

**A Play In Which Nothing Happens, Repeatedly**

**With Preliminary Notes and Author's Note**

William Haydon

# **A Play In Which Nothing Happens, Repeatedly**

By: William Haydon

## List of Characters

Man 1

Man 2

Man 3

Man 4

Man 1 (2)

Superman

Officer 1

Officer 2

People

Person

## Preliminary Notes on the Play

This play ideally should be performed in a black box theatre, preferably one with a closing front curtain. If not a front curtain, then a black curtain that serves as the backdrop of the stage, as many black box theatres have. For scenes 6 and 7, the stage should be able to accommodate a white sheet/curtain in the back of it. All that is required is some simple lighting, a sound system, and the props entailed in each scene. However, I have no reservations over productions taking liberties with their own idea of the play.

## Scene 1

*(A nursery with oversized cradles to fit grown men, who lie inside in tattered garments, some with hoes and pitchforks. Man 2 walks slowly in from stage left, looking at the people with a calm smile on his face. He stops at the side of Man 1's cradle, looking down on him. Then he gently pulls him up by his armpits. Once he has sat the man upright, he pulls out his legs and pulls Man 1 forward to help him out of the cradle. He does so but knocks over the cradle in the process in a loud crash.)*

**Man 2:** Do you recognize me?

**Man 1:** No, where am I? This place feels familiar but I don't recognize it. *(Breaths in sharply through his nose)* I recognize this smell. *(Looks at the other cradles and smiles)* These are my friends, I know them *(Puts a hand up to his mouth to try to stifle his widening smile.)* Who are you?

**Man 2:** I am your father. Don't you know *me*?

**Man 1:** I'm sorry I don't. *(Looks at himself quizzically)*

**Man 2:** I see you are confused.

**Man 1:** Yes. I have memories and I know what this place is; it's for newborns, but I'm not new. And... I don't recognize this body, my limbs feel strange. It's like I am wearing gloves over my whole body. It's like I'm half-numb.

**Man 2:** Oh but you are. You see, you have in a way been born again. I have transplanted your brain from your former body into this one. You will feel strange for a while, but you will get used to it.

*(Man 1 is visibly confused, he looks over his body again. He begins by holding his arms out in front of himself, flipping them over a few times to see both the top and undersides. Then he puts his hands on his stomach smacking it lightly a few times. He goes on to do a few squats before looking at the bottoms of his feet. He then begins to make the motions of taking off his pants, but is stopped by Man 2, who grabs one of his wrists.)*

**Man 2:** Ok now, that's enough. Do you know who you are now?

**Man 1:** I think so, but it's hard to think. I have so many voices in my head. I can't always tell which one is mine. Who am I?

**Man 2:** That is because you have been connected with the rest of my children. *(He holds out one of his arms, motioning to the rest of the cradles.)* I was able to connect you all when I switched your bodies.

**Man 1:** But how? And who am I?

**Man 2:** You don't need to know how. Come, are you ready to see your new home?

**Man 1:** But I still have questions. Who am I?

**Man 2:** Good. Questions are good, but do not ask that one. In fact, don't ask any. Just do as I say, and remember that questions are good. You have just been born again, so it will take you a while to get used to this new body, but keep in mind that things are better now. Aren't you glad that you have left that old body?

**Man 1:** I don't know. I don't remember what it was like.

**Man 2:** I'll tell you. It was getting old and the joints weren't working right. You were going to die soon, but your father saved you. I have given you hope, the chance of a new tomorrow. Be excited; you can. The world is your oyster.

**Man 1:** Th... thank you. That sounds horrible. So... things are better now. That's a relief. *(His face contorts in pain and he grabs his head.)* But I keep- owww. Who am I?

**Man 2:** Nevermind that. You are everyone. You are all my sons. Just don't ask anymore. Look here *(pulls a piece of candy with a bright blue wrapper from his pocket.)* Looky here. Don't you want this? *(Dangles it in front of Man 1's face)*

**Man 1:** What's that? I've never seen it before.

**Man 2:** It's candy *(Eats it.)* Whoops all gone. Mmm it tastes so good and sweet.

**Man 1:** Sweet?

**Man 2:** Yes, the sweetest thing you can imagine. *(Makes a conspicuous effort to show how much he enjoys the candy.)*

**Man 1:** Is there more?

**Man 2:** Yes, there's much more. You can have as much as you want, but you'll have to come with me.

**Man 1:** Where are we going?

**Man 2:** Home. There's more candy there, and so will be all your friends. And most importantly, me, your father. Come on, you can try out your new body and see all the new things you can do with it.

**Man 1:** *(Smiles)* You really mean it? I can use my body?

**Man 2:** Yes, and remember the candy.

**Man 1:** After you.

**Man 2:** *(Furrows his eyebrows, looking angry)* Don't tell me what to do. *(Curtains close)*

**Man 1:** *(From behind the curtains)* Are all of these buildings nurseries?

**Man 2:** Yes, my children.

**Man 1:** There's so many that I can't see where they end.

End Scene

## Scene 2

*(A red room with a red television at the front middle of the stage facing inwards, a red couch in front of it facing the audience, a red wardrobe stage left, and a red bed stage right. There are no set pieces indicating walls.)*

**Man 2:** Welcome to your new home.

**Man 1:** *(looks around)* Where are the walls? I thought a house has walls. *(Grabs his head to indicate that the headaches have returned. He continues to hold his head with one hand until indicated otherwise.)*

**Man 2:** You can't see them? Look closer. They're there, you just have to use your new eyes.

**Man 1:** I'm sorry, but I don't see them.

**Man 2:** *(Angry again)* Sons, I'm starting to get tired of these games. *(Takes off his belt and folds it so that he holds it in his hands like a strap.)* Now do you see the walls or don't you?

*(Man 1 looks around himself nervously and still expressing pain from the headache.)* Oh, of course, the walls. *(Walks over to stage right then stops as if there is a barrier in front of him. Looks back at Man 2 who is holding his hands to his hips. Man 1 makes a knocking motion with*

*the hand that is not holding his head.)*

**Man 1:** They sound sturdy.

**Man 2:** *(Smiles, putting his belt back on)* I should hope so. Made them myself. Now look at this have you ever seen one of these before? *(Gestures towards the television.)*

**Man 1:** No, what is it?

**Man 2:** It's a transmigration device. It allows you to connect with the souls outside your community. They are the ones you can watch, not the ones you can be. After a while you will synthesize, no longer just yourself, but you will always be my sons... Here watch.

*(Man 1 sits down on the couch while Man 2 turns on the television by turning a knob on it. Blue light shines on them.)*

**Man 2:** Now you watch this while I go and get the candy.

**Man 1:** Ok... I have a question- *(Grabs his head in pain)*... I- owww... I don't know... Thank you, father.

*(Man 2 smiles, giving an approving nod, then exits stage left. Man 1 watches the television, clutching his head with both hands, curling his body into his lap. Bright blue lights flash. He becomes more and more interested as he watches until he is no longer holding his head in pain and instead is laughing hysterically, slapping his knees. Man 2 enters with two pieces of candy in his hands, one of which is blue and the other is red, but he drops them when he sees Man 1's behavior. Man 2 rushed over and turns off the television.)*

**Man 2:** What do you think you're doing?

**Man 1:** I'm doing what you told me?

**Man 2:** That's not what I told you to do! Are you trying to give me a heart attack, and think of yourselves can't you see what it's doing to all of you? Of course not, I can see that you only care for yourselves.

*(Man 1 grabs his head in pain again.)*

**Man 2:** You wait right here until I get back.

*(Man 2 exits stage left, leaving Man 1 doubled over in pain on the couch, with both hands clutching his head. Man 2 enters again with a pair of what look like sunglasses, with a small pill-box sized box on one side-arm and an antenna on the other, with a red tip. He gives them to Man 1.)*

**Man 2:** Put these on. You are no longer allowed to watch television unless you are wearing these and they are turned on. You just have to make sure the batteries are charged, but you'll have to buy those yourself. You'll know its working when the antenna-tip lights up green. Now I am going to attend to some business, and I do not want to catch you watching this without them ever again, do you hear me?

**Man 1:** *(Dejectedly)* Yes, father.

**Man 2:** I'm very disappointed in you. Oh, cruel fate that hath caught me on its spear. Oh, that I must live to bear the treachery of my sons. After all that I've done for them. A roof over their heads. *(Bends down and picks up candy)* And candy that he had never tasted in his previous body. *(To Man 1)* Why? Why? Why? *(Drops the candy)*

**Man 1:** I'm sorry, father.

**Man 2:** After all I've done for you. You make me sick. *(Smiles)* Now have a good time while I'm gone. *(Exits stage left.)*

*(Man 1 fiddles with the glasses, looking it over. He opens the box where the batteries are supposed to be to reveal its emptiness. Then he closes it and looks at the television. He grabs his*

*head again and gets up to turn the television on, putting his glasses on as he walks over. The same cartoon sounds come from it, and as soon as he sits down to watch he begins to smile again and stops holding his head in pain. The antenna still displays red.)*

End Scene

### Scene 3

*(Man 1 is walking in circles, holding his head in his hands, mumbling to himself. The lights are dim and he is visible only by a dim light meant to indicate a street lamp.)*

**Man 1:** Who am I? Who am I? Am I we? But me is not us. So, I am not we, I can't be. Who am I? Who- *(Grabs head in pain)* owwww. Where is father? He has been away for so long.

*(Man 3 enters from stage right, wearing jeans and a white wife-beater. He looks tired and covered in dirt. He sees Man 1 pacing and cautiously approaches.)*

**Man 3:** Are you ok, brother?

**Man 1:** Brother? I'm your brother? That's who I am?

**Man 3:** Well, we're all brothers, aren't we?

**Man 1:** I don't know you tell me? I thought I was everyone. Does that make me your brother?

**Man 3:** I don't know, maybe. Where are you from?

**Man 1:** I don't know. I can't get my thoughts straight.

**Man 3:** Well, you must be from somewhere, and you must be somebody. Because I certainly know who I am, so you must too. How else can any of this make sense?

**Man 1:** *(Yelling)* I can't! Don't you see!

**Man 3:** *(Takes a step back.)* Well don't get mad at me. *(Regains his composure.)* Here, maybe we can try to retrace your steps.

**Man 1:** It's no use. I've tried that, but nothing seems to be in order.

**Man 3:** Ok maybe we can try playing a game.

**Man 1:** *(Perks up.)* A game? How so?

**Man 3:** Well, I figure that you can try to be something and then see if that feels right. If it doesn't then we will know that you aren't that thing. How does that sound?

**Man 1:** Yeah I like the sound of that. Let's try it. Give me something.

**Man 3:** Ok. How about a construction worker?

*(Man 1 ponders for a bit. Then begins to mime using a pickaxe to break rocks. He starts out with gusto but soon begins to lose energy. Soon he gives up.)*

**Man 1:** I don't think I am a construction worker. It doesn't feel right to me; it's like it's not in my blood.

**Man 3:** Fine fine. *(Thinks for a moment)* Ok, how about this? Try being a swimmer.

*(Man 1 ponders for a bit. Then gets down on his stomach and mimes the breaststroke, but is prevented from completing the motions because his hands hit the floor so that he cannot make a full stroke, until he stops, shaking his head.)* Ok, what about this. *(Flips over onto his back and imitates the backstroke, but his hands keep hitting the floor like before.)* No no wait. I have an idea. *(He flips back over onto his stomach and does the frog stroke. At first he is excited by being able to complete the motions of the stroke, but soon loses interest as he looks around himself to realize that he is not moving. So he stands back up.)* Any more ideas?

**Man 3:** How about a soldier?

**Man 1:** *(Ponders for a bit. Then gets frustrated.)* No! No! None of this is right. None of these things are me. Maybe I am everybody.

**Man 3:** We are all everybody.

**Man 1:** But I still feel deep in my bones that I am me.

**Man 3:** *(Frustrated)* Ok, fine so *you* decide. It seems like I'm no help to you anyway.

*(Man 3 exits stage left. Man 1 Paces, grabbing his head. Suddenly, jazz music starts to play. Man 1 slowly takes his hand off of his head, stopping in his tracks. He begins to smile.)*

**Man 1:** You know I always felt that I could be a dancer. *(He breaks out into an interpretive dance.)*

*(Man 3 enters stage left and sees Man 1 dancing. He folds his arms and leans back, impressed by Man 1's performance. He begins to tap his foot. Suddenly, the music ends, but neither Man 1 nor Man 3 notice. Enter Man 2 from stage right. Aghast, he runs over to Man 1 and takes him by his arm. Man 1 shrieks. Man 3 exits stage left, running.)*

**Man 2:** And what do we have here? I leave you alone for one moment and this is what happens to you? After all that I've done for you. I save him from death and this is how he repays me. With this... this, pornography! How can you live with yourself? Do you have no shame? Well, I for one do. I am ashamed to call you my sons. After I give you all the world, all you could want from life and more. I am more than shocked. This is why we can't have nice things! Maybe it is time that I take the world from you. What do you think about that? *(Raises his arm in preparation to strike Man 1, who cowers, holding up his free hand in defense. Man 2 stops, looking up slowly at his raised hand then slowly down at Man 1.)* Oh, what have I done! what am I doing?! Only a good-for-nothing father like me would be caught dead preparing to beat my sons. *(Lowers his hand gently to place it on Man 1's shoulder, and lets go of his arm, placing that hand on his shoulder as well. Man 1 looks up, and, upon seeing Man 2's remorse, stands up.)* Could you ever forgive me?

**Man 1:** Of course, father. Can I-

**Man 2:** *(Embraces him and spins them around as he does)* Oh thank you, thank you! You really are my sons.

**Man 1:** *(While being hugged uncomfortably tight, with a strained voice)* Can I watch the televisions some more?

**Man 2:** *(Stops, and hold out Man 1 at full arm's length, holding him by the shoulders)* The what? *(Man 1 Points to the television)*

**Man 2:** What did I tell you about questions? Come on, let's go home. *(Stays still)*  
*(Man 1 looks around, confused)*

End Scene

#### Scene 4

*(The same set as scene 2, except there is no television in the front, and all the set pieces are back a bit, but not too far to be hard to see. Man 1 is sitting on the couch, wearing the glasses that Man 2 gave him. The antenna is still red. At the front center of the stage is Superman, dressed like the comic book character. Man 1 watches intently.)*

**Superman:** And now for something completely different.

*(Man 1 gasps and leans in)*

**Superman:** I thought instead of fighting crime I would read a poem. *(Pulls a notepad and glasses out from the back of his spandex. Puts on the glasses and flips through his notebook, licking his fingers to leaf through the last few pages before getting to the one he wants)* This is a poem by Clark Kent. *(Clears throat loudly)*

Half-hearted country:

Hearts, halved by themselves,

In which convictions serve a capricious purpose.

To whom can we prove our beneficence,  
Proof of our humanity, our worthiness to be?

The desire to feel, and to feel to be  
Compels directions,  
The course of vanities.

We carry axes.  
Make whetstones of bodies,  
Tools to sharpen our distinctions.

At the end of the day,  
Axes lie by foot-sleeves.

Flamboyant fragrances,  
Who hope to find fault,  
Create it,

So that it provides sustenance,  
Allowing takers take what's fair,  
As they should by design.

Embarrassed by those we hope to be,  
We decide  
We are  
What we hope to see.

For it is we who're blest,  
We victors over best:  
We, who stand out,



Among the rest.

*(Takes off the glasses, blows on them to cover them in condensation, then wipes them on his costume. Man 1 claps.)* That was good, wasn't it? I have another poem from Mr. Kent. *(Clears throat)*

When we show our underbellies, relaxed,  
Apprehension settled, worry to rest,  
In a quiet air that lowers our guard,  
A lurking fervid feeling wakes uproused  
By sense of calm.

All reason chased away,  
Consolation removed from its place.  
High-pitched bloods fill our heads,  
Which can't keep up.

But you spoke of dreams.  
You invited, opened the door dazed,  
High on comfort-thoughts that fill your head  
Of friends and feelings — known but to you.

*(Man 1 claps.)* Well that's all the time we have, folks. If you want more, then you'll have to tune in next week. *(He turns to stage right. Puts up his hands like he is flying, and makes whooshing noises, while he walks off.)*

**Man 1:** Next week... hmmm... *(He stands up, yawning and stretching. Then he walks over to the bed and gets in.)* hmmm... next week.

End Scene

## Scene 5

*(A thatched hut on stage left, and a rice paddy on stage right. Man 1 and Man 4 are working with hoes in the rice paddy. They both wear tattered garments.)*

**Man 1:** What do you do?

**Man 4:** What do you mean? I do a lot of things; I am a human being.

**Man 1:** I mean what is your occupation? Among these things that you do you must do something to support you and your family.

**Man 4:** I do this. *(He goes back to working.)*

**Man 1:** Don't you want to know what I do?

**Man 4:** *(Not stopping)* I can see that you do nothing.

**Man 1:** I am a dancer. *(Man 4 stops mid-motion, tense, with a shocked look on his face.)* But you must be thirsty. Here, I'll fetch us some water. *(He puts down his hoe.)*

*(Man 1 enters the hut. Man 4 goes back to working. As he continues to garden, he expresses concern on his face and looks at his naked wrist like he is looking at a watch. Then he stops working and looks at the hut, but goes back to his work. He starts to hoe faster and faster, accompanied by an intensifying look of anger on his face.)*

**Man 4:** Police! Police!

*(Enter 2 police officers. Officer 2 is wearing a backpack.)*

**Man 4:** He's in there *(pointing to the hut)*

**Officer 1:** How long has he been in there?

**Man 4:** A very long time.

*(Officers gasp then huddle together, whispering)*

**Officer 2:** You know what this means, right?

*(Man 4 steps back looking concerned)*

**Man 4:** Yes of course. Don't you?

*(The officers huddle together and whisper. Officer 2 steps back and pushes Officer 1 forward.)*

**Officer 1:** Yes. We do.

*(Man 4 nods.)*

**Man 4:** So what are you going to do about it?

*(Officers huddle and whisper)*

**Officer 1:** What seems to be the problem?

*(Man 4 releases an exasperated sigh.)*

**Man 4:** He's in there! He said something very concerning and went in there and has been in there for a very. long. time.

*(Officer 2 takes off his backpack, pulls out a thick tome, and begins to look through the pages.)*

**Officer 2:** Ah ha! Right here. It is illegal to wear masks.

**Officer 1:** Yes. And rules are rules.

**Man 4:** But he's in the hut.

*(Officer 2 folds his arms against his chest, using one to stroke his chin.)*

**Officer 2:** Huts are masks of sorts.

**Officer 1:** *(Angrily)* Listen to him, he's an officer of the court.

*(Man 4 looks confused.)*

**Man 4:** Ok so what are you going to do?

*(Officers huddle and whisper.)*

**Officer 2:** You said you haven't seen him in a long time?

**Officer 1:** A very long time.

**Man 4:** Forget it! I will get him myself.

**Officer 1:** No it's too dangerous. We will handle it!

*(Officer 2 steps back, looking scared.)*

**Officer 2:** We will?

**Officer 1:** Yes, you ninny. Brace yourself. Once more unto the breach, ay?

**Officer 2:** Yes... Yes!

*(Officer 2 lets out a battle-cry then runs in. Officer 1 stands still, looks at Man 2, then walks in. They almost immediately come back out with Man 1, holding him up by his armpits; his feet drag on the ground. They throw him to the ground in front of Man 4.)*

**Officer 2:** Now what do you have to say for yourself?

*(Man 1 looks up at Man 4, frightened. He looks back and forth between the officers and Man 4, before putting his face to the ground.)*

**Man 1:** I'm sorry, alright! I'm sorry!

**Officer 1:** He says he's sorry.

**Officer 2:** Damn right he's sorry. And are you going to do it again?

**Man 1:** *(Crossing his fingers behind his back.)* No! Never!

**Officer 1:** Well I think our work here is done.

**Officer 2:** You've done it again, pal. *(Claps Officer 1 on the back.)*

*(Officers Exit. Man 1 slowly gets on his feet. Then he grabs his head in pain, contorting in pain. Man 4 smirks.)*

**Man 4:** You still get them, huh. *(Laughing)* You're not very bright, are you? *(Shakes his head)* When your muscles ache from swimming against the current what should you do? *(Leans in, with his hands on his hips, raising his eyebrows)*

**Man 1:** I don't know! I don't know! Ow... Stop asking me questions!

**Man 4:** Exactly! You float on your back down the current. Now here.

*(Man 4 picks the hoe and forces it into Man 1's hands. Man 4 goes back to working, while Man 1 is doubled over, hardly holding his pitchfork)*

End Scene

## Scene 6

*(A white sheet as the background. Man 1 stands in the middle of the stage. Two mirrors face him, one on stage left, the other on stage right. Man 1 (2) is dressed in the same clothes as Man 1.)*

**Man 1:** How do I know if I am going to be good at something?

**Man 1 (2):** Well, you won't be good at something until you know you're good.

**Man 1:** So does that mean I'm bad at it?

**Man 1 (2):** Well you gotta go out and do it. That's the way you find out.

**Man 1:** Yeah but... If I don't know I'm good at it now, then based on what you say that means I'm bad at it. Cuz I don't know.

**Man 1 (2):** Yeah well-

**Man 1:** So that means I'm gonna be bad at it now, because I haven't figured out if I'm good by doing it, and so if I do it now it's gonna be a bad job and then I'll know I'm bad at it.

*(Man 1 (2) squints ponderously at Man 1, then takes a step back, puts his hand on his hips, and stares out at the audience without making eye-contact with anyone in particular. He smacks his lips then folds his arms and looks at Man 1 again.)*

**Man 1 (2):** Well, I figure it's this way: you gotta tell yourself that you're good at it and then go find out if that's the truth, but if you're telling yourself that it is, then it's gonna help you prove it, and then you'll know for sure. I figure that's the order.

*(Man 1 squints at Man 1 (2) then looks down at his shoes. He lifts one up to examine the sole. Then he looks back up.)*

**Man 1:** So how long have you been thinking this - what you said first.

**Man 1 (2):** As long as I can remember.

**Man 1:** And how long have you been living life like this?

**Man 1 (2):** The first way or the second?

**Man 1:** The second - no the first. Well I guess it doesn't matter. What I mean to ask is how have you been finding out what you can do?

**Man 1 (2):** The first way. No, the second! I mean... I go out and do something well and then I'd know if I'm any good at it. If I don't do it well then I'll know I'm bad. But don't worry yourself so much about it. Getting in your head is only gonna mess with your composure, make you all nervous.

**Man 1:** All right, I guess I won't then.

**Man 1 (2):** You won't go out and try?

**Man 1:** No I won't worry.

**Man 1 (2):** Attaboy.

End Scene

## Scene 7

*(The same white sheet as background. Enter Man 1 and Man 2 from opposite sides of the stage. Man 2 runs and embraces Man 1, who looks confused.)*

**Man 2:** My sons!

**Man 1:** *(Quizzically)* Who are you?

**Man 2:** It's a good new look, eh?

**Man 1:** *(Still confused, but deciding to go along with it.)* So refreshing! And well deserved no doubt!

**Man 2:** *(sternly)* Do you doubt me?

**Man 1:** No I said "no doubt."

**Man 2:** Goodie goodie. *(Raises eyebrows and leans in)*

**Man 1:** And much better than theirs were.

*(Man 2 leans in more)*

**Man 1:** They looked terrible.

*(Man 2 raises his eyebrows higher)*

**Man 1:** I hated them.

*(Man 2 leans in as far as he can without falling forward and raises eyebrows as high as he can)*

**Man 1:** *(Clenching his fists)* Bastards bastards! Curse them! I hate hate *hate* them!

**Man 2:** Ha ha, what are you going on about? Today is today not yesterday or tomorrow is today.

**Man 1:** But you -

**Man 2:** *(Puts an arm around Man 1's shoulder and whirls him to face the audience)* Look at the sky, at how clear it is. Imagine yourself a bird looking down, look how far you can see. The world is your oyster. Now you are free. But whatever you do, don't forget me. *(He pokes Man 1's nose then, releasing him, jumps up and clicks his heels)*

**Man 1:** Wow it looks so - *(He starts to approach the front of the stage, but is interrupted by Man 2 pulling him back into place. Man 2 then holds his arm out as though he is a circus leader displaying a performance, smiling and raising his eyebrows)*

**Man 2:** Isn't it wonderful.

**Man 1:** Yes, but what's over there? *(Man 2 suddenly slaps him)*

**Man 2:** Nevermind what's over there! Didn't you hear what I said?!

**Man 1:** *(Cowering)* You said the world is my oyster. *(Grabs his head in pain, doubling over)*

**Man 2:** *(Pointing his finger right in front of Man 1's face)* Nevermind what I said and don't you forget that! *(Man 2 starts to pace in circles with his hands on his hips)*

End Scene

## Scene 8

*(The same set as scene 2. Man 2 is in Man 1's face, visibly upset. Man 1 is cowering, holding his head in pain with one hand)*

**Man 1:** I'm sorry, father.

**Man 2:** After all I've done for you. You make me sick. *(Smiles)* Now have a good time while I'm gone. *(Exits stage left.)*

*(Man 1 fiddles with the glasses, looking it over. He opens the box where the batteries are supposed to be to reveal its emptiness. Then he closes it and looks at the television. He grabs his head again and gets up to turn the television on, putting his glasses on as he walks over. The same cartoon sounds come from it, and as soon as he sits down to watch he begins to smile again and stops holding his head in pain. The antenna still displays red.)*

**Man 1:** My goodness what a treat. I feel like dancing again. *(Stands up and goes over to the television. He changes the channel to one that plays classical music. Then he steps back a little bit and begins to waltz, miming that he is dancing with someone. Suddenly, he grabs his chest, thrusting it forward like something is trying to burst out of it.)* What is this? *(It happens again)* Am I dying? Oh god, Oh god! Please, God! *(As though he has no control over his body, he jumps up and forward with his arms and legs outflung. Then starts reciting a poem upon landing.)*  
Tightly caught,

Describe it without words  
And you reproduce thing-itself.

Capture what you find to be  
Your image that exists

As you hope it should.

*(He looks around himself, as though he wasn't aware of what just happened, then goes into another poem)*

In that moment,  
I saw it,  
I saw it,  
The elusive concept-as-I-saw-it.

Through that lens,  
Realized by his gusto  
He spoke it with conviction.  
The concept-as-I-saw-it.

It was there,  
It was there,  
I saw it.

He spoke with such conviction.

But, awake in the new day,  
Water and the old way,  
I perceive it not as it was,  
But the way I see it now.  
Nevertheless,

I was there.

And in those hours,  
I could see;  
In those hours,  
It was I to me.

*(He looks around himself.)*

I, he, me, or we? Which one is it? What was I asking? Oh, yeah! What am I? What am I? Am I? No not that's not right, not quite right. How'd it go in that dream? It was *(snaps finger in frustration)* Damn, almost had it. *(Perks up)* Oh, now I remember. I am.

End Scene

## Scene 9

*(In the red room again, except now there are red walls as well. Man 2 sleeps on the bed, and Man 1 is on the floor on a thin mattress pad. Surrounding him are the men from the first scene, but who are now wearing jeans and white wife-beaters covered in dirt. Next to them lie yellow construction worker hard-hats. Man 1 gets up out of his bed to reveal that he is wearing a plain white t-shirt with white pants. He walks over to the television and stares at it nostalgically, running his hand over the top. He goes to turn it on but stops himself as his hand is about to*

*touch the nob, jerking his hand back. He then walks over to the groups of people and smiles. He lets out a quiet laugh, but stifles it by putting his hand over his mouth. He then turns around to look at Man 2 and begins to sob quietly into his hands before wiping his face and exhaling. He then walks over to the door. Man 2 suddenly shoots up in his bed as Man 1 puts his hand on the doorknob.)*

**Man 2:** *(Yelling)* Don't you dare! Sons! *(The rest of the people sit up and watch intently.)* You just wait until I get over there! You've got another thing coming! *(Fumbles getting out of bed, getting tangled in the covers.)*

**Man 1:** *(Begins to take his hand off the doorknob and looks over his shoulder.)* What makes you think you know me?

*(Exit Man 1)*

**Man 2:** *(Still fumbling)* Sons! Sons! You get back here! Sons! *(Falls out of the bed still tangled in the sheets.)* Good riddance!

**Person:** *(Leaves his bed, which is among the people, and helps Man 2 to his feet. Man 2 storms over to the door to lock it.)* Who was he?

**Man 2:** Who? Who are you talking about?

**Person:** That man who just left.

**Man 2:** He was no one- I mean, no one just left. It was the wind. A draft. But I'm glad that you're asking questions, but for God's sake just keep them to yourself! Or don't... *(Looks up ponderously, folding his arms and stroking his chin. Then he shakes his head, as if snapping out of a thought.)* Nevermind that! Just don't let me catch you asking any questions! Now, all of you go back to sleep. There's nothing to see here.

*(The People, including Person, go back to their beds and close their eyes. Man 2 walks over to Person's bed and stares down at it. The sound of a gust of wind is heard, causing Man 2 to jump then tense up and shake in fear. He looks over his shoulders and checks to make sure the door is locked. Then he goes back over to his bed, picks up the sheets from the ground and goes back to sleep.)*

End Scene

## Scene 10

*(Man 2 stands at a podium in the middle of the stage facing the audience. As he talks he makes eye-contact with the audience members.)*

**Man 2:** What you have just seen wasn't a play. You did not see anything at all. Maybe you were dreaming; maybe you were on a drug; maybe you hit your head. I don't care. Just let me be clear you haven't seen anything real. So don't come up to me afterwards and ask me about it because I won't know what you're talking about. Now you might feel that you have been cheated now that I call the play you have just seen not a play, but like I said before *I don't want to hear it*. It is not for you to ask me what's real and what's not because only I myself know, and you will just have to give me a chance to explain. I will answer all your questions. Please wait until after the play is

over to ask. Now, do you have any questions? Please don't be afraid to ask me because, as we all know, the world is our oyster.

End Scene

Fin



### Author's Note/Interpretation Of His Text:

This is not an exhaustive explanation of the text. Rather, it serves to explain some of the aspects that I felt were key for the understanding of this play.

In this play, I endeavor to create an allegory of the context in which theatre of the post-Mao era was created. Specifically, I attempt to examine the conflict of the proliferation of avant-garde modernism against state-endorsed socialist realism. Gao Xingjian's experience was foregrounded to me in this process, and he served as a template for some of the events of the play. Other than Xingjian's experience I was inspired by his play, *The Other Shore*. I was also inspired by Samuel Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot*.

Rather than stuffing the play with discrete metaphors for the conflict of socialist realism and avant-garde modernism, I decided that form would be able to convey content. So, the absurdist nature of the plot itself is meant to express the concept of avant-garde theatre. The play begins in a more realistic manner, that is, there are more definite settings and a linear progression of time between the first two scenes. As the play goes on, I deliberately confuse the concept of a linear progression of time between scenes to reflect the proliferation of avant-garde theatre in China in spite of the state preferring socialist realism. The confusion of time and setting also is meant to convey Deng Xiaoping's flip-flopping stance on artistic freedom of expression and state censorship.

Man 2 is a direct metaphor for Xiaoping, with his constant contradictions and obfuscations of his own logic and promises. His action of transporting brains to new bodies and taking the position of their father is allegorical to the implementation of his new policies, following his ascendancy, that were aimed at righting the wrongs of the Cultural Revolution. The

scenes in which Man 1 is accused of subversive activity are allegorical to the *anti-spiritual pollution campaign*.

Man 1 is a metaphor for modernist artists who struggled to express themselves under the constraints of censorship in the post-Mao era. The headaches he experiences due to his connection to other minds are reflective of the modernist artist in the post-Mao era feeling of constraint that stemmed from being forced to write in the mode of socialist realism, which espoused the philosophy of collectivism. The scene in which there are two Man 1's talking to a clone of himself is atemporal and without clear setting, in order to express the lengths artists had to go to remove themselves from the political restraints of the PRC and that modernism was an outlet for them.

In a way, this play is a bildungsroman, considering that it follows Man 1's growth into an artist who repudiates the constrictions imposed on him by his father. However, it is clearly an absurdist version. My hope is that the conflicts which Man 1 must confront and the manner in which he confronts them will produce a salient allegory of the status of avant-garde theatre in the PRC in the post-Mao era.