

Self Expression

by

Doug Brook

(An earlier version of Self Expression won

Honorable Mention

First Annual Full-Length Playwrighting Contest (1999)

Actor's Theatre, Santa Cruz, California

Staged readings May 26-27, 1999

Directed by Maria Crush)

(An earlier version of Retrograde won

First Place

Fourth Annual Ten-Minutes Playwrighting Contest (1998)

Actor's Theatre, Santa Cruz, California

Premiered January 7, 1999 in *Eight Tens @ 8 festival*

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Directed by John Howie Patterson

John: Chris Sugarman

Lynn: Katryn Kinser

New York professional premiere November 13, 2002

Streetlight Productions' *Yearning for the Fourth Grade*

Lion Theatre, 42nd Street Studios

John: John-Paul Lavoisier

Lynn: Kerri Tucker)

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PREVIEW SCRIPT

For the full script, or production/rights inquiries, contact doug@brookwrite.com

WRITER'S NOTE

Self can be defined in two ways.

A person's course through life, the path of his self, typically goes from the beginning, through youth, adulthood, a midlife questioning of the reason and nature of life, the end, and perhaps whatever might happen afterward.

Self can also be the sum total of an individual's thoughts, feelings, and other internal distinctions.

This play expresses both of these definitions of self. The play contains a series of scenes that mirror the aforementioned stages that a self experiences. They are interspersed throughout a storyline where a man wrestles with the ability to express himself to the woman he loves.

Or maybe it's just entertaining and thought-provoking without all that babble to justify it.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The play can be done with or without intermission. An intermission is best before or after Self Expression IV.

The scenes should flow smoothly one into the next, which is why doubling such as what's detailed below is strongly recommended. The smooth flow is well achieved with lighting localized on the performer(s) who end one scene and start the next, while the rest of the people (and sets) flow into place around them as smoothly as possible.

The play is not intended for huge set pieces. Tables and chairs to suggest a restaurant, desks with chairs (or a conference table) to suggest an office, etc.

Character doubling (some variation is possible in supporting characters):

W1 - REGAN / EVE / LAURA / LYNN / SARAH / MARCIE

M1 - CLARK / ADAM / MARTIN / JOHN / KIRK / TODD

M2 - COP / JUDGE / MAN / FRED / JIM

M3 - WAITER / PROSECUTOR / JOE / BURGLAR / HIM

W2 - DEFENDER / CAMILLE / CHRISTINE / WOMAN

W3 - TEACHER / CAROLINE

W4 - LINDA

SELF EXPRESSION I

A nice restaurant. A tastefully appointed table is center, with two chairs occupied by **CLARK** and **REGAN**, two professionals in their late twenties.

REGAN

I believe that all things in nature go through the same phases of existence.

CLARK

(Pause.) Okay.

REGAN

What do you mean okay? I just said something deep, profound, thought-provoking... At least conversation provoking, and all you can say is okay?

CLARK

(Pause.) Well, I agreed.

REGAN

I haven't told you what I mean by it so you can't possibly agree.

CLARK

That's not true. I can agree with it just as you said it.

REGAN

You think you agree, but you don't really know what I meant yet. Or you're just being nice and agreeing with anything I say.

CLARK

I agree.

REGAN

You do.

CLARK

Certainly.

REGAN

With which? I said two things.

CLARK

Since you think I don't agree with you when I say that I do, does it matter?

REGAN

Yes.

CLARK

You know which one you were right about. Why do you need me to confirm it?

REGAN

I was right about both. But to help you avoid making a fool of yourself in some future conversation by disagreeing with me about what you don't realize you just agreed with, I'll explain what I meant.

CLARK

Perfect.

REGAN

I believe that everyone's, everything's, existence goes through phases. The creation of a life, the learning and maturation of that life, the newly matured living of that life, the realization of the impending mortality of that life, and whatever becomes of that life once its existence as we know it ends.

CLARK

In other words, you're born, you grow up, you're a yuppie, you have a midlife crisis and grow old reflecting on what your existence has been, and then you die and go somewhere else, maybe. Nothing earth-shaking there.

REGAN

That's one application.

CLARK

There are others?

REGAN

Certainly. Everything in nature goes through those phases in their own way.

CLARK

You don't see a seahorse going through a midlife crisis.

REGAN

That's exactly my point.

CLARK

It can't be. It's my point.

REGAN

A seahorse goes through a later-in-life awareness of its impending death, but the seahorse doesn't experience it as a midlife crisis. You thought it was your point, but it proved mine.

CLARK

That just shows how much I understand you at your deepest levels, and how much I respect your perspective.

REGAN

Smooth. Very smooth.

CLARK

I try.

REGAN

No. I don't think you do. I think it's natural for you.

CLARK

I'm not one to argue with such an intelligent lady.

REGAN

Now you're trying.

CLARK

I'll try not to.

REGAN

You don't do as well when you try as when you're just yourself. Don't you think?

CLARK

Yes. That's very true.

REGAN

You have to learn to say no. You're not very good at it, are you?

CLARK

No. See? I'm getting better at it already.

REGAN

But let's take the seahorse. It's created, yes?

CLARK

Is it okay if I say yes?

REGAN

Even if it's not capable of intelligent thought like people are, it develops, it learns where to get food, it grows for some period before it's a fully developed seahorse, yes?

CLARK

Why are you fixated on seahorses?

REGAN

You brought them up.

CLARK

I do that a lot. I mention seahorses and women can't stop talking about them. Why is that?

REGAN

Because with seahorses the male has to go through the birthing process. It's a small victory, but we'll take it.

CLARK

You don't want kids?

REGAN

Which brings us to phase three, living as an adult. Yes, for some people this can mean living life as a yuppie, getting a job, a spouse, a house. But for others it doesn't.

CLARK

But it can.

REGAN

But it doesn't. Not even for all people. What about the ones who stay single?

CLARK

I was hoping they wouldn't be as relevant tonight.

REGAN

Then the fourth phase. Awareness of mortality.

CLARK

Yeah. I'm not sure I agree with that one.

REGAN

See? You don't agree.

CLARK

Caught me. You're brilliant, you're wonderful, I'm just not sure about this one. People learn about death when they're young. Even animals do. You saw "Bambi."

REGAN

Never saw it.

CLARK

Really?

REGAN

Really.

CLARK

Anyway, only people go through midlife crises. Some go through it before midlife, some never get to it if their lives are cut short.

REGAN

True.

CLARK

See?

REGAN

But...

CLARK

That's not a good but.

REGAN

Excuse me? What's wrong with my butt?

CLARK

Nothing. You have a wonderful butt. My only regret sitting with you at dinner is that I can't see it.

REGAN

One more crack... comment like that and you'll see it as I walk it out of here.

CLARK

Pretty cheeky of you.

REGAN

That's sexual harassment. I could have you fired.

CLARK

Are we still at work?

REGAN

You're working me.

CLARK

Just working at proving your fourth phase wrong.

REGAN

Don't get yourself fired from your day job. A child can learn the concept of death, but as life goes on we can more fully comprehend it. I think there is a moment when all things recognize their mortality in the greatest scope they can. For many it might be a split-second before they die, because they can't really understand death as a rational concept. But there is at least a split-second in which the newness of whatever brings something to death registers in its mind as something new and unique.

CLARK

Of course it's unique. It's a once in a deathtime experience.

REGAN

Have you ever died in a dream?

CLARK

No, just at the track.

REGAN

Some say it's impossible, that if you're about to die in a dream you wake up at the last possible moment. And if you were to actually die in your dream, your mind comprehends that as you dying, so you never wake up.

CLARK

That's crazy.

REGAN

Says you.

CLARK

I've had dreams where I've died. I've felt the cool steel of a blade stabbed into me. I've felt a bullet go through my shoulder. All kinds of things.

REGAN

You've felt what you assume those things feel like. And those are only the causes of death. They might be the last thing you feel before death, but they're not death itself.

CLARK

I felt it, then I felt myself die.

REGAN

What did dying feel like?

CLARK

It felt like nothing, really. It felt like emptiness.

REGAN

That's not death. You felt the emptiness, the nothingness. So you were still alive to feel it.

CLARK

Okay.

REGAN

So anyone, even an animal, might not recognize it for what it ultimately becomes, but they're still suddenly newly aware of its imminence as they never have been before.

CLARK

So if I'm a seahorse walking down the street, experiencing contractions to the delight of all the human women around me, and someone drops an anvil on my head, you expect me to have a split-second awareness of my demise as I'm getting smeared on the pavement?

REGAN

We're about to eat here.

CLARK

Only if the waiter ever makes an appearance.

(A very polished **WAITER** makes an appearance.)

WAITER

Good evening.

REGAN

Good evening.

(**WAITER** waits patiently for **CLARK** to reply also. **CLARK** notices.)

CLARK

Oh, good evening.

WAITER

Lovely evening, isn't it?

REGAN

Why, yes.

WAITER

A bit too cloudy for my taste.

CLARK

That's too bad. (Pause.) Was there anything else?

WAITER

Oh, my apologies. I get carried away with my banter. I'm Irving, your waiter this evening. Are you ready now?

CLARK

We haven't had a chance to look yet.

WAITER

I understand. Settling in from the walk to the table, regaining your strength before hefting the menu open. It's difficult for people in my line of work to distinguish a menu that's closed out of readiness from a menu that hasn't been opened yet. Would you care for a drink while you look over the menu?

CLARK

Yes...

WAITER

(To **REGAN**.) Miss? Or, is it Misses?

REGAN

It's Miss.

WAITER

Miss? A nice young woman like you? Really? I'm in shock. Then again, what mere mortal would be good enough for a woman of your charm? (To **CLARK**.) Really, sir, do you know anyone who measures up? (To **REGAN**.) He doesn't. I'm sure he's out there for you, Miss, just building up the anticipation, waiting for the right moment, trying to ensure he's worthy of you, and then you'll finally meet him.

REGAN

Flattery will get you nowhere, but can it get me a dry martini, please?

WAITER

Very good. Sir, what would you like?

CLARK

A black Russian.

WAITER

Then what are you doing here with her? (**WAITER** laughs harder than everyone else, including the audience.) Very good, I will bring your drinks in a moment.

(**WAITER** exits left.)

CLARK

Better be careful. We're the victims of an aspiring actor's new material.

REGAN

Well, one of us is acting like a victim.

CLARK

I'm sorry.

REGAN

Relax. You don't have to impress me, I'm already here with you. (Pause.) Besides, I gave up any hope that you would impress me a long time ago.

CLARK

Good. That makes me feel so much better.

REGAN

Just relax. Okay, I'll change the subject to something easier. Phase five.

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