

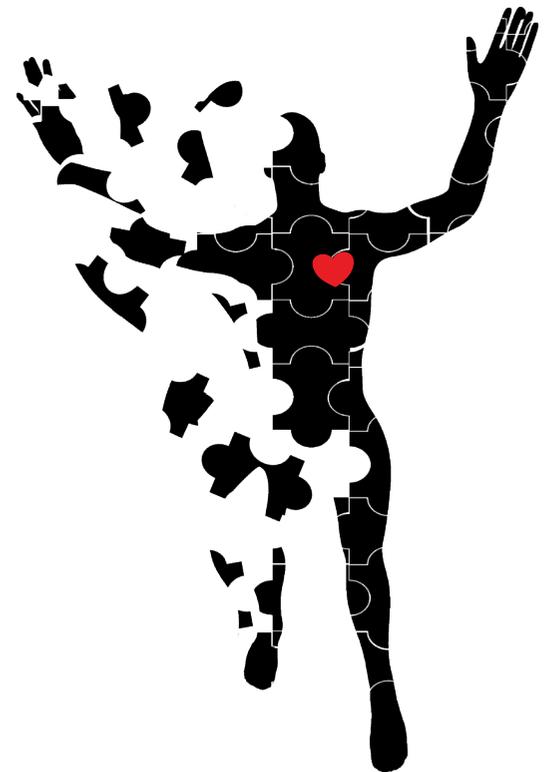
MICHAEL Z. KEAMY

Unlaunch'd Voices
An Evening with Walt Whitman
Body/Works

Parturition

Mr. Leach and the Nurse

The Party



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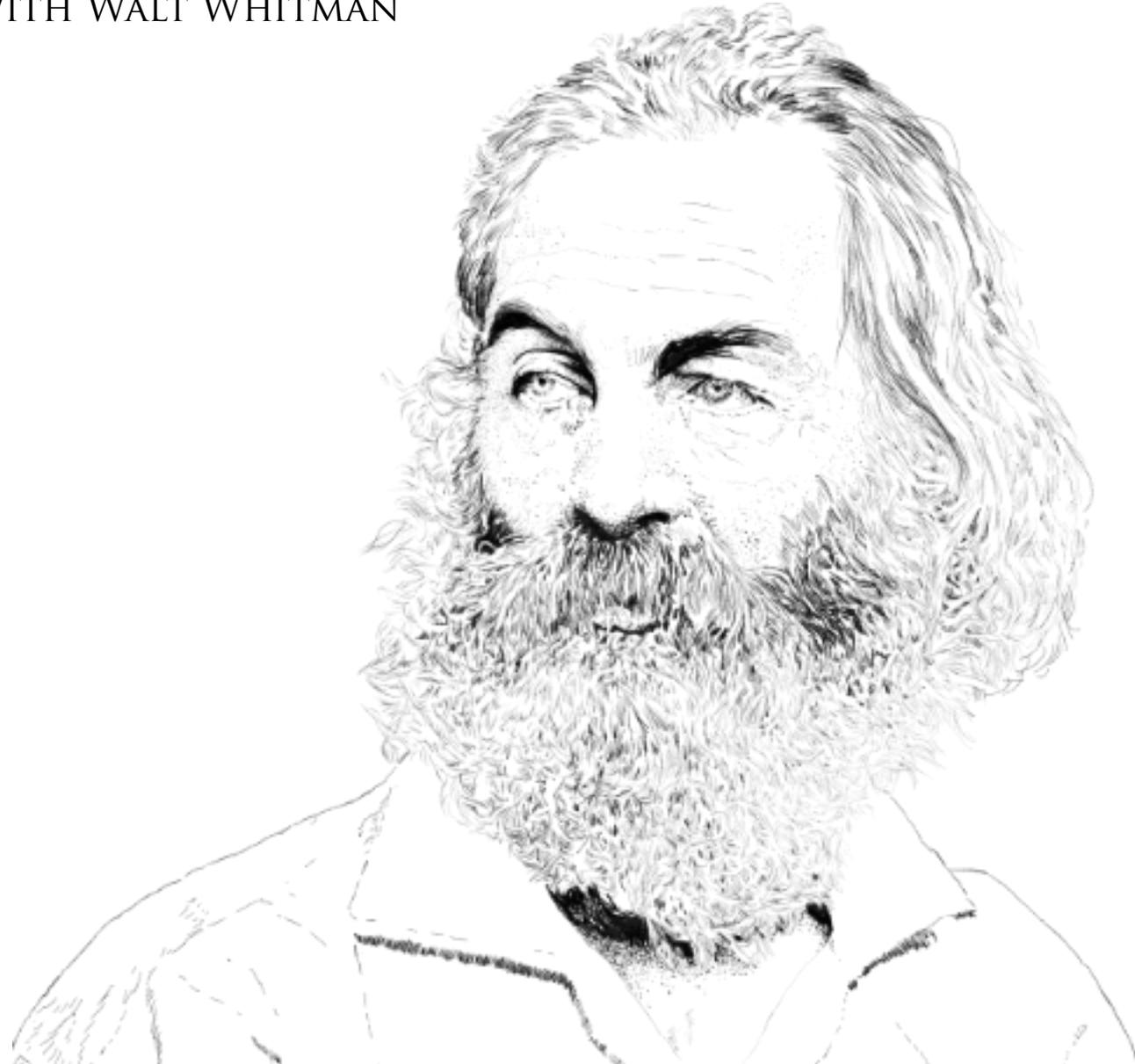
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Some additional edits and corrections were done by Art Klossner.



UNLAUNCH'D VOICES

AN EVENING WITH WALT WHITMAN



*Must I change my triumphant
songs?
Must I indeed learn to chant the
cold dirges
Of the baffled and sullen hymns
of defeat?*

UNLAUNCH'D VOICES... AN EVENING WITH WALT WHITMAN, strives to capture what I interpret to be the most vital contributions of the man. This generation will never know precisely how Whitman walked, talked, thought, or the many other ways he expressed himself and lived. To avoid any misrepresentation, I choose to keep any historical fictions or needless theatrics out of the play.

Instead I rely on the poetry - which surely stands on its own - and on as much of Whitman's actual words and dialogue as possible. A portion of the dialogue was gathered from a priceless source, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, a vast nine-volume collection of daily conversations with Whitman, written by his friend and neighbor, Horace Traubel. These books contain records of daily visits with Whitman over a period of five years leading up to the poet's death. The volumes are filled with anecdotes, stories and memoirs, as well as important historical data. Whitman's own prose works including *Specimen Days*, were also a valuable source.

Of what value is Whitman to us in contemporary America? This is a question I asked repeatedly during the creation of this performance. Certainly, it is in Whitman's inestimable contribution to our modern form of poetry and in his creation of free verse. But more, his worth lies in his "human-ness," his determination to retain his individuality, his struggle with his sexual self, his joyfully inclusive view of life and his refreshing embrace of death.

Finally, I hope to leave you with greater insight not just into the "Great Man" or "The Great Poet," but with an appreciation of Walt Whitman as an eternally great spirit.

Michael Z. Keamy

A Note on the Text

Walt Whitman's poetry appears in italics.
Stage direction appear in bold.

A Note on Slides

The use of period slides assist in creating a visual, historical sense of place and at times reveal the poet's subconscious. Images were gathered from Matthew Brady's extensive collection of Civil War photos, anatomical slides from Grey's Anatomy as well as other readily available images from historical and Whitman family archives.

Unlaunch'd Voices: An Evening with Walt Whitman

A Play by Michael Z. Keamy
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ACT ONE

(May 31, 1889. Walt Whitman's bedroom/study. The space is very cluttered; piles of books, manuscripts, newspapers, etc. cover the desk, floor and chairs. There is a window upstage center and a doorway stage right leading to a hallway.)

Walt Whitman is seventy. He wears an overcoat and hat. A recent stroke leaves him dependent on a wheelchair and cane.)

(In dark) Horace!

(Lights up) Horace!

(Calling out of window) I've searched everywhere, I can't find it! Hold on...

(Calling offstage) Mrs. Davis, did you see Horace's' notebook while you were cleaning? **(Listens)**

Near the pile of books? *Which* pile of books?

(Walt searches downstage.)

(Noticing audience) Well, hello! Howdy'do? Excuse me for a moment, please...I... **(Back to window)** Horace, I can't find it! No, don't come back up, It will turn up somewhere. I'll give it to you tonight. You'll bring the carriage 'round at eight o'clock? Fine, fine. Yes, I'll be here! If a party is being held for Walt Whitman then Walt Whitman himself had best show up!

(To audience) Howdy'do! Forgive the confusion...excuse the mess. I'm glad you found a spot to sit down. Mrs. Davis, my housekeeper, calls this room "utterly indecent, disorder added to disorder. Not a fit place for a man or his visitors!"

Well...I reminded her of what a critic once said about my book *Leaves of Grass*. "It is a confused book. The author gets mixed up at the start and is never put to order again."

'*That explains this room, Mrs. Davis,*' I said.

Nevertheless, when she heard you were coming she took it upon herself to "tidy things up."

(A whisper) She has arranged everything so I don't know where a damn thing is! Bless her; I know her heart is in the right place. As is Horace's heart...

Horace and his notebook! Oh, Horace is my friend and neighbor. He visits every day now, you know, records our conversations, writes everything I say down in his little notebook. Oh, I don't mind. In fact I want him to as long as he writes about me honest, doesn't prettify me – I told him just be sure to include all the hells and damns!

But how are you? Howdy' do? HOW-DY-DO. Ain't that a good word? It has phonetic significance, a truly American greeting. It rolls off the tongue more readily than "*Good evening*" don't you think?

Myself?

Well...

The doctor says that from a medical point of view I'm getting along alright. But from my point of view I'm in a pretty boggy condition indeed. But, if the doctor feels alright about it I don't suppose it matters what I feel.

I like to see the doctor comfortable anyway.

I *can* still write, read, work. I can laugh, cry, be myself in most ways. I suppose I shouldn't kick because I can't climb mountains. But *seventy*? Tonight there is a celebration in honor of my seventieth year.

Seventy years...

I suppose it's fitting then that you're here and that you want to know about me and the *Leaves*. My *Leaves of Grass*.

I've had lots of visitors lately. Do you know Oscar Wilde? He was here... a fine, large handsome youngster. And smart. He had the good sense to take a liking to me. But I don't agree with his "art for art's sake" notions. Like literature for literature's sake. Writing created on such a principle removes us from humanity. It is only from humanity that the light can come.

I never wanted to be a witness for saviors or exceptional men. I wanted *Leaves of Grass* to be read by the average man, the common man, like yourself.

(Walt retrieves and reads from a copy of *Leaves of Grass*). "*The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it.*" My words. The task I set for myself right at the start. Now as I sit here gossiping in the candlelight of old age, I and my book, casting a 'backward glance o'er travel'd roads'...I must admit I have not been embraced. Not by those that mean the most to me.

I know from a business and worldly point of view, *Leaves of Grass* has proved to be worse than a failure. I cannot separate the book from myself. I have thrown my life into it. It was always the book, giving it all, all. But the people... I've had no way of reaching them. I needed to reach the people but...I...

(Aware of audience) I am getting to be a sort of monologuer. It's a disease that grows on a man who has no legs to walk on.

You know, when I was younger I wanted to be an orator. I knew I had something to say and was afraid I'd get no chance to say it through books. I was full of designs for things that were never executed- lectures, songs, *plays*, God help me!

It took me some time to get down -or up -to my proper measure. I was writing for years with no particular direction. The words seemed disconnected from myself, my true self – my soul. Then in my mid-thirties it occurred to me that America, like myself, had yet to find its own voice, its own poetry. It was this – the desire to be America's poet that really got me started.

I took to the open air, to nature, and wrote, wrote, wrote...the words came spilling out.

I had an experience at that time. A mystical experience you might call it. One early summer morning I walked far out into a field. I was alone and quiet was all around me... I lay down on the damp earth... I felt the morning sun on my face. I asked my soul to-

(As Walt recites his poem, he slowly stands, sheds his coat, unbuttons his shirt and rolls up his sleeves, transforming into his younger, vibrant, healthy self.)

*Loaf with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat,
Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not
even the best,
Only the lull I like, the hum of your valv'd voice.
I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning,
how you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over
upon me,
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your
tongue to my bare-stript heart,*

And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till you held my feet.

*Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that
pass all the argument of the earth,
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
and I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
and that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters
and lovers,
And that a kelson of the creation is love,
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,
And mossy scabs of the worm fence, heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-
weed.*

(Taking notice of his new 'self') I cannot be awake, for nothing looks to me as it did before,
or else I am awake for the first time, and all before has been a mean sleep!

I created a character, like me yet unlike me, an extension of myself – the way I longed to be perceived. This Walt Whitman was one of my changes of garments.

*Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son, turbulent,
fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,
No sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart from them,
No more modest than immodest.*

*Unscrew the locks from the doors!
Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!*

The poems continued to flow from me-

(During these readings, Walt picks poems to read from desk, floor, etc. as if in a random order)

*I celebrate myself and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.*

*I loaf and invite my soul,
I lean and loaf observing a spear of summer grass.
My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil,
This air,
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and
Their parents the same,
I, now 37 years old – in perfect health begin,
Hoping to cease not till death.*

(New poem, Walt's cane becomes a walking stick.)

*Afoot and lighthearted I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.
Henceforth I ask not good fortune, I myself am good fortune, henceforth I
whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing,
Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criticisms,
Strong and content I travel the open road.*

(New poem)

*Have you reckon'd a thousand acres much? Have you reckon'd the earth
much?
Have you practic'd so long to learn to read?
Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?*

*Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns left.)*

*You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look
through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the specters in books,
You shall not look through my eyes either, not take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself.*

(New poem)

*Take my leaves America, take them South and take them North,
Make welcome for them everywhere for they are your own offspring.
Surround them east and west for they would surround you, and you precedents,*

*connect lovingly with them, for they connect lovingly with you.
I conn'd old times; I sat studying at the feet of the great masters, now if eligible
O that the great masters might return and study me.*

*Dead poets, philosophers, priests,
Martyrs, artists, inventors, governments long since,
Language shapers on other shores, nations once powerful, now
Reduced, withdrawn or desolate,
I dare not proceed till I respectfully credit what you have wafted hither.
I have perused it, own it as admirable,
(moving a while among it)
Think nothing can ever be greater, nothing can ever deserve
More than it deserves,
Regarding it all intently a long while, then dismissing it,
I stand in my own place with my own day here.
My own day...*

Getting my own day wasn't easy. From the start, I was surrounded by opposition and advice. Even concerning the title, *Leaves of Grass*. "There are no *leaves* of grass, Walt, those are *your* words. There are spears of grass, spears, spears" But *spears* of grass would not have been the same to me. Etymologically, *leaves* is correct.

So I stuck with it. *Leaves*.

I never write a word that somebody don't object to. The thing that one likes, another don't. It is God bless you for this and Goddam you for that. I used to think God was everywhere. I was wrong. The adviser is everywhere! Well, take *my* advice. Never take advice.

I published the poems myself, set the type myself, paid the printing costs myself. Soon reviews appeared praising *Leaves of Grass*...written, anonymously, by me.

And then there were the other reviews ...

(Reading from newspaper clippings)

"Who is this arrogant young man who proclaims himself poet of time and who roots like a pig among the rotten garbage of licentious thoughts?"

(New clipping)

"This Leaves of Grass is a heterogeneous mass of bombast, egotism, vulgarity and nonsense."

(New clipping)

"It is impossible to imagine how any man's fancy could have conceived such a mass of stupid filth unless he were possessed of the soul of a sentimental donkey that has died of disappointed love."

I don't know if you ever realized what it means to be a horror in the sight of the people about you.

I also sent first copies of *Leaves of Grass* to various esteemed men of letters. I got little response. But one – one of those responses was great. So great I keep it here, close to me in my chest pocket. May I read it to you?

(Slide of Emerson)**(Walt reads letter.)**

Dear Sir,

I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of "Leaves of Grass." I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy... I give you joy of your free and brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things said incomparably well, as they must be. I find the courage of treatment, which so delights me, and which large perception only can inspire. I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little to see if this sunbeam were no illusion; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits, namely, of fortifying and encouraging. I wish to see my benefactor, and have felt much like striking my tasks, and visiting New York to pay you my respects.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

(Slide out)

Oh! This letter electrified me! This glorious letter! It inspired me to continue writing with "free and brave thought."

And so I did.

It's funny. In retrospect it's funny that this man who motivated me so, this idol, this Emerson, was later, too, to advise.

Have you been to Boston?

I have several times, once to visit with Emerson...strange old Boston, with its zigzag streets and multitudinous angles. Crush up a piece of letter paper in your hand, throw it down, stamp it flat, and there you have a map of old Boston.

I've spent a good deal of time walking on Boston Common. I know all the big trees along Tremont and Beacon Streets. I have come to a sociable, silent understanding with most of them. Between these elms I walked for two hours one bright, sharp February with Emerson.

He was the talker and I the listener. His talk was an argument, no... *attack* against the construction of my poems. Especially my '*Children of Adam.*'

Now, in that poem I wanted to celebrate the wonder of the human body, the male and female form. I felt it necessary to describe the parts fully. Like so-

*This is the female form,
A divine nimbus exhales it from head to foot,
it attracts with fierce undeniable attraction,
I am drawn by its breath as if I were no more than a helpless
vapor, all falls aside but myself and it,
Books, art, religion, time, the visible and solid earth and what was
expected of heaven or fear'd of hell, are now consumed.
Mad filaments, ungovernable shoots play out of it, the response
likewise ungovernable,
Hair, bosom, hips, bend of legs, negligent falling hands all diffused,
mine too diffused,
Ebb stung by the flow and flow stung by the ebb, love-flesh swelling
and deliciously aching,
Limitless limpid jets of love hot and enormous, quivering jelly of
love, white-blow and delirious juice,
Bridegroom night of love working surely and softly into the prostrate dawn,
Undulating into the willing and yielding day,*

Lost in the cleave of the clasping and sweet-flesh'd day.

I described the female form *too* fully, Emerson seemed too think. He urged me to drop certain passages. By doing so he said I would "appeal to a larger audience, quiet the critics", and "allow "all that is good about *Leaves of Grass* to shine through."

Advice ...

"What have you to say to my suggestions, Walt?" Emerson asked.

I paused. I could never hear the point better put, but I felt down in my soul the unmistakable conviction to destroy all and pursue my own way.

"Our conversation has been more precious than gold to me," I said, "but now I feel more ready than ever to adhere to my own theory and exemplify it!"

Censor? *Never!*

I want the utmost freedom, the utmost license. Censorship is always ignorant, always bad. Whether the censor is a man of virtue or a hypocrite seems to make no difference. The evil is always evil. I believe that under any responsible social order, decency will take care of itself.

I wrote '*Children of Adam*' to celebrate the wonder of our human form. Was I to censor this celebration?

Oh my body! I dare not desert the likes of you in other men

and women, nor the likes of the parts of you,

I believe the likes of you are to stand or fall with the likes of the

soul (and that they are the soul,)

I believe that the likes of you shall stand or fall with my poems, and

that they are my poems,

(Anatomical slides)

Man's, woman's', child's, youth's, wife's, husband's, mother's, father's,

young man's, young woman's, poems,

Head, neck, hair, ears, drop and tympan of the ears,

Eyes, eye fringes, iris of the eye, eyebrows and the waking or sleeping of the lids,

Mouth, tongue, lips, teeth, roof of the mouth, jaws and the jaw hinges,

Nose, nostrils of the nose and the partition,

*Cheeks, temples, forehead, chin throat, back of the neck, neck slue,
Strong shoulders, manly beard, scapula, hind-shoulders, and the
ample side-round of the chest,*

*Upper arm, arm pit, elbow-socket, lower arm, arm sinews, arm bones,
Wrist and wrist joints, hand, palm, knuckles, thumb, forefinger,
finger-joints, finger-nails,*

Broad breast front, curling hair of the breast, breast-bone, breast-side

Rib, belly, backbone, joints of the back-bone,

Hips, hip-sockets, hip strength, inward and outward round, man-balls, man-root,

Strong set of thighs well carrying the trunk above,

Leg -fibers, knee, knee-pan, upper-leg, under-leg,

Ankles, instep, foot-ball, toes, toe-joints, the heel;

*All attitudes, all the shapeliness, all the belongings of my or your
body or anyone's body, male or female ...*

*The curious sympathy one feels when feeling with the hand the naked meat of
the body,*

The circling rivers the breath, and breathing it in and out,

*The beauty of the waist, and thence of the hips, and thence downward toward
the knees,*

The thin red jellies within you and me, the bones and the

marrow in the bones,

The exquisite realization of health;

O I say these are not the parts and poems of the body only, but

of the soul,

O I say now these are the soul!

(Slides out.)

How people reel when I say this part or that part. Or bare legs and belly, Oh God! You might suppose I was citing some diabolical obscenity!

Soon after the publication of *Leaves of Grass*, I received another letter. One I do not carry with me. It was from a preacher in Maine. He said, "If I wrote more like other people and less like myself other people would like me better."

I have no doubt they would...but where would Walt Whitman come in on that deal?

I hear that it was charged against me that I sought to destroy institutions.

But really, I am neither for nor against institutions.

(What indeed have I in common with them? Or what with the destruction of them?)

I am not traditionally religious, I know it. But I am not anti. Yet I have been called so – irreligious, an infidel, God help me! I think the *Leaves* the most religious book among books, crammed full of faith! What would the *Leaves* be without faith? An empty vessel! Still, most preachers are not friendly to me. I don't despise them – it's their sermonizing and prayer that is weariness to me.

Why should I pray?

Why should I venerate and be ceremonious?

Why should I skulk or find myself indecent, while birds and animals never skulk or find themselves indecent?

Sometimes...

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self contain'd.

I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,

They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,

They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,

Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things,

Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago,

Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.

But we... we talk about salvation. We need most of all to be saved from ourselves. We need most to be saved from our own priests- priests of the churches, priests of the arts. We need that salvation in the worst way.

We have got so in our civilization that we are afraid to face the body and its issues. We shrink from the realities of our bodily life, we refer to the functions of man and woman, their sex, their passion and normal desires to something which

is to be kept in the dark and lied about instead of being avowed and glorified in We will not allow it to be freely spoken of but it is still the basis of all that makes life worthwhile, don't you think?

Sex advances the horizon of discovery!

Sex, sex, sex, whether you sing, or make a machine, or go to the North Pole or love your mother or shine shoes or anything! Sex is the root of it all!

(Pause) And yet...

Even as I celebrate, I confess I am haunted by my own doubts, fears, excess. Yes, I – Walt Whitman, a cosmos, brave, lusty, free... even I ...

Do I contradict myself?

Very well then, I contradict myself.

I am large. I contain multitudes.

I have made mistakes, have said things that should not have been said, have been silent when I should have spoken.

Are you the new person drawn toward me?

To begin with, take warning. I am surely far different from what you suppose; Do you suppose yourself advancing on real ground toward a real heroic man? Have you no thought, O dreamer, that it may be all maya, illusion?

Come now, I will take you beneath this impassive exterior.

This hour I will tell things in confidence. I may not tell

Everybody

But I will tell you.

There is that in me- I do not know what it is

but it is in me- it is a word unsaid.

It is not in any dictionary.

Here the frailest leaves of me and yet my strongest lasting, here I hide and shade my thoughts.

The voices are veiled, voices unlaunch'd.

A young athlete is enamour'd of me and I of him.

But toward him there is something fierce and terrible in me eligible to burst forth.

He masters me! Me... ever open and helpless, bereft of my strength! Utterly abject, grovelling on the ground before him! This must *stop!*

(Walt moves to desk and writes frantically)

(Slides of original letter wash over Walt and entire stage)

Stop! This cheating, childish abandonment of myself, fancying what does not really exist in another, but is all the time in myself alone. It is imperative, that I obviate and remove myself from this incessant and enormous perturbation. Give up absolutely and for good this feverish, fluctuating, undignified pursuit! It cannot possibly be a success! Let there be from this hour no faltering, not once, from this hour forth for life!

(Slides out)

(Walt stops writing, pauses.)

I am he that aches with amorous love.

*Does the earth gravitate? Does not all matter, aching, attract all matter?
I am he that knows the pain of unrequited love.
Agonies are one of my changes of garments.*

(Retrieving copy of Leaves of Grass)

But now ...

*I think there really is no unreturn'd love. The pay is certain one way or another.
I loved a person ardently and my love was not returned.
Yet out of that, I have written these songs.*

(Reading from Leaves of Grass)

*When I heard at the close of the day how my name had been
receiv'd with plaudits in the capitol, still it was not a happy
night for me that follow'd,
And else when I carous'd, or when my plans were accomplish'd,
still I was not happy,
But the day when I rose at dawn from the bed of perfect health,*

*refresh'd singing, inhaling the ripe breath of autumn,
When I saw the full moon in the west grow pale and disappear in
the morning light,
When I wander'd alone over the beach, and undressing bathed,
laughing with the cool waters, and saw the sun rise,
And when I thought how my dear friend my lover was on his way
coming, O then I was happy,*

*O then each breath tasted sweeter, and all that day my food
nourish'd me more, and the beautiful day pass'd well,
And the next came with equal joy, and with the next at evening
came my friend,
And that night while all was still I heard the waters roll slowly
continually up the shores,
I heard the hissing rustle of the liquid and sands as directed to
me whispering to congratulate me,
For the one I love most lay sleeping by me under the same cover
in the cool night,
In the stillness, in the autumn moonbeams his face was inclined
toward me,
And his arm lay lightly around my breast - and that night I was happy.*

(Walt closes book)

Dazzling and tremendous! How quick the sunrise would kill me,
If I could not now and always send sunrise out of me!

Writing was now my redemption- through it all, all - through the battles raging
inside me and the other battles yet to come.

(A loud persistent knocking at door)

No! Not now, Mrs. Davis, not yet. I'm still looking...searching... I'm not done...
not finished!

(Knocking turns into drum sounds louder and louder)

The real war, the real *Leaves of Grass*, the real Walt Whitman was yet to come.

(Drum sounds get very loud as lights fade to black)

END ACT ONE

(In dark, drum sounds fade in, turning into knocking sounds as lights come to half)

No! Not now, Mrs. Davis. Not yet. I'm still looking...searching...I'm not done...not finished!

(Lights to full and sound out)

(To audience)

*This is unfinished business with me...how is it with you?
I was chilled with the cold types and cylinder and wet paper between us.
I pass so poorly with paper and types...I must pass with the contact of bodies
and souls.*

I was simmering...searching...in many ways I hadn't even really begun.

Leaves of Grass was now in its third edition and gaining some recognition – though primarily among a small group of literati in England. In America, I was still widely unread. It had become a rallying cry with a group of men in this country – “Down Walt Whitman, down him in any way, by any method, with any weapon you can but down him, drive him into obscurity, hurry him oblivion!”

But suppose Walt Whitman stays, stays, is stubborn, stays again, will not be downed?

*Afoot and lighthearted I take to the open road.
Healthy, free, brave, the world before me
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose...*

So far so well, but the most and best of the poems, I perceived, remained unwritten. The work of my life remained to be done. The paths to the house were made, but where was the house itself?

And of those who were listening, I wondered, who learns my lesson complete?

*Boss, journeyman, apprentice, churchman and atheist,
The stupid and the wise thinker, parents and offspring,
Merchant, clerk, porter and customer,*

*Editor, author, artist and schoolboy – draw nigh and
commence;*

*It is no lesson – it lets down the bars to a good lesson,
And that to another, and every one to another still.*

*It is no small matter, this round and delicious globe moving
So exactly in its orbit forever and ever, without one jolt
Or the untruth of a single second,
I do not think it was made in six days, nor in ten thousand
years, nor ten billion years,
Nor plann'd and built one thing after another as an architect
plans and builds a house.*

*I do not think seventy years is the time of a man or woman,
Nor that seventy million years is the time of a man or woman,
Nor that years will ever stop the existence of me, or anyone else.*

*Is it wonderful that I should be immortal? As everyone is immortal?
I know it is wonderful, but my eyesight is equally wonderful,
and how I was conceived in my mother's womb is equally wonderful.
And pass'd from a babe in the creeping trance of a couple of summers
and winters to articulate and walk – all this is equally wonderful.*

*And that my soul embraces you this hour, and that we affect
each other is every bit as wonderful.*

*And that I can think such thoughts as these is just as wonderful,
And that I can remind you, and you think them and know them to be
true is just as wonderful.*

*And that the moon spins round the earth and on with the earth, is equally
wonderful.
And that they balance themselves with the sun and stars is equally
wonderful...*

And I do not understand what can be more wonderful than myself!

Do I use “I” too often? I ... I ... I ?

This isn't egotism... purely.

You see, all I have sought to do with *Leaves of Grass* is to put a person, a human being, *myself* in the latter half of the nineteenth century in America, freely, fully and truly on record. I realized that to best express this I must be the center from which the poems radiate. Indeed, there could be no other. And so I was content for a long while to express this and to dote on myself.

Now, all of this might have gone on and on and come to naught had I not been shaken – blasted out of my self absorption – by the occurrence of our Civil War.

(A cannon blast)

It was the war – it's sights and sounds and the thousands – the tens and twenties of thousands of American young men wounded, operated on, dying, that opened a new world to me somehow... made me explore deeper mines than any yet. It was the war that really made me pray, brought me to my real knees.

The year was 1861 –

*Year that trembled and reeled beneath me!
Your summer wind was warm enough,
Yet the air I breathed froze me.
A think gloom fell thru the sunshine
And darkened me.*

I cried out-

*Must I change my triumphant songs?
Must I indeed learn to chant the cold dirges
Of the baffled and sullen hymns of defeat?*

There could be no dainty rhymes or sentimental love verses for you, terrible year. I wrote a rally cry!

(Drums)

*Beat! Beat! Drums! – Blow! Bugles! Blow!
Through the windows – through the doors – burst like a ruthless force,
Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation,
Into the school where the scholar is studying;
Leave not the bridegroom quiet – no happiness must he have now with his
bride,
nor the peaceful farmer any peace, ploughing his field or*

*gathering his grain,
so fierce you whir and pound you drums – so shrill you bugles blow.*

The day was April 12, I remember clearly. I had just left the opera and was walking down Broadway to the Brooklyn ferry. Suddenly, I heard the cries of the newspaper boys who came tearing and yelling up the street, rushing from side to side. There had been a firing on Fort Sumpter and the United States flag in Charlestown. This marked the start of the succession war.

*Beat! Beat! Drums! – Blow! Bugles! Blow!
Over the traffic of cities – over the rumble of wheels in the streets;
Are beds prepared for sleepers at night in the houses? No sleepers
must sleep in those beds,
Would the talkers be talking? Would the singer attempt to sing? ...
Then rattle quicker, heavier drums – you bugles wilder blow!*

The crowd read the headlines, shivering in small groups in the rain. I can see them there now under the lamps at midnight. I can see their faces again.

You know, I don't think the war seemed so horrible to me at the time, when I was busy in the midst of its barbarism as it does now in retrospect. Still – I never once questioned the decision that led me into the war and to Washington; whatever the years have brought, whatever sickness, whatnot, I have accepted the results as inevitable and right.

I entered the war to find my brother George.

George was quick to enlist with the thirteenth regiment. You see, in New York and Brooklyn, we all thought the rebellion would be crushed in a few days or weeks but, oh, this feeling was quickly reversed by battle after battle... and then the shock...my family received news that George had been wounded-dead for all we knew.

I quickly left for Washington to find him.

(At desk, sorting)

Letters.

My memories of war are filled with letters. Letters piled high, letters strewn.

Some cherished, some never opened. Letters to lovers. Letters from mothers to son's and from son's to mothers.
This was my first ...

(Slide of Mrs. Whitman)

Dear, Dear Mother,

I succeeded in reaching the camp of the 51st, N.Y. and found George alive and well. When I found out this was so you may imagine how trifling all my little cares and difficulties seemed – they vanished into nothing- and now that I have lived for eight or nine days amid such scenes as the camps furnish, and had a practiced part in it all, and realized the way hundreds of thousands of good men are now living – not only without comforts but with death and sickness – really nothing we call trouble is worth talking about.

One of the first things that met my eyes in camp was a heap of feet, arms, and legs under a tree in front of the hospital...

George was wounded by a shell, a gash in the cheek but it has healed without difficulty already.

I will stay here for the present – long enough to see if I can get any employment. Of course, I am unsettled at the moment.

*Dear Mother, my love,
Walt*

I stayed.

I stayed throughout most of the war. I worked as a government clerk and wrote essays for the New York papers. But my real work was visiting the sick and wounded in the hospitals. In a sense this was the most real work of my life. Books are all very well but this sort of thing is so much better...don't you think? As life in life is always superior to life in a book.

For four years I saw war where war is worst. Not on the battlefields, no, in the hospitals. There war is worst. I mixed with it.

(Slide of Civil War hospital ward)

(Walt puts on coat, hat and prepares himself for his visiting ritual. Moving into hospital area he kneels at several bedsides)

My habit was to prepare for my daily and nightly visits, which lasted for four or five hours each, by fortifying myself with a good night's rest, a bath, clean clothes, a good meal and – this is important – as cheerful a presence as possible.

The soldiers are mere lads, many only seventeen years old. As I pass from boy to boy I try to give a word or a trifle without exception. I give all kinds of sustenance: blackberries, lemons and sugar, wine, brandy and tobacco, handkerchiefs. I always give paper, envelopes and stamps. Then I select the most needy cases and devote my time and services to them.

To many of these young men there is something in personal love, caresses and the magnetic flood of sympathy and friendship that does, in its way, more good than all the medicine in the world ...

So I go round.

Some of my boys get well, some of my boys die.

(Slide out)

(Back to desk)

Letters.

Another to be written, another to be read.

(Slide of soldier)

Mr. and Mrs. Haskell,

Dear friends, I thought it would be soothing to you to have a few words about the last days of your son Erastus Haskell of Company K. I write in haste, and nothing of importance only I thought anything about Erastus would be welcome.

From the time he came to Armory Square Hospital till he died, there was hardly a day but I was with him a portion of the time.

I had no opportunity to do much, or anything for him, as nothing was needed, only to wait the progress of his malady. I am only a friend visiting the wounded and sick soldiers, (not connected with any society or State.) From the first I felt that Erastus was in danger, or at least was much worse than they in the hospital supposed.

I was very anxious he should be saved, and so were they all. He was

well used by the attendants – poor boy, I can see him as I write – he was tanned and had a fine head of hair, and looked good in the face when he first came, and was in pretty good flesh too – (he had his hair cut close about ten or twelve days before he died) – he never complained – but it looked pitiful to see him lying there, with such a look out of his eyes. He had large clear eyes, they seemed to talk. Many nights I sat in the hospital by his bedside till far in the night – the lights would be put out – yet I would sit there silently, hours, late, perhaps fanning him – he always liked to have me sit there, but never cared to talk – I shall never forget those nights, it was a curious and solemn scene, the sick and wounded lying around in their cots, just visible in the darkness, and this dear young man close at hand lying on what proved to be his death bed. I do not know his past life, but what I saw of him, he was a noble boy – I felt he was one I should get very much attached to.

Poor dear boy, though you were not my son, I felt to love you as a son, what short time I saw you sick and dying there. But it is well as it is – perhaps better. Who knows whether he is not far better off, that patient and sweet young soul, to go, than we are to stay? Farewell, dear boy. You did not lay there among strangers without having one near who loved you dearly, and to whom you gave your dying kiss.

Mr. and Mrs. Haskell, I think you have reason to be proud of such a son, and all his relatives have causes to treasure his memory. I write to you this letter because I would do something at least in his memory; his fate was a hard one, to die so. He is one of the thousands of our unknown American young men in the ranks about whom there is no record or fame, no fuss made about their dying so unknown, but I find in them the real precious and loyal ones of this land, giving themselves up – aye, even their young and precious lives, in their country's cause.

Though we are strangers and shall probably never see each other, I send you and all Erastus' brothers and sisters my love.

Walt Whitman

(Slide out)

Have you seen someone die?

Have you had the privilege?

I have.

Hundreds of times. I have witnessed the deaths of these brave young men.

I have leaned close and whispered to them. I have kissed their lips and wished

them well on their way. Vigils wondrous...strange...beautiful.
What indeed is finally beautiful except death and love?

(Walt moves to sit on ground aside dead soldier.)

*Vigil strange I kept on the field one night;
When you my son and my comrade dropped at my side that day,
One look I but gave which your dear eyes return'd with look I
shall never forget,
One touch of your hand to mine O boy, reach'd up as you lay
on the ground,
Then onward I sped in the battle, the even – contested battle,
Til late in the night reliev'd to the place at last again I made my way,
Found you in death so cold dear comrade, found your body son of
responding kisses, (never again on earth responding,)
Bared your face in the starlight, curious the scene, cool
Blew the moderate night-wind,
Long there and then in vigil I stood, dimly around me the battle field spreading,
Vigil wondrous and vigil sweet there in the fragrant silent night,
But not a tear fell, not even a long-drawn sigh, long, long,
I gazed,*

*Then on the earth partially reclining sat by your side
Leaning my chin in my hands,
Passing sweet hours, immortal and mystic hours with you
Dearest comrade – not a tear, not a word,
Vigil of silence, love and death, vigil for you my son and my soldier,*

*As onward silently stars aloft, eastward new ones upward stole, vigil final for
you brave boy, (I could not save you
swift was your death,
I faithfully loved you and cared for you living, I think we shall surely meet
again,)*

*Till at latest lingering of the night, indeed just as the dawn appear'd my
comrade I wrapt in his blanket, enveloped well his form,*

*Folded the blanket well, tucking it carefully over head and
Carefully under feet,
And there and then and bathed by the rising sun, my son in*

*His grave, in his rude – dug grave I deposited,
Ending my vigil strange with that, vigil of night and
Battlefield dim,
Vigil for boy of responding kisses, (never again on earth responding,)
Vigil for comrade swiftly slain, vigil I never forget, how as day brightened,
I rose from the chill ground and folded my soldier well in his blanket,
And buried him where he fell.*

(Walt rises, takes boutonniere from his coat lapel and places it at the foot of dead soldier He slowly dons hat and cane, returning to Walt Whitman at seventy.)

Such was the war.
It was not a quadrille in a ballroom. Future years will never know the seething hell and countless scenes- and it is best they should not. The real war will never get in the books. Its interior history will not only not be written, the deeds and passions will never even be suggested. And the actual soldier, with all his ways – his incredible dauntlessness, tastes and language – his fierce friendship, strength and animality I say will never be written.

And perhaps should not be.

So goodbye to war.

And now I say goddam'em...goddam'em, goddam'em, goddam'em! All wars!
The whole business is about nine hundred and ninety-nine parts diarrhea to one part glory.

All the loss, the pain...

Well...such things are gloomy.

Yet even these things have their place. There is a saying, "God doeth all things well," the meaning of which, after due time has appeared to my soul.

*No array of terms can say how much I am now at peace about God
and about death.
I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least.
Why should I wish to see God better than this day?*

*I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four and each moment then,
And in the faces of men and women I see God
And in my own face in the glass.*

*As to you, death, and you bitter hug of mortality,
It is idle to try to alarm me.*

*I am the poet of death as well as the poet of life.
I welcome you.*

*Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate around the world, serenely arriving,
Arriving, in the day, in the night, to all,
To each, sooner or later delicate death.
And as to you, corpse, I think you are good manure, but that does not offend
me.
I smell the white roses, sweet scented and growing,
I reach to the leafy lips, I reach
To the polished breasts of melons.
As to you, life, I reckon you are the leavings of many deaths.
No doubt I have died myself ten thousand times before.*

*What do you think has become of the young and old men?
And what do you think has become of the women and children?*

*They are alive and well somewhere,
The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,
And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the
end to arrest it,
and ceas'd the moment life appear'd.*

*All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.*

Do you see? It is not chaos or death. It is form, union, plan. It is eternal life. It is happiness.

Just happiness.

(Walt retrieves copy of *Leaves of Grass*)

We must work, you see, at finding beauty in this life, work at being grateful.
Yes. I am grateful.

I am grateful for your visit. Looking back with you has made me realize a man has never really been more fortunate than I have been in having things done just as he demands them. Take *Leaves of Grass* for instance. It certainly is what I, I alone designed it should be.

Proud. Proud indeed we may be, my book and I! Why should I call it a failure? Why? Why this endless questioning of myself? Whether lost, lost at last, unaccepted, unread – there at least it is – direct from my hands.

*O me! O life! Of the questions of these recurring,
Of the endless trains of the faithless, of cities fill'd with the foolish,
Of myself forever reproaching myself, (for who more foolish than I, and who more faithless?)
Of eyes that vainly crave the light, of the objects mean, of the struggle ever renew'd,
Of the poor results of all, of the plodding and sordid crowds I see around me,
Of the empty and useless years of the rest, with the rest me intertwined,
The question, O me! So sad, recurring---What good amid these, O me, O life?
Answer.
That you are here—that life exists and identity,
That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.*

This is what you shall do ...

Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your labor and income to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown or to any man or number of men, go freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young and with the mothers of families, read these leaves in the open air every season of every year of your life, re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem and have the richest fluency not only in its words but in the silent lines of its lips and face and between the lashes of your eyes and in

every motion and joint of your body-

(Walt discovers Horace's notebook.)

Is that ...? It is! I've found it! Horace's notebook!
He'll be glad to have this back. This collection of ramblings of an old, grey poet.
I have developed a knack for gabbing and loitering...perhaps you've noticed. I've even taken to talking to myself at times; especially walking outside in the woods.

*The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my gab and loitering.
I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.*

(A knock at the door)

Yes, Mrs. Davis? On its way? So soon?

Horace and the carriage are coming. I'll need to say so long!
I've enjoyed our visit – no, more than that, it fortified me. I feel ready to celebrate my seventieth birthday after all! A glass of champagne won't kill me. Indeed, if I had my way I'd crack a bottle every day. It does me no harm.

So long!

*I depart as air, I shake my locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacey jags.*

*I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again, look for me under your boot-soles.*

*You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.
Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,*

I stop somewhere waiting for you

(The sounds of a carriage approaching. Lights start to fade.)

(Walt at window)

Horace! I've found it! I'm here! I'm ready! Horace!

END

**I KNOW THAT LEAVES OF GRASS HAS PROVEN TO BE WORSE THAN A FAILURE...
I CANNOT SEPARATE THE BOOK FROM MYSELF..."**

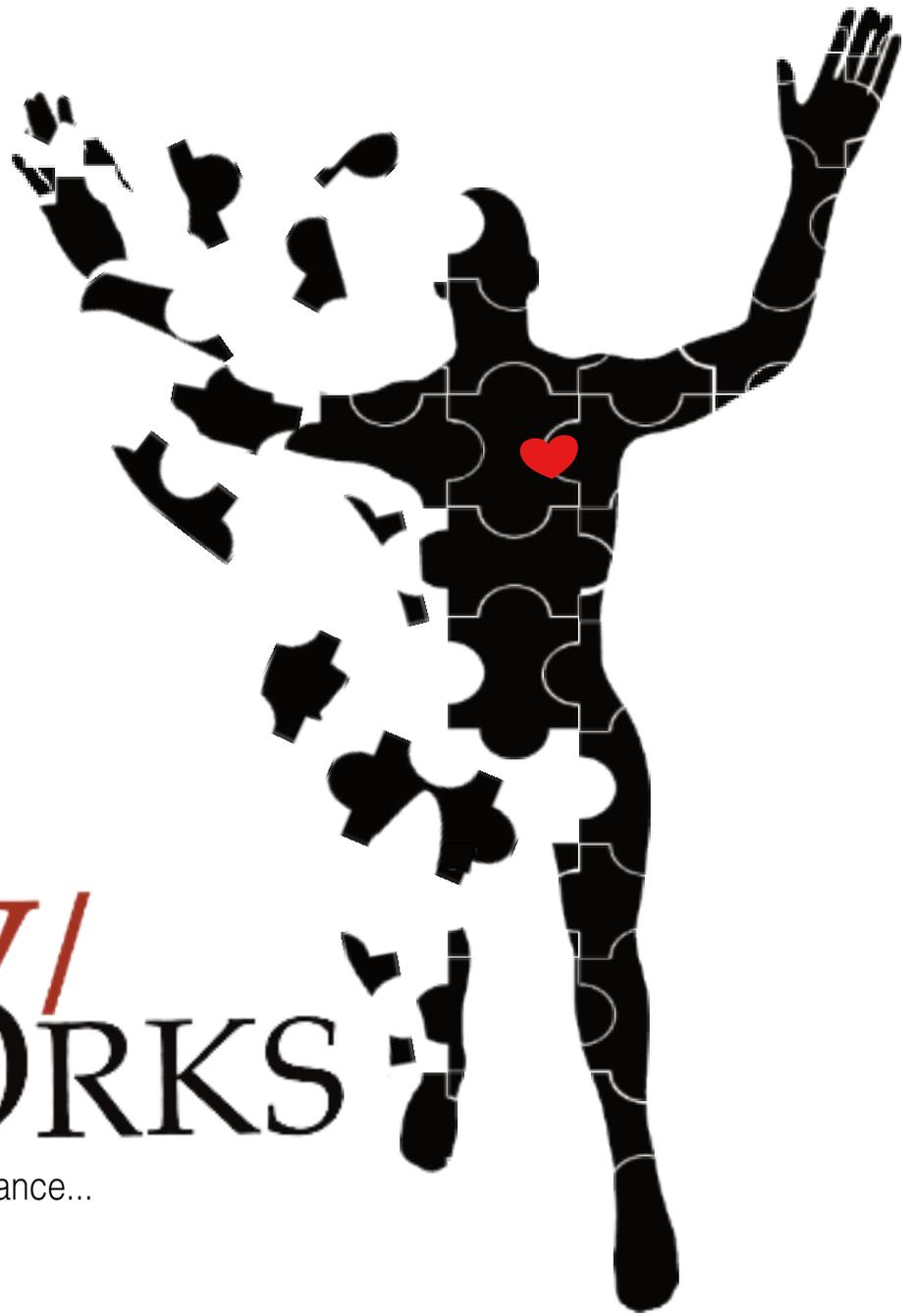
This inspirational play takes place on May 30, 1889, Walt Whitman's seventieth birthday. A celebration dinner to honor the poet is scheduled and many friends and celebrated guests are to attend. As Whitman prepares himself for the event, we, the audience, are an intimate visitor in his room. Walt welcomes us and starts to reminisce, questioning his success as a man and a poet. This search leads us through Whitman's life- a journey filled with humor, pathos and poetry. As we witness the "mystical experience" that inspired the creation of Leaves of Grass, Walt transforms into his younger self. We hear of his strong opposition to censorship, his celebratory views on sex and the human body, and his struggle with his sexual self. We learn about the harsh reception of his critics and the now famous letter of encouragement from Ralph Waldo Emerson. We later become witness to the agonies of the Civil War, and Whitman's involvement as caretaker to the sick and wounded. It is here on the battlefield where Whitman finds "the most important work of my life." By reassessing his life with us, Walt Whitman comes to an understanding about himself, God and Death that is transformative for him and the audience.

"Mr. Keamy's play provides an especially subtle mingling of poetic and social understanding..."
WILLIAM J. IRVIN PH.D.

...The weaving of Whitman's poetry and conversations... gives the audience an understanding of the development of Whitman's career.
PAT ELLIOTT, REGIS COLLEGE

"Anyone interested in knowing more about this great figure will enjoy an evening with Unlaunch'd Voices..."
THE BRATTLEBORO REFORMER





Body/ WORKS

One man's "touching" search for balance...

To be touched.
To relax.
To have no pain.
To be healthy, sexy.
Listened to, loved.

**THE RE-
EVOLUTION
OF MAN**

(Lights up)

(ACTOR is surrounded by large puzzle pieces. Each puzzle piece has a word printed on it including, but not limited to: Homo, Sapien, Habilis, Erectus, Ardipithecus, Ramidus, Modern, Mind, Soul, Body, Balance, Work, Play, Sex. etc.. At upstage center is the beginnings of what will become the complete puzzle, an image of the human body standing in anatomical position. Throughout the play, esp. between monologues, ACTOR will put into place an appropriate word or two until the puzzle is complete. There is an exercise ball which ACTOR will use as chair, prop, etc.)

ACTOR is trying to figure out the puzzle but is perplexed and after a few beats, frustrated.)

HEEEELP!!!!

(Soon a loud, thundering VOICE (of God?) speaks)

HOMO!

(ACTOR is startled, then indignant.)

SAPIEN!

(Then, realizing he is being assisted in piecing the puzzle together, ACTOR picks up puzzle piece and begins to arrange in accordance with voice's instruction. VOICE continues slowly, methodically.)

HOMO!

ERECTUS!

HOMO!

HABILIS!

HOMO!

(The words start to come faster than the actor can piece puzzle together.)

SEX!

WORK!

PLAY!

MIND?

(Pause) SOUL????

(Pause) BODY!

BODY!!

(An order) BOOOODY!!!

(ACTOR removes his shirt.)

BOOOODDDDY!!!

(Frightened, actor removes his pants. ACTOR is in a loin cloth, to his surprise.)

(Pause) BALANCE?

BALANCE?

BAAALLLANCCE!!!!

(ACTOR begins to walk a straight line as if on a balance beam. A storm begins, wind, lightning and thunder. The force of the storm throws ACTOR off balance. HE falls to the stage in a fetal position.)

' LET US MAKE MAN IN OUR IMAGE, AFTER OUR LIKENESS!!'

(We hear the first rumblings of "Also Sprach Zarathustra" by Richard Strauss. Actor holds up the corresponding puzzle pieces before enacting each movement.)

ARDIPITHECUS RAMIDUS **(ACTOR moves about the stage in a primitive ape-like crawl.)**

HOMO HABILIS **(ACTOR moves about the stage using a "tool" to smash an object.)**

HOMO ERECTUS **(ACTOR moves about the stage with more erect posture.)**

HOMO MODERNE **(ACTOR moves about stage with an erect, near modern human gait.)**

VERY MODERN HOMO **(As the music builds to a crescendo, ACTOR tears off loin cloth, revealing a jock strap. HE moves about the stage erect and proud as modern man.)**

(Lights and music out)

(Lights up on ACTOR, loud crash of thunder.)

(ACTOR looks at body, then up at God.) Do I make the cut? Am I Your image?

(Silence.)

I've done the work! The body work!... For thousands of years!... I've evolved, into THIS, Your image, complete, human, perfect...

Welllllll...**(To audience)** OK. Lets get real here. NOT perfect...not PERFECT...I'd like to be broader here...tighter here and THIS!- Its not that I'm obsessed but...**(Grabs love handles)** you know...recent studies suggest 60% of Americans are overweight?!!....

Could that be the image God was after?
Is that His likeness?

Or... is it six-pack abs he was thinking? a Brad Pitt, Gwen Steffani kind of thing?

(Lightning, loud crash of thunder.)

WHOA!! HEY!! Shallow..I know! I'm just trying to piece it all together! To figure it out! To fit in!
To feel in control! To move about this earth freely and easily in the temporary vessel you have outfitted me in!
OK...I know!... I am made of mind, soul and body... and I'm trying like hell to keep a balance...
REALLY!

BODY LANGUAGE

(Actor pieces some puzzle parts together.)

But it's the body I'm always focused on... wrestling with, fucking with!

But WHY? Why the Body?

Why not the Soul ?.. God knows I've searched for it... in books, church, meditation- I haven't found it -it's so elusive- and isn't the soul inside the body anyway?

Why aren't I focused on the mind? Developing it to it's capacity? I could go back to school... No. I could read more... books, magazines, surf the world wide web, 24 hour television CNN , FOX 25, STORM TRACK 5 shit! At this age I want to shut information OUT- I want to put road blocks on the information highway. I want peace of mind. I never wanted to be a brain like Einstein anyway, or journey deeply into it like Freud or Jung or Reich...

Ya know?...

Reich?

Willhelm Reich?

(1897-1957)?

Austrian psychiatrist?

He concluded "A patient's body language is more revealing than their words."

If thats true what's my body trying to say?...**(Tries to talk with body, gives up, dresses).**

He said, "Some people create an armor with their musculature to shield themselves from the outside world...their instincts...their hidden desires..."

Do I have enough muscle??

Am I shielding??

And if muscles are an armour... just WHAT is Arnold Schwarzenegger hiding?

Reich also believed you could break down this armor using forceful touch. He used deep, deep, massage on patients and got extreme reactions... crying, laughter, screaming!!!

Then he developed Orgone theory saying ... "*Orgone energy is everywhere; in water, in the color of the sky, and especially in a good orgasm.*"

Then he built this Orgone box and...welll..

Wilhelm Reich was starting to loose it...

But he did contribute to what we now understand as the mind -body connection.

In acting 101 our first lesson was to develop character through body language. The teacher asked,

“What body part would your character lead with?”

For instance. I am playing Othello. Paranoid. Jealous. Enraged.

I might lead with my eyes. **(Physicalizes)**

Or... Oedipus, having just plucked out my eyes, I might lead with my hands. If I was Romeo ...young and dumb and full of cum. I might lead with my hips.

I wonder what I lead with?

Probably this huge nose most of the time..I could play Cyrano without makeup.

I know as a kid I lead with my head **(Physicalizes)**

Always a little ahead of myself..mind first, body later- the weight of the world on my shoulders...when you lead with your head you get kicked around a lot.

So in defiance I learned to lead with my chin. Overcompensating, not seeing, walking like I had a stick up my ass...

when you lead with your chin... you also get kicked around a lot.

So I started to work out, learned to lead with my chest exuding confidence, readiness, strength of character...

But now I ask isn't this overcompensating too? Armour? Maybe I should just let it go, deflate, relax.

Now there's the fear of leading with my abdomen.

60% of Americans do!

(A Southern Preacher) Gluttony- one of the seven deadly sins, can manifest itself in...

Oversized automobiles or McMansions in the suburbs, but often shows up here, in the body.

America! An endomorphic nation!"

Ectomorph, mesomorph, or endomorph...which one am I? Society tells me how I should look-

then the mirror turns and shows me my body image-then my mind twists the image around til I don't know the truth.

I definitely was an endomorph...maybe still am...parts of me?

Then I busted my ass at the gym to morph into a mesomorph. 'cuz face it- Mesomorphs are where it's at...right? In my next life I wanna be a big, healthy, white, straight, mesomorph with a name like TOM - have an easy laugh- a cute gal- use the word DUUUUDE a lot and not have to even think about things like how I move or what I lead with. Cuz when you're a MESO like TOM in this world you're cock of the fucking walk and nothing can touch you-!!!

(Regains composure)

Where was I...?

My body. Figuring it out.

I work it. I work it out.

I run. I lift weights three days a week, (I sound like a gay personal ad) yoga twice.

I feed it. Good shit. Organic.

I rest it. Eight hours a night.

I scrub it. With a loofah. Keep it clean. I touch it. A lot. Everywhere.

I let others touch it too.

Ya wanna?

Oops, see? There I go...lost in my body again..losing balance.

What about you? Are you in balance, mind, soul, and body?

Can we have it all?

Are you juggling?

Keeping things afloat?

Are you dropping the ball?

Or just trying your best... like this guy...talk about out of balance...

If you go to a gym you've seen him...

He's the guy on a cell phone...

GOOD WORKOUT

(A burst of house music.

MAN is talking on a cell phone at the gym. He also fumbles with head phones, water bottle etc. Props and action are mimed.)

Blasé? BLAAAAASEE? How can his portfolio be Blasé?...I -I don't even know what the frig blasé means!

Whoa, Whoa Sal... calm down! Take a breath with me. **(Breathes)**

What's the clients' name?... PUTZEL?!!... Tell that prick to sell!!!

(Breathes deep, calms himself) Look, Sal, I'm at the gym, I got fifteen minutes for my hour workout. It's not a good time. Have him call the office at two... or my cell... or no... have him e-mail ..or he can fax the off-...its broken? Again?

Wait a sec-

(At a passerby)

Hi honey.... good, I'm good and you? Good, good, good.....

(MAN gets onto stairmaster machine, programs it and begins to climb)

(Back to phone) Sal you there?

No. I haven't seen her yet. I'm lookin' though. Kerri. Her name is Kerri. No, no, Brenda was the one I took for a drink last week. I'm talkin' 'bout the blonde ..yuh.. ..yuh...**(Laughs)** Arsehole - take a chill pill, handle Putzel and leave me alone!! I need this workout!!

(After a moment, another passerby) Hey buddy buddy how ya doin? cool-listen-do me a favor? Change the channel on the tv? The market channel. I think it's 38 or 39 or- Thats it!...awesome... thanks buddy have a good workout-

(Puts on headphones. Phone rings,he fumbles.)

Yuh? Hey ALI! Whats Uuuuup ? No, I didn't get any message... was it on my cell or work? Home? Oh. Yuh four thirty right? oh five? That'll work, cool.what are we doin' tonight back and bi's? and abs? ...I hate doin abs- I know, I know, I need it... hey you're the trainer-

(Leaning on console) Wuh? Yuh... I'm doin' cardio right now. How long?... I've been climbing for...I dunno, about...fourty-five minutes or so. Yuh! Im sweatin'. My heart rate? **(Feels neck, wrist for pulse)** I dunno . Fast... my posture? I'm standin' straight like you said. **(Stands straight)** My breathing? Deep, yup yup. Haven't smoked for two weeks now ... **(Breathes deep)**

Ali ? Can you hear me? You're fadin' in and out... phone sucks...you there? Can I put the creatine in with my protein powder? Gives me the runs. Huh? Should I take it before or after spin?...spin.. I'm losin' you. Ok, four thirty right? I mean five. Back and bi's and abs...

(Hangs up)

(Takes deep breath. Watches TV phone rings, he fumbles)

Shit! Yuh? SAL? What are you a moron?. No I'm takin' a dump...YES, Im working out... Really? What'd he say? CALM DOWN SAL... Did you tell him to call me? Then don't worry about it. Hey- I'm not stressin' about nothin'. Remember that seminar I told you about? That de-stress your life thing with that guy with the big white teeth?...

You should take it. I'm tellin ya. You're stressed .Get a massage. Get your ass in the gym once in awhile, Get in touch with your body! I mean golf is alright but-

Whu?...yuh ...no, no, not Saturday I told you guys Saturday is out Heather and I agreed

Saturday is our day... actually Heather and her therapist agreed...

Howd'you play last week?. See? I told you...that's impossible for a par five ...that's why I don't hit the three wood - Whoa! -

Speaking of wood here she comes...mamma mia.... Kerri. Kerri is sooo very. What's she wearing? What are you?... I don't know... this tight...Shit I can't see her from here - shit!

Sal I gotta go. Yuh after her -no - I got another call. Don't call back! And how many times do I have to tell you?-

You can't play golf angry!! Bye asshole.

(Takes call)

Hello? Hiiii honey...you know where I am...you know. Where am I every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 12 o'clock, where?

No. Not Burger King - not Burger - think.

(To a passerby) Hey! Wait! Buddy, I was watchin' that-

(Back to phone.) The health club, right! And why do I tell you to not call me at 12:00 on Monday, Wednesday and Friday? huhhh? Because I am working out -we agreeeed. What's Bruno barking at?... Oh...

(Tiring, leaning over machine)

I will be home at seven o'clock. What time do I always get home ? I came home at ten because I needed to meet a client ...for drinks...it wasn't fun.

I'm doing it all for you babe... the overtime... working out. Yes, you...remember we saw that guy on T.V? Whatshisname?... ya know ...the gay guy... yeah alright, he's not gay.. Ricky Martin, right.

Remember we talked about his ass? I bet you my ass could look like his in six months?.... Why are you laughing? Whats so funny? Heather, I do not see whats so funny... Ali says this will work-

(Kerri walks by) Oops another call...hon I gotta go...It's work..I gotta go now... I love you too.
(Kissing sounds, hangs up)

Heyyy...hii...howya doin'? Nice day out there huh? Beautiful..Kerri, right? Kerri I'm Don we talked after spin last week-. Oh you gonna swim now? Good, good. Yeah I'm just gettin'... a little stair in between workouts, I'll lift later... Kickbox, do some abs... or some... yoga, pilates... do you -?
(She starts to walk away) Oh,..you gotta go? Well- hey! Have a good workout...nice to see you again ...Kerri ...nice-
(Loses balances and slips off of Stairmaster. Looks around.) Shit. Asshole. Shit.

(Reprograms machine, resumes his climb.)

Hi... guy? Do me a favor? Can you grab a magazine for me? Thanks man...any one is fine...PEOPLE...TIME...US...THEM... Whatever. Thanks bud.

(Flips through magazine)

*"Ten ways to make her happy in the bedroom..."**"Ten ways to close the sale..."* *"Ten ways to be be superdad-"*....

(Remembers ...dials cell phone) Maria? Hey. What are you doin' home? I wanted your machine... How'd Donny's game go ? Really? Awesome.

Did you tell Donny why daddy couldn't be there? Maria, don't start. You know this job.You want your fancy lifestyle, child support rollin' in- you gotta understand - the money ain't growin' on trees!!!!.

Look, tell Donny I'll pick him up Saturday. We'll play pool or see that Disney crap if he still wants - you took him already? Why do you never leave something for me to do with him? Huh? No-you always!!...

(Pause. breathes.)

Ok, Ok.

Are we fighting? Maria? Huh? Then maybe it's a bad time I know it is for me.

(Hangs up)

(Climbing faster, tiring. Remembers something. Takes out phone and dials)

Heather? Me again. Listen. I forgot to give Bruno his pill this morning can you- I know we agreed- I said I would take care of him, he's my dog - but I forgot. so... What?

You gonna let the dog die?... It's no big deal. Get a pill, Open his mouth..no he won't bite. Did he ever bite you? Huh? Yeah but thats cuz I put peanut butter all over you. Look, the vet says he needs one in the morning and-

You don't have to pry his jaws open! Try this. Get a piece of bologna from the fridge. I didn't eat it all. Salami then. No salami? Alright- mortadella- whatever the frig is in there- wrap the pill in the mortadella and see if he takes it. I'll wait.

(Pause)

Hello? Did he take it? He spit it out? He - Put the phone to his ear. Bruno? Bruno? C'mon baby... be a good dog... take the pill for daddy. Heather? what's he doin'?... humpin' your leg?... listen, screw it! I'll take care of it! Shit.

(Really tiring, flips through a magazine)

"Ten ways to maximize your workout..."

(Dials) Hey. Sal. Listen. I won't be back to the office 'til two. Emergency at home. No. Bruno. Whu? Putzel? He's heading to the office NOW? Well he's gonna have to WAIT. SHIT.

(Takes a deep breath. To self)

Breathe , Breathe...

Sal, hey- I'm learning to prioritize here .

Family first, then my health , NO- first my health , then my work...

You should do the same buddy TAKE MY ADVICE. WORK OUT. YOU'LL LIVE LONGER. I'M GONNA FINISH THIS WORKOUT!!!

(MAN hangs up. HE puts on headphones. Sings 'Superman' by Five for Fighting.)

"...I'm more than a bird..I'm more than a plane... More than some..."

(mumbles)

..IT'S NOT EASY... TO BE...ME....."

(He climbs as lights fade out)

(Lights up)

Gym culture craziness.
Health clubs are our modern day churches -we bow and sweat to the Cybex god. Sacrificing.
Giving penance...
And our bodies have become so much more than just the temple of our souls.
We carve them carefully...like statues...to adorn other temples..

But what are we really trying to accomplish here? All this bodywork...

Some guys build up themselves up to gargantuan proportions and take these huuuge bodies to work. To sit. Behind a desk. To type.
Form over function...

I know a vegan woman... She says, “ *I run seven miles in the A.M., swim for an hour at lunch then weight trains in the p.m. ...”On light days!*”

(Yuh... light days in more ways than one....)

The ability to develop the mind is limitless.

Our souls ...may be infinite.

But aren't our bodies, ultimately, finite? A product of our genes and DNA?

Perhaps Karen Carpenter come close to finding the answer...

Extreme body sculpting...

Or how 'bout that thousand pound guy they buried in a piano case?

Did he stretch body limits and get to some truths?

All these unanswered questions...I want answers. Integration. Balance...

(ACTOR places BALANCE puzzle piece.)

We travel to other lands ... cultures...North, South, West...and East.

They're more balanced, more enlightened there after all...aren't they?

(Light change. A flourish of Indian music)

NAMASTE

(In a strong and lilting “Indian?” accent)

Ok.

Good morning! Can you please stand and come to the front of your mats?

What a beautiful group. Welcome! I am so pleased to be here teaching yoga today. First, I will tell you a little about myself. My name is Threepac.
I was born and raised in New...Jersey. I am a teacher of the Ashtanga style of yoga...
and... I am single.

Is the room hot enough? Yes?

I know I am a little moist. This is perfect for our practice today.

Ok. Now. Besides myself... is this anybody's' first yoga class?

(Scans room)

No? Ok. Good. Easy for me.

Today we will perform Sukhasury-... Sukhasurana-....Sukasuryanamaskar or, the easy sun salutation... easy to do, maybe, but a bitch to say...

Salute to the sun!

To increase body awareness, I want to concentrate as we move through the postures- or Asanas-on two very important actions.

First, your Ujjayi breathing. And what is Ujjayi breathing???

Ujjayi breathing comes from rubbing the breath against the back of the throat. The inhale is like when you gasp at something shocking **(Gasps and holds hand to chest)** only your mouth

stays closed.

(Demonstrates) Can you try this with me?

Good.

Holding your hand to your chest isn't needed.

The exhale is similar to when something feels very, very good and you go aahhhhh!!.

(Exhales lasciviously)

But again your mouth is closed. **(Demonstrates)**

Can you try Ujjayi breathing with me now?

Louder! I cannot hear you! Breaaathhhhhheeee! Ok. Good.

Next we focus on your Mulabandha. My favorite!! And what is your Mulabhandha?

Mulabandha is your root and is located between your genitals and your anus. This is a very special place.

With your hand, can you feel your Mulabandha for me ? **(Observes class)**

Ok. Nice.

Throughout your Ass -anas contract this area. This is the place you contract when you must pee very, very bad but have no place to go. Some men might squeeze here to avoid a premature ejaculation...

Shhhhhhh. It's ok. You know who you are.

If anyone is having trouble locating Mulabandha, Threepac will be happy to come 'round and point it out to you. **(Looks around)**

No?...Well...Ok.

I guess we can begin our salute to the sun.

At the front of our mats start with hands in Namaste .

Namaste means *"The spirit in me bows to the spirit in you."* Let us close our eyes and visualize that for a moment.

(After a long pause, opens eyes) I don't see anything... you?

Never mind.

Ok. Feet together, spread your toes. wider.... wider! Like baboon!

Lift from the top of the head like God is pulling your hair...placing your hands at your side, tilt your hips in, in, in.

This is Tadasana! Mountain pose! Does your body feel like a mountain? Heavy yet light?... like... a fat person on crack?

No?

Ask yourself... whhhhyyy?

Step two - inhale and raise your arms reaching to the stars and then-exhale we dive forward , arms out like an olympic diver... be like... Greg Louganis... come out!...over and hang in Uttanasana.

Let your head goooooo...loose like a goose.

Now inhale into Ardhattanasana. Back flat, reach your bum to the person behind you!

Reach your head to the bum in front of you!

Beautiful! I love this pose!!

Then Chaturangadandasana! Exhale and jump back to a pushup and lower to the ground slowly, slowly, slowly!

Not all the way! Don't be wimpy...!

Then... raising head and chest inhale... into upward dog pose. Delicious...can we hold this pose for a moment?

(Stands and observers the class) Doesn't it feel good? The stretch across your chest? The breasts spreading.... and your genitals...where are they right now?

Don't look! feeeel. Are they touching the floor?...

Yes?

Then you are doing this wrong!!!

Your genitals should only lightly graze the floor.

(Demonstrates) That's right... tease the floor with your genitals.

OH! Here is a good place to remind you that private lessons in my home or yours are always available. **(Pause)**

Adhomukhasvanasana ! Exhale! Roll over the toes lifting your bum into an upside down V-

shape. This pose is also called down-dog... for obvious reasons.
 Now we will stay in this pose for five breaths... but first, we will bark like a dog.
(Barks like a dog).

He he he ... barking is not a part of the sun salutation but wasn't that fun?

Ok. Now. Stay in downward doggie. Stay doggie stay. For the count of five.
 Breeeeathe!!!!... 5...Bums up!!.. 5...Have you forgotten your Mulabandha?..I haven't...And your
 breathing?...4...Are you getting tired? Are your arms starting to burn? To bad!! Some people are
 paralyzed and feel nothing below the neck!! Enjoy the pain! 3...2...1....

Exhale and jump forward to Ardhattanasana bum and head, bum and head
 remember?...Beautiful.

Exhale into Uttanasana, then inhaling we sweep up, up, beautifully then exhaling
 beautifully placing hands once again in Namaste, into mountain pose.

How does your body feel now? Tingly? Hot? No?...Then you are doing this wrong and I cannot
 help you!
 Smile inwardly congratulating yourself for finishing a sun salutation. (claps)

Stop clapping!

Lets try something else..

A balancing pose. Tree pose.

Take your time here now... slow... focus..
 Take the right foot...hurry up... and place it inside the thigh... below the groins.

What happened to your breathing? Trees breathe too!
 Hands in Namaste reach up to the sky. Are you a strong tree? A hard tree? Are your fruits
 swaying in the wind? Are you falling down?

This is all a part of yoga.
 Congratulate yourself for falling!

Ok. Enough. The other side. Try closing your eyes this time. One... Two...(Opens eyes).
 Oh my goodness! All the trees have fallen!? Is this the rainforest? Urban sprawl? Up, up, up!!...

Ok. How are your groins? Are you tight in your groins? I know my groins are a problem for me.
 We will stretch our groins in Warrior pose.

Starting with Warrior one... Spread your legs!!
 Wider, Wider! Open your vice like groins!

First, watch how I move ...Warrior 1, 2, 3 and 4.
(Faster) Now, this time, with me, Warrior 1,2,3 and 4.
(Faster) Now this time I will show you something special. Warrior 1,2,3, and 4! (He takes a
 twisting bind and has a groin pull).

Aaaaaarrrrrrrrghhhh!!!! Uh Oh....
 Threepac has hurt his groins.
 It's ok. Im ok... Shit...

Let us bring our legs slowly to center **(He is in obvious pain)** Ahhhhhhh...

We must end our practice here today.
 I'm sorry, I was having fun, but my damn groins...

So. Once again, let us bring our hands into Namaste.

Remembering that the meaning of the word yoga is "union",
 Union of mind, soul and body....

Let us close our eyes and visualize that for a moment.

(After a long moment he opens his eyes)

I still don't feel anything....You?

(Lights out)

(Lights up)

I didn't feel anything.
 When I was a kid. I wasn't very aware of my body. You know, you go through that amazing
 period when your body is so malleable it's like nothing can hurt you...

"Hey, Mike come out and play!" (He runs, trips and falls, gets up easily).

But then awareness comes. First, through pain. Getting whacked in the head by a shopping cart in the market... strep throat.... the first horrifying vomit. Your dog gets hit by a car.

You start to feel things...(ACTOR places the EMOTION puzzle piece)

My astrologer tells me, " Michael , you experience the world kinaesthetically. Through feeling. through touch...You have to move, use your body, your hands..."

My god..how did she know that shit?

It was tough for me to sit behind a desk in school. **(He acts this out.)**

As I matured I thought an acting career would support my kinaesthetic nature ... So I studied theater which did fit the bill but didn't pay any.

So... I became a waiter. Because that's what actors do...right?

(A magical light change. A musical number sung to "Music and the Mirror" from A Chorus Line.)

"God I'm a waiter ..a waiter... waits...Give me a table to wait on, give me someone to serve, let me wake up in the morning to dish out an entree' or just an hors d'oeuvre! Seat me a party, seat me a party, seat me a paaaarrrrtyyyy! Give me a chance to serve food! All I ever needed was my notepad and a pencil and a chance to wait on you!"

(Lights bring us back to reality)

It was physical work which was great but after years and years of it, I felt brain dead. and it didn't feed my soul. I just ended up feeding a lot of young souls. Out of balance again.

The breaking point?...

(A woman with heavy New York accent) Excuse me...are you our waiter? We'd like to start with a cocktail. I would like a martini. Straight up. Vodka. Olives. Dry. Ice on the side. My husband will have a scotch. No ice. With water on the side and I think we can order... Harold are you ready? Fine. I'm having the tenderloin, MEDIUM, PINK. Tell the chef if its overcooked I'll send it back. Now what comes with that? **(Listens)** NO.

I'd like a potato. Baked. Plain. Harold? You sure you want the Schrod? He'll have the Schrod. Dry. No bread crumbs. If it's not dry I'll send it back. Now what comes with that? (listens) NO. You have broccoli? He'd like the broccoli. No sauce.

(To Harry) You want the sauce? Ok. He'll have the sauce. ON THE SIDE ! Make sure the food is hot- Whats your name?- Michael. Make sure the food is HOT...

Because the rest of my life isn't; My daughter doesn't call me, I hate my face lift, My husband has erectile dysfunction, So make me happy, feed me, give me love and make SURE... IT'S... HOOOOOTT!!!!

Enjoy your meal...!!

I knew, once again I needed to change careers.

But what would bring me the balance I was looking for?

I was still figuring it out...searching...

I always had a great interest in anatomy. The body, the mind- boggling beauty of it all. Maybe too much of an interest. Throwing me off balance.

I admit, as a teen, certain body parts took on a greater importance than others...

An inordinate importance.

You?

You may have been drawn towards... a breast.

Or perhaps...a vagina caught your attention.

For me it started at an early age... with Batman.

Well, Robin, actually.

If he would turn a certain way in his tights and a bulge should appear, something mighty would occur in my body.

Holy faggot Batman!

A few years later, at the mall, I was thrown out of a record store...caught... scratching through the cellophane on the Stones Sticky Fingers album... trying to pull down that damn zipper. Something primal... animal.

Body playing with the brain, body messing with the soul...

(He places the SEX puzzle piece as lights fade out)

THE PENIS MONOLOGUE

A long, slow drum roll.

Lights slowly increase

as ACTOR drags onto stage a very large draped object on wheels.

The drum roll climaxes with a cymbal crash as actor tears away draping to reveal a huge penis.

The ACTOR falls to the ground in supplication and bows repeatedly as

lights fade OUT.

WHAT BECOMES OF THE BROKEN HEARTED ?

What is this hunger in the body?....

His name was Anthony Giovanelli.
Giovanelli means young ...something in Italian.
and he was... Something, young and Italian.
...Anthony Giovanelli.
It's like a prayer, isn't it?

His real name...though this is theater, he and the pain are not fiction. I will not change names to protect the innocent here, ladies and gentlemen.
Fuck him.

Anthony and I worked out at the same gym. He was seventeen. I was nineteen
(Damn I should have known better...).

The first time I saw him he was bench pressing on the Universal Machine. (In 1980 Universal Machines were cool).

He lay in cut off sweats, legs spread wide, a worn t-shirt riding up, exposing a flat stomach with a perfect line of belly hair that quickened my heart. His skin... perfection...

I think Michelangelo looked long at skin like that in Florence... pausing a moment to question the pale, blue veins that ran through it.

He sat up ... shook his curls, catching my gaze with liquid eyes. His full lips turning at one corner, looking down at his crotch, then smiling back at me...slyly.
So pleased to be appreciated.

Later, I saw him emerge from the steam room- Hollywood style- Greta Garbo in Anna Karenina - steam swirling around his sinewy shape, fitfully revealing skin, wet, shoulders, chest, belly, hip and finally a clearing - exposing a perfectly formed cock.

My body...flipped out. Electricity burst through my balls, ran up my spine, around my belly, dilating my aorta, flooding my veins with blood, my cock growing to amazing proportions- shrinking the skin on my head.

Well...I called it love.

We became... friends? We played basketball.

“Wanna play some hoop ?”, he asked.

“Yeah. sure.”

I didn’t really know how but lied.

(Plays this out)

“Come on,man, shoot! Shoot!”

He would get basket after basket. All athletic grace.

I would fumble. Tripping over myself. Tryin to be cool.

He stood behind me, blocking my throws, leaning in, pressing his cock against my ass ...

As I dribbled.

You like that, huh, Mike?’

No need for a reply.

After workouts we’d talk in the sauna our sweating bodies close, slippery, electric.

I’d press my leg against his. He didn’t move his away.

He said, “Hey wanna come back to my place and get wasted?”

I had to work.

Waitering. Feeding the masses. Important.

I said, “No, I can’t.”

He said “C’mon!”

I said, “No, I can’t.”

He said, “Cmon.”

I said, “I can’t!...”

I have only two regrets in my life... You have witnessed number one... Number two will follow.

In bed that night my body hungered for something no amount of self satisfaction could feed.

What was this? ...Primitive....Animal...Anthony.

The next day in the sauna, Anthony said something about his... GIRLFRIEND..

What? I didn’t believe it... he’s just afraid of his feelings... a cover...

‘Til i saw them walking through the park one morning..holding hands.

More like she held his hand.

See, there is a phenomenon gay men are familiar with that I call “*Hang on to your man.*” It’s what happens when a girl checks you out checking out her guy.

She’ll grab and pulls him close.

“Yuh honey, you better hold on!!!”

Another phenomenon is the “*Macho Snort*”. **(Snorts)**

It’s what straight guys do if you look at them a second too long. **(Snorts)**

They look down at the ground and snort.(snorts) Must be some primal... vestige of some ancient... mating ritual...whatever.

That day in the park Anthony didn’t snort. He blushed and waved as she pulled him close.

Suddenly my body was not my own. I could have killed. A crime of passion. I fantasized running up to her... pulling her hair... throwing her down to the ground... kicking her teeth in and.....

Instead I waved “hi” .

Clearly, new borders were being drawn in our relationship.

Anthony started to play basketball with a real team. With guys who really knew how to play the game.

Now I was treated like a small annoyance .

He’d say “Hey” polite, removed... resolved in his heterosexuality.

Didn’t he know I loved him?

I mean, A-N-T-H-O-N-Y was my fucking PIN number.

(A whisper) It still is...

But I kept my distance , watching him from afar; lifting weights, wrestling (my personal favorite), playing hoop...

As he showered, I’d find his clothes in a sweet, musky heap near his locker.

Did I touch them? Did I hold them to my face to see how his body smelled?

Anthony... body smell..desire...

I've spent too much time looking again for that same scent.

Then.... an amazing thing happened. The day came when Anthony's horniness or curiosity or need to dominate or please or whatever the hell it was came.

One night at the gym he caught me alone and asked if I ever saw "*upstairs.*"

"*Upstairs*" in this gym were four abandoned floors, endless dark hallways, hissing pipes, rat turds, falling plaster... porn magazines from 1971.

I had explored upstairs before.

I said, "*No, I've never been up there.*"

He said, "*Come on*"

I froze.

He said, "*COME ON!*"

Then like in a dream we ascended the dark stairway, him in the lead. For eight flights I watched his grey cotton sweatpants shift between his buttocks. Climbing, buzzing in my head, heart racing.

The top. Dark. Stairs end. A wall. He turns. Our bodies graze each other. I feel his heat. His lips on my hair. His breath on my face. Erections stir.

"*Cool, huh?*" he said

"*Yuh,*" I said.

"*Yuh,*" he said.

Long pause.

"*Well...I should go.*" he said

Brushing by me... back down the long, dark staircase. Into the safety of light.

Leaving my arms full of air.

Well...

I've played this scenario over and over in my mind.

At night, hot hands reaching...

In the day thinking -THAT'S HIM!- in a crowd. The shape of a head, the type of walk, can bring him back, can make me weak.

Body memory...desire...death.

Anthony and I... lost touch.

Recently, a mutual acquaintance said he heard that Anthony had died.

No. No...

That won't do.

Anthony has a date at my deathbed.

Let's roll the film of my fantasy death scene...

(Sound and strobe light effects of a movie projector playing.)

The year is 2054. My deathbed. I am old and very ill... but still look remarkably well. My last day. No drips or monitors, no need now... it is only a matter of minutes. A morphine haze. Images rush through my brain as it unloads memory. It's not so unpleasant I think... this giving the body up...

I turn.

Anthony!

He's here! He hasn't aged . He still wears that t-shirt and those gray sweats... He leans over me, warm and I can smell that smell - sweet, musky and something else. No words. We look into each others eyes. There's an understanding and then

He takes off his shirt.

Gently... he... slides his arm under my neck, cradles and lifts my head, kisses my cheek... my mouth then...

he looks down at his crotch, smiles at me slyly...

He unties his pant strings. He knows what my body needs now this last moment. He offers me his cock and I take it in my mouth as he strokes my hair.

Somehow this all makes sense and I am comforted so I let my body go, deeper, my desire fulfilled.

I am an infant again with warm and sweet mother's milk in my mouth. Peaceful, comforted, home...

(Strobe light and sound effects slow until we are in quiet and darkness.)

“What Becomes of the Broken Hearted” by Jimmy Ruffin plays as lights come up. ACTOR places the last puzzle pieces on to the board. The image is of a complete human form.

ACTOR then mimes preparing a client for a massage session. HE indicates massage table, shakes out hands, stands at the clients feet and pulls gently, then moves to the top of the table and kneels, cradling the head of the client. Sound fades OUT.)

To create balance. Mind, soul and body. My work, my play, my life. To integrate.
A way to never lose touch.
I think I finally might have found it.

A fish rots from the head.

So it's here I start my massage. A chance to focus.
To ask myself, 'What am I trying to do here?'
To witness this body lying before me.
Supine. Face up. Face down is prone.
(A lesson for the uninitiated).

I watch their breathing. Is it shallow or deep? Is there a smile on their lips? Or are they resisting?
Do they need calming?
Is their forehead lined with intense thought...?

Then I hold their head in my hands.

This is *“Head Cradling.”* Powerful in its simplicity. How perfect the head rests in upturned palms. Like hands were made for this.

They're tall , short, lean , fat, soft , hard, young and old. Sometimes ugly. Sometimes very

BODY / WORKS

beautiful. You want to kiss them. Sometimes they're fragile, ill, you feel like crying. Sometimes they're difficult. You want to hit them.

“What am i trying to do here?” I ask myself.
Change them?
I watch.

I apply some oil
(Starts to apply oil and to work the musculature of the neck and upper back)

I feel the quality of the muscle. I squeeze it.
I work it. I create heat.

I work the sternocleidomastoid. My favorite muscle .

The Sterno-cleido-mastoid is the long muscle that appears when you turn your head to one side. It starts behind your ear at the base of your skull and ends at the center of the sternum.

Audrey Hepburn sported one a hell of a Sternocleidomastoid.

I pull through the shoulders, knead into the neck, then brush across the face to empty the head.
(Stands)

There is a change now. I feel it in the air. I move on.

I hold their hand.
The amazing hand. A universe of tendons, bones and muscles. Home to the muscle Opponens Pollicis, the muscle that separates humans from the all other creatures, the muscle that allows us to do this- **(ACTOR holds out hand touching thumb to pinkie finger)** giving us the ability to hold onto, to GRASP. Other muscles with names like Flexor Pollicis Brevis, Digitorum Profundus, Abductor Digiti Minimi...

In anatomy class we'd kid, *“If you let me play with your Digiti Minimi, I'll let you play with my Teres Major..”*

(Working the hand)

"I can't believe how good that feels" they'll say.

"Of course", I think... *"When was the last time someone held your hand?"*

"What is more or less than a touch?" Walt Whitman asked...

Indeed.

Sometimes they hold onto your hand, not letting go...

What are they trying to say? Or is it subconscious? This need to hold onto...

Others hands are flat, rigid, refusing to acknowledge human contact.

Fine.

I move on.

The leg.

I lift the sheet to reveal it. Careful to tuck at the groin.

Appropriate draping is a science to the massage therapist.

How to balance the ratio of exposing the body, to the degree that it is necessary to work on a particular muscle group, with the ratio of covering the body in a matter that is comforting, non-sexual and, dare I repeat, appropriate to the poor bastard who is lying supine, naked and at my mercy on the mother fucking table .

I, in most cases, would prefer to completely remove the aforementioned drapery and dispose of it in the nearest appropriate receptacle.

But I'm a professional, and appropriate so I tuck... and hide that Teres Major or Digniti Minimi in a most appropriate way.

To further divert myself, or them, of any thoughts of inappropriate activity, I will go first to the foot.

Aaaahhhhhhhhhhh. Ooohhhhhhhhhhh. Mmmmmmmnnnnnnn.

Yes! Yes! The feet...no resistance here. All that standing, walking, wrapped up in tight, sweaty shoes.

Is any other body part so regularly abused?

(Don't answer that...)

I slip through the tendons, dig into the bones, pull through the toes. This little piggy and that little piggy and this little piggy is really gnarly.

I watch their face to see if they're ticklish.

Some you can't tell... some make it very clear

(Imitates the squirming of the face, holding in the laughter).

(Uncovers and begins massaging the leg.)

The leg.

Strong yet vulnerable, lying there on its own - be it hairy or smooth...

But if it is hairy you need extra oil. Slather the shit on.

This is lunge position. Using my body weight to push through the muscle.

"Don't your hands get tired?"

I get that a lot.

No. You don't massage with just your hands but with your whole body...hopefully, even more.

Another thing I hear *"Boy, your girlfriend is lucky to have you around."*

Presumptuous.

(Moves to other leg)

The subject of girlfriends and wives comes up with guys a lot.

When we meet I ask them about their health history, why they came, where they carry tension, etcetera and have they had a massage before...

"Ahh...well, sorta.. (Snort) sometimes my girlfriend will rub me down you know and... she's alright... but...(Snort)"

Ok.Calm down. You're straight. I know. It's ok. Your'e safe. Breathe.

But I suppose there is real concern... especially when I start to work right.. around... here.

In massage school we played this scenario out... using a chalkboard eraser as a penis.

We broke into pairs. One playing the massage therapist and the other playing the client. When the massage therapist got to the inner thigh, the client would turn the eraser vertically under the sheet creating a tent. This was our cue to stop, move to the persons head, crouch down and use *"the following standard recommended dialogue..."*

"I notice that something has come up..."

Actually, the standard recommended dialogue was,

"I notice you are aroused. This is a normal response to being touched, but, this is not a sexual massage. Try to breathe and relax and we can continue or if you prefer we can just stop now."

I've never used those words exactly but it was a fun exercise and certainly gives new meaning to the phrase,

"Clapping the erasers."

What do I do? With this sexuality?

Things come up. For me. For them. Sometimes both of us.

Human. Basic. Good.

But now I think work is about more than dick.

I take the power and redirect it.

I lunge . I... Create... Heat.

I break down muscle tension! I increase circulation! I release lactic acid! I release endorphins!
I put you to sleep! I make you feel awesome! I AM GREAT AND POWERFUL. I... AM... OZ!!

This is monkey pose. **(Monkey sounds.)** That'll make 'em feel safe!
(Takes other hand)

Again I touch their hand. They are safe.

The arm - great indicator of surrender. Are they holding it stiff against their flank? Or can I take it, shake it out, and raise it above their heads? Can I stretch it? Can I take both arms? Can we fly together? Can I open you up? Can we dance...?

Time to turn.
Prone.

(A light change)

The back. The Tabula Rasa. The roadmap. The blueprint of the scars of living in this world. Of standing erect and bearing the weight of gravity.

Here lies the *"Heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to..."*

Begin. Some smoothing out and warming strokes to push the blood through. To soften...lightly to start.

Then, they'll ask me to work deeper.
I'll consent. I let myself go there. Deep. Deep as it takes to break it down. To let it out.

I press into the tissue. I get to what's underneath.

One hundred and one muscles.
One thousand and one stories...

Don talks about his wife. His job. His son. Things aren't working out. It lives in his shoulders.
Tight and raised to his ears.

Kerri is a triathlete. Muscle and bone. She can't get her swimming time down. She talks and talks and talks as I work...her feet never stop kicking.

Ali. A body builder. He's loaded with up on steroids, Ritalin, Ephedrine, too, then Valiums to bring him down at night. . His tongue is green from Gatorade, his moods swing like a pendulum, his muscles feel like stone.

Kenny had AIDS. He'd fall asleep and drool as I massaged his head. We'd laugh at that. He started strong then wasted away evenly until there was no muscle left. I suppose I was massaging something else then...

It's so quiet.
Like a church.
Our breathing.
I work.
They sleep... my mind wanders...

I think of how strong a body can be;
A sinewy climber reaches the top of a jagged cliff.
I think how delicate a body can be; A window washer falls forty feet, his spine snaps, it breaks through the skin of his neck.

I try to sooth. To heal.

They want me to work deeper still.
Deeper? How deep? To what's underneath?
Ok. I consent.

I tear away the skin and fascia. I expose the wet muscle, red with fresh blood. It pulsates. Blue veins run through it.
Deeper?

I slosh aside the organs and lymph. Deeper?
I rip the muscle clean from the bone.
I expose them completely.

(Stops)

What is this?
This power?
These hands on this body?

What am I trying to give ?

Integration. Balance.

And all the things I want for myself.

To be touched.
To relax.
To have no pain.
To be healthy, sexy.
Listened to, loved.

To be present.

To be in my body. To nurture it To enjoy it.
And then to be able to let it go, fearlessly, when the time comes.

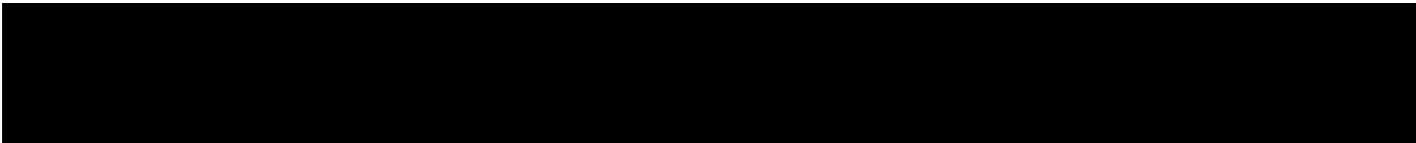
To move freely and easily about this earth in the temporary vessel I have been outfitted in.

And maybe make that easier for someone else.

(To client on table)

Thank you. I'm finished. You can get up now.

(Lights fade)



END

"WHAT HAPPENED IN BOSTON, WILLIE"

"BODY WORKS"

**Written & Performed by Michael Z. Keamy Directed by Curt Miller
Sound by Mike Mayo, Michael Abbott Lighting Design by Julian Benoit**

Michael Z. Keamy is apparently a massage therapist with brains enough to turn this profession into art by adding mime and music and monologue. His "Body/Works" is much less a gay peep-show (though there is a touch of that) than a song of the body electric. MACHINE, the gay bar in the bowels of which the play is performed, is next door to THE RAMROD, but to works are universal.

Keamy opens with "The Re-Evolution of Man" --- a mime piece which in just a few minutes runs all the changes from Genesis' first six days of creation to the arrival on the scene of the modern gay male. A section called "Namaste" presents Keamy as the roshi conducting a yoga class. There is a piece satirizing the workout-artists who try to spend a few hours every day on exercise machines, but have a cell-phone pasted to their ear to keep in touch with the office, the wife, the mistress and the boyfriend. And there's a good long mime section demonstrating the love the massager has, not for any individual, but for the body itself.

Under Kurt Miller's direction, the piece contains just enough self-deprecating humor to keep the show bubbling. The frame for the show is a pile of jigsaw-pieces which, when finally put together, creates the portrait of a human male. And the best thing about the show is Keamy's empathetic ability to speak from inside characters created in seconds.

REVIEWS OF CURRENT PRODUCTIONS NOTE: ENTIRE CONTENTS COPYRIGHT 2005 BY LARRY STARK

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EXCERPTED FROM

THE THEATRE MIRROR REVIEW

MAY 2005

Michael Z. Keamy takes a look at his body - and ours

Michael Z. Keamy takes a look at his body - and ours By Thomas Garvey

PUBLISHED: THURSDAY, MAY 5, 2005

Ah, the body as metaphor - such a tantalizing topic, but such a difficult one to make fresh! Far too often, it seems, artists settle for the portentous rather than the profound when it comes to our bodies, our selves - a trap which Michael Z. Keamy, in his well-meaning one-man show *Body/Works*, falls into more than once, particularly when he's groping for Big Answers to even Bigger Questions. There's nothing wrong, of course, with seeking more balance in our body-centered culture, but Keamy's obvious opening gambits, which come complete with the theme from 2001, the voice of God, and the thin joke of apes evolving into gym bunnies, all fall flat (and there's not much new about big puzzle pieces with question marks on them, either). But when Keamy keeps the focus on the particular (not to mention the personal) it turns out he has a number of keen insights to share - and *Body/Works* holds us with its modestly poignant charm.

It turns out this actor/playwright is a longtime body warrior - Keamy's spent his professional life acting, or training, or doing yoga and massage; for him, the body has always been inescapable, front and center. And maybe that's the problem with some of the show; most of the philosophy Keamy deploys feels clichéd, having trickled down from the academy (or the ashram!) to the aerobics room; meanwhile the little vignettes of actual gym life feel direct, alive, and precisely observed. We immediately recognize the asshole on the Stairmaster, for instance; clutching a cell, and yelling tirelessly at his girlfriends and assistants (while fretting over his designer dog, who just upchucked at home), he's that nervous Napoleon who yells at you to change the television channel for him - and Keamy captures him perfectly. His horny yoga instructor, meanwhile, is a type rather than a character, but still fills the bill for an amusing spoof of the po-faced sexuality of much Asian-inflected body-mania.

Even better is this licensed masseur's penetrating tour of the massage table; his contemplation of the simple (but all-too-rare) human contact of merely holding hands is quietly moving, and his techniques for dealing with the occasional erectile disfunction (either his own or his clients') is a genuine hoot. Keamy gets still more intimate during his long recount of a teenage crush on a straight (but bi-curious) boy at the neighborhood gym. It's an old tale, and one that figures in many a gay life: the hot young thing who really seems to like you, even if you're not good at sports, or have lots of friends, like he does. Of course the "relationship," while teasingly physical, only seems to be on tap when nobody else is around - and inevitably, after leaning all the way over the edge, the straight lad returns to his settled sexual identity with a casual laugh, leaving the gay boy feeling devastated. Keamy calmly leads us through the whole sad saga with restraint and consummate skill, and even includes a curious epilogue: he recently heard his teenage tormentor was dead.

Now there's a timely comment on the body - as well as a hint at what happens to the broken-hearted: they finally realize that they'll survive (even when the objects of their affection don't). It's the rueful high point of this small-scaled, sensitive, and affecting show.

"...There's this moment, when you know there will be the next moment, when you're gonna take the dive, when you're gonna be floating in the air...then, you jump."

Parturition

Three Plays about Life and Death

In these three provocative short plays, Michael Z. Keamy explores the decisions desperate people can make when at the crossroads of life and death. The need for human connection, the fulfillment of desire, and even the expression of humor- all things become heightened when these characters find themselves in a situation in which they have nothing left to lose.

Parturition Magda and Laura are two women living very different lifestyles but they face a common decision. When their lives intersect- obsession, the past, the cruelty of nature and the maternal instinct join forces to change their lives forever.

Mr. Leach and the Nurse A beautiful young nurse and an elderly and terminally ill man share an unexpected and very human moment of intimacy.

Party A rooftop, a party, guests, champagne...a guest of honor and a surreal bon voyage.





Parturition

Then... the balloon popped. I popped.
One night on the bathroom tile floor with
pain and some blood- just like that. I
screamed, "*Boone, the baby, my baby!*"

SCENE ONE

Cast

Magda: A twenty year old woman

Laura: A forty-two year old woman

Magda

(Magda is seated in a rocking chair. She is sewing what appears to be a pillow.)

When I first heard the news, I swear, I was walking on a cloud. For four whole months, I was floating.

Even Boone, my boyfriend at the time, remarked how I looked *“like you just had the best sex of your life.”*

But Boone was a pig and of course would say somethin’ like that.

This was nothing like sex.

“Far from sex,” I told him *“This is something pure. This is like nothing you will ever know. This is heaven inside of me. I’m pregnant. I’m pregnant. I’m going to have a baby!”*

Boone didn’t seem to care so much. If anything, he got quieter even... goin’ to work, comin’ home, watchin’ sports, drinkin’ his beer, smokin’ his cigarettes. Even though I told him, “Do that outside from now on, no smokin’ in this apartment from now on! We have a baby on the way.”

He looked at me like I was a lunatic. Then he looked down at the ground like he does with that grin.

I will tell you, I think my being pregnant shook him up. I have heard that babies can do that to a man. Well. I didn’t worry about that. By then I was already falling out of love with him anyway. I already had what I wanted most. His sperm. His baby. My baby now. For four months...

For four months, you should have seen me! I was the most beautiful, big, most beautiful pink balloon, floating up there, up against the purest blue sky, floating above my house, above Boone, above work, above Dad, above the whole town.

I felt clear. Clear like I was doing what I was put here on this earth to do.

I do think I was born with it in me. I remember even when I was a little girl I always had a baby doll with me. *“That doll is just attached to her,”* my Mom use to say.

It’s true, too - I never let myself be alone. I always had a baby in my arms. A baby to hold, baby to wash in the tub, baby to kiss goodnight. And I’m not just talking about my doll. We lived on the farm then and I was the one who took care of all the baby animals... the chicks, the baby goats...feeding them with a bottle when the mother couldn’t. I loved holding them, the feeling of their hard hair and the strong pull of them tugging at the nipple. You ever feel that?

I even learned how to help Dad give birth to the baby calves. They’d come out all tangled, sticky, wet and red. And all the kittens, I cared for them, too. The ones that didn’t get drowned by my Dad...

Oh, he was just doin’ what needed to be done. I learned that lesson fast.

I did cry like a baby when he drowned that first litter in the rain barrel in our back yard. “Too many mouths to feed around here without more damn cats,” he said.

I remember them floating up to the top the next day, picking them out of the barrel with a stick and looking at their small wet faces. Dead, even though they looked like they had barely been born.

But that’s life. On the farm, you get to see it up close.

I remember when one of the chickens I loved- Speckle I named him because he was spotted all over- and the day came when it was his time to be killed. I didn’t watch it but I heard him squawk and the ax hit the wood. At dinner I wouldn’t eat a thing ‘til I was forced. My Dad said “Don’t be stupid. Eat. It takes life to make life.”

When you get older you understand these things. That life ain’t fair.

(Magda stops, considers the pillow, adjusts its shape, and then continues to sew)

You’ll think I’m silly. I know, maybe I shouldn’t have, maybe it was too soon, but you can’t help yourself, you get excited and start thinking and wondering and everything changes.

I did buy some baby clothes when I was in that happy stage. Expensive ones, too, from the downtown shops but yellow because I didn’t want to know. I wanted to be surprised. Boone didn’t want any surprises. He said he saw a little penis in the ultrasound but I didn’t think so. All I saw was this perfect baby with the sweetest hands and feet, a little mouth, lips so small...so peaceful and floating...like an astronaut.

But space was in me, the universe was me.

Then... the balloon popped. I popped. One night on the bathroom tile floor with pain and some blood- just like that. I screamed, *“Boone, the baby, my baby!”*

There was nothing he could do. Nothing anyone could do, it was what it was. My beautiful baby was gone.

The doctor said there was nothing I could have done different, that it just happens to *“a certain percentage of women,”* which I guess means me.

Then there were all these tests and him sayin’ it didn’t seem likely- *“it doesn’t seem probable that you will carry a child to term.”*

I don’t mind sayin’ at that time I felt such

hate. For him, for myself, my body, hate for this whole world. Doctor said I should think about adoption. But that wouldn't be the same. I told him so. I said *“don't make light of something you can never understand.”* I stood and looked at him right in the eyes and I told that doctor, for me, adoption is not an option!

Ouch!

(Magda pricks herself with the needle, draws blood and sucks her finger. After a moment she resumes sewing.)

I guess I didn't hide my feelings so well 'cuz things fell apart fast. Boone left in a fit on Super Bowl Sunday. He left half a beer, half a bag of Lays and a cigarette burning in the ashtray. I stayed in bed mostly and called in sick a lot... and then lost the job at the market.

Sometimes things can get very dark.

I was thinking about that Dorothy girl in the *“Wizard of Oz”*. You know how she went from black and white to color? I know it sounds crazy but I feel like that happened to me but backwards.

When I was pregnant I was in that color world. When my baby died I went into the black and white.

It has taken some time to get back on my feet. I know you might not know it from lookin' at me, but I'm okay now. I see there is a light at the end of the tunnel. And I have a plan.

I got this great new job as a housekeeper for this lady- her name is Laura- and she lives in this huge house in the nice section of town. She's pregnant. I can tell. We haven't talked about it all yet... but I can tell she isn't too happy about it.

I can't understand that, can you? I never will understand that.

She's a lot older and maybe that's why or maybe it's 'cause she's divorced.

Either way...it's not fair.

But I guess she's alright we get along okay ... that is when we see each other 'cause she's always working.

I don't mind that. I love being alone in that big house, cleaning and traveling from room to room. I pretend it's mine. Tryin'on her beautiful clothes from the closet that's big as a room. Sometimes I even lay down on her king size bed. Lookin' up at the chandelier on the ceiling...

It can feel sad sometimes to go back to my apartment at the end of the day.

But yesterday morning before Laura left for work, I told her the news- the good news- that I was pregnant too. I told her how cool that was, how now we could share stories and how interesting that will be, how we could go through being pregnant together.

I think she used the word “wonderful” to describe it.

I agree. I think going through this together will make us the best of friends.

(She stops sewing, stands and positions the pillow under her shirt. The pillow fits nicely at her belly.)

There. I think that's a perfect fit if I do say so myself.

At least to begin with. At least for now.

(Lights fade out)

SCENE TWO

Laura

(Laura is a successful, smartly dressed forty-two year old woman. She is in her spacious office and stands in front of her office desk.)

I've requested a meeting today. A meeting with my boss, Mr. Jerome Gerard. This meeting will be different from all the others. It will not be about my position, not about any salary increase or dissatisfaction.

“Have a seat, Laura,” Jerome will say, not anticipating this meeting is about something personal, something unexpected.

(Laura moves to a bar area and starts to pour a glass of wine. She suddenly stops

and moves back to desk)

Getting to where I am now has not been easy. It has taken a lot of work, a lot of sacrifice. This is something I have had to accept. Sacrifice.

To succeed, it is sometimes necessary to take time away from other things... and I did. My friends, my social life, my husband, my children and, trust me, they did not make it easy.

In my mother's time the sacrifice was different. You stayed at home, you raised children, you were a mother completely. The sacrifice came when your children moved on to college or their own lives and left you with...what?

I'll tell you. Nothing.

I saw this happen to my mother and I swore it would never happen to me.

As soon as I could make the transition, as soon as could make the switch, I did.

I was present- present completely for my children's adolescence. I put my education and career on hold and I never questioned it.

Believe me, raising my children has been the greatest joy and the greatest challenge of my life. I have no regrets. They are both remarkable, wonderful individuals, above average in every way, both attending the best universities.

But the day came when I knew I needed to get back. Back to my work, back to myself.

I can remember pulling out of our driveway on my first day back to work. I remember Lisa and Mark's faces- thirteen and twelve at the time.

They both just stood there- stunned. You might think I was being cruel, saying goodbye to them forever...

Well. I know I can credit myself with the wonderful way they have both turned out. I'm confident that asserting my independence has taught them to be independent as well.

The lessons they learned from my husband, Paul, were different. Paul was on travel most of the time and missed out on the everyday details; the scraped knee, the dirty underwear, the figuring out what to cook, always that breakfast, lunch and dinner. Because we do, after all, have to eat.

No, Paul would be present on weekends for the fun things and the kids rallied around him. I can admit it was difficult for me not to feel resentful- even though I understood. I understood better than anyone regarding Paul and his charm. He had this way of making everything seem like fun, like an adventure. I can't blame them for loving him.

I loved him.

(Laura moves to bar and stars to pour a glass of wine, then stops and moves away.)

Paul and I divorced a year ago- an amicable separation, a long time coming. We still talk and I think we have both done a wonderful job

supporting each other and our children. I don't regret the decision. It has brought me a lot of good.

I've moved on.

(Moving to window) Now I have an office on floor thirtyfour of Gerard and Associates, the top floor, with a panoramic view of the city. If you look closely, on a clear day you can see all the way to the ocean...lovely. Ironic.

How I've sacrificed to get to this position, this floor, this room with all these panels of glass and... I've always been afraid of heights.

Suddenly everything seems ironic.

When the feelings first came, I suppose I denied them. I had been feeling tired, with headache on and off, not unusual for me, God knows. Maybe there was a little nausea. I did notice my period was... irregular, but it always had been. Work was especially busy that month so I just plowed through- coffee and Advil.

Then one morning while driving to the office, I remembered my Mother and I thought, Oh. And there was this strange relief.

I am forty-two. At forty-three my mother went into an early menopause and, I'll tell you, once it started it came on strong. This steady, patient woman turned into something fierce... a mad stranger. We children and Father learned how to tip toe around her, how to douse the flare ups before they grew into the all too often wildfire.

I thought: this is what is happening to me.

Stupid.

That would have been easy.

Two months ago at our National Sales Convention, I met a man. A man from our office on the opposite coast. He was... charming, persistent. At the first days luncheon he asked if he could take the empty seat near me. I said yes. Soon it was every lunch and I was... flattered, vulnerable. Then there was dinner and another dinner and, eventually, one breakfast.

So I find myself, this forty-two year old woman, in a drugstore line with a home pregnancy test. *"Efficient, easy to use"* just pee into a cup, insert the plastic applicator, look for the plus or minus sign. A *"no brainer"* as my daughter Lisa would say.

I follow directions. I watch the plastic dipstick turn a lovely shade of robin's egg blue and, faintly at first, but then as clear and permanent as a branding mark, the plus sign.

A moment of happiness, or a moment of horror?

Well.

If you are one of the desperate and fortunate, like my housekeeper, twenty-two and trying every which way to conceive, there is happiness.

If you are thirteen, God forbid, and taking the test in the bathroom of your parent's home, I suppose horror would be in order.

If you were me... If you were me, you wouldn't know what to feel. You would be floating ...lost.

I lie in bed at night and stare at the ceiling knowing this life is growing inside of me and... I just don't know what to -

(Laura sobs, briefly, pauses, collects herself).

I've reconnected with my therapist. I've consulted with my physician. We have weighed the options, explored scenarios.

Of one thing I am certain - abortion is not an option. There are some places I just will not go.

I also will not- will not- start to show and stay on here to be talked about or ridiculed behind my back. I will not put myself in the position of having to act thrilled and chat about *"the baby on the way"*.

(Laura moves again towards bar but this time pours a small amount of wine in the glass and drinks it down in one long swallow.)

So.

I've requested a meeting today with my boss, Mr. Jerome Gerard. Gruff and unpredictable Jerome. In the halls here at

G&A, he's known affectionately as *"the prick."*

But we understand each other, and I know he respects me and my work. We will negotiate like we have negotiated in the past. I will present the facts clearly and offer alternatives. He will be convinced. A temporary leave, work from home. I'll assure him I won't miss a beat. We will shake hands.

"Good luck, Laura," he'll say and he'll make some off color joke, as is his way. I will come back here afterwards, relieved, organize and pack some things and then...home.

(Laura unconsciously rests her hands on her belly).

Home.

Time to be alone, time to think things through.
(Laura takes a deep long breath and exhales)

I'm confident it will all unfold as it should.

It always does.

I'll have to let my housekeeper know, switch her from mornings to afternoons. She cannot disturb my work.

(Laura suddenly becomes aware of her hands and drops them to her side. She checks her watch)

It's meeting time.

(Laura picks up a notebook and pen from

her desk and exits the office)

(Lights fade out on an empty room)

SCENE THREE

Magda

(Magda is in a cramped space with an upright chair. She paces, sits)

I know you'll want to ask me how I did what I did. Everyone else here keeps asking me that and I tell them, so I guess I can tell you.

It's funny.

When I tell people how I did it, I find out what most people really want to know is how I could do it.

I guess there's two ways of looking at some questions.

Okay, first...how could I do it? Well... Have you ever wanted anything so bad and wished for it so hard and for so long that you can't ever believe that no can be an answer?

I tried.

After Boone left there were lots of other guys. Some of them I never even knew their names, I just let them have me. Then I would lay in

bed after with my legs crossed and pray, holding it in me. I tried.

I followed my cycles and counted the days. I didn't take any hot baths. I wore the moonstone fertility pendant I bought at the new age store.

Nothing took. Then you see the world around you. You see how everyone else lives. You see people at the mall with three kids and a fourth one in a baby carriage and you start to feel sick-like.

Something in the way you think changes.

Did you ever stand at the edge of a high diving board and look way down at the water?

You feel all light and afraid. You can feel your heart beat in your neck and something tickle in your privates. You stand there. You make a deal with yourself.

There's this moment when you know there will be the next moment, when you're gonna take the dive, when you're gonna be floating in the air.

Then, you jump.

Funny thing is, when you're floating your brain isn't thinking about the past moment or the next moment or about fear. You're just there, in that moment, frozen in time.

Well, I was in that moment when I did what I did and I guess that explains the first

question.

The answer to the second question- how I did what I did- is easy. It's just facts.

I was wearing my fourth pillow, the nine month size, when I did it.

It matched the size of Laura's belly perfect and she and nobody else ever guessed anything other than what I wasn't really...pregnant.

She was sitting at her desk, working as always when I did it.

I chose the knife a few weeks before. A real sharp, professional one I used to slice oranges in her kitchen.

I was calm. Calm 'cause I had everything planned out so well and because I was in that floating place.

I snuck up behind her, real quiet on that thick rug. I grabbed her hard by the hair and jerked her head back all the way. The knife sliced her neck so fast and her eyes looked into mine upside down and real wide like she couldn't believe how fast it was happening either.

I lowered her and the chair down onto the floor as gentle as I could because of the baby.

It was all about my baby now.

I yanked her slacks down and pushed her

shirt up over her head. There was lots of blood and some noise in her throat but that ended pretty quick.

I knew I needed to work fast. I cut into her belly longways from her belly button down. The first cut was clean and easy, like slicing through the skin on top of a cooked chicken. Deeper down it got tough though, in what I guess what was muscle. But then there it was, I found it, the womb... and I think it was the most amazing thing I'll ever experience in my life.

You should have seen me work.

It all happened like it was meant to be. Carefully cut through what I needed to cut to get to the baby who was alive, I could see it and feel it was moving. I cut the cord and everything and took it to the tub right away and washed off the blood and some white stuff and then-

She cried.

My baby girl cried, and I cried too because I was so relieved and so happy that we were okay, that everything was going to be okay. I wrapped her up tight in a clean sheet and took Laura's milk from the fridge and then-

We drove.

We drove and drove until I couldn't keep my eyes open. Then we'd sleep in the back seat, rolled up in a blanket together like a cocoon.

We had everything we needed and more. We had each other. And you never saw a happier and more peaceful baby anywhere.

We traveled like that for four days, like we were together in the same beautiful dream. I sang and she would sleep, she would cry and I would feed her.

We passed through farmlands and hills. We saw all kinds of animals and two rainbows together in the same sky in the desert.

For four days we drove... and then I stopped.

Stupid.

But we needed a bath and a real bed. I was careful and picked a motel in the middle of nowhere and I even parked out back.

Inside I drew the shades and shut out the sun and let the air conditioner run. Then all clean and tired I held her in bed and we slept for what seemed like forever.

It was a beautiful place to be.

But knocking woke us up. Loud knocking that felt like a punch in the stomach and these men kicked in the door and I screamed and screamed and kicked and fought and then...

I guess I passed out because all I knew next was...

They took her from me and put me in here where they keep asking me all these questions.

Well.

They can ask as much as they want but the only answer is this- I am as good a mother as my baby could ever have and no harm will ever come to her as long as I'm alive.

I've been praying. Praying they will come to see things my way and let me have my baby back.

It's just the best thing to do, don't you think?

(Magda searches the audience for an answer. After a moment, she sees something scatter across the floor)

There you are!

(To audience) Did you see him? My little mouse? He runs through here every day.

(Magda crouches on floor) There you are! You're so cute. You're so precious. **(Taking some crumbs from her pocket)** I saved you some bread like I promised you I would.

Here you go, sweetie. Here you are. C'mon. Don't be afraid. I won't let them catch you.

I won't hurt you. Never hurt you. There you are sweetie. Eat. Eat.

(Lights fade out)

Parturition was first produced at The Newburyport Firehouse Theater in Newburyport, MA. on January 22, 2011 and was directed by Kate Braun with the following cast:

Magda *Ashley Risteen*
Laura *Leslie Pasternak*

END

Mr. Leach and the NURSE



My skin is falling off my
bones. Ah...so nice...the
heat. Your skin is beautiful.
A porcelain doll. A Hummel.

Cast**Mr. Leach: An elderly, terminally ill man****Nurse: A young woman****(Nurse enters the hospital room of Mr. Leach, carrying bathing supplies.)****Nurse**

It's time for your bath, Mr. Leach. Mr. Leach?

**Mr. Leach
(Groans)****Nurse**

Mr. Leach, it's time for your bath. I'm sorry if I woke you. Did I wake you? Were you sleeping?

**Mr. Leach
(Groans)****Nurse**

Are you in pain?

Mr. Leach

Pain. Yes.

Nurse

Did they instruct you how to use your pain pump? They must have shown you. It's really very easy. Anytime you feel pain, anytime you need a little comfort, just push the red button. Understand?

Mr. Leach

Comfort. Ahrg.

Nurse

There is really no good reason to feel pain. Don't be brave. Better if you press the button before the pain starts. If you wait too long and the pain starts, the medicine may not be as effective. The medicine works best when-

Mr. Leach

Shh.

Nurse

Did you say something? Are you in pain?

Mr. Leach

Shh, I said. Pain? Yes.

Nurse

Push the button. Do you want me to do it for you? Do you-

Mr. Leach

No! No drugs. No medicine. I'll fade away.

Nurse

There is no benefit in hurting, Mr. Leach. Having pain serves no purpose. We're fortunate there are medicines that can help.

Mr. Leach

Help?

Nurse

Help... get you through. Help you sleep, eat-

Mr. Leach

Can't eat.

Nurse

Enjoy visitors.

Mr. Leach

No visitors.

Nurse

You don't want visitors? I can set that up-

Mr. Leach

No. Nobody left. All my people. Gone.

NurseI'm sorry. **(Pause)** I'm sure it's difficult to feel so alone right now and to be in such-**Mr. Leach**

Shh. You're beautiful. Wash. Wash me.

Nurse

Yes. Now. I'm going to roll you onto your side. You can help me by just relaxing. Letting your body be heavy. On the count of three. One, two...three!

Mr. Leach**(Turning)** Argh! Ah! Jesus fuck.**Nurse**

I'm sorry. I- please press the button. It will make this much

easier for us both.

Mr. LeachOkay. I'll press. I'll fade. **(He presses button)** I'm fading. Every time I press the red button I'll go deeper. Soon I won't be able to talk...move...or know what's going on.**Nurse**

You're not fading. You're right here. See? I'm going to undo the top of your johnny, okay?

Mr. Leach

Do what you need. I am fading. Don't kid me.

Nurse**(Applying wet cloth to neck, back.)** Let me know if this is too hot, please.**Mr. Leach**

Ah...so good...the heat.

NurseGood. I'm going to raise your arm Mr. Leach. **(She washes.)****Mr. Leach**

My arm.

Nurse

I'm sorry does it hurt? You might need to press again.

Mr. Leach

No. My arm. Look at it. So old. It's not

even mine now.

Nurse

It's your arm. It's long and...strong.

Mr. Leach

Was strong. Lifted three kids, up and down. I could lift my wife too. Dance her around with this one arm. Now? Gone. Skeleton arm, old man arm.

Nurse

Three children! How wonderful! Your wife?

Mr. Leach

Gone.

Nurse

I'm sorry. Your children? Are they-?

Mr. Leach

Not here. They come and go. And you pretty lady?

Nurse

Me?

Mr. Leach

Husband?

Nurse

Fiancé. He's...away. Iraq.

Mr. Leach

Iraq. Bastards.

Nurse

It's ok. He wants to be there. It's just...

Mr. Leach

Lonely.

Nurse

Lonely?... Yes.

(Pause as nurse washes.)

Mr. Leach

Humiliating.

Nurse

What?

Mr. Leach

A beautiful woman. Washing your ass.

Nurse

It's not, Mr. Leach. It's my job. Sometimes a part of life.

Mr. Leach

This is no life. Just waiting. **(Pause)** Do you know what the nurse said when she found a rectal thermometer in her pocket?

Nurse

No. I don't.

Mr. Leach

Some asshole has my pen. **(Pause)** Do you have kids?

Nurse

No children yet, no. I- we hope to. I'm going to have you lay on your back now, Mr. Leach. Can you turn? Can you lie comfortably on your back?

Mr. Leach

(Slowly turning) I'm comfortable nowhere. I'll be comfortable when I'm dead.

Nurse

Your skin looks good. Not dry or rough. **(She washes)**

Mr. Leach

My skin is falling off my bones. Ah...so nice...the heat. Your skin is beautiful. A porcelain doll. A Hummel.

Nurse

Does this hurt your chest? Your chart says you're having radiation here.

Mr. Leach

I feel no pain. I pushed the red button. What else does my chart say? Pull the plug? Done for? Take him out with the trash?

Nurse

No, Mr. Leach, nothing like that. Just that- well, I was told you were funny, that's all. And a little bit of a flirt.

Mr. Leach

Flirt? Good. Glad I haven't lost everything.

Nurse

I'm going to wash your legs now. Are you warm enough?

Mr. Leach

Hotter by the minute. Tell me young lady,

what else? What else do you do besides wash old men?

Nurse

Mr. Leach, I love my job. I love nursing. And, you know, it's a lot more than just washing-

Mr. Leach

Of course. I can see you are good nurse. A great nurse. What else?

Nurse

What else?

Mr. Leach

What's your passion?

Nurse

Well. I do play piano. I'm not very good, but I play. My parents insisted I take violin when I was a kid and I was terrible. But piano, that came easy.

Mr. Leach

I love piano. And big band. I was a singer.

Nurse

A singer? Like, professionally?

Mr. Leach

No. Electrician. But I loved to sing.

Nurse

Well, I'm impressed. I wouldn't have guessed that. My fiancé sings when I play...

Mr. Leach

I sang fifty-six years. Small bands, Knights of Columbus, weddings, funerals. Small stuff.

Nurse

I think that's...very interesting. I'd love to hear you sing.

Mr. Leach

Maybe if you could accompany me on piano.

Nurse

Yes that would be nice. Can I ask you a favor?

Mr. Leach

Ask.

Nurse

Can you sing something? I mean for me, now?

Mr. Leach

I can try. For you.

(With effort, sings)

"And now, the end is near; And so I face the final curtain.

My friend, I'll say it clear, I'll state my case, of which I'm certain..."

I remember it goes something like that.

Nurse

Well, well! Very beautiful. I'm impressed. Very nice voice!

Mr. Leach

It used to be. Not a bad voice. I never

thought I'd sing again.

Nurse

Well, thank you. I'm honored. Now, Mr. Leach, I was going to wash your genital area but, if you prefer, I can just leave you the wash cloth and give you privacy if you'd prefer to do it yourself.

Mr. Leach

No. I prefer...you. Please.

Nurse

Okay.

(After a moment she starts to wash him, gently)**Mr. Leach**

Just a noodle now. A dead fish. Useless. Feels good...the heat. **(Pause)** Do you know why nurses make the worst lovers?

Nurse

No. I don't.

Mr. Leach

Because they're taught to wait until the swelling goes down.

Nurse

Mr. Leach-

Mr. Leach

Not funny?

Nurse

It's not that, it's just- well, something else. In your chart it also said you can be...

inappropriate.

(She pulls the blankets over him).

I'm sorry. I'm finished now.

Mr. Leach

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you mad. It's just my way.

Nurse

Take my hands. I'm going to pull you up to sitting.

(She takes his hands and pulls him upright.)**Mr. Leach**

Ahrgh! God dammit! God damn pain!

Nurse

Oh, God, I'm sorry, Mr. Leach. It's okay. Try to relax. I'm going to push the button for you, okay? Lay back. I'm sorry. Breathe deep...breathe...

Mr. Leach

God damn this pain, this cancer, this room, this...**(Drugs start to take effect.)**...please...

Nurse

Is the pain better, now?

Mr. Leach

Yes...fading...please-

(Lines become very slow, deliberate.)**Nurse**

Yes?

Mr. Leach

Stay.

Nurse

I will. I'm here, Mr. Leach.

Mr. Leach

The piano.

Nurse

Yes

Mr. Leach

Play for me.

Nurse

I wish I could, Mr. Leach.

Mr. Leach

A favor.

Nurse

Yes?

Mr. Leach

I sang for you.

Nurse

Yes, you did. It was lovely.

Mr. Leach

A favor. For me.

Nurse

Yes?

Mr. Leach

I want to see you.

Nurse

See?

Mr. Leach

I never will again...ever again. Please?

Nurse

Mr. Leach... I -

Mr. Leach

Please. Your skin...never again. Beautiful skin.

Nurse

I should go now.

Mr. Leach

Please. I'm fading. Fading...

(Mr. Leach begins to hum "My Way")

(Nurse stands and starts to exit. She stops suddenly and hesitates. Then, very slowly, she turns towards Mr. Leach and begins to unbutton her blouse.)

END

PARTY



Yes. And maybe now rest is best. And it's just wonderful that you are both here to see him off. It will mean the world to him.

CAST:
Eight party guests, Mom, Dad, Him (Guest of honor)

(A rooftop. A party. Guests, champagne)

Guest One

Attention! Attention!! Can I have everyone's attention, please? I've just been informed-

Guest Two

Oh my God! He's on his way up!

Guest One

I've just been told he's on his way up, so let's fill our glasses-

Guest Three

Fill your glasses! Everyone! Champagne all around!

Guest Four

Yippee!! Hooray!!

Guest One

He's just going to die!

Guest Five

A perfect day. A perfect view. I'm so happy for him. I couldn't be happier for him.

Guest Six

Who deserves it more? Really? Done more?

Guest Five

And never complained. But forged ahead. It hasn't always been easy for him-

Guest Six

Who is it ever easy for?

Guest Five

Yes, but for him. I couldn't be happier.

Guest Six

Agreed. Cheers! **(They drink)**

Guest Four

Does everyone have a glass? Are they full?

Guest Seven

Empty. Empty here.

Guest Four

We'll have to fix that. Won't we? **(Fills glass)** I'm so excited. Have you ever been so excited?

Guest Seven

You'll have to get back to me on that one. Maybe when I finish this glass.

Guest Four

Oh you. Always so funny.

Guest Seven

No. You. You're the funny one.

Guest Four

Im not funny. I'm happy.

Guest Eight

Lets all be happy. For Him.

Guest One

(To MOM and DAD who are seated downstage, staring out)

And what's happening here? Why, you both look so glum.

Down in the mouth. Oh! You need glasses for the toast!

Someone - please bring his Mother and Father-

Guest Two

Right away! Two cold glasses coming right up!

Guest One

(To Mom and DAD) Look at this rooftop view! Have you ever seen such a view?

Mom

Yes. I suppose it is...lovely. Such good friends, all of you.

Dad

Good friends wouldn't let him go...

Mom

Dear. Shush. We agreed.

Dad

We agreed...

Mom

It's hard.

Guest One

Of course.

Mom

We want to be happy. For him. We're trying.

Dad

We've always wanted what's best. Best.

Guest One

Yes. And maybe now rest is best.

And it's just wonderful that you are both here to see him off. It will mean the world to him.

Guest Two

(Serves Mom and Dad) Two fresh glasses! He's on his way up! Get ready! Shh! I hear him!

(Sound of footsteps, climbing.)

Guest Four

Shhhhhhhh! He's coming up!

Guest Eight

Shhhhhhhh! He's here!

(The roof top door opens. HE enters)

All Guests

Surprise!!

Guest One

Everyone! **(sings)** "For he's a jolly good fellow-"

All Guests

"For he's a jolly good fellow, for he's a jolly good fellow which nobody can deny!"

Him

Well! Well... I- I must say I'm-

Guest Three

Speech! Speech!

Him

Speechless. I didn't expect-

Guest Seven

He's speechless. For a change.

Guest Four

Oh, you. Shush.

Him

I expected to be alone. It was so quiet. Climbing the stairs and... no idea. I had no idea. You guys-

Guest Six

We know you didn't expect all this.

Guest Eight

A little bird told us that you'd be coming here today and we wanted-

Guest Two

To be here for you.

Guest One

Because we like you!

Guest Eight

I don't like him. I'm just here for the champagne. Ok, I'm kidding. The champagne and the view.

(Laughs all around)

Guest Four

Surprised? Are you surprised?

Him

Mother? Father? Even you?

Dad

Hello Son

Mom

Dear. We wouldn't have missed it for the world.

Him

I'm touched. Truly moved.

Guest 3

Speech! Speech!!

All

Speech! Speech! Speech!

Him

I guess what I'd like to say is, I mean...thank you...first of all...all of you. I know it sounds like a cliché but I love you, love you all very much and... it's important for me to know that you know, that you understand, that my going away is my decision. Alone. And that decision has nothing to do with any of you. And that you all came here to say goodbye means more to me than...well, more to me than I can say. I look around at each of you... each face and there is a memory...a story- a laugh, a cry, a fight. Memories I will take with me. You can be sure of that. Whatever this journey brings, I am sure of that. So. Words. Enough of words. I'm shaking. A glass of champagne would be nice.

Guest One

Oh Jesus, he doesn't have a glass?

Guest Two

His own party!

Guest Three

Get the man a glass!

Him

(Drinks down in one long swallow)

I'm ready.

Guest Four

Certain?

Him

Certain.

Guest One

He's ready! Line up!

Guest Four

I've never been so excited!

(Mom and Dad turn their chairs to face upstage.

The Guests form two lines facing each other.

HE stands at upstage end of line.)

Guest One

Everyone! Together! Ten, Nine,..

All

Eight, Seven, Six Five, Four, Three, Two, One!

(HE rushes through the line, high fiving each guest as he passes. Arms outstretched, HE runs, flies, jumps off the edge of the roof.)

END

This book was put together as a tribute to the work of my dear friend Keamy for his 60th birthday.

Over the years I have designed his posters and publicity materials and decided an appropriate gift might be to redesign it all from scratch and publish it in one volume, not as text for actors to read in preparation for performing one of the plays but instead as pieces of literature in their own right.

Keamy's own personal aesthetic of clean lines and uncluttered spaces was the inspiration for the look of this book.

I hope this reflects that and honours his work.

Vincent-louis Apruzzese
Montreal, QC 2021

Michael Z. Keamy is a playwright and actor. He currently resides in Boston, MA.

