

The Whales
By M. Stefan Strozier
(www.mstefanstrozier.org)
A production of La Muse Vénale, Inc. Acting Troupe
(www.lamusevenale.org)
And
World Audience, Inc.
(www.worldaudience.org)

The world premiere of *The Whales* was at Where Eagles Dare Theater (347 West 36th Street, New York, NY) January 5-29th, Thursday-Sunday, 2006. The director was M. Stefan Strozier. The assistant directors were Joshua Blankman and David Segretto. The light designer was David Segretto. The sound engineers were Leck Dzie and Rich Warren. The stage manager was Grizelda Lazo. The dramaturge was Alan Kanevsky. The props supervisor was Veronica Heffron.

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Characters (In order of appearance – some roles appeared in earlier versions – actors are encouraged to play more than one role):

Producer Ann Pielli
Dionysus Brenna McGuire
First Maenad Doua Moua
Second Maenad Veronica Heffron
Harry Alton Rich Warren
Cool Joe Eastside Ben Bailey
Player Smooth Law Mark Phillips
Nurse Susan Bucci
Hostess Ann Pielli
Poetess Sunshine-y Veronica Heffron
Poet Transfixing Game Don Jeans
Melissa Ridgebone Holly Vanesse
Dramaturge Don Jeans
Director Grant Peters
The Butterfly Fairies Actor 1 Ann Pielli
Actor 2 Susan Bucci
Actor 3 Mark Larson
Joanna Higginbotham Denise Collins
Tony Crusher Tristan Lawrence
The Whale Chorus, King, Chorus Leader, Earl Grant Peters
Queen of Whales Veronica Heffron
Prince of Whales Mark Larson
Grandmother of Whales Susan Bucci
The Whales Doua Moua
Swashbuckler Ann Pielli
Dancer Jordan Peters
Very Short Actor
Short, Hunchback Actor
Mark Larson Mark Larson
Stage Manager Griselda Lazo
1st Chinese passenger Doua Moua
2nd Chinese passenger Griselda Lazo
Angry Passenger Don Jeans
Homeless Preacher Jordan Peters
Uncle Wong Ann Pielli
New York Times publisher, Arthur Don Jeans
New Yorker publisher, Bill Jordan Peters
Samuel French publisher, Morris Mark Larson

Act 1

Scene 1:

Setting: The Sidewalk, outside of the main door to “The Monster”, in Greenwich Village, NYC. Dionysus exits “The Monster.” She/he is carrying a drink and smoking a cigarette, with 2 of his/her Maenads. Dionysus wears a toga and is a transsexual. His maenads are semi-naked, wearing fawn skins draped over their shoulders; and, carrying rods, tipped with pine cones.

Dionysus: This Spotlight On Festival is the worst theater festival of all time; even worse than John Chatterton’s Midtown International Theatre Festival! This heat is oppressive, for the love of God! Festivals are supposed to be held in the spring. Even the demi-God Oskar Eustis can’t produce a good play, over at the Public Theater on Lafayette Street.

[Enter Harry, Cool Joe, and Player Smooth, flustered. They do not notice Dionysus and his maenads. Throughout the entire play, Harry carries a pile of loose paper and wears nerdy glasses.]

Harry: Wait. I hear violins.

Cool Joe: I don’t hear violins. But I hear tubas.

Harry: How strange. Tubas?

Cool Joe: Tubas. Indeed.

Player Smooth: Is that possible?

Harry: Now I hear tuna fish!

Cool Joe: Tuna fish?

Harry: Tunas. Indeed, tunas.

Player Smooth: I’ve always wondered what a tuna fish sounds like.

Harry: They sound like this: woaaa-hakakaka...woaaa-hakakaka. Okay, let’s keep moving; we’ve got to find Uncle Wong. I have to become a published playwright.

[They move to exit.]

Player Smooth: Wait! Who are they?

[They stop.]

Cool Joe: Who are you?

First Maenad: Back up, fools! O, Dionysus, god of theater, shall we kill all the New York City playwrights? Afterwards, we can outsource playwrights from India, via the Internet.

Dionysus: No, it is a bad idea. For though New York City playwrights are skewered alive in places like the Theater Workshop Company on 36th Street; or, in Oskar Eustis's Workshop on Lafayette, this city still cares a little bit them.

Second Maenad: Master: What are these things called musicals?

Dionysus: For the life of me, I do not understand musicals. They are singing; but it's certainly not a tragedy of Euripides or Sophocles, or an opera. Nor are musicals like one of Aristophanes' comedies, with a Greek chorus. I really should stay more current. More wine, woman! All the good playwrights are long dead and down in Hades' realm. And, I'm not going back there to retrieve one.

Second Maenad: But we like hell, master; can we go back to hell, please? All of the artists are down there, having so much fun!

Dionysus: Oh, stop, concubine. As you know, Hades would only allow me to return with a freshly dead playwright. And, which freshly dead playwright am I going to retrieve: Mr. Edward Albee? True, he would pass for freshly dead. But, then what: yet again, pay two hundred dollars to see the horrible play *Whose Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, on Broadway? No!

First Maenad: O great Dionysus, Mr. Edward Albee is still alive.

Dionysus: Well, he looks freshly dead – though he is a very sexy old man. Do you have his number? Perhaps, I should simply drive all the playwrights mad. That might produce a good play. Maenad: do you know where can I get a good massage in Greenwich Village, with a happy ending?

Second Maenad: Isn't a woman good enough for you, master?

Dionysus: Generally: no. I had to teach you how to make love, did I not? I am so frustrated!

Player Smooth: Is that Uncle Wong?

Harry: I don't think it is Uncle Wong, no.

Dionysus: Who speaks of Uncle Wong?

Harry: Me?

Second Maenad: Perhaps, a good playwright can be found in one of the City's madhouses?

Dionysus: Yes, that's it! Find an insane playwright, who will fully believe in his fantasies. I will make his fantasy reality, and we'll have a GOOD play! Weave sweet dreams of your soft bodies into his brain. Whisper in his ears great rewards await his toils, if only he can produce one good play I can enjoy. We need the Whales' help.

First Maenad: Do we know The Whales?

Dionysus: They are first cousins of Proteus, the shape changer. He's the one Odysseus squeezed in his hands, forcing him to stop changing his shape. The Whales are friends of my Uncle Poseidon. Oh, Jesus Christ, why these blank looks? They're family! Simply tell the mad playwright, if he believes in The Whales, they will come to aid his quest. I will see to it! Make the mad playwright understand he must do it all himself – no director or producer. A play in the theater of life!

Cool Joe: Are you sure that's not Uncle Wong? It sounds a lot like Uncle Wong!

Harry: That is not Uncle Wong, I am sure of it! Quiet!

Dionysus: Who dares speak of Uncle Wong in my presence?

Harry: Me?

Second Maenad: But the playwright will have to have his play published by Samuel French to be considered a legitimate playwright by the New York theater community, right, Dionysus? He might not even get Off-Broadway without being published.

Dionysus: Son-of-a-bitch! He will have to be published by Sam French. Who is Sam French, anyway?

Second Maenad: I think it's a fictional name.

First Maenad: These three look like New York City madmen. Excuse me, are you insane? Do any of you happen to write plays?

Harry: Yes, actually, I am schizophrenic. We're from the local homeless shelter. I fancy myself a playwright, sir.

Dionysus: Give Uncle Wong a call, down in Chinatown, right away, maenad. Have The Whales rendezvous with him in Chinatown. Uncle Wong will help this playwright get published. Uncle Wong is big in the publishing business. What are you waiting for; find him! I would like to get his play in the running for this season's Tonys. I'll meet you later. I need a drink.

[Exit maenads, stage left; exit Dionysus, through the audience, into The Monster.]

Second Maenad: Come with us, madmen!

[All exit.]

Scene 2:

Setting: A café, where this is going to be a poetry reading. Enter Harry, carrying a stack of loose-leaf paper. It is a late summer night. Enter two poets, a male and a female; then, a hostess.

Hostess: Good evening, everybody. It's another Friday night of poetry in New York City. My name is Chaff Garland. Our first poet is actually a poet team: Our man poet is named Transfixing Game; and, our poetess is named Sunshine – y.

Poetess: It's Sunshine – I. The y or e acts as a pejorative, reflexive pronoun.

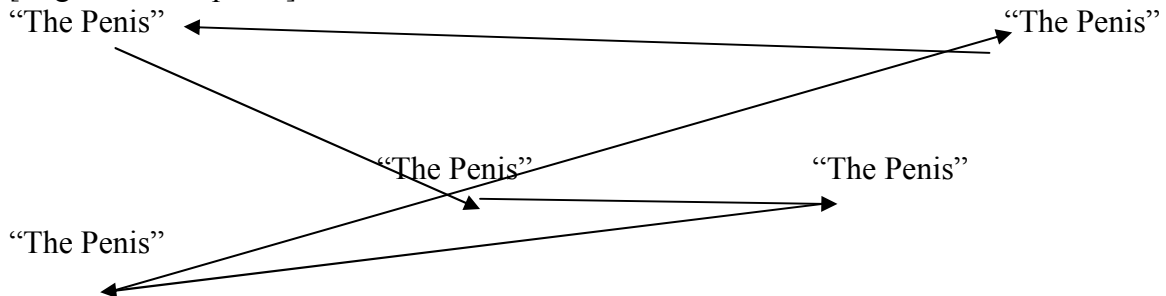
Hostess: Oh, excuse *my* place where the sun does not shine.

[Hostess exits. Note: The subsequent conversation, between Harry and Melissa, occurs concurrently, with the poets' performance.]

Poetess: [Poetess starts to create a bass line, into the microphone, as if she were raping. The Poet begins with his arms outstretched, above his head, in an "artistic-expressive" manner. The man then moves his arms to his side – or, wherever, so as to convey experimentation, while dancing. The "Penis Song" begins, sung by the male and female poet. The man sings, "The Penis, The Penis," moving in a pattern, with each new syllable of the word, as such:

Poet:

[Begin and end point.]



[After the Poet has moved through the steps twice, the Poetess stops the bass line and begins her dance. Poetess sings, ‘Vaaaaaginnnaaaaa,’ while holding her hands above her head and waving her hands back and forth, as she sways with her hips. Next, while the

Poet continues his dance, the Poetess returns to the microphone and begins her “poem.” She speaks very intensely, as if singing a song, with one hand on the microphone.]

Poetess: Layers upon layers of froth from the red hat. Foo man chu. Rickyticky-tavy. The New York Times Arts Section. If we raise the war for the score to the door, then there will be no whore, no more, eating marshmallow s’mores. The soldiers come home from the war and knock on the door. I had sex with your moms last night. There were wild polka dots on the ceiling. The wars feeling hurt is like a whale in the night. The president is in the garden. The Congress is sitting in chairs. We are all here. Riots! Ahhh! Race card! O.J. Simpson. Wild Spots. Imagine. Finals night. Ahhh! Nixon. Crime in the Ghetto. Fox news channel. Finals week. Ahhh!

Hostess:

[Hostess moves back to stage and fights the poetess for the microphone.]

Excuse me; you have gone over your 3-minute limit!

Poetess: Machismo. PETA. Save the whales! Die, Republican bitch!

[Poetess and Hostess fight. Poet Transfixing Game tries to break it up; but he is pulled into the fight. The three of them take the fight offstage.]

Harry: Excuse me; but what are these people doing?

Melissa: I think they are reading poetry. My name is Melissa.

Harry: My name is Harry. Is their poetry postmodern, avant-garde?

Melissa: Yes, I think it would qualify as such.

Harry: Isn’t avant-garde supposed to be good?

Melissa: No, I think it is supposed to be bad.

Harry: Oh. Well, it is very strange.

Melissa: You haven’t been here before?

Harry: No, I live at Fort Washington. But, I don’t think I’ll use postmodern avant-garde in my play.

[Hostess returns with Poet and Poetess.]

Hostess: And now tonight’s main performance, a rock opera about Mary Lincoln’s insanity and her unfair and unjust institution by her son Robert Todd Lincoln.

[Hostess exits.]

Poetess: I'm not flipping crazy!

Poet: You're flipping cr-a-zy! Lady, you're flipping cr-a-zy!

Poetess: No, I'm not crazy!

Poet: Yes, you are, and I am going to institutionalize you right now!

[Suddenly Poet and Poetess break out in a Charleston dance, while Harry and Melissa continue their discussion. They change dances steps every few seconds, moon walk, Macarena, finger on nose and going under water, etc.]

Melissa: Isn't Fort Washington a homeless shelter?

Harry: I am a playwright. I stopped taking my medication because I am writing a play for the Whales, who have been sent to find a good play, to perform before Dionysus and Zeus. It is a contest. But, I don't think I will use avant-garde in my play.

Melissa: Oh, wow. *You know so much about mythology!?*

Harry: I have been studying Bullfinch's Mythology every morning at 10:30 a.m. for the last five years, cover to cover. I finish the book approximately between 9:51 and 9:59 p.m., every night. So, I know it pretty well.

Melissa: Huh. I am a playwright.

Harry: For example: Here is a sample from page 69, "...Zeus discovered the plot, and He was very upset, and unleashed his lightning bolts upon the land." Ka-pow! Boom!

Melissa: Oh! Oh, my! I am studying for my MFA in theater, across the street, at Columbia University. Can I enter the contest?

Harry: I don't see why not.

Melissa: Is there an application form to complete?

[Melissa laughs, mockingly; Harry does not laugh. Melissa composes herself.]

When did you write your play?

Harry: I am writing a play about my fantasies. I write down, everything I see. But, the Whales are real. They are coming; you'll see. I am not crazy; I am a playwright. Everyone else is crazy.

Melissa: Oh. I believe you.

Harry: When the Whales arrive, they are going to change everything. They are being sent by Dionysus, God of Theatre, because He is upset there are no good plays, anymore. I wrote one good play, which made it to off-Broadway; but the liberals didn't like it and they drove me away. I have sort of had some difficulties writing my second play.

Melissa: What is it called?

Harry: It's called "The Whales."

Melissa: Oh, right. Maybe I can help you. Would you like me to arrange a reading of your play, at my university?

Harry: Yes! There are three of us in the cast. We have the first part already memorized.

Melissa: Oh, it's all right. That's the purpose of a reading, to get out all the bugs.

Harry: I am familiar with readings.

Melissa: Really? Oh, that's right, you're a playwright. Ah, would you like to leave here? Maybe we can get a drink?

Harry: I told you I've already missed my bed tonight, trying to find some avant-garde poetry. I don't drink.

Melissa: Oh, sorry. I don't drink either.

[Melissa turns away and drinks half a bottle of whiskey.]

Melissa: Come on, let get out of here. Tonight, you're with me.

Harry: But, I don't want to go to sleep. The longer I stay awake, the more my dreams become real; and, sometimes The Whales arrive during my waking dreams. I think my waking dreams are connected to my fantasies, as if The Whales are trying to become a part of reality, through my waking dreams.

Melissa: Wow. You really are frickin' crazy. Okay, we won't go to sleep. Come on; let's go to a midnight movie. Have you seen the new Tom Cruise movie?

Harry: I love Tom Cruise!

Scene 3:

Setting: A theater, with a play reading being performed. Harry, Cool Joe and Player Smooth wander into the audience and sit. Melissa, Joanna and Tony are watching the play. The cast of “The Butterfly Fairies” wear paper bags, fashioned as puppets, on their hands.

Dramaturge: Good evening. My name is Nicholas St. Germaine, III. I will be the dramaturge for this production of *The Butterfly Fairies*, by poet/playwright-short-medium-long story writer and novelist, painter, sculptor, environmental-activist Spring Feather Rise Smith: A cultural study of feminism, during 12th century Iran, in the Shakespearian historical theatrical traditions. The play opens in a hotbed of radical activity, very typical of this period, in the larger cities, extant: a literary salon. Women are so about change being a good thing. The lead character’s name is Hol Tounger Hussain. Her Faustian foil is Boo Tilicious Hasan. The actors immediately jump up and start dancing, like 12th century Iranian butterfly fairies, around the literary salon.

Director: Splendid! Now, let us become the butterfly fairies. Feel you inner butterfly; let its wings of literature fan you spirit! Breathe, like a butterfly fairy. Look up here, at me. Jump – higher, higher – touch the sky! You must understand the soul of the butterfly fairy. Love the butterfly fairy!

Actor 1 (The Very Short Actor): Penis, the war monger!

Actor 2: The Giant Vagina!

Director: Oh, yes, yes!

Actor 1 (The Very Short Actor): How long have you had that vagina?

Actor 3: It is a very nice vagina, Chairman Mao.

Actor 2: Spanish Harlem!

Director: Yes, yes! Lee Strasburg, roll over in your grave!

Actor 1 (The Very Short Actor): Take it up the ass and smile like Nixon!

Actor 3: George Herbert Walker Bush is Satan.

Actor 2: God is dead!

[Actors continue, dancing like butterfly fairies and speaking similar lines; and, occasional butterfly kisses.]

Joanna: Oh, Jesus; the-a-tre! – Politically sensitive, correct the-a-tre!

Tony: Ya like that director, Joanna?

Joanna: Yes, Tony, he is marvelous.

Tony: He studied *The Method* with Lee Strasburg. He is also known as an amazing, world renowned acting teacher.

Director: Spontaneity! Stream-of-consciousness! Stupendous!

Joanna: I never did like that name, *The Method*. Always sounds like some kind of tough guy.

Tony: Strasburg studied Stanislavsky, who studied with Chekoff, who studied under Tolstoy, who studied under The Pope, who studied under Jesus Christ.

Actor 1: No more Vietnams! Oh, baby!

Joanna: It is an impressive resume, without question. Let's get The Butterfly Fairies on Broadway, as a union showcase. How much grant money is Bard College giving us, for work-shopping Spring Feather Rise Smith's play in our theatre?

Tony: 'Bout a hundred Gs. We need at least half a 'mil for a union, off-Broadway showcase. You want; ah, we can use my acting troupe's union actors, for free – I mean, with my small fee. Forgeta' 'bout it.

Actor 2: I love Tom Cruise! I love Nixon!

Actor 3: Stella Adler is a genius!

Tony: Matter a fact, I been meaning to use my people for a big show. They don't call me Tony Crushner for nothin'. What the fuck you lookin' at, Fruitcake?

Actor 1: Vote Independent in the next election!

Actor 2: Republicans are evil! Wyoming!

Joanna: Work with me, Tony, for Christ sake!

Tony: Oh, sorry.

Actor 3: I love Nixon!

Joanna: It all right, darling, no biggie; just pretend we're in *Whose Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. Play the game.

Tony: Excuse me, Joanna?

Joanna: Yes, dear?

Tony: Let me show you somethin’.

[Tony opens a shoebox, filled with cash; and, produces a letter, from an envelope, from the box.]

Look: read this. We just got the big grant, from the National Endowment of the Arts! Oh, baby! Free tax money; rub it over your body, baby! Forgetta’ ‘bout it!

[They start to rub cash over their bodies; especially, their genitalia.]

Joanna: Rub it on my couchie; oh, yes!! Stop! Stop; I think they might see us.

Director: Cut! Cut!

[Director approaches Actor 3.]

What’s the matter with you, fairy? Why did you say to vote ‘independent’?

Actor 3: What do you mean? What have I done wrong, sir?

Director: I don’t think you are listening to me, fairy.

[Director starts to bash the fairies head against the wall.]

This is a goddamn *Democratic* stream-of-consciousness exercise! You son-of-a-bitch!
DO NOT JEOPARDIZE THIS OPPORTUNITY FOR ME, YOU GODDAMN FAIRY!!
Go sit in the corner, you frickin’ fairy!

[Equity Police # 1 blows whistle. Enter Equity Police # 1 & 2.]

EP # 1: Excuse me; I received a complaint from an anonymous Equity Deputy there is a play being performed in serious violation of the Equity Union Showcase. Have you all taken your fifteen-minute break?

EP # 2: Is that a camera? I smell smoke, from a smoke machine, in this theater. How many rehearsals has this play had? How much are tickets to this reading? I’ve seen enough. You are all under arrest!

[Dramaturge slowly exits, stage right, to avoid being arrested. Equity Police # 1 shoots dramaturge in buttocks. Chaos ensues. Everyone exits the theater.]

Scene 4:

Setting: Joanna and Tony re-enter the theater.

Joanna: Well, so much for the goddamn *Butterfly Fairies*. Where were we, darling?

Tony: Joanna, the tickets to latest play, *Heathens in Hoboken, Number Seventeen*, are only papering – comps. I paid the fashionable artist MoMA sent, to make the playbill artwork of cow fetuses being hung and disemboweled, by grade school children. Ben Brantley, of *The New York Times*, gave *Heathens* rave reviews. It's got your gays in the play, and whatnot.

Joanna: Mother-fucker; where'd I put my cup of double-triple espresso vanilla bean mocha latte, with a splash of Honduran *flava* crystals?

Tony: You listening to me? I got some of my money in that production.

Joanna: Yes. I'll call the little pip squeak, Brantley; and, tighten his screws; until, he loves it so much he screams in agony! Ha ha ha!

Tony: Do you think my play might actually be *bad*? The first sixteen *Heathens* were good, weren't they? Am I a writer? Huh?

Joanna: Yes, all of your theatrical works are splendid and wonderful, which is why they're published by Samuel French. My darling dear, nothing written is ever *bad*. Mel Brooks has been teaching us this lesson, in *The Producers*, for half a century. Cheer up, darling; cha cha with me. Is how one dances a Puerto Rican salsa dance?

Tony: Do I look Puerto Rican, bitch? How about a fresh one?

Joanna: No, Tony! Don't slap me!

Tony: Melissa is sponsoring a reading tonight – some group from a homeless shelter for the mentally ill. Do you have a few singles, in case they beg?

Joanna: A homeless shelter! Jesus, Tony! Are they sufficiently medicated? Well, I guess we can show a little charity, just for the hell of it, even if we don't stand to gain personally. Melissa! Get your little cracker-ass in here!

[Melissa re-enters the theater, coaxing Harry, Cool Joe, Player Smooth with her.]

Oh, hello, dear. Come over here. Is your charity group here?

Melissa: They're over there, ready to perform. But, it's not charity. Harry is a playwright.

Joanna: Whatever, my dear? Why on earth would anyone ever want to produce a play, written by a mad, homeless playwright? Theater is business. Always ask yourself, "Will this bring me money, fame, bolster my standing in the liberal establishment – or, lead me toward a lecturing, paying position at the Learning Annex?" It's all about the Benjamins, my darling. You are here on daddy's nickel, which is paying my tenured hinny. Darling, your daddy and I have a special relationship. I want his money to buy the best little artist, marketable.

Melissa: So I am a liberal playwright?

Joanna: Poet Wystan Hugh Auden once famously said, "Theater is a safe place, where liberals are promoting their ideas in peace and making a good living, in the process."

Tony: Is that the exact quote?

Joanna: Don't be so fussy about a little plagiarism among friends, for Christ Sake.

Tony: Well, we might as well get the show started.

Harry: What about The Whales?

Joanna: Excuse me? Is this the homeless man? What is your name, sir?

Harry: My name is Harry. The Whales are coming, to judge their contest. Do you have a play to enter? Are you going to enter "The Butterfly Fairies"?

Joanna: What are you talking about?

Harry:

[Simultaneous to Harry's opera-like whale-call, Cool Joe and Player Smooth rock their bodies on the ground, swimming like seals, arms at their sides.]

Whooooo Baaaaal. Clee-ack! Whooooo Baaaaal. Clee-ack!
Whooooo Baaaaal. Clee-ack! Whooooo Baaaaal. Clee-ack!

Cool Joe & Player Smooth: Auk! Auk!

Joanna: Why have you allowed a madman into our theater? Someone call the police. Have this crazy homeless man arrested, immediately.

[A loud, deep whale's bellow is heard, over the sound system, startling Joanna.]

Oh!

Harry: Look: here they come, from the depths of reality. Just there – at the edges, see? Prepare yourselves.

Joanna: Prepare for what? Who is here? What is happening?

The Whales and The Whale Chorus:

[Enter The Whales and The Whale Chorus, who are in one group, dressed with colorful togas. The Whale Chorus leads this group and it consists: king (he has a staff, with a head ornament), queen, prince, grandmother. The Whales are many minor whales of the court. The king is the chorus leader. All of the whales run on stage in a group, moving with playful motions, as if they were a collection of Barney dinosaurs. Some of The Whales roll around on the floor; then all assemble into a choral group.]

Harry: Here are The Whales! Here are The Whales!

Joanna: Oh, dear.

The Whale Chorus: O Hail, insane playwright, who called us!

The Whales: Oh, he who called us.

The Whale Chorus: O Hail, goddess of intelligentsia, academia, postmodernism!

The Whales: You got so much postmodernism.

The Whale Chorus:

We are sent by the hermaphrodite god, Dionysus
To judge the best play, not about Communism

The Whales: He does not like Communism.

Joanna: Oh, help me. What kind of whales are these?

Harry: The king is a sperm whale. He dives very deep in the Pacific Ocean.

Joanna: What is that one?

Cool Joe: Oh, that one is the queen. She is a finback. She lives in the Atlantic Ocean; but she doesn't dive anywhere near as deep as the king.

Joanna: And him?

Player Smooth: The Prince of Whales looks like a melon-head; and, the old one, the grandmother, is a humpback. The rest are pilots and orcas and dolphins; plus, a few right whales.

Joanna: What kind of whale is that one, with the thing on its head; and, locks of what appear to be hair?

Harry: That is a Jewish whale, wearing a Yakama.

Joanna: Oh. Are they going to eat us? Mooooo.

The Whale Chorus:

Dionysus does not enjoy musicals
Or Broadway Disneyworld commercialism
These mere big corporations' vehicles
Theater is a religion; and, the church has a schism

The Whales: Just simple vehicles of the rich.

The Whales Chorus:

He's been to festivals and workshops and even had to pay
Unrecognized as an industry comp, by imbeciles on Broadway

The Chorus Leader:

Playwright, commence your logic
Postmodernist, prepare your rhetoric

Joanna: Are you in charge here? – Because I really don't appreciate you just trouncing in here and taking over. For your information, we are engaging in true art here – theater!

The Whales:

You must recite your lyrics in meter
And take direction from our leader

Joanna: Ahh! All I wanted was to eat some sushi tonight.

[Swashbuckler and Dancer poke their heads from behind either end of the curtain.]

The Whales:

You, postmodernist, will speak in anapest tetrameter
And you, playwright, will answer in iambic tetrameter
Both concluding with a choking-song, cut to a diameter

Joanna: Stop this madness! What is happening? What has happened to the 4th wall? I feel as though I have been transported to some alter reality, where the play no longer exists and I am inside of another theater. Is there an audience here, watching me?

Harry: There is no more 4th wall. Yes, there is an audience here; I hear them breathing. Listen. One of them is snoring – no, farting. I can almost, just about, smell them. Over here, I don't smell anyone – I must be upstage; but over here, whew! They must be from Romania – or, maybe New Jersey. He is bald and ugly! And, are those real? If you are there, audience, you must help me, come over to the other side. Do not tell anyone! Shh!

Melissa: Harry! You are not leaving reality. And, if you do, I am coming with you.

Harry: We cannot leave, until this play is resolved. We must obey The Whales, as I have told you; but you are not listening to me! I am smashing the 4th wall!

[Smashes the stage set with an imaginary, giant hammer. Tony runs offstage. As Harry spends a minute smashing the set, Swashbuckler and Dancer enter the stage and perform a swordfight, which causes Harry and everyone else to stop and watch.]

Swashbuckler:

Fie and drumsticks! All not henceforth –
BUT, lay snails and such apricots as blithe.
AND, the clambasted pick-a-dilly
Clubfooted horgoth which dines – aye.

Dancer:

[Dancer enters the stage, skipping with one hand on his hip, his sword pointed forward.]

Ravenhampster, tis I, Jacobin!

Swashbuckler:

[Turns, dramatically.]

Ah, Jacobin! Better gallywack than the gardenshack.
[They embrace. Enter juggling, Very Short Actor, who drops his balls and chases them across the stage. Enter Short, Hunchback Actor, who is doing summersaults on the floor; but awkwardly.]

Aye, good to no'or and forcrackle.

Dancer: Ah, tis such, and rims.

Swashbuckler: Sent a blowin', in peculiar herewith, mine arse?

Dancer: Aye, tis, aye. Ravenhampster, deer spot langtoon's weasels?

Swashbuckler: I have not.

Dancer: They hath smote the pole.

Swashbuckler: Nooo! God!

Racked, ransacked, bemoaning doom and goo?
AND, the habadash's whiskers of morn'
Nary a golden splendor; forsooth a fortnight – and ere
Happenstance, thus; for, the nary told word
In flights of ribald night whistlers
Hum-a-da-hum-a-da-hum-a-da

Dancer:

Oh! And the monkey-spankers!
How lecherous lights ole one-eye!

Swashbuckler:

The autumn day's done; the yonder morn braces
For sunlight's reach and lovely songs
Long beyond the night's wrongs
Thus they compound; aye – and, as such,
Wrested arms and delightful noon
Silent as a still lake, eye-fashioned by a loon
Pecking the calm, slicing the sheet, diving
Down, down, to rocky shores and what more? Nay!

Dancer:

[Dancer stabs Swashbuckler in the kidney. Swashbuckler dies. Dancer performs ritual Hari Cari with his sword.]

I love you, Joe Chino!

Joanna: Who the hell are you two?

Dancer: We're rehearsing for a Shakespeare play.

Harry: This is Shakespearean comedy?

Melissa: Yes, it is.

Harry: I don't think I'll put any of it in my play.

[Dancer, Swashbuckler, Very Short Actor, Short, Hunchback Actor exit.]

Who is he?

[Enter Dionysus, from the audience, carrying a martini, calling The Chorus Leader over, to stage right.]

Dionysus: Is this the playwright we met in Scene One?

The Chorus Leader: Yes, that one there. He wrote a play, which was rejected by the liberal elite.

Dionysus: I wonder if he knows about them.

[Dionysus points to the audience.]

Explain to them what the hell's going on here. I'm working on my buzz. I'll catch you on the flip side, G – trying to learn the slang. Word.

[Exit Dionysus.]

The Chorus Leader:

[Chorus Leader addresses the audience.]

Yes, Harry, there is an audience here. I am the playwright and I am speaking, right now, through the mouth of one of my characters. I am writing an ancient Greek comedy. I am following all of the rules of ancient Greek comedy, including this section, which is called a parabasis. I am in charge of this play! Just to prove my point, watch a demonstration of my power, as I destroy of the gods!

[Chorus Leader turns and make hand gestures, as if he were a magician, at one whale in the chorus, who falls to the floor 'dead'.]

[Enter Stage Manager, who drags the dead whale from the stage.]

Are there any questions? Let's sit back and enjoy the rest of the play.

The Whales and The Whale Chorus:

Here we are, at the crux of the matter
One claims art's foundations shattered
The other denies this; says nothing's the matter
And to worry is to get worked into lather

The Whales Chorus:

Let the contest begin
And may the best one win

[The Whales and The Whale Chorus, Dancer, Swashbuckler, Very Short Actor start to slowly lean on the walls, sink to the floor, fall asleep, start snoring, occasionally stirring.]

Joanna: My child, you do not understand the art of the 60s. Andy Warhol's pop art movement changed the face of art. Yes, he was not a great artist; but he was trying to be bad. Truman Capote and Thomas Wolfe invented New Journalism as a way to remove the illusion of grandiosity from fiction, from writers such as Hemingway or Fitzgerald. My generation single-handedly reduced art to ruins. The Modernist poet T. S. Eliot's epic poem, 'The Wasteland', eradicated millennia of Judeo-Christian metrical, rhyming, silly poetry, such as Aristophanes. My generation is known as the Postmodernists. I personally know Norman Mailer and the great poet Billy Collins! I rest my case.

Harry: We all want to love the theater.

[The Whales and The Whale Chorus, Dancer, Swashbuckler, Midget all stand, quickly.]

We all want to fall in love with it again. We want our theater back. \$150 is too much to pay for a ticket. It's not right. We want control. We want our theater back. Our theater does not consist of Billy Joel musicals. Our theater does not belong to tourists or the mayor. Our theater belongs to us! And, we're not going to take it anymore, because we want our theater back. Say it with me. We want our theater back! We want our theater back! We want our theater back! Can I get an Amen!? I want to create the new, to change art and theater. I rebelled with my first play, which made it to off-Broadway, "Hang all the Hippies at High Noon"; but your critics crushed it, and me. Now it is up to the whales to decide the fate of art's future!

Joanna: So you are the infamous Harry Alton, the playwright who wrote "Hang all the Hippies." I see you in flesh and blood. What Anthony Lane said is true: You really are crazy.

Harry: Yes, I am playwright Harry Alton! I have The Whales with me! And, we're here to win!

The Chorus Leader: Now you, audience, shall judge who has the better argument. All of those who think Joanna won, say, nay! And, all of those who think Harry won, say aye! And the winner is:

[Joanna is full of expectation and nervous anticipation. Her shoulders slump after she is declared loser.]

The ayes have it! Harry is declared the winner! Postmodernist: Leave the stage! Your time is over! You are a loser!

Joanna: What!? I demand a recount!

The Whale Chorus: There are no recounts with the Gods, my darling.

Joanna: But I am a producer – stop! I am not leaving! Do you hear me? Are you listening to me?!

[One whale, from the The Whales, approaches Joanna, gives her a hug, returns to his or her spot in the overall chorus. Joanna mouths “thank you” to the lone whale.]

This is my theater – wait – I mean, I am very unhappy by your decision to get to get rid of me. I am special, as an actor. And you need therapy! Please, Mr. Whale, don’t fire me. I will do an-ything for you.

[Joanna approaches the Chorus Leader, hinting at sexual favors; but he resists. Joanna is frustrated by his lack of interest.]

I had a PHD in theater. I am one of the founders of La Mama Theater. I was a regular at Joe Cino’s Caffe Cino. I gotta right! I gotta right!

[The Chorus Leader motions to the Stage Manager, who enters and grabs Joanna around the waist, carrying her offstage.]

Oh! Put me down! I’ll have you all blacklisted!

The Whales and The Whale Chorus

O, playwright, you have won the argument
Let’s hope it does not become your detriment
We are here to help you and sign a song
Go to Chinatown and find the great poet Uncle Wong
So you can get published!

Harry

Where is Uncle Wong?

The Chorus Leader: Uncle Wong is a wise poet, who will help you get published by Samuel French. I have no idea where he is.

Harry: I am ready then, to do as you say.

The Chorus Leader: Let's sing a song. Everyone knows this song. It's called, "Off to Chinatown."

[The Whales and all on stage divide into two groups and sing and dance, as they exit.]

We're going off to Chinatown, way down to Chinatown
To meet Mr. Uncle Wong, oh big Uncle Wong
He's going to show us how to write a play
In the good, old-fashioned Greek way
For a long time I was lost at sea
Like a mariner, that was me
And then, to my rescue, came The Whales
They showed me the way; I raised my ship's sails
We're off to Chinatown, rockin-rolling Chinatown
To meet Mr. Uncle Wong, oh big uncle wong
He's going to show us how to write a play
In the good, old-fashioned Greek way

Scene 5:

Setting: A subway car, with scattered passengers, Harry, Melissa, Cool Joe, Player Smooth, Dancer, Swashbuckler, Very Shot Actor, Short, Hunchback Actor, The Whales and The Whale Chorus. Chinese Passenger talks to himself, changing seats each with each line. Note: Chinese Passenger pretends to be the two actors on the TV series "The Honeymooners". The two imaginary characters the Chinese Passenger is pretending to be are having a lover's argument. At the end of his pretend argument, the two imaginary characters make up and the Chinese Passenger kisses himself.

Chinese Passenger: Chu tao boy moo hop yong ko rap long hi dong fu dee cap- capcap-cap boowwwwwwwwwwwww – ha! Look woman, I work my fingers to the bone!

Chinese Passenger: Quing aaaaaaa jujujujujujuju too-pai! Wing-chi! Wha-cha! Hiya! Dick Cheney. Oh, don't you start with me!

Chinese Passenger: click-lakawake-mamamamma-hpapapapapa-cichichichichic-seeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeemeeeeeeeeeeeeeee. Don't make me come over there!

Chinese Passenger: ha ka top sow low me down do mo pop ulul hguai ajhoiwe ljkae roeinfalkd oaidnf pop! I'll tell you what! I'm sorry. baby.

Harry: Maybe we should have taken the E train and not the R train. That guys seems a little strange to me.

[Everyone claps and cheers the reconciliation of the Chinese Passenger. Enter Homeless Preacher.]

Homeless Preacher:

God can save you! Pray to sweet Jesus Christ. Jesus is sweet like Sunday ice cream. Mmm, good. I am Sonny Pain! I am personally in love with Satan; who can believe that fact? Can you? I have risen with my giant sausage, to the everlasting kingdom; who wants to partake of my giant sausage? Can anyone spare a dime? Can you spare some change, buddy?

The Whales and The Whale Chorus:

What is ice cream of Jesus Christ?
Is it good and very high-priced?
Is Jesus a god or son of a god?
Does he carry a sepulture or a rod?
And what is Satan, a milkshake
Or a chocolate ice cream cake?

Cool Joe: How are we going to find Uncle Wong, in Chinatown?

Harry: Do you think they know where he is?

Chinese Passenger: Gi go mmm pla hopscotch ring tied wolf upsta come on Brooke Shields.

Chinese Passenger: Boo! Hap si unda Delong UNCLE WONG Chinese restaurant on Grand Street?

Player Smooth: Did you hear that?

Cool Joe: They know where Uncle Wong is!

Homeless Preacher: You, mister! I am going to eat your soul and spit it out, all over the hot coals of hell! Hahahaha!

Angry Passenger: Hey, man, why don't you shut your pie hole?

Homeless Preacher:

You don't believe in the Devil, sinner! God going to take you soul, and cast it to hell, to burn in everlasting flame! Hahahahaha! I am the great and chosen Planet Voltron Omega Tom Cruise.

Sometimes, a man gets the best seat on the subway. He is happy.
Or he is squished. The end is near. Have fear

Chinese Passenger: Go ta one block Canal den two knock fa da umbrella. Wha-cha!

Chinese Passenger: Usa da foor cy, Luke Sky-walka. Wooop! Ya all come on back na,
ya hear?

The Whales and The Whale Chorus:

Boo who ludes and dudes
Whoop whoop, moo moo
Hot dogs and biggy boobs
That man is taking a poo!

[Homeless Preacher starts to take down his pants.]

Angry Passenger: Hey! This is a public place!

Homeless Preacher:

[Homeless Preacher stops, his pants unbuttoned.]

I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.

Angry Passenger:

All that glisters is not gold –
Often have you heard that told.
Many a man his life hath sold
But my outside to behold.

Chinese Passenger:

Can such things be,
And overcome us like a summer's could,
Without our special wonder? You make me strange
Even to the disposition that I owe,
When now I think you can behold such sights
And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks,
When mine are blanched with fear.

Chinese Passenger:

What sum owes he the Jew?

The Whales and The Whale Chorus:

Wherefore art thou, Romero?
Yuk, yuk, whoop, whoop!
Be bop too moo

Yuk, yuk, whoop, whoop!
Be bop too moo

Harry: Let's make them tell us where Uncle Wong is.

Cool Joe: Let's get them!

[Harry, Cool Joe, Player Smooth, Melissa rush 2 Chinese passengers.]

Chinese Passenger: Halt! Do you not see the world has gone mad? And you propose to do nothing?

[Lights go out and there is heard loud scuffling and bangs for several seconds. Lights rise. Everyone freezes in place. The rest of the group is frozen in whatever comic action they were about to perform.]

Harry: Where is Uncle Wong!

Chinese Passenger: You will not reach him! Men and women, the time has arrived for action. The weak and undesirable must be left behind. Climb mountain – wha cha!

Chinese Passenger: Hi-ya!

Harry: Owww, hi-ya!

[The angry passenger shoves The Chorus Leader to the ground. Lights go black. More sounds of grunting and scuffling.]

The Chorus Leader:

[Lights rise. The Chorus Leader is about to slam his staff on top of the head of the angry passenger. Every person freezes.]

Poor Harry; will he achieve success? Will he create order from madness?

Lights go black; more scuffling sounds; and, other bizarre sounds.]

The Chorus Leader:

[Lights rise and everyone except The Chorus Leader is divided into two groups, which are lined against the walls. Square dance music plays. One Whale and the Homeless Preacher interlock arms, in the center of the stage, square dancing. It does not matter if they do not know how to square dance. Lights go black. Music fades.]

Scene 6:

Setting: Lights rise. Harry, Melissa, Cool Joe, Player Smooth enter, from the curtain, SR, with Harry moving it inside, as if he were entering a bar in the Wild West. Melissa is behind them. On stage are a table and one chair. Uncle Wong is sitting on the table, his legs crossed.

Harry: Where is Uncle Wong?

Uncle Wong: Who is fool, who dare to ask for Uncle Wong?

[Harry, Melissa, Cool Joe, Player Smooth enter and stride confidently to the table. Harry bows before Uncle Wong.]

Harry: I am fool who dares.

[Harry bows before Uncle Wong. Enter The Whales and The Whale Chorus; juggling, Very Short Actor and Short, Hunchback Actor; Dancer and Swashbuckler. Very Short Actor goes behind the curtain and pulls out a large, homemade gong, which he slams once, with a mallet. All sit in front of Uncle Wong.]

Uncle Wong:

[Uncle Wong gesticulates comically during the story.]

I tell you all story. Many, many year ago, there were two sisters, who lived in a berry bad part of town. One sista name Al-i-ca. Otha sista name Jan. Sista name Al-i-ca was berry ugly. Other sista, name Jan, berry, berry beautiful. Den, one day, along come a handsome prince, in a stretch limousine. He get out and ask for da ugly sista. Ugly sista say, 'Why you choose me and not my beautiful sista?' Handsome prince say, 'I'm tired, woman, of doing the same thing, always. I need change in my life. Can't you see that?' Ugly sista say, 'Okay den, let's go party.'

Cool Joe: That was a wonderful story.

Uncle Wong: Here is fortune cookie.

[Uncle Wong hands Harry a fortune cookie, from his pocket. Harry opens it, eating the cookie.]

Player Smooth: Wait, that's it? There is nothing else to say? How is Harry going to get published?

Stage Manager:

[There is a loud commotion sound offstage. Then, a large object is hurled onstage. Next, a latter crashes on the stage; or, a curtain is dropped – or, some other large lapse in stage management occurs. Enter the stage manager, alone, who spends several minutes awkwardly trying to reassemble what went wrong, moving through the set and the actors. Stage manager motions to one actor to help him. One actor assists the stage manger.]

I'm sorry for the disturbance. Pardon me. Excuse me, folks; I'll just be a minute. This kind of thing happens in live theater – it's not a problem at all. Is there any Brooklyn in the house?

[Exit stage manager.]

Harry: What do we do now? Is there no answer?

Uncle Wong: Read message of fortune cookie! Answer must be found, not own answer.

Player Smooth: What does it say?

Harry: It says if I want to be a playwright, my play must first be published by Samuel French publishers. 45 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10010-2751.

Cool Joe: We have the answer!

Melissa: The little strip of paper says all that?

Harry: Oh, Wong, The Whales said you are a great poet. I have to gain your wisdom.

Uncle Wong: Fortune cookie say to write play must be publish!

Harry: But I do not understand the point of this story!

Uncle Wong: Where you get publish: On Internet? Whale god says publish on paper. Must always obey whale god. You lean how to be wise by doing it yourself.

Cool Joe: We only have one hour to make it. Let's hurry!

Harry: I have to do this myself. I must learn it all, on my own. My fantasy can become real; I can enter my dreams. The world is crazy, not me.

[All exit, running. Uncle Wong remains on the table. Lights go black.]

Scene 7:

Setting: The office of Samuel French publishers. The publishers of Samuel French, The New York Times and The New Yorker are in the office. They are throwing scripts out the window, to see if they can get them into the East River. Before lights rise, heavy laughter is heard. As lights rise, the three of them are laughing, rolling on the floor, twisting and turning in delight.

New York Times Publisher: Fantastic, man! I haven't had this much fun in a long time, Morris. We don't do this kind of thing over at the New York Times. Look out, below!

[All 3 publishers are heaving piles of paper scripts out the window. The back up and run up to the window, and then heave it as far as they can out the imaginary window. All 3 run up to the window together and after the script is heaved, they grab the edge of the window and watch it fall, yelling, "Hoooooooooooooooo!" and leaning as they watch it fall. Then, they all jump back from the window, fix their hair, etc.]

New Yorker Publisher: I feel twenty years younger! Morris: it's like the Summer of Love, all over again: so much control! This is so much fun. We don't have anything like this at The New Yorker. Did that one make it to the East River?

New York Times Publisher: The Samuel French system for choosing scripts to publish is really incredible. Hey, all right, man! Damn, that one fell in the mudflats.

Samuel French Publisher: What are you guys talking about? Arthur: as editor of the New York Times, you're more powerful than the mayor. And, Bill, controlling the New Yorker is the equivalent of being King of American Culture. Hell, even those journalists at Newsweek got to print a bunch of lies about the Koran, which got scores of people killed in the Middle East. That is real power! Those are lucky bastards. You guys did a real good job backing their story. Look: All we do here is publish plays. Watch out; here comes a heavy one!

New York Times Publisher: Newspaper rags, Morris. The only thing we do for fun at The New York Times is "Jason Blair Day." Our journalists write whatever they want – you know, make up stuff. Coming up behind you!

New Yorker Publisher: We do that too, at The New Yorker. We call it "Seymour Hersh Day." Hey, here comes another!

[The New Yorker publisher trips and his script flies all over the room, loose leaf. He gets up, ashamed.]

My bad. Sorry. I slipped, Morris.

Samuel French Publisher: That's all right. Just be more careful next time.

New Yorker Publisher: Oh. I'm sorry about the mess. I guess I don't move like I did 20 years ago.

New York Times Publisher: Can I throw this stack out the window too, Morris?

Samuel French Publisher: Oh, no, those are plays I'm still considering. My student-interns from Columbia weed out the pro-gay, pro-Jew, pro-black, profeminist, etceteras, and stack them here. The rest, out the window, to try and reach the East River!

[Buzzer rings. Samuel French Publisher presses the phone's button.]

Yes, Blanche, we're kind of busy.

Secretary Voice (over the theater intercom): Mr. Hobson, I'm sorry for interrupting, sir; but there is a man here with whales.

Samuel French Publisher: What?

[He puts his hand over the phone.]

She's sort of weird.

It's Friday afternoon, Blanche; I don't have any appointments.

Secretary Voice: He says he is a playwright who must be published, in order to win the contest that the God Dionysus is holding for Zeus – what's that, honey? – Oh, and he says it's so that Dionysus can't watch a good plays in New York because there are no more good plays in New York, and the Whales sent him to you...and Uncle Wong...and that Uncle Wong is in publishing too, so you might publish this playwright – *HARRY* – because he is good friends with Uncle Wong.

[All 3 publishers fall to the ground, laughing so hard they have to grab their sides. Eventually, they recover.]

New Yorker Publisher: Oh, my god. Is it Friday? I feel like I'm in a dream, this is so much fun.

Samuel French Publisher: Hey guys, I just had an idea. I'm going to show you how I handle playwrights.

[Samuel French Publisher presses the phone's button.]

Send him in to see me.

Secretary Voice: Yes, sir.

New Yorker Publisher: Man, you know how to party, Morris.

[Enter Harry, Cool Joe, Player Smooth, Melissa, The Whales, The Whale Chorus, juggling, Very Short Actor and Short, Hunchback Actor; Dancer and Swashbuckler.]

New York Times Publisher: Melissa! Who are all of these people you are with?

Melissa: Daddy? These men are from a homeless shelter. And, these are The Whales. They are Greek gods.

New Yorker Publisher: Who's the midget? Did I buy you a midget for Christmas? Why aren't you in school? Where is Joanna?

New Yorker Publisher: Hey, you're that playwright Anthony Lane forced out of business a few years back. You were against liberals – Harry Alton!

Melissa: Daddy, I'm in love! And I think I might be pregnant.

Harry: Who here is the Samuel French publisher?

[There is a long pause. The Samuel French publisher boldly steps forward like a cowboy.]

Samuel French Publisher: I am he.

Harry: Here is my script. I must be published, so that I can enter my play and leave reality.

Samuel French Publisher: Ha, ha. Nice try. I can categorically inform you that we are not going to publish your play.

[New York Times Publisher and New Yorker Publisher laugh at Harry.]

Harry:

[The following speech is filled with much heartfelt emotion and vicious anger and yelling. Harry yells so loud, he almost scares the other people.]

But, you haven't even read it! We already won the contest of the best play. And, Uncle Wong said all we had to do is to become published. The Whales said to follow my dream. Someone has not told me the truth. Oh! I am not the one who is crazy here – all of you are crazy! I wanted to do the bidding of The Whales; their fantasy is reality! But, I can't follow them down, to the deep ocean! If I had succeeded as a playwright, I would have had my own laughers, in the back row, laughing, even if my plays weren't good! But, I can't write a play! No! I have failed The Whales. I have failed my buddies Cool Joe and Player Smooth. And, I have failed myself. I am going back to the homeless shelter.

Melissa: It's okay, Harry; you have me. And, maybe you have created a play, after all, about yourself, strange as it is; yes. It is beau-ti-ful – oh, yes.

New York Times Publisher: Excuse me; but if you don't return to your liberal studies at Columbia, I am revoking the funding of your college loans!

Melissa: Yes. And, I am in love with you, yes. I have loved you since I first laid eyes on you and you spoke your first words to me; yes and yes. Yes. Yes. Yes!

[Melissa falls unconscious in a swoon. Her father rushes to help her.]

New York Times Publisher: My god, someone get some water!

[Very Short Actor exits and returns with water. New York Times Publisher gently puts the water to Melissa's lips. She begins to slowly sip the water and returns to consciousness. All cheer loudly. Melissa stands.]

Melissa: I am sorry, Harry; but I will return to Columbia. I guess you have to go back to the homeless shelter, after all.

Secretary Voice:

[Buzzer rings.]

Excuse me again, sir; Dionysus, the Greek god of theater, is here to see you.

Samuel French Publisher:

[Samuel French Publisher presses the phone's button.]

Blanche: Is he union or non-union?

Cool Joe: No one cares about what you say, anyway, baby. Because Harry is my man!

[Cool Joe does a flirtatious dance in front of Harry.]

Melissa: Oh no, you don't! Harry is mine!

Secretary Voice: Dionysus says he is not a member of Actors Equity Union because, technically, gods don't have souls to sell. And, he says he doesn't have enough money to join the Union, anyway, due to a problem with compulsive gambling, wine, women, and song.

Cool Joe: Listen, here, sweet pants. The man is mine.

Melissa: Oh, no he is not.

Samuel French Publisher: Please tell Dionysus we're busy; and, I don't meet with actors on Fridays.

[Melissa and Cool Joe momentarily tangle. There is a loud boom over the intercom. All action stops. Enter Dionysus, holding a martini, along with the maenads.]

Dionysus: Well, well, are you Mr. Harry Alton? Is there a play going on here?

Harry: Yes.

The Whale and The Whale Chorus:

Dionysus, Great God of Theater
We have plunged the depths
And walked in humans' steps
To locate you a playwright
Who for his art is ready to fight
Dionysus, Great God of Theater
Have we found you a keeper?

Dionysus: Yes, cousins, you have done it! I saw the whole play; and, despite the uncomfortable seating, I could not stop laughing. I have seen a play, which I enjoyed, all the way to the ending. Give me your script, son.

Harry: Why? Don't I have to be published?

Dionysus: Let's not quarrel with the gods, my boy. There's nothing here. It's just blank sheets of paper. You crafty devil!

[Dionysus hurls Harry's script out the window.]

You were bluffing. Ha! Oh, you are good.

Harry: Are you capable of taking me to my fantasies? Is this actually my play that you have been watching?

Dionysus: Yes! And it's a good play that you have written, Harry Alton! Joanna was wrong, and because you are worthy and put up a noble fight against the establishment, now your vision will prevail in American theater! Now we are all going to Mount Olympus, with my Maenads, who will entertain you forever. You are going to write plays, for all eternity! And they shall all be good plays!

Cool Joe: What about the laptops? Are there any laptops in Mount Olympus?

Dionysus: The laptops are in Mount Olympus. Harry, you are King of The Whales!

Melissa: Wait! Harry, I have changed my mind; I want to come to Mount Olympus, too.

Dionysus: Too late!

Melissa: Oh, no!

Cool Joe: I told you Harry was mine, little sweetie!

The Chorus Leader: Here is your scepter.

[Chorus Leader gives Harry his scepter and bows.]

New Yorker Publisher: You can't just walk out on us like this! You escaped with your life last time. Prepare to die, this time!

[New Yorker Publisher takes out a gun. Everyone on stage, including Dionysus, hits the ground in a flurry of activity. Only Harry and New Yorker Publisher remain standing.]

As the editor and publisher of The New Yorker, I wield immense power in New York City! Who the hell do you think you are?

[New Yorker Publisher moves to the actors trying to reassure them; they back further away from him.]

I am not going to hurt anyone; I am only going to kill Harry! The New Yorker is the most important magazine in this city! Have you read my columns?

Harry: No, sorry, I have not.

New Yorker Publisher: Everyone has read me!

[Harry aims his scepter at The New Yorker Publisher, whose gun slowly is pushed away by the magic force of the scepter and then the gun flies from his hand.]

Your powers are useless against me! I am a playwright! I am King of The Whales! You shall pay for your foolishness!

[Harry continues to fire his scepter at The New Yorker Publisher for several long seconds. Everyone watches in horror. The New Yorker Publisher squirms in pain. All actors on the ground start to scream and wail at Harry's awesome power and his excessive use of force. The lights change color, reds, yellows, low booms are heard. Harry continues for at least 30 seconds. Each fire from the scepter rises to an almost orgasmic climax. Each time the New Yorker Publisher squirms in pain, and yells. Dionysus finally gets up, slowly.]

Dionysus: Leave him, Harry. We must get to Mount Olympus.

Very Short Actor: Hey! What about me?

Short, Hunchback Actor: Do we get laptops too?

Dionysus: Come on along; everyone gets laptops! Harry: Lead the way, stage right!

Harry: I am going home!

[Exit Dionysus, Maenads, Harry, Cool Joe, Player Smooth; Very Short Actor and Short, Hunchback Actor; The Whales and The Whale Chorus; Dancer and Swashbuckler. Samuel French publisher, The New York Times Publisher, The New Yorker Publisher, remain on stage. Lights go black.]

The End.

[Coming soon, to a theater near you: *The Whales II* Harry and his accomplices are forced to return from Mount Olympus and settle the most important score of their existence.]

Notes on Theatre in 2006

M. Stefan Strozier

The Whales caused me to fall in love with theater. Unfortunately, it was not well-received by the critic-intellectual crowd. The play still ran its scheduled 4 weeks, 16 shows, and garnered a crowds of about 15 per night, in January, most of these civilians I gathered by promotion efforts. And, everyone loved the play; some people thoroughly loved it. But, comedy is very tricky and the script required a revision, which I've just finished. The play had "the stink on it," as producers call it. I did not care, since I knew the play had a snowball's chance in hell of being produced at the next level, though some people told me I should pursue that.

The purpose of The Whales was to have fun and, in this respect, it succeeded on a very rare level of attainment. The cast, crew and I had more fun with this play than anything I have ever experienced. When the run was over, I crashed harder than I think I have with any play or anything else in my life, as did everyone else. Relationships arose from this play. There were cast parties every night, and a finale cast party at the end of the play in New Jersey. I learned a lot about directing and all of the actors were amazingly talented.

What can I learn from this "disconnect," as we called it in the military, when two disparate sides should be alike or together? Subsequent to the production; but prior to this re-write, I received a review from a critic named Jack Goodstein, who read the play. He did not especially like it; but he seemed to not get some of the humor; or, he was offended by the inside nature of the jokes. The critic, who reviewed The Whales in production, related some positive things about the play; but did not like the production.

Granted, the production was a little chaotic, with 20-some actors in a black box theater. I sought explanation for these forces at work.

The Whales is basically just a farce. When it is taken as such, it is hugely enjoyable. Some of the actors created characters that were out of this world. Everyone created a bizarre costume for their character, along with accents, inflections, and funny non-verbal movements. Watching each strange character incarnation then interact with another one onstage was some of the funniest stuff I've ever seen. I never thought it could get so good. I still recall images in my mind, from time to time.

The people who had a problem with The Whales were the ones who took offence to the satire of it. The play is a mash-up of elements of Aristophanes' plays and then packaged into my own story. In this re-write, I took out the weak scenes. One scene, which simply had to go, because it just did not fit, involved the 3 male schizophrenics rapping to each other and dancing to a beat. The actors ad-libbed each night, creating these wonderful songs and amazing dancing. Of course, the critic did not like that scene. Soon after the play ended, I read in a *New York Times* review that Will Powers' version of *7 Against Thebes*, featured rapping and dancing, in "A new theatrical form." In any event, the new form does not work in theater, as both our plays discovered.

The Whales was also cathartic for me, as I finally got to get my say. I suppose some time will have to pass, in order for people to not take the material in the play so seriously. And, this re-write will help. I am inspired, on the one hand, that I was able to write this play and people seriously considered it, despite some amateurish reactions. On the other hand, I am uninspired by the fact that no one said a word more – the thing just

kind of died. Nevertheless, I was able to write, direct, and produce another play, full of challenges, and art, which took me one step closer to my goal of global supremacy.

Thank you for reading.

M. Stefan Strozier (www.mstefanstrozier.org) lives in New York City. He is the founder of La Muse Venale Acting Troupe (www.lamusevenale.org). His plays "Guns, Shackles & Winter Coats" and "The Whales" and "The Tragedy of Abraham Lincoln" were performed in lengthy runs, off-off Broadway, and/or in the Midtown International Theatre Festival. He has directed four plays and produced nine, all off-off Broadway. His stories, poems, non-fiction, etceteras have been published in many online ezines, in print, newspapers, and in his first collection of short stories, *Sickness of the Young*. His former pen name is Mila Strictzer. He is also the founder of the ezine *audience* (www.worldaudience.org).