



Yin & Yang Eat At Me

Jesse Glass

Argotist Ebooks

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CHARACTERS

A.—YOUNG MAN IN MID 30’S. (QUENTIN ON SCREEN)

B.—YOUNG WOMAN IN MID TO LATE 20’S OF MIXED JAPANESE HERITAGE. (NELL ON SCREEN)

MRS.YOSHIKAWA-- ABOUT 55 YEARS OF AGE.

MR. YOSHIKAWA.—A SMILING JAPANESE OF ABOUT 70 YEARS OF AGE.

RADIO VOICE.—RASPING, OF INDETERMINATE AGE AND SEX.

SCENES SET IN BLACK ARE TO BE PROJECTED ON A LARGE SCREEN BEHIND THE PLAYERS.

SETTING:

STAGE BARE EXCEPT FOR A TABLE ON WHICH LAY SEVERAL LETTERS, WITH A READING LAMP TO THE SIDE. TWO CHAIRS BY THE TABLE. NEAR THE TABLE AND CHAIRS, A FREE-STANDING, VINTAGE, 1940’S RADIO, WHICH ERUPTS INTO MUSIC AND COMMENTARY AT VARIOUS MOMENTS DURING THE PLAY. POSITIONED ABOVE AND BEHIND THE PLAYERS IS A SCREEN.

LOCATION: NAGASAKI, 1996.

[STAGE IN DARKNESS. B. ABRUPTLY SNAPS READING LAMP ON, REVEALING AN ATTRACTIVE YOUNG WOMAN SEATED AT THE TABLE READING FROM A LETTER AS IF READING TO A CHILD.]

B:

“Thanks for your latest. Please sell my blood in little bottles to the poor, who only believe in fox-fire and genetic drift. Lover-man, you’re still on my mind with

Those revealing notes (& thank god for ‘em!)

The gifted old woman

kept us all in stitches

saying what? & what? & what?

Do you recall her name?

Anny? Manny? Nanny?

She spoke so highly of you

that my husband grew jealous

and made violent love to me

all that afternoon, cursing

when he finally came.

Cut switches from the trees & call them me. It would be lovely to hear from you, so that I know you keep breathing you seething old bow wow, who never learned the meaning of so many things. Before

you finish reading, please turn on the radio.”

(SHOUTS) Did you hear that? She wanted him to turn on the radio!

A (Off-stage.): Go ahead.

[B. TURNS ON RADIO. SHE TRAINS THE READING LIGHT INTO DARKNESS UNTIL SHE SEEMS TO FIND HER TARGET—A. B. THEN TUNES THE RADIO DIAL UNTIL, IN A RUSH OF STATIC...]

RADIO VOICE:

The form is a function of itself. This form signals the

Objectification of memory. It didn't fool her. The miserable

Official process of objectification. Encasing. Embedding.

The stop and start fossilization. Entropic

Movement of

You—the voice...

[THE RADIO VOICE DISAPPEARS IN A JUMBLE OF BIG BAND MUSIC, WHICH, ITSELF, SOON FADES TO A HISS.]

A. (SILENCE, THEN): I can't see you with the light in my eyes like that.

B. But I see you. (BEAT) It's better with the light on. Believe me. Listen

[FIDDLING WITH THE RADIO DIAL: THE SOUND OF RAIN]

A. Ah--That's the beginning of it.

B. And after that the heat will come and so will the sand flies and the mosquitoes.

(BEAT)

Did you get your shots?

A. Uh...they... they...tried three times to hit a vein and couldn't do it. She giggled and bowed. (What an odd custom.)

[RADIO VOICE ABRUPTLY RESUMES.]

Exist

Nowhere but

Here

The instant wedded
With

The eternal. Pivot
On

This point
My

Tongue. Stylus of

Memory.

[LIGHTS SLOWLY RISE ON A. AND B. AS RADIO FALLS SILENT.]

A. We can start anywhere.

B. Let's start with your birth:

(BEAT)

At your birth a bird sat in the window of the summerhouse gazing at the dust inside, then up & flew away & circled before it settled down in the sycamores.

A. How do you know?

B. Just bet it did. & Get this—at your birth a man threw an armful of slate in the air & called it other than what it was.

(BEAT)

Named it Art as it fell.

A. Kiss me, ok?

B. Not yet. Always something worming about in Asia with a gritty thickening over the lungs, isn't it, a green deflecting carapace, a smudge for an all-seeing eye, waiting, waiting to scurry sideways near and sink a painless capillary in a lobe to siphon up a little blood, and fashion from a scab a weapon. Something old and evil waiting in the mossy buddhas to rub off. (BEAT) I feel it, have always felt it most when I prayed. When I..

A. You must have been born just at the end of this season you speak of. When the heat was thickest and the locusts galvanized the air.

B. See...Yin and Yang eat at away at me. Anyway....

RADIO: *Your* Yin and Yang eat at me.

B (POINTING TO HER FACE): You might catch my illness.

(A APPEARS TO HYPERVENTILATE THEN SLUMPS FORWARD AS IF IN A MEDUMISTIC TRACE.)

A.: I didn't realize... Haaaaafuuuuuu...ma, ma, ma, mixed blood, Haaaffffuuuuas they say in Japan, ha, haaaaafuuuuuu.

[SCREEN LIGHTS UP. A. (QUENTIN) DRESSED IN THE STYLE OF 1896 .]

(SPOKEN AS A. WORKS ON A STRANGE-LOOKING MACHINE BOLTED TO A PEDESTAL.): I hope to God she's not pregnant. Oh, why did we get carried away last night? I wanted it so badly, and she held her hands over her eyes and wept the whole time. And when I had finished, brute that I was, we both cried together. Now she says her (WHISPERED) monthlies haven't arrived. God! She seems to think I've a guaranteed job--that I'll immediately be able to support her, the child, and that mother of hers. But I want to go East. I've heard there's a wizard--a Serb named Tesla—now living in America--who can draw the lightning from the skies. I want to talk to him. I must go to Europe as well to round out my studies.

(HE FINISHES WIRING THE MACHINE, WALKS AWAY FROM IT AND SITS BROODING BY THE DARKENED WINDOWS OF THE LABORATORY. HE COVERS HIS FACE WITH HIS HANDS AND BEGINS TO WEEP. AS HE SOBS, THE MACHINE'S FLY-WHEEL SLOWLY BEGINS TO TURN, ROCKING THE PEDESTAL ON WHICH IT IS MOUNTED. THE FLY-WHEEL PICKS UP SPEED THE HARDER THE YOUNG MAN SOBS. A. STANDS UP AND IN RAGE STRIKES A PANE OF GLASS AND CUTS HIS HAND. THE MACHINE CRASHES TO THE FLOOR.)

(SCREEN OFF)

(A APPEARS TO RECOVER HIMSELF)

RADIO: God damn you to hell. *Anyone who fucks me over...*

B. When you were born your mother remembered herself as a child, and how her grandfather went out to buy a carton of six ounce Cokes on a night in July, and never returned except as a ghost in a dream. When she gave you her breast for the first time, people still lived who recalled doing the Lindy Hop and could hum the tune to “Cement Mixer Putti Putti.”

A. But about your sickness....

B. An eternal low-grade fever. A liver fluke picked up from a bare-foot stroll by a pond in a Taiwanese park. Something defined loosely as a form of parasitical skepticism noodling away at the cerebellum. Or something as straight-forwardly obvious as a stick rammed down a throat like a squirrel I once saw suffering in Golden Gate Park. It tried to draw breath around the stick but succeeded only in making a rasping, flute-like music.

A. And it died like a victim of Solaris?

B. There was a crowd of appreciative listeners wringing their hands and talking about banning public parks, believe me....no bull.

A. And that's you?

B. Shhhh. The rain is letting up a little.

A. Your music?

[SHE KISSES HIM.]

B. Nothing elaborate, you see.

[SHE BITES HIS LIP.]

A. Ow!

B: You see what I'm saying?

[A. PUSHES HER LIGHTLY AWAY. "WALTZ TRISTE" BY SIBELIUS. A. AND B. DANCE AS THEY RECITE THE PASSAGE FROM B1 TO A1]

B1. Then turn. See?
Then wild & moving into it.

Then broken as a stick in water.

We are. Go on.

B. Then stars. The momentary.

A. Ash, my dear.

B. Huh?

A. Ash. I mean, Listen [SINGS]:

A quiet day. Read & wrote.

Sponge-mop ran & came in 5th...
...nerves, too much food. Throat swelled. (Specific here)
& saw the Rosicrucian tomb of a man
by the name of O'Donnell, the ancestor
of a certain literary figure...pyramid tomb

& Egyptian gate-way...then went
to the catacombs...I said “we’ll look
like that one day.”—to=no one.

No dream I can remember.

B. Uh.

A. ...”flame-like head.”

B. A mirror that’s both map and a cosmological treatise.

A. Can’t tell any more than this.

B. But...tell me.

A1. Turning. Gem in the light.

But, no. You—tell me.

B. Not to a “foreign devil.”

RADIO VOICE (WHISPERING): I vant to be a vider like mine vazer en ze vazerland!

A. [SPOKEN IN A TEXAS TWANG] But I want to communicate
with someone I know in the old way.

A handshake, a direct look in the eyes,
yet even to my own kind I have become a new animal.

Something neither A nor B. A gilled thing
with translucent skin. My bones themselves
have taken on the contours of my cage.

(BEAT)

B. Or rage?

A. See? Your Yin and yang eat at me.

B. Let me speak for them a while.

[THEY KISS. SOUND OF STEADY RAIN]

A. I never realized....

[THEY KISS LONGER. THEN, ABRUPTLY...]

B. May I look out your window?

A. What do you see?

B. Ohhh....Windswept dunes. Ohhhh.... acrid clouds
Drifting drifting (motel motel motel), the film noir moment changing
like a beer bottle held to the light just before being thrown against a passing car
driven by the Grand Dragon of the K.K.K...
red sand,—the evidence of
(STARTLED)...what?

Mixed blood?

The sky half full
or half empty
of acrid clouds
according to my mood, ya know?

(BEAT)

I want to have a child someday.

A. (STARTLED): A what?

(SCREEN ON. SAME SETTING A FEW WEEKS LATER. A. WORKS ON A LARGER, MORE COMPLICATED VERSION OF HIS ENGINE. AS HE TINKERS WITH HIS MACHINE A CHORUS OF MALE VOICES CHANTS OFFSTAGE):

CHORUS

**He found the human heart to be
A pigeon trapped in a black
Electric cage.**

A. (TO HIMSELF)

**We'll have to quiet our sadness,
Perhaps fly above it!**

(BLACK OUT. END OF SCENE 2.)

SCENE 3.

(SAME SETTING. MR. A. WITH A BIRD-LIKE CONTRAPTION HOOKED UP TO WIRES. FIVE UNUSUALLY PALE MEN SURROUND HIM. THEY ARE DRESSED IN BLACK AND WEAR SMOKED GLASSES. THE MEN BEGIN TO QUARREL AMONG THEMSELVES, FISTFIGHT, SHOUT. THEN THEY LINK ARMS TO CREATE A

"MOTOR" AND BEGIN TO TURN FIRST SLOWLY, THEN WITH GATHERING SPEED. THE WINGS OF THE MACHINE BEGIN TO BEAT. A. THROWS A SWITCH. THE ORNITHOPTER RISES IN TIME TO THE WORDS CHANTED BY THE "MOTOR" AS IT TURNS.)

CHORUS

**But the electricity
Will not quite**

Lift it above

**This
World**

Because...

(THE ORNITHOPTER WOBBLER, RISES.)

But it works

Hurrah!

(SCREEN OFF.)

A. (ANGRY): So O.K.—You want to know my life? Here's my life.
Someone knocks at the door,
rings the doorbell. Yes
there is gravity out there
& light & the absence of light.
There's oxygen rearranging
the curtains. Come tomorrow
I will dress in suit and tie
& head for the train to take me
to where all is insincerity and mis-
communication and indirectness
and equivocation. Where
all unravels in stares and silences,
hauteur and aloofness.

A. "Ask-Hole!"

[BLACK OUT.]

SCENE 4.

(THE RADIO ALONE ON STAGE. ON THE SCREEN MEN AND WOMEN POINTING UP AT THE SKY IN GREAT EXCITEMENT AS A CIGAR-SHAPED FLYING CONTRAPTION CIRCLES ABOVE THEM. RADIO SPEAKS IN A "HARD-BOILED" MANNER)

I get up. Look at myself in the mirror. Brush my teeth with my finger and a little gin. Kiss the wife hello, then goodbye, knowing all the while that I am destined for something beyond anyone's expectations. Day after day. I know these days run out soon enough. Once I was 25 years old--then blam! blam! blam! I'm 35. I always knew, though,--even as a kid I knew--that I'd do something someone would write about in 100 years. Someone.....

I always knew it and yet...there's my child ready to replace me. There's me, 35 years old and...still nothing. I write the city pages. Fill them with all the vice and corruption of our great Sodom by the sea. And yes...need I mention the Grisettes on the street giving me the once over with the eye? Inviting me to share their common lives? And I do. (As I give 'em the old hammer they so very much love! 'Tell me you love it!' I say wildly to one and all!) Like a satyr-Christ, I invade their domain. I write about them in easy to understand language. Entertaining and educational. This is my beat. I transfix their drab moth wings to the white sheets. I get their powder on my fingers while they flutter in my mental embrace. I write about the misery of vice in language even a schoolboy understands.

I watch for the miracle to happen as I hover above them in beds that reek of steel and motor oil. But the light still does not break through the blank front of their skulls. I question them, but they say the same old commonplaces, the truisms, the weather saws. I push a monocle in my eye and look at the contours of their bodies. Press my face as close as I can until the flesh of their breasts and bellies burns my nostrils and shines like the surface of an alien world. Still, I cannot see the truth, the miracle, the thing beyond viscera and gristle.

I grab them. Shout in their faces. "Tell me the marvelous secret! Give me a quote for the readers of the Chronicle!" They laugh. Ask for another drink...

And now this.... airship comes to our skies. This machine that embodies the dodecahedral secret I seek. As if to prepare me for this, four weeks ago I dreamed of the future relationship between humanity and the machine. I dreamed that a ghastly Socrates came to the city morgue at midnight. (I was there compiling my usual weekly mortality tables, understand.) Socrates began to interrogate the dead. They did not answer, but stared with gaping mouths and clouded eyes. Some propelled themselves in machines across the floor. Neither the corpses nor the machines that moved them had lives of their own, but the machines were sensitive enough to amplify the minute muscular contractions that accompany decay, giving the dead a semblance of life. I watched till dawn, the only sound the random rolling of the wheels, and Socrates' whispered monologues.

Then Socrates lifted a young lady from her mechanical device and forced his fist down her throat. He was looking for the seat of consciousness, he said, and he pulled a wet flower from her chest and held it out to me. The flower had a tough, fleshy look, and it was streaked with blood. Socrates passed his hand above it, and it followed his motions as if it were a sunflower following the track of the sun. When Socrates snapped his fingers it turned black and coiled upon itself, and was still. Socrates ate the flower, then rose in a burning sphere of light. Within the sphere was a fetal clown with the face of a skeleton. A tube lead from its fleshless jaws to my left ear, down which it whispered incredibly funny things. I began to laugh. I laughed so hard I woke myself up.

When I awoke I had a fever. My wife with our baby at her breast was mopping my brow. "Would you like some tea?" she asked. I sat up. Reached for my shirt and pants. I had to be back out on the street...

What is this airship? Where does it come from? I believe I know the worm at the heart of the nut that makes it tick like a carefully constructed timepiece. The dark miracle of its construction. But now I must track the airship down to verify my intuitions; then report the truth in easy-to-understand language, so that the wealthy patriarch, working his jowls over the morning paper, may at first chuckle at what he reads. Soon he'll realize the implications of my sentences, and he'll begin to scream loud and long. So loud that all of Nob Hill will be disturbed, and a thousand birds will rise to the sky!

(BLACK OUT. END OF SCENE 4)

SCENE 5

B (WITH COPY OF THE JAPAN TIMES IN HAND): I want to have a child, but it will never have "mixed blood." Mixed blood children weep for the foolish acts of their parents in this country. Their sufferings are in all the newspapers as one and all can see.

A. Well, I wouldn't....

A. You have nothing to do with it.

A. I suppose not.

A. (NEAR TEARS, TEARING THE NEWSPAPER AS SHE SPEAKS): They're never accepted. Even grandfathers drop the hands of their granddaughters when they approach the village shrine. They walk ahead grinning at the other old men and women and do not look back, the grandmother shuffling behind in her kimono, crying out that she has pure green tea in her veins, and not a drop of any other, the child lifting her hands to the frozen sky and yelling for them to wait for her.

[SOUND OF A ROULETTE WHEEL.]

[BLACK OUT. SOUND OF A WHIP CRACKING OVER AND OVER. END OF SCENE 5.]

SCENE 6.

B. Are you listening?

[COUGHS.]

I stood by myself in the dark cold hall and sang for hours. Nobody heard me, or cared to hear.

A. What did you sing?

B. Old country songs. A few I'd picked up from listening to the radio between midnight and dawn.

A. I believe I heard you.

B. You didn't!

A. Yes, I was passing by then. After midnight. I had just arrived here from America. Slightly drunk, because I didn't know what else to do. I leaned against a wall and heard your singing above the wind.

B. There was a storm that night.

A. You sang a few popular songs as well.

B. I did, I believe.

A. I wanted to come stand in your doorway and tell you how beautifully you sang, but I didn't dare.

B. You were wise in that.

A. I would have interrupted your songs.

B. Yes, and I wouldn't have answered the door from fear. Perhaps I would have called the police.

A. But I stood there with my woozy head in the cold night air and listened to those songs six years ago.

B. Don't lie.

(BEAT)

You know it wasn't me.

(BEAT)

And my people have said so many sad and downright odd things about your people.

A. Do you hate me?

B. A little.

A. But listen to what someone a long long while ago wrote...

[PAUSE. LOOKS IN HER EYES AS IF SEEKING PERMISSION.].

B. Go on, perform

A. [READING AS TO A CHILD]:

I was asked to attend the funeral of my wife's uncle Kenpatchi, a kind and wonderful man, who helped us settle in to our apartment in Tokyo, and was totally supportive of our marriage from the first. My father-in-law was sick and could not travel and my mother-in-law had to stay with him in Nagasaki. Therefore my wife and I had to be present to represent the Kyushu branch of the family. The service was held in the deceased's house in the middle of July. The service was Jodo-Shinshu. I witnessed two "things" during the services connected with this funeral that I shall never forget. Let me say this plainly: I did not want to see them—in fact, I felt as if I were witnessing something I was not meant to see—like bursting the door open upon a primal scene. I wasn't enlightened by what I saw. I was horrified.

The first service took place on the eve of the funeral. The monk lit his incense, piled oranges on a kind of portable altar, and began droning out his chants. The coffin, understand, sat by the far wall. As he chanted I noticed a shadow slowly climbing up the wall, seemingly in time to the monk's voice. Soon it was of the size and shape of a man, which appeared to be looking about the room! I rubbed my eyes. In my mind I heard distinctly what sounded like someone saying "Here I am, standing again among you! Standing!" in an exulting voice. It was not until later that I learned that this uncle had died of cancer and a particularly loathsome tumor had erupted on his lower back which kept him from standing up. This one proudly gentle man was forced to crawl like a child. The vision disappeared with the end of the chant. But this was not all I saw. Early the next day we returned to attend the funeral and cremation. Needless to say, I was not eager to do this, but my sense of duty dictated that I must. This time another monk came, set up the altar as before, and the chanting commenced. It was morning, but the curtains were pulled shut and the fumes of the "senko" filled the room. There was also the strong smell of evergreen sap, but it could barely mask the razor smell of decomposition. Shortly after the beginning of the service something told me to look up, and there I saw beneath the ceiling and directly above the coffin a globe the color of the rain spinning about its axis in time to the chanting. I could somehow see within that living globe every moment of the deceased's life from the time he was conceived to the time of his death. Indeed, I could see him in a trillion tiny tableaux that periodically changed in movements that swept from the lower left hand quarter of the globe to the upper right, all seemingly in time to the monk's variations in chanting. How did I know that this sphere contained all that the man was? It was like looking at the curved outside of a jar of rice, following the patterns with the eye. One knew that more of these luminous selves were packed

inside. As the chanting ceased the weird globe dissolved.

Does that...come between us?

B. Unh Unh.

A. But listen:

This rift is what I am. But your disc-shaped face coming towards me through the distance of years as I sit here making plans for the day, even while someone swaggers through heated rooms thinking himself at least as large as the sky...makes the cheap coffee less bitter, you know?....Why don't you ever send the prize money you promised us?

RADIO (WHISPERING): *Goddamn you! I'll see you in hell! Everyone who fucks with me has their life ruined!*

A. You were—what?—three years old when this was written?

[B. SHAKES HER HEAD YES. "THE CHILDREN'S HOUR" BY DEBUSSY. END OF SCENE 6.]

A. When you were born there was a sea close by and one in the distance. Lots of giant tuna then.

B. Yes, that could have been so.

And when you were born you were black, black, black. Not from lack of oxygen. It seems your mother, Kathleen, had some kind of dye in her womb. That's what the doctors said.

A. I've always suspected brain damage. Which could explain my weakness in social interactions.

[BOTH BREAK INTO LAUGHTER.]

A. But maybe it explains something else. A memory of sorts and it's about a long-puzzling incident that happened when I was just three years old. Or at least I believe it happened.

There was a stranger when I was a child. He entered the cellar of our home after "Swing-Shift Theater," and long after the American Flag had turned to electronic slush. My girl-mother and I—she was only 19 then—heard his curse and his entreaty to the dripping walls as he sought his way up to us. She turned off the television and said "Shhhhhhhh, do you hear that?"

I recall the whites of mother's eyes shifting in the dark, and I beside her on a quilt on the floor, holding our breaths, listening in terror. We were far beyond telephones, far beyond the help of night-shift fathers—his thirteen hounds asleep on their chains made no sound.

"I do!" I whispered. My mother squeezed my hand.

What did this Other want with us, cursing as he tripped over my Radio Flyer? The rattling water pump, the square-rimmed spectacles in their cobwebby sheath, last year's canned tomatoes and a workbench stacked with sagging cardboard boxes—all the treasures of the cellar were his.

I crept across the floor into the kitchen, eased open the badly-painted drawer (often it jammed, but this time—no), found a butter knife, and returned to my child-mother.

“I'll protect you,” I said.

[HIS VOICE TRAILS OFF AS HE APPEARS TO BE SILENTLY RELIVING THE EVENT IN HIS MIND.]

B. That's really American.

A. What is?

B. The thing about the knife, while someone stumbles in the dark with evil intent.

(BEAT)

Well?

A. What.

B. Finish the story. Did that “Other” find you and your girl Mother? Show me the scars.

A. Do you see this mark on my forehead?

B. That isn't....

A. It is.

B. My god....a scoop mark!

A. We were abducted!

[RADIO PLAYS “IN MY FLESH SHALL I SEE GOD” FROM THE MESSIAH.]

A. But it actually turned out that my mother was molested by my grandfather.

B. So it wasn't aliens after all?

[RADIO PLAYS “WHAT A BEAUTIFUL WORLD” SUNG BY LEWIS ARMSTRONG.]

A. (SLOWLY) That's right. It was just my grandfather in his evil dotage.

B. I'm so sorry.

A. My mother mentioned these molestations at my grandfather's wake. She said it was the reason why she left home and eloped with my father when she was only 15.

[BLACK OUT. END OF SCENE 5. LIGHTS SLOWLY UP.]

[SCENE 6. A. AND B. AND A LUMP OF TRANSLUCENT STONE.]

B. Then why did you come to grace us in this country?

A. It was love more than anything.

B. You liar! (LAUGHING.)

A. Ok., then--cash.

B. And now are you a rich man?

A. Here, look at this thing I picked up today at the village market. That's real rock crystal, but see? What does that flaw look like?

B. It's a baby surrounded by black flames...

A. And when I turn the stone like this?

B. A screaming King! Why this is priceless!

A. I thought so too. But it continues to grow larger the longer I keep it.

B. Something like cancer, isn't it.

A. Or global domination....

B. Really, how much did you pay for it?

A. I'm not at liberty to say. But it was a bargain. With a capital B!

B. Watch out Asia! [MAKES THE WHISTLING SOUND OF BOMBS DROPPING AND EXPLOSIONS.]

(A. AND B. GAZING INTO THE STONE--)

A. Look here. Try to read this with me. (A prime example of Anecdotal Complexity!)
(Push a rag at night/beside the barely risen moon.) And tongue. Over there.
Clamped into position.

A movement towards something
we should all fear.

B. [HIDING HER EYES AND GIGGLING.] I don't wanna know! Tell me when it's over!

A. Shhhhhh. Countless events. Something just on the edge of recall.

Crows collecting in the corners of the eyes...harden into a seacoast struck by typhoon winds.
Mountains blue-green in this driving rain, these driven tears. A sudden "blinding flash."
Wasn't I the self-styled hero of that moment?

RADIO VOICE: *You're not anyone's hero. You're the Emperor!*

[SCREEN ON. A. (QUENTIN) AND B. (NELL) AT DINNER WITH MR. AND MRS. YOSHIKAWA]

FATHER

So you're an engineer?

A:

An electrical engineer.

FATHER

What?

A:

An electrical engineer. Direct current. Like Edison.

FATHER

I'm a botanical taxonomist myself. Strictly amateur, you understand. It's a nice way for an old man to wait for death, writing of the deathless.

B:

Papa, don't talk nonsense.

FATHER (LAUGHING)

Old men are known for talking nonsense. Isn't that right young man?

A:

Quentin.

FATHER

Quentin.

A:

I wouldn't know, sir.

FATHER

No need to be nice to me. I'm just a retired banker. A mediocrity. As Nell can report, I was a tolerable father, but a general failure as a husband, was I not, Mother?

MRS. HARTER

You've been a wonderful husband.

FATHER

And you, dear, are a fabulous liar. Anyway, my work on the weeds that grow in these hills will probably not advance the progress of science one iota, but I shall still pursue it to stave off boredom. As a banker I was a sleek machine that manufactured boredom, and now, with only a few people to bore, I am myself drowning in boredom. I rise, eat, defecate, kiss the wife, comment on my daughter's good looks, and return to my boredom as a dog returns to its vomit. Old age causes you to gnaw at the past until it's relatively tasteless, then turn to the present to watch the vacuum of the future creep in. Banks are a bore. I have been a bore all my life, and now that the time is coming when I shall bore no more, I seek that thing which is less boring than all others--nature.

A:

Wonderful, sir.

FATHER

What?

A:

Wonderful sentiment. I, too, find most things boring. All things that pass away. All the transient moments. Yet there are certain fundamental ideas that entertain me. The mathematical underpinnings of visible phenomena, the sky at night, electrical devices, psychology, the microcosm and the macrocosm

MRS. HARTER

Do you find us boring, Quentin?

A:

Not at all.

FATHER

Does our beautiful daughter bore you?

A:

You make me blush to confess it, sir, but your daughter enchants me beyond measure.

MRS. HARTER

A bit forward of you to ask him that, Father.

FATHER (LAUGHING)

Yet he is true to his word. Do you not see? He's blushing like a maiden!

B:

Father, another joke!

FATHER

I know--I'm beginning to bore you! Yes, you may take Nell to the church social tonight. Explain the mysteries of electricity to her if you must, but cut your lecture short by 10 o' clock.

A:

Sir, I'll have her back by nine.

(BOTH B. (NELL) AND A. (QUENTIN) RISE FROM THE TABLE.)

FATHER

As I said. Ten is fine. But be careful. Horses can be skittish at this time of year. They don't like these high winds.

MRS. HARTER

Have a good time.

B:

We will try!

FATHER

Kiss your father's cheek.

(B. DOES.)

NELL

Good night, Father.

FATHER

Good evening to you both.

(THEY EXIT.)

(PAUSE)

MRS. HARTER

I don't trust him.

FATHER

He's intelligent. You can tell by his darting eyes. Is she serious about him? Have you questioned her about his intentions?

MRS. HARTER

As usual she's tight-lipped about the subject. I know they've been exchanging letters for two months. And I've seen the word "love" through the envelope several times.

FATHER

I'm ashamed of you. She's almost a grown woman, and you're spying on her correspondence.

MRS. HARTER

I will not abide an elopement.

FATHER

He may make a fine husband. An electrical engineer...the future, they say, will be powered by electricity.

MRS. HARTER

**His eyes are set too closely together in his face. There may be madness in his family.
(LOWERING VOICE) And I think he masturbates. The pallor of his skin gives him away.**

FATHER

Groundless speculation. Help me up.

MRS. HARTER

Here's your cane.

FATHER

I'll retire to my study. I've a new specimen of Valerian to catalogue. Make some coffee, will you?

MRS. HARTER

Yes. Enough to keep us awake till they return. He's reptilian, I say.

FATHER

Nonsense, dear. Let us return to the contemplation of our insignificance.

MRS. HARTER

Husband, your modesty is like a warm blanket on a sweltering day.

FATHER

Make that an electric blanket....

[SCREEN OFF. END OF SCENE 6.]

SCENE 7.

A. A muddy field in winter. Two horses with their rumps turned to the wind. You coughing into your collar and the sky exploding into rain!

B. Get up and walk around! Poe's dead hand flying off shelves. Get some circulation back into those toes, "Ask-Hole."

A. No, I see it, now.

[BLACK OUT. SPOKEN BREATHILY INTO A MIKE. PERHAPS STROBE LIGHTS. FOG.]

A. Night train rushing. Pachinko lights among rice fields. Across from me, two women. The younger—a late-working office worker-- crosses thick ankles, a book in one small hand. The other, hands in lap, nods and dozes, shopping bag between her hip and the end of the box seat. We slow, bump to a stop at a brightly-lit platform. Moths whirl florescent lights. Someone steps into the train.

"We tried and failed," he says in German. Pauses. Weaves two steps sideways "I'm sorry.

I did my best."

RADIO. (WHISPERING.) I did my best.

A. "We tried. We failed. We did our best." He says in Japanese.

It is then that I realize he is talking to me.

RADIO (WHISPERING.) *He is talking to me.*

A. He salutes me; begins to march unsteadily in place.

The two women across from me look up, then away.

The younger whispers to the elder. They move into another car.

I lift the book like a shield, but the old man will have none of it.

"Captain!" he says, his face, the skin stretched over bone, the sunken eyes, the soiled cap, the liver spots on his hand pushing my book down and away.

"Take it easy," I tell him in Japanese.

He salutes again, tears like crystal maggots in his infected eyes.

Straightens his back, singing a German war song. Pumps his legs. Then he begins to sob in earnest.

RADIO VOICE (WHISPERING.): *A German war song.*

A. I stand up. Make for the back of the train. He is shouting and saluting as I go.

(BEAT)

They've been quarantining travelers these days. Especially from Hong Kong.

A. I know. (Breaks into coughing.)

[BLACK OUT. END OF SCENE 6.]

[SCENE 7. RADIO SPOTLIT ON STAGE. ON THE SCREEN MEN AND WOMEN POINTING UP AT THE SKY IN GREAT EXCITEMENT AS A CIGAR-SHAPED FLYING CONTRAPTION CIRCLES ABOVE THEM.]

RADIO VOICE:

It was said that the captain of their ship was an electrical engineer of genius. He was given to barely tolerable extremes in emotion. It was impossible to predict the direction of his moods from moment to moment. Once, toward the beginning of his endless flight, he was sitting at his chart table dressed in his blue uniform with the golden eye and thunderbolt insignia blazoned on his chest, apparently at ease, smoking a pipe and perusing an incomplete atlas of the winds of the upper atmosphere (which he himself was compiling, and which gave him the greatest amount of what a normal human being would insist on calling pleasure, since he was the first Columbus to push into those virgin wildernesses of height), when suddenly, he threw down the atlas and began to tear at his face and hair with such violence that the other members of the crew below decks rushed outside and tied themselves to the L-rods on the hull. The engines, through sensitive magnetic plates, picked up the huge surge of emotion from the Captain, and began to work at triple speed, causing the aluminum wings to beat the air at a supernally high rate, lifting the craft to the very reaches of the atmosphere. The men who were not dead already, froze and asphyxiated at the same time, which was all the better for them, since they, like the captain, now needed their safety suits no longer, and could stay with the ship with no regrets and no loving memories of the families they left behind.

Oh great black bird chugging across the sun! Did Senor Jose Bonilla, director of Mexico's Zacatecas Observatory photograph you then? Did you throw out great streamers of light for his benefit, and for the benefit of the single unblinking eye of his camera? Were you described by various observers as canoe-shaped, cigar-shaped, driven by wings, propellers, fins? Furthermore: Why did so many men and women burst into tears when they saw it? Why was it observed hovering anyplace where the traces of human carnage and despair remained? Why were the American Indians not afraid of it, even when the Captain stepped from the underbelly of the craft and shot them down as they sang? Why was it seen in the midst of one of the worst sea storms of the century, floating peacefully, midway in the typhoon-ravaged air, above the toiling hulk of that other legendary ship, the Flying Dutchman?

One question more: why was the Captain, when he was strapped to the mechanism which powered the craft (and which inspired extreme suffering, even for the most ossified of the dead, remain inclined to pull a locket from his jacket, and cry out the name Nell, even after the hood had been pulled over his face, and the leather belts were fastened so tightly that not one quanta of pain could escape the bellows of the machine?

[LIGHTS UP ON A. AND B. SEATED AT THE TABLE.]

A. Am I a common, “run of the mill” type person?

B. (Putting her make-up on.) Yes you are. Average. Just Average. Now leave me alone, you “Ask-Hole.”

[SCREEN ON.]

MRS. YOSHIKAWA (READING NEWSPAPER):

Look at this. They’ve spotted the airship again. The men on board wear smoked glasses, and it’s said they work for an Emperor in the East. Why, we often wear smoked glasses on our walks, do we not? And haven’t I seen you writing notes on botany to Emperor Meiji?

MR.YOSHIKAWA:

Well, Mother, he and I attended university together. But that was so long ago...

MRS. YOSHIKAWA:

I wonder if there will be wars in the 20th century?

MR. YOSHIKAWA:

Your meditations are all very disturbing, dear, but now let's go to bed, shall we?

MRS. YOSHIKAWA:

Not until our visitor returns our daughter to us.

MR. YOSHIKAWA:

I don't believe he ever will.

MRS. YOSHIKAWA:

What?

MR. YOSHIKAWA

Return our daughter to us.

[SCREEN OFF.]

[BLACK OUT. SAME AS AT BEGINNING.]

RADIO VOICE:

Joan Armatrading.

A.) Midnight.

B.) Drunken encounter. Sleep.

RADIO VOICE:

The form is a function of itself. This form signals the

Objectification of memory. It didn't fool her. The miserable

Official process of objectification. Encasing. Embedding.

The stop and start fossilization. Entropic

A.) Movement of

B.) You—the voice—
Exist

RADIO) Nowhere but
Here

A.) The momentary wedded
With

B.) The eternal. Pivot
On

RADIO) This point
My

A.) Tongue. Stylus of

Memory.

END