.

OLD DEAR. (makes a face) Apparitions on the air. Visions by shrine and templeside. I don't know....

CRK. You don't know! What do you know? Can it be a matter of perfect indifference to you whether Greece keeps or does not keep altars aflame before the gods of Greece?

DEA. Actually, at this point we tend to think of ourselves more as actors than as gods....

CRK. Being a god is only an advanced case of being an actor. Actor or god, I doubt you are prepared to do without the tribute of every eye fixed. Actor or god, you're needed as never before.

DEA. Really? We are?

OLD DEAR. Oh, sure, they're all over us now. But one remembers the times... the attitudes.... All those cracks about tired old devices that should have been retired years ago.

DEA. The sleeves pressed to lips to conceal a yawn.

SCHOLAR D. The cries from the back of the house of "Here come the marines!"

CRK. It won't be like before! Don't you see, events have lost the ability to shift for themselves. As the only ones who any longer know where things go, you'll have a free hand, center stage; they'll be your situations.

DEA. (struck by this) Hm....

(looks to SCHOLAR D.)

OLD DEAR. (to CRK) But even if we were to... accept the engagement, I don't see how, with the crane out of service--

CRK. You say the word and it's back in service. The theatre can be ready for you at a moment's notice.

OLD DEAR. (struck by this) Hm....

(looks to SCHOLAR D.)

SCHOLAR D. (to CRK) Why us? After all... isn't the responsibility clearly another's?

OLD DEAR. Yeah, he
(indicating YG)
got us into this, let him get us out.

CRK. Be assured: he also has his role to discharge.

(The YG looks up quickly.)

SCHOLAR D. Yes, but when I spoke of "another".... Forgive me, Lord Mechanōs, I don't quite know how to say this, but after all... the boy didn't just wander off course, you directed him. Away from theatre. Into the shadow of some real event.

CRK. And since when is theatre anything but "the shadow of some real event"? Not that for a moment I mean to deny my share in all this. That's why I'm here.

OLD DEAR. You mean, you personally intend--?

(makes a swooping downward gesture)

CRK. To take you in. To put you down. My hand... is never from the wheel. I'm with you... every step of the way.

SCHOLAR D. (struck by this) Hm....

DEA. (to SCHOLAR D.) Well?

OLD DEAR. (to SCHOLAR D.) Well?

SCHOLAR D. Well....

(The three dei eye each other, none wishing to be the first....)

YG. And yet--they hesitate. Perhaps they remember how firm-set, ~~formerly~~, was their Hermes against their going-- and so cannot now but wonder at his present position.

DEA. (to CRK) Just where is Hermes in all this?

CRK. Why--at your side. In your midst. With you every step of the way.

SCHOLAR D. When may we expect to be hearing from him?

YG. What do you mean, when may you expect to be hearing from him, you're hearing from him.

OLD DEAR. No one hears from Hermes much these days. Since he made it big, he moves in a different sphere.

YG. What are you talking about? There he is!

(points to CRK)

OLD DEAR. What!

YG. Not but what I, too, don't wonder at the guise, wonder at the moment--above all, wonder at this sudden ardor for all as before. A much-changed Hermes, after all, might sooner be expected to applaud much change, since amid it his own might pass virtually without remark.

OLD DEAR. A much-changed--?
(points to CRK)

Evohé! This--Hermes?

DEA. Lord Mechanōs, didn't you let it be known--

CRK. Believe me, I did nothing but try.

OLD DEAR. (to YG) This is Mechanōs. Surely you--
(to SCHOLAR D. and DEA)
Wouldn't they have had to at least cross paths at the moment when--? Oh, but of course: he didn't take the crane.

YG. (to the three dei) Look, I understand why you didn't just tell me straight off: if to no more than this
(indicates the CRK)
the God Withdrawing, to how much less you--mere Shadows of the Course, Followers in the Wake of the Hermetic Backout.... But there doesn't seem much point now. Why not simply...
(kneels to CRK)
hail Lord Hermes!

DEA. (to SCHOLAR D.) Where's he getting this from?

SCHOLAR D. I can't begin to imagine.
(to YG)

Really, just because he's wearing Hermes' Garb--
(to CRK)

By the way, sire, how did you come by--?
(points to Hermes' Garb)

CRK. (with a look at the YG) Oh... fell to my share.

YG. What do you mean, "fell to your share"? I flung it in your face!

OLD DEAR. Well, if you gave him the things, I don't see how you can make so much of his wearing them.

YG. But it's nothing to do with--! I saw, he acknowledged-- But you can't. My god. You still can't! You never can!

CRK. (to the other three dei) Friends! We stand here disputing--and meanwhile the consequences mount. Each moment that passes carries the Greek world a little farther from itself.

DEA. But what are all these "consequences"? As far as I can see, all we're talking about is, at most, what, two, three excisions from the standard repertoire. Let's see..... If Oedipus never gets exiled, we lose the Oedipus at Colonus, obviously. If he never kills Laius and has children by Jocasta, out go the Antigone and The Seven Against Thebes--oh, and I guess you have to throw in The Suppliant Women, which presupposes the events of The Seven Against Thebes. Total damage: four, maybe five, classroom favorites--and good riddance to them! Greek drama is already up to its eyeballs in the scripted and the verbal. Surely it can sustain the loss of a few dramatic texts.

CRK. Yes? And can Greek drama sustain the loss of the Greek theatre?

DEA. I really don't see--

CRK. (to SCHOLAR D.) Will you join me in giving this young lady a lesson in historical entailment?

(addressing the DEA, but pausing at the end of each premise to allow the SCHOLAR D. to supply the conclusion:)

If Oedipus never kills his father--

SCHOLAR D. --he will never marry his mother and be driven from his native city.

CRK. If he is never driven from his native city--

SCHOLAR D. --he will never be forced to seek refuge in Athens.

CRK. If he is never forced to seek refuge in Athens--

SCHOLAR D. --he will never be obliged to promise the Athenians prosperity in return.

CRK. If Athens does not enjoy prosperity--

SCHOLAR D. --she will never develop her set of distinctive cultural institutions--

CRK. --foremost among which are--

SCHOLAR D. --are--my god!--are her dramatic festivals!

CRK. (to DEA) Such are the "losses" you speak of so lightly. Such are the losses we are staring down the barrel of. Nothing but the descent of her gods can save the Greek theatre now!

YG. (to CRK) Oh, there it is! I wondered whence all the urgency-- Didn't seem as if a little thing like the world coming out different would suffice to explain.... But, now, the collapse of the Whole Arrangement--for how shall it any longer be possible to argue: "my absence, my service," at a moment when, so clearly, nothing but the most resolute entering in--

(to the dei, pointing to the CRK)

Ah, friends, look again: by his vehemence, if by none other mark-- Who but Hermes has such a stake in the fortunes of, who but Hermes is on his feet at a challenge to, the Hermetic Backout?

CRK. Not a god here this does not touch as nearly as Hermes! Does the theatre totter? Come, tread with me the last, few-- No Oedipus--no Athens: true. No Athens--no theatre: yes, but further: No theatre--

OLD DEAR. --No crane!

CRK. There is always the crane. Its dependence on-- indeed, its very connection with--any sort of theatrical structure is... more or less of a fiction. Already before the first foot was lifted in the first glade, the crane laid its dark angles across the Attic noon. Theatre... merely packed in around.

OLD DEAR. (raising an imaginary glass in a mock-impressed toast) To the crane! Well, then?

CRK. Ah, but not all the devices of Greek stagecraft are so... self-sustaining. Some there are... whose very existence ... hangs by a thread. This platform, for example...

(stamps his foot)

can you not feel... how it teeters on the brink... of having never been built?

(The dei look puzzled.)

Ah, friends! Not with me yet? If Oedipus never takes that first step toward theatre which is the slaying of Laius-- there'll be no dei ex machina!

And that's the direction things are headed, even as we speak, unless some kindly god intervenes.

(The three dei don't get it. The CRK spells it out:)

Unless some kindly god intervenes.

(The three dei look at each other, weakening.)

Pneumata and chums! I know your resistances: in myself, also, I meet them. In my ears, too, still resound the warnings of Hermes: "Forever one too many, you are best out of it. Come! Away!" Ah, but these are circumstances, this is a moment--oh, my friends!, here at last is a situation where for once, the deus ex machina is the inevitable solution!

(At the same moment, as if in silent consensus, the OLD DEAR, the SCHOLAR D. and the DEA "break ranks," start upstage toward the clothestree, on which their outer garments are heaped, and begin to get dressed.)

OLD DEAR. (in a manner that acknowledges nothing of the CRK's efforts at persuasion--as if introducing a whole new subject:) I know I've always said: no comebacks. But I guess in my heart of hearts I always knew if the package was right.... One last wild hillside: torches, clappers--the works. Like to see anybody question the involvement of a god who's pounding in their veins.

(to CRK)

The crane--after all this while, is it still--?

CRK. Right where you left it.

OLD DEAR. You understand, if I ask, it's only that, on the point of return, I wouldn't mind being able to feel a shade more confident--

CRK. It works both ways.

OLD DEAR. (not sure how to take this) Ah. Well--evohé, people-people.

(exits)

(The DEA approaches the YG.)

DEA. I don't want you to get the idea I'm backing away from our project. It's just that I've come to feel we should be doing a lot more to involve our audiences directly in our process. After all, if we vanish into workshop and slam the door behind us--how can we then turn around and blame the public for staying away? I mean, who's setting who the example? Anyway... I think I've come about as far as I can come working off verbal impulses. I need to get into the space, you know?

(starts to leave, turns back to YG)

Oh, one thing: how did you get back up?

CRK. (before YG can reply) My first step down already puts me in the way of return.

(The YG looks at the CRK.)

DEA. That's interesting....

(She exits, trying to develop a movement-pattern for "a first step down that already puts you in the way of return.")

The SCHOLAR D. approaches the YG.)

SCHOLAR D. For some time now I have been meditating... a return to the field. In no way should this be seen as a retreat from the high ground of scholarship! Much fine work has been done, and continues to be done, at a remove from the theatrical life of its day. (One thinks, for example, of the late scholiast, Pollux composing his great treatise on stage machinery solely from documentary sources seven hundred years after the fact.) And yet...

(approaches front edge of platform)

this endless hovering over the same tracts... never getting one's hands dirty... never seeming to approach more near....

(peers intently over platform)

Strange... a world from which it has all been lifted still registers as "The World, Pretty Well." It's only when one zeroes in a bit--goes to look for, say, Philoctetes' island, and comes up with a minor Aegean landfall; seeks "Chalcis' reddening strand," and there's this nondescript patch of Mediterranean beach--that the true extent, the full magnitude, first begins to.... A vast labor of sorting and reclassification lies before us: which to accomplish--and perhaps thereby in the end regain my former eminence--

CRK. "Perhaps regain"--? Surely you do not challenge my power to--? Here is my hand upon the crane: can you for a moment doubt that I will... take you up on it?

SCHOLAR D. I meant: regain my former eminence in my discipline; produce a revival of scholarship; put some drama back in the field. A great work!--one, however, which is only able to be performed on site.

Which brings me to the crane....
(exits)

(The YG looks after the departed dei.)

CRK. I know--how could one not be thinking it?-- "Easier, far, for them!" They've but... to straddle their storm or two, gleam forth from their grove or two--and then quick back upstairs to bask in the impact. Whereas--in one's own case? Difficult, even, to imagine restitution on a scale, a role... that would once begin to be commensurate--

But now look up! For just such a role,--all yours and just yours--to no other talent fitted, by no lesser transgression earned--stands gaping wide.

SCHOLAR D. }

OLD DEAR. }

DEA. }

(offstage, impatiently) Mechanōs!

YG. Do they really not know you?

CRK. They know me for Mechanōs--as another might know me for Hermes. Mainly, they know what they have to do.

YG. Fortunate are the gods! But, then, I, too know what I have to do.

(He crosses to the closet, kicks off his shoes, and begins to remove his clothes.)

CRK. Hey! What are you--? You can't go in there without--?

YG. I'm not going anywhere.

CRK. What?

YG. Least of all, in search of any "roles." I'm letting my theatrical connections lapse.

CRK. What on earth--?

YG. Have I not achieved what every deus ex machina since the curtain rose only dreamed of: come bashing in through the skylight and scattered the scene? My trajectory... is accomplished. I am... where I always wanted to be.

CRK. You've had a remarkable début, surely--

YG. Début and farewell, all in one.

CRK. --but if you now intend to capitalize on it--

YG. I intend to reflect on it, repose on it, gaze till I have gazed my fill on it. It's... the high point of my career, the achievement... I am above all determined to preserve.

CRK. What do you imagine us to be discussing if not how best to preserve your achievement?

YG. I don't understand. Were you not but now adjuring me to put a hand, lend my strength to--

CRK. --the work of reclamation? Oh, I think there we may trust your colleagues to do what must be done. No, when I speak of "a role all yours and just yours"... What if you were now to take your departure from theatre--

YG. I tell you, I have taken my departure from theatre!

CRK. I say: take your departure from theatre and...
replay it as theatre?

YG. A re-enactment?

CRK. A tour. A one-man show. Hillside and agora.
Educational bookings all up and down the Peloponnese.

YG. How is that going to arrest "the chaos now threatening
the whole Greek scene"?

CRK. Once the situation's been claimed for theatre, it won't
matter so much whether it's arrested or not.

SCHOLAR D. }
OLD DEAR. } (offstage, impatiently) Mechanōs! Mechanōs!
DEA. (

YG. Still they call for Mechanōs.

CRK. The situation calls for Mechanōs.

YG. Thinkest thou? I would say the situation calls for
Hermes. I would say the situation cries out for Hermes.

CRK. A cry for Mechanōs may bring on Hermes.

YG. Yes? And a cry for Hermes--what may that bring on?--
especially now, with "the damage spreading by the moment"
--soon no Athens, only slightly less soonnottheatre--

CRK. If you'll agree to my plan, there's no limit to the
amount of damage we can absorb--up to and including the
non-foundation of the Greek theatre. Because in your work,
dramatic art would have found a new starting-point--this time
unassailable. A theatre that has learned to take its dangers
for its subject, that can turn back into itself even the impulse
to depart from it, is safe for the duration.

YG. Those sound to me like the sorts of recognitions one
retires from the scene with.

YG. Yes... that's more or less the view of our goddess-friend --who, moreover, claims to have already roughed out this entire little-- Maybe you should offer the gig to her. As for me... I'm afraid my dramatic potential escapes me. To "make a show" of it, to set about finding theatrical equivalents for the whole immense downturn--

CRK. --you just come out onstage and do what you did: the downcast looks, the tentative steps, the yearning glances back up toward a Height That No More--

YG. Yes, but what I "did" was--not to come out onstage! I performed the actual descent!

CRK. Well? And what am I proposing but that you perform the actual? Of the falling out with theatre, too, theatre is made. Why should not the stock of theatrical passions be joined in repertory by the passion for down?

YG. But down--is out! Surely if this little excursion of mine proves anything, it's that... to have come down in reality is to have gone beyond theatre, exceeded the bounds of theatre--

CRK. Thinkest thou? Why, then--welcome to the fold!

YG. What? What "fold"?

CRK. Of the Sitters By. The Keepers Hence. The Confraternity of Hermes.

YG. Hermes! What's any of this to do with--?

CRK. The theatre "exceeded"? The theatre "gone beyond"? God of Upscrambling, you yourself--

YG. What!

CRK. --could not have put it better; indeed, need scarce have put it different.

YG. But--I look upon Hermes as everything I am not!

CRK. Look again! And tell me if you do not rather look upon two figures... surely making, if not surely made, for one another; a match--if something less than perfectly matched. What is Hermes if not... the Young God a little further down the line?

YG. Hermes... is above all what I would avoid becoming!

CRK. But--in the best tradition of Greek theatre--can only avoid by becoming, become in avoidance. Would it not be wiser to allow some commerce between all you are and all you least are; all that holds off and all that enters in? We are along a single trajectory, thou and I--though never at a single point along it. Between the heights of avoidance and a profound immersion plies the crane; For every up, a down. And for every passion for down--

YG. It's not true! I had effects! I made it in to--

CRK. You made it into grounds for withdrawal. What more could Hermes himself have made it into?

YG. Yes, since by a going hence alone could be secured--

CRK. --one tells oneself--

YG. ---all the gain of a going in--

CRK. --and so reflecting, takes one's seat at the winch.

YG. I'm not "one"! I'm not Hermes! I'm not you!

CRK. Would you flee the comparison?

(points straight down)

This way safety lies!

(The YG starts for the front edge of the platform, but pulls up short.)

YG. Almost had me for a moment there! Sooner than come down to him, to what depths was I not prepared--? But, now, see--!

(crosses to the closetree and resumes undressing)

CRK. Hey! What do you think you're--?

YG. Coming out on top. Remaining above the fray.
The Greek theatre does not fight its battles in public
~~--was it~~ not even so we knew me to have strayed past its
 bounds? Well, I shall not stray that way again.
 Look now! I hold off from entering in. I invite you to
 enter into my holding off. Hermes, Hermes, where art thou?

(The YG is all the while undressing.
 He is down to his last garment, the wraparound
 white loincloth from Act I, when--)

CRK. (suddenly points a finger straight out at the YG)
 You don't believe it!

YG. What?

CRK. All this about "preserving achievements," "keeping
 above the fray".... You're just afraid of getting in there
 and learning the truth.

YG. Afraid? Listen, I'm not the one the prospect of
a world all different sends into all sorts of--

CRK. No? And what about the prospect of a world
no different at all, a surface that has scarcely been scratched...?

YG. What?

CRK. Are you sure you've really had all these "effects"
 you're so proud of?

YG. WHAT!

CRK. Such vast stretches of history, legend, myth--
 how could one ever really be sure?

YG. What do you mean, how could one be sure? You told one!
 All my information comes straight from you!

CRK. Well, here is a misgiving also straight from me:
 What if... you were never there at all?

YG. This is crazy. A moment ago I'm supposed to have
 changed the course of history. Now you're raising doubts
 I so much as--

CRK. Made a dent? Left your mark?

(squints over front edge of platform)

Nothing visible from this distance. Or... nothing that really carries any weight, anyway. Nothing you could actually hold in your hand.

YG. Wait a minute, there is something I....

(begins rummaging through his cast-off costume on the closettree in search of the feather)

CRK. (produces the feather from within his costume and holds it up to the light appraisingly) I don't know, now, if it was me planning to spend the rest of forever squatting on my gains, I'd want to be pretty clear just how much weight to assign—

YG. Hey! Where did you--?

CRK. There is, of course,

(lifts feather high overhead)

The Test to perform--but of performance, to him, let no man speak: he will not take the plunge, and so... all hangs suspended:

(trawls feather back and forth like a dipping wing)

In flight or in theatre? This world or another? Act or drift?

YG. Ah, what is it with you? Then, when I hungered and thirsted downward, you pulled every string you knew to draw me up short--staying out was then the only way. Now I am well content to hold up here--and see how you go about to argue me down.

CRK. To this, what reply but--?

SCHOLAR D. (from offstage) Mechanōs!

OLD DEAR. (from offstage) Mechanōs!

DEA. (from offstage) Mecha-- Hermes!

YG. (turns, his eyes big with wonder, toward the CRK) What--?

CRK. --It is the nature of the device!

(As he speaks the following, the CRK starts edging around toward the offstage side of the platform.

Instinctively compensating, the YG comes a little further onstage.)

It's all done by counterweighting. A deus ex machina is forever rushing around to the side where weight is needed, coming out now at this position, now at that--how else may a god of the theatre hope to prevail but by righting a balance?

ALL THREE OFFSTAGE DEI. (a single powerful cry:) Hermes!

YG. How--?

(As if set in motion by this last cry of the dei, the CRK now begins "winding up" like a softball pitcher to toss the feather underhand into the air. He whirls his arm round faster and faster, all the while continuing to back offstage.)

CRK. Ah, really, you should try to get more comfortable with these little exchanges and reversals. What is theatre but exchanges? What is theatre but--?

(The CRK releases the feather straight up (or rather, appears to the YG to do so: the audience will quite clearly see him palm it), and simultaneously backs the final step offstage.

The YG shades his eyes and looks directly up into the sun to follow the descent of the feather. But after a moment he concludes that the CRK has flung the feather out too far--it is not going to come to rest on the platform, but will continue down past the platform's front edge, and on toward the stage floor.

Alarmed and galvanized, the YG--without a thought, natural as a monkey--scampers down one of the legs of the platform and out onto the stage floor--he is there before he knows it.

Shading his eyes, he casts his gaze upward, so as to bring the feather--which he has had to leave off tracking while he descended--back into view.

In the course of scanning the sky, he suddenly catches sight of the platform--way up there!

And only now does it first dawn on him... where he stands.

In wonder, he looks round to every horizon for confirmation... yes! ground level.

Then, as if this were the first moment of arrest to a fall he only this moment realizes his whole life down to this moment has been, the YG closes his eyes, lets go his weight, sags, and sinks back into the perfect release of gravity-at-last, ground-underfoot-at-last....

Suddenly, he snaps out of it, remembers where he is and what he's doing there.... The feather!

He quickly looks up. But as if the platform had, during his moment of inattention, risen several hundred feet higher off the ground, he finds he must now back up a step and crane his neck back sharply to bring it into view.

Then, as if the platform had again--just in the time that took--shot up some more, he is obliged to take another step backwards and tilt his head back further still, just to keep it in sight.

And now again: another step backward, a further tossing back of the head.

And again....and again.... Further steps backward, sharper cranings upward....

The movement-pattern has become an exit.)

The End