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# Other truths: negation as a device for reader engagement in post-colonial settler literatures

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## Other Truths: negation as a device for reader engagement in post-colonial settler literatures.

#### Master of Creative Arts (by research)

From University of Wollongong

by **Michael Freundt** 

**Creative Writing** 

**Faculty of Creative Arts** 

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#### **Abstract**

The veracity of the term 'writing back' has been well established, since its coinage by Salman Rushdie in the early 1980s, as an apt description of what some writers from post-colonial countries do when they re-engage with the literature from the imperial centre. Generally this is achieved through counter-discourse by which post-colonial texts, or 'settler literatures' seek to subvert the iconic imperialist texts to not only re-attach a post-colonial readership to a truth more aligned with their own experience but also to re-align the imperial readership to 'other truths' in keeping with the world-view of the post-colonial experience.

Such writers of post-colonial literature use varying techniques of engagement, and re-engagement, for their counter-discursive goals; and one of these techniques is via negation not only of the imperial text but also of the imperial author. This thesis argues that writers of settler literatures negate the authorial power of iconic imperialist texts on which they are based. However Wolfgang Iser's writings on reader response teach us that where there is negation there needs to be a logical alternative truth to actively re-align readers' beliefs and re-attach readers' loyalties to the authorial power of the new settler texts. The three texts under analysis, Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997); J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1987) and Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976) actively provide and achieve this: they urge readers to adopt the new world truth inherent in the settler texts themselves.

#### **Thesis Certification**

#### **CERTIFICATION**

I, Michael K. Freundt, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the award of Master of Creative Arts, in the Department of Creative Writing, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged.

The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Michael K. Freundt

15 December 2011

## Other Truths: negation as a device for reader engagement in post-colonial settler literatures.

#### Introduction

This thesis investigates the ways in which post-colonial literatures subvert the reader's world view, largely created and/or reinforced by texts from the imperial centre. It argues that such abrogation is achieved via writing back to the colonial centre using a deliberate and antiestablishment negation of the authorial power of the imperial text itself. It will also be shown that just as a photographer poses his work to testify to his world view, so too a writer, and, even more so a post-colonial writer, 'poses' truth for counter-discursive purposes. The three texts analysed to argue the above are Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997); J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1987) and Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976). Each text uses negation as a writing-back strategy, leading the reader towards a post-colonial view implicit in the text's ambition.

This essay builds on Thieme's notion of pre-text and con-text where the latter refers to "a body of post-colonial works that take a classic English text as a departure point, supposedly as a strategy for contesting the authority of the canon of English literature" (Thieme, 2001, p1). These con-texts "refract[ed] back on the pre-texts" (the classic English text) "in question, opening up possibilities of variant readings by undermining the notion of the stable text" (Thieme, 2001, p13). The emphasis of this study, however, lies in a particular reading of the con-text that undermines, not the "notion of the stable [pre]text" but the notion of authorial authority in the canon of English literature.

The thesis uses as its chief methodological tool Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theory. As an academic and literary critic, Iser examines the complex relationship between text and reader, especially in relation to articulating how the reader perceives truth in fiction. His examination also demonstrates how texts change the reader's response to that truth and how writers seek to rebuild the reader's intellectual world-view into a body of knowledge prescribed by, and sympathetic to,

the text. It is this transformation from the empirical reader<sup>1</sup> to the implied reader that forms the basis of Iser's construct. Iser explains that the implied reader "incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualisation of this potential through the reading process" (Iser, 1974, pxii). One of the major strategies employed by the text to do this is through negation. The uniqueness of the novel is "that it led to a specific effect: namely, to involve the reader in the world of the novel and so help him to understand it – and ultimately his own world – more clearly" (Iser, 1974, pxi). Iser goes on to argue that novel-making takes social regulations (norms) and transposes them into a new context which is, more often than not, set up to be questioned rather than confirmed and this is done by varying degrees of negation. The reader, when faced with this negation seeks from the text a positive alternative, one that may be alien to him<sup>2</sup> but one that not only neutralizes the negation but is coupled with it, forcing a change in the reader's world view. As Iser explains, this negation "impels the reader to seek a positive counterbalance elsewhere than in the world immediately familiar to him" (Iser, 1974, pxii). But what is negated "remains in view and thus brings about modifications in the reader's attitude towards what is familiar or determinate – that is, he is guided to a position in relation to the text" (Iser, 1984, p34; italics from the text). As shall be seen, the texts under analysis do not just "impel the reader to seek a positive counterbalance" aided by the posed reality, but they provide the reader with one; subtly, and not so subtly, guiding the reader down the path to a post-colonial enlightenment imbedded in the text's pedagogy.

#### **Truth in Fiction**

James maintains that truth is "a property of ideas"; ideas that agree with reality (James, 2008, p5). Realist literature is synonymous with verisimilitude; the text inspires the reader to accept the illusion of truth that the text creates via literary means. Iser attests that "literature means a texture of indeterminacies" and "everyday life itself consists precisely of a series of constantly changing patterns"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This is a term coined by Umberto Eco as Radford explains:

The empirical reader is you, the person next to you on the bus, anyone, when we read a text. Empirical readers can read in many ways, and there is no law that tells them how to read because they often use a text for their own reasons such as escape, entertainment, or killing time on the bus commute. (Radford 2002)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Masculine pronoun used by Iser.

(Iser quoted in Stein, 1981, p215). Iser in *The Act of Reading: a Theory of Aesthetic Response*, also maintains that "as we read we react to what we ourselves have produced, and it is this mode of reaction that, in fact, enables us to experience the text as an actual event..." It is our own reactions "that make us animate the meaning of the text as reality" (quoted in Stein, 1981, p216). The task of the text is to inspire the reader to actuate this illusion which, in terms of the text, appears as truth in the mind of the reader even if the story is historically true or not.

Truth in fiction over centuries of novelistic writing has evolved into a multifaceted construct but for the purposes of this essay this truth is defined via its dual nature. In the eighteenth century writers were adamant that their 'stories' were true: that the events were true as history is true. Daniel Defoe's name did not appear on the title page of Robinson Crusoe<sup>3</sup>. The author wanted his readers to believe that the story was an actual account (non-fiction) so Defoe wrote as 'the editor', as he called himself, in the Author's Preface: "The editor believes the thing to be a just history of fact" (Defoe, 1719, p35). The subterfuge is that it was written by the first person narrator, Crusoe. This deceit foregrounded the novel which Cadabo calls "an ambiguous genre that straddled the divide between fiction and factuality without purportedly crossing into the terrain of untruth" (Cadabo, 2010 p23). In the late twentieth century Kate Grenville, in her advice to would-be fiction writers, wrote: "...take whatever you already have and turn it inside-out and put it back-to-front in many different ways. This gradual process of transformation is the process of turning life into fiction" (Grenville, 1990, pxii). It is clear that fiction writers have changed the reader's expectation of truth, from the presumption of the 'real' to an accepted form of fictionality that allows all the modern genres that inhabit the world of literature: i.e., science fiction, romance, historical fiction, creative journalism etc. With the turn of another century writers, and readers, are increasingly concerned with the process of fiction making. This tilt to postmodernism is exhorted by the literary critic James Woods, "...fiction is both artifice and verisimilitude, and there is nothing difficult in holding together these two possibilities" (Woods, 2008, p2).

Full title: The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an un@inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoque; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With An Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by Pyrates.

Davis also points out that this appearance of truth has a dual nature: it is morally verisilimilar while at the same time, by employing providence (coincidences, improbabilities, sensation, exotic locations, etc.), seeming un-verisimilar (Davis, (1996, p112). This binary definition is what I mean, for the purposes of this essay, by the term 'truth' in fiction.

This artifice in fiction, as quoted by Woods, is similar to the way photography works as a force of enlightenment. Film-maker Errol Morris in his book "Believing is Seeing. Observations on the Mysteries of Photography" (2011) makes clear the difference between truth and reality in photography. A photographer 'poses' his photographs – adds real items or leaves others out - to draw attention to an aspect of the view that the viewer might miss, or, in other words, he limits the risk of the viewer 'missing the point'. As explained by Schultz (2011) Morris uses two photographs by Robert Fenton, taken in 1855 of a deserted battle field of the Crimean War. The photographs are almost identical: low barren and treeless hills through which runs a dirt road. However in one cannonballs litter the roadside ditch while in the other, as well as these, cannonballs are also seen strewn across the road. All elements of the shot are real: hills, road and cannonballs but in the 'un-posed' photograph the viewer takes a little time to notice the cannonballs in the ditch; but with the 'posed' photograph the road-strewn cannonballs more sharply articulate the photographer's motive in taking the shot in the first place: the horrors of war that mar a landscape and the lost lives of those that walked it. Such posing, according to Morris, is inevitable; just as a photographer poses real objects, real people to suit artistic imperatives so too a writer 'poses' reality, manipulates reality, to lead the reader in the emotional or pedagogical direction to which the text aspires.

#### Truth and the Post-colonial

Literatures from settler societies have, from their very beginning, used various means to extricate themselves from the dominance of their imperialist pretexts and in some cases they have actively tried to subvert those texts. This counter-discourse, as described by Ashcroft et al, "raises the issue of subversion of canonical texts and their inevitable reinscription" (2000, p57). However, the authors reference

Terdiman's address to this problem: that the texts are not simply subverted but affect the "whole of the discursive colonialist field within which imperial texts function in colonized contexts" (ibid). This metonymic aspect of post-colonial writing theory is important in understanding the extent of its influence and the potency of the postcolonial text. Moreover what is at the core of this study is to uncover and describe one of the counter-discursive techniques used by writers from settler societies.

Terdiman's concept of counter discourse is "to characterise the theory and practice of symbolic resistance" (Ashcroft et al 2000, p56). The canonical texts were, more often than not, employed in the imperialist education systems: texts such as Daniel Defoe's *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*; Charles Dicken's *Great Expectations*; Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and Joyce Carey's *Mister Johnson*. Almost invariably these texts presented an adverse depiction of a character or characters from the colonized societies under imperial rule; certainly so from the point of view of the post-colonial writers who also inhabit the same space as the colonised 'other' and who appropriated the language of the colonisers to subvert these adverse depictions and therefore sought to influence the very audience that *believed* the originals in the first place. The resulting post-colonial texts, in relation to the list above and corresponding to the same order, are as follows: J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*; Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs*; Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

This counter-discursive intent is also called 'writing back' which illicits the idea of responding to the imperial centre from the edges of empire with a new truth that subverts the old truth and sets to repair the depiction of colonised peoples from the colonial misconception of the imperialists. However, as Tiffin explains such texts are not "simply writing back to an English canonical text, but to the whole of the discursive field within which such a text operates and continues to operate in post-colonial worlds" (Tiffin, 1987, p98). It is the correction of these entrenched misconceptions, via writing back techniques, that form the counter discursive goals of writers from settler societies. However these post-colonial writers pose alternative realities, as did their imperial predecessors, but they also – and this is where they differ – re-pose the imperial manipulations that led to the perceived misconceptions and therefore set about re-defining the reader's world view to one acceptable to the post-colonial cause.

Following are analyses of the three texts in relation to reader response theory and the texts' use of negation in attempting to change the reader's world view by undermining the authorial power of the pre-text itself.

#### Jack Maggs

This text, from page one, establishes a close relationship with the reader – establishes power over the reader, presents the reader with a negation of the authorial power of the imperialist pre-text, *Great Expectations*, and, at the same time, offers a positive alternative. This leads the reader to the counter-discursive conclusion.

The text establishes a personal relationship with the reader. Early in the text the reader's attention is seized via direct address: "Had you asked him his impression of her appearance he would not have heard your question" (Carey 2005 p10). Here 'you' is not used as the indefinite personal pronoun where 'one' could be substituted, but as an address in the second person; confirmed by the subsequent use of the second person possessive pronoun 'your'. The text is directly addressing the reader. This is a deliberate textual strategy to garner the reader's loyalty and therefore strengthen the text-reader relationship; a relationship that the text will later undermine. It is this relationship together with the acknowledgement of the reader's contribution to the relationship that gives this relationship its strength.

Before the text can present the counter-discursive strategy - the negation of authorial power - it must establish a counterbalance that the reader will appropriate in order to make sense of the negation created. The text presents the reader with two very different writers and expends much literary energy to describe their respective texts and how those texts are created. Jack Maggs writes in secret for an audience of one with the precise purpose of telling the truth with only his own history, integrity and singularity of purpose to draw on, while the Dickens-like character, Tobias Oates, writes very publicly using a vast array of investigative practises for as large an audience as he can influence and for the precise purpose of monetary gain. Chapter 21 describes the birth of Maggs' text, written at night in secret, "by the light of four bright candles"; written with invisible ink, "he watches these fresh lines fade...they

became invisible" and for one pair of eyes only, "you must BURN EVERYTHING when it is read" (Carey, 2005, pp105-106; uppercase from the text). However Tobias Oates lives in a house "built of London brick...was newly painted, newly furnished...was strong and bright and solid" (p58). His study, with

its neat varnished systems of shelves and pigeon holes...ordered as methodically as a laboratory...stored not only his Evidence, but also experiments, sketches, notes, his workings-up of the characters who he hoped would one day make his name, not just as the author of comic adventures, but as a novelist who might topple Thackeray himself (p63).

This creation of two very different authors is at the centre of the con-text's subversive intent inspired by Carey's first reading of the Dickens' pre-text, *Great Expectations* (Dickens 1965). Carey's first inclination "was to be mad at Dickens for giving him (Magwitch) such a bad rap and to want to somehow fix that up" (Boswell, accessed 2011). In Carey's informal language he wanted to right a wrong; to counter the 'bad rap' Dickens had given the character of Magwitch which Carey saw as a metonym for the prisoners turned pioneers: his ancestors (ibid).

To fulfil his aim, Carey invents a childhood reminiscent of *Oliver Twist* for the young Jack Maggs inviting the reader to sympathise with a character who is bred and therefore forced by adults, his carers, into a life of crime. It is through this sympathetic character that the text creates another author, the positive, in the context, who is opposed to the depiction of the negative, in the pre-text, and consequently the counter-discursive battle is fore-shadowed. These two texts inhabit the con-text itself: Maggs' letters that turn into his autobiographical journal and Oates' journal that records his dealings with Maggs, and is the fore-runner of Oates' subsequent novel, *The Death of Maggs*. The former, where the reader is given insight and a post-colonial view of the sympathetically inducing early life of Maggs (represented as authorial truth) and the latter which Maggs is forever railing against as "an oversimplification of the characters of others" (Thieme, p112) and "his annoyance turns to violent anger at Oates for stealing the image of his first love for his fictional ends" (ibid). Tobias Oates, is seen as a manipulative and unscrupulous character, as he "hatched his scheme" (Carey, 2005, p66), intent on the approbation of other people's lives and experiences to mould and distort for the purpose of his own financial and notorious gain as he aspired to be a "novelist that might topple Thackeray himself" (Carey, 2005, p63). Maggs indulges in this "disgraceful art" (Carey, 2005, p105) but with a sympathetic history and for purer motives. With the two very different versions of the writer and his craft the text forces the reader to make a choice: which authorial voice does the reader give more credence to; Maggs or Oates? One of the fundamentals of Iser's construct is negation. The con-text creates a negative image of the well known and accepted notion of criminal/villain – boy/hero established by the pre-text and familiar to the empirical reader. This negation impels the reader to seek a 'positive counterbalance' which the con-text supplies by bountiful means: the centrality of Maggs; the sympathetic history written (ultimately) for the reader; Maggs' admirable motives and honesty of intent and his happy ending: he returned to NSW with his new wife, prospered with four successful businesses and two presidencies, of the shire and Cricket Club (p462). Since it is the 'world view' created by the pre-text that the con-text is challenging, exclusively in relation to the character of the villain, Magwitch, the con-text undermines the social norm that Dickens was justified in his depiction of Magwitch and compels the reader to replace it with a new 'social norm': the 'true' Magwitch depicted in the character of Jack Maggs. As Thieme explains,

...the text suggests that Jack is an alternative author figure...[an] exponent of a different kind of written narrative, a subaltern who emerges from the Gothic shadows of the canonical text to tell another side of the story (Thieme 2001 p117).

Not only is this negation the means by which the con-text subverts the pre-text but the 'new' villain (Oates) is the re-embodiment of the source of authorial power in the pre-text: Dickens. With the original master of authorial power dethroned by the exposure of the dark side of professional authorial means the con-text doubly subverts the original: its content *and* its creation.

#### Foe

This creation of a sympathetic pre-history to the canonical text in order to fore-ground the writer's counter-discursive point has also been used by other post-colonial writers: Jean Rhys in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and J.M. Coetzee in *Foe* 

(1986). However in the Rhys' text the pre-history is a linear mono-story similar to that of the Carey text; whereas in the Coetzee, the pre-history creates a filial/paternal role reversal based on a pre-history not of a canonical character but of the way of creation that produced the canonical text itself. It is to the analysis of the Coetzee text that I now turn.

In *Foe*, the text begins with the image of the first person narrator, Susan Barton, swimming clumsily and desperately in her petticoats to the shore of a desert island. She is fleeing a mutiny and the murder of her captain, the body of whom, with a metal spike in his head, still lies in the rowboat she has just abandoned. The image is graphic, and arresting to the reader: the empirical reader.

At last I could row no further. My hands were blistered, by back was burned, my body ached... I was alone on the waves with the captain lying dead at my feet, a handspike jutting from his eye socket (Coetzee, 1987, pp 5, 9).

This empirical reader is the 'raw material' that a con-text, such as *Foe*, seeks to subvert and given the opening scene a careless empirical reader might assume that the narrative is going to be set on a desert island and the story will tell of the heroine's adventures. A more careful empirical reader will notice the small quotation mark that begins the first sentence. If the empirical reader fails to notice the quotation mark at the very beginning of Coetzee's text, and at the beginning of every paragraph that follows, the aside on page 9, "...the stranger (who was of course the Cruso I told you of) gazed at me...", will alert the reader that something is wrong: this is not a written narrative. Who is the second person 'you'? It is from this point, if not from the very first sentence, that the empirical reader begins the transformation into the implied reader. The text is wielding its influence.

The quotation mark renders the narrative not a written one but a 'spoken' one. Susan Barton is not actually floundering in the ocean but sitting comfortably, one assumes, in the presence of her host, or perhaps her guest, sipping tea and *telling* of her ordeal. The reader is made a listener or, more accurately, an eavesdropper. This weakens the reader's position and, at the same time, strengthens the text's power. As Thieme succinctly puts it "books read people as people read books" (Thieme 2001, p2) and the reader is ultimately left in some suspense and at the mercy of the text to

explain Barton's location and motive. Such expectation is not satisfied until Part III on page 113 (Coetzee 1987). However, the text has not finished manipulating the reader. Part II of the novel contains dated writings, beginning with "April 15" (p47), that the reader is led to believe are letters: "In my letter yesterday..." (p52). Quotation marks are still used but the reader is no longer a listener but now a reader although the disposition of 'eavesdropper' is still applicable. With Part III (p113) the narrative begins (in the first person past), as quotation marks are absent, and the narrator's location is explained and with great satisfaction Susan Barton confronts Foe, not for the first time but for the second: "...he stood before me, the same Foe I had first set eyes on in Kensington Row" (p113). This first meeting is absent from the text but the reader 'invents' such an episode and believes that it occurred because, as readers whose position has been weakened by a text that has been strengthened, we believe and trust in the text. "As a Model Reader [implied reader], you will agree to abide by the rules I [the text] set in order for you to derive a coherent understanding of me" (Radford 2002). Here too, as in Jack Maggs, there are two texts: the one supplied by Barton, and the one ultimately written by (De)Foe. The ruse of this context is that Barton's text is written before Foe's, and before Foe becomes Defoe, but is that which inspired the text that became The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe. However Barton is placed at the centre of the con-text with her as the first-person narrator giving her authorial power over a (pre) text that has yet to be written. Just as Foe fabricates his name as Defoe, in an attempt, one surmises, to sophisticate his authorial authority, the reader is led to propose that his text too is fabricated; not as Barton would have willed – as a 'true' account- but as a sensational adventure in an exotic location for the gratification of readers who were eager to read such stories believing them to be true. As Davis explains,

...this claim of verity allows Defoe's readers to feel as though they are not engaging in mere divertissements but are analysing and learning from the mistakes of others, seeing God's judgements in all that happens (Davis, 1996, p15).

The text of *Foe*, like that of *Jack Maggs*, also gives the reader a diminished view of the writer (Daniel Defoe) of the pre-text. He is elusive, pursued by the authorities for unspecified debts, reluctant to meet Barton, who he finally beds, and only minimally helps her in her dire circumstances. She is humble of her writing, her "dull story" to

which Foe concurs "it is too much the same" (Coetzee 1987, p125) but the reader is drawn to her and her plight and all the more sympathetically for knowing what (de)Foe does with her story.

As well as negating the credentials of the pre-text both *Jack Maggs* and *Foe* offer the reader a positive alternative: another text written by the sympathised, central and credible character whose story is posed as the 'real truth'. Hence the counter-discursive intent is fulfilled changing the reader's world view to one complicit with that of the text.

#### A Fringe of Leaves

The text *A Fringe of Leaves* does not write back to a canonical text but writes back, via counter discourse, to an incident that has become mythologised within a colonial context and negates that myth in favour of a humanistic alternative reading.

The incident of the shipwreck of *The Stirling Castle* on Australia's east coast in 1836, where Mrs Eliza Fraser was subsequently marooned, her husband and companions murdered; where she was enslaved by an aboriginal tribe but managed to escape is documented. However Brown (1998) is dubious about the efficacy of the historical facts.

Looking back over the 160 years since the shipwreck of the Stirling Castle, it is possible to detect many examples where potent images from dubious later or secondary versions of the story have contributed to a conclusion or 'truth' that simply perpetuated ignorance or served the interests of some person or group (Brown 1998, p15).

The facts of the story have been mired by time and distorted by "some person or group" for their own unspecified ends. The Eliza Fraser 'myth' is part of the 'colonialist field' and although *A Fringe of Leaves* does not write back to a particular character as other post-colonial texts do (Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs*, Coetzee's *Foe*) the effect on the empirical reader is no less didactic.

The narrative encompasses Mrs Roxburgh, and her husband, Austin's return to England from the edge of the colonial empire: both literally and figuratively, returning to the centre of the imperialist power where they seek to reaffirm comfort, safety and contentment. All the ship's human cargo, except Mrs Roxburgh, perish

and Ellen Roxburgh/Gluyas, with her dual personality (more on this later) for the reader to take comfort in, becomes 'the other' in the primitive aboriginal society as rich in ritual social habits and religiosity as her own.

As she had conciliated Austin Roxburgh and his mother by allowing herself to be prinked and produced, she accepted when some elderly lady of her own tribe advanced to adjust a sulphur topknot; it might have been old Mrs Roxburgh adding or subtracting some jewel or feather in preparation for a dinner or ball. (White 1996 p268)

..most likely the ceremony was over, for she sensed something akin to the atmosphere surrounding communicants coming out of church looking bland and forgiven after an early service. (p 271)

It is in this context that the text subverts the colonial assumptions and opens up other possibilities of human behaviour and justification. Although the natives are portrayed, without romanticism or excuse, as savages and cannibals, Ellen Roxburgh, a civilised and cultivated wife of an English gentleman, can, by having all – including her clothes and hair – stripped away from her, be a victim of human nature and the urge for survival just like any "White" reader if placed in the same predicament. When she is driven by hunger and circumstance to discover what she is capable of, her reaction is to simply, and pragmatically, dispel it from her mind. As the text explains,

As she went, she tried to disentangle her emotions, fear from amazement, disgust from a certain pity she felt for these starving and ignorant savages, her masters, when she looked down and caught sight of a thigh-bone. Renewed disgust prepared her to kick the bone out of sight. Then, instead, she found herself stooping, to pick it up. There were one or two shreds of half-cooked flesh and gobbets of burnt fat still adhering to this monstrous object. Her stiffened body and almost audibly twanging nerves were warning her against what she was about to do, what she was, in fact, already doing. She had raised the bone, and was tearing at it with her teeth, spasmodically chewing, swallowing by great gulps which her throat threatened to return. But did not...She was less disgusted in retrospect by what she had done, than awed by the fact that she had been moved to do it...she had partaken of a sacrament...In light of Christian morality she must never think of the incident again (p272).

She had eaten the flesh of another human being and while her "twanging nerves were warning her" against it "she was, in fact, already doing it." Here again a duality of purpose. Not only was she disgusted by what she had done she was "awed by the fact that she had been moved to do it." In an almost sarcastic tone against "Christian

morality" the text implies that every Christian would do the same when faced with their own dark behaviour: indulge in justification - does not a Christian, at every communion ritual partake of the flesh of a human being and call it "a sacrament"? – and decide that she "must never think of it again." The above quote contains "sequent sentences [that] act upon one another" (Iser, 1974, p276) and each sentence "opens up a particular horizon, which is modified, if not completely changed, by succeeding sentences (ibid, p 278). Hence the reader is led by the text to come to the same conclusion as that of the protagonist.

The text of *A Fringe of Leaves* reminds the reader continually of the existence of 'the other' in such a context by paralleling the duality of the protagonist. The semiotic nature of the Ellen Roxburgh/Gluyas creation subverts any reader's desire to understand this woman as a developing human being; her past, her other self is constantly with her. When the indigene women of the island tribe hack at her hair and smear her with grease the woman's retort is binary,

Leave off, can't 'ee?' Ellen Gluyas shrieked, and then, as Mrs Roxburgh took control, 'Why must you torture me so? Isn't it enough to have killed my husband, my friends' (p251)?

This is one of many examples (pp 164, 191, 222, 260). The narrative encompasses Ellen Roxburgh but Ellen Gluyas is always present, just below the surface: the 'lump of a country girl', a 'crude Cornish girl', threatening the educative resolve of the 'lady', 'a beautiful and accomplished woman'. Ellen Gluyas is a simple maid, competent, unruffled, sensual, and pragmatic and of a class close to the lowest of society. Ellen Roxburgh while never forsaking her alter-ego's attributes learns to hide them beneath the hegemony her husband, and mother-in-law, prescribe for her.

The text, by a linear form of educational narrative via Iser's "sequent sentences", allows the reader to make sense of information being introduced for the first time to colour and metamorphose incrementally into the truth surrounding the next piece of information and so on. Thus the reader's imagination is stimulated to create individualistic truth. Whatever the reader may know of the Eliza Fraser myth it is here negated in favour of an alternative reading; an understanding of human nature that although far removed from the reader's personal experience has led the reader

to *believe* the story and therefore the post-colonial hegemony implicit in the text is allowed to influence the reader and change his world view.

#### Conclusion

These three texts set out to give a different view than the one then held in the reader's world encyclopaedia; they set out to *change* that view. They offer a negative understanding of the basis of that original view while, at the same time, offering a positive alternative. This alternative is linked to the central character and the use of the first person narrative (*Jack Maggs* and *Foe*) and sympathetic association (*A Fringe of Leaves*) persuade the reader to accept the alternative version as truth; even though the reader is aware that the form of this persuasion is via a fiction, the relationship between text and reader is so interdependent that by the conclusion of all three narratives the reader has adopted the text's world view.

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### Nagasaki

#### A play

### Master of Creative Arts (by research)

From University of Wollongong

by **Michael Freundt** 

**Creative Writing** 

**Faculty of Creative Arts** 

2012

#### **Play-script Certification**

#### **CERTIFICATION**

I, Michael K. Freundt, declare that this play-script, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the award of Master of Creative Arts, in the Department of Creative Writing, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged.

The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Michael K. Freundt

15 December 2011

#### **NAGASAKI**

A play by Michael Freundt

**Characters** 

**Lilly**: a maid, mid twenties.

**Mrs Delaware**: a widow, late seventies.

**Katherine Pinkerton**: her daughter, thirtyish.

**Lieutenant Commander B.F. Pinkerton**: a navy officer; Katherine's

husband, late thirties.

**Sharpless**: the US Consul to Japan,

mid fifties.

**ChoCho San**: a Japanese girl, twenty.

**Suzuki**: her relative and

companion, early

twenties.

**Trouble**: (non speaking) a small

child of four years.

Musician/s

#### Act 1: San Francisco, USA, summer 1905

Scene 1: Mrs Delaware's parlor, late afternoon.

Scene 2: Late evening, two months later.

#### Act 2: Nagasaki, Japan Late autumn 1905

Scene 1: The garden of ChoCho San's house, morning.

#### **NAGASAKI**

Before the lights go down and when the buzz of the audience is at its height **Katherine Pinkerton** wanders onto the stage from the wings, taking in the auditorium, the audience, the set. She smiles at people. The audience of course quietens. She is pleased: everything is just as it should be; she plumps a pillow. She feels comfortable, at ease. She exits. The play begins.

#### ACT 1 Scene 1

Scene 1:

A parlor with photographs announcing a large family. It is an insular world.

The door opens and **Lilly** enters with a bowl of overblown roses and places them, re-arranging some of the photographs to find room. She rearranges more photographs and objects, tidying and pottering; she plumps a pillow. She sits down in one of the two chairs and arranges her skirts around her. Not satisfied with this, she tries the other chair.

LILLY: (practising) Katherine. Ma'am. Katherine. Kate. Kathy.

She giggles at the thought.

Mrs Katherine. Madam. Kate. Miss Kate. Kate.

Mrs. Delaware enters briskly, notices Lilly and the roses and exits. Lilly waits smugly then changes chairs yet again. Mrs Delaware re-enters with a rather large tray containing cups, saucers, sugar, cream jug, coffee pot, coffee spoons, plates and cake. She places the tray on a low table between the two chairs and takes the other chair.

LILLY: So far, so right.

Mrs. Delaware gets up and clumsily drags the low table towards her.

LILLY: (cont) MaMère! What are you doing?

MRS. DELAWARE: I can't reach properly, Rose. I need it nearer.

LILLY: Have you ever seen me do it like that? Drag it

so blunt-like?

MRS. DELAWARE: I dare say you never poured sitting down.

LILLY: It wouldn't be proper.

MRS. DELAWARE: Well, with me doing it, properly it is.

LILLY: Now, MaMère my dear, you did say you wanted

me to teach you the household duties and such

things.

MRS. DELAWARE: So you keep telling me.

LILLY: MaMère! Dear, dear me. Have you forgotten what

it is that you wanted me to teach you? All this? Have you forgotten who is coming home today?

MRS. DELAWARE: Oh yes, Rose, I know - and will the time ever

come? - but I can't help thinking that a little desire on my part to be self-reliant and busy - so my Kate would not think me slobbish and lazy expressed to you in such a casual manner, has grown to such an extravagance in that little mind

of yours.

LILLY: What? Well, if something is done proper, properly

then it's...it's better to do it...it's...the best...thing.

That's the way it goes, right?

MRS. DELAWARE: Yes, something like that.

LILLY: Well, there you are then.

MRS. DELAWARE: But I'm sure what I meant was for us to share the

household duties; and I've very much mastered

them I'll have you know.

LILLY: Not quite it would seem to me, MaMère, my

dear.

MRS. DELAWARE: What do you mean, 'not quite'?

LILLY: You've let the coffee get cold.

MRS. DELAWARE: Sometimes, Rose, you go too far.

LILLY: "But, Rose," you said, "you're one of the family",

you said. "Take off that silly uniform", you said, "I'll do the flowers," and, you said, "now that you

have a home".

MRS. DELAWARE: Yes, Rose, I know. Now take off that face and I'll

pour the coffee and you portion the cake. What do

you say to that?

LILLY: You've forgotten the cake knife. No. No. Don't get

cross now. I know what we'll do. You pour the coffee and I'll go and get the cake knife...and the

cake forks.

MRS. DELAWARE: I won't cut yours until you get back?

LILLY: No, no, MaMère, I won't be long.

She exits hurriedly. **Mrs. Delaware** takes a deep breath and pours the coffee. **Lilly** suddenly re-appears.

LILLY: (cont) Oh MaMère!

MRS DELAWARE: What?!

LILLY: (cont) Isn't it just so...so...Oh My! Everything is

just SO! It makes me such a happy little puss when we can both rattle around this breadbox of a house, just the two of us doing things for each other. It's such a HOME for me, don't you know.

And she's gone again.

**Mrs Delaware** recovers and finishes pouring the coffee. She looks around the room and notices Lilly's rearrangements. She gets up and returns the photographs to their original positions and is returning to her seat when **Lilly** returns, unseen by Mrs Delaware. She notices Mrs. Delaware's rearrangements but opts for a change of tack.

LILLY: (cont) MaMère!

MRS. DELAWARE: Ah!

LILLY: MaMère!

MRS. DELAWARE: What?! What is it?! What?!

LILLY: It just hit me. MaMère! She may have changed.

She may be a completely different person.

MRS. DELAWARE: Oh Rose. No, I don't think so. There has been

nothing in her letters to change the image I

have in my head.

LILLY: But don't they dress differently in the east? Aunt

Hilda told you with such shock in her voice of all

the "outrageous" - that's what she said

"outrageous"! - French paraphen...paragalia or whatever it was she said. And you, dear MaMère, said yourself that them in the east dress quite differently and are fit to have their head changed.

MRS DELAWARE: No, Rose.

LILLY: But it's what you said.

MRS DELAWARE: I said that all those French fashions can turn a

girl's head. That's what I said.

LILLY: But you put a real dizzy picture in my head,

MaMère, of...of a different head on her shoulders or something. I'm sure that's what you said.

MRS DELAWARE: No, Rose. That might have been what your little

mind thought I said. But no. I said it's possible that the fancy fashions of the east, all those French designs in the latest catalogues could turn

a girl's head...

LILLY: But how do you mean...?

MRS DELAWARE: It's a figure of speech!

LILLY: But...

MRS DELAWARE Rose!

LILLY: What?

**Mrs Delaware** silences her with a look. She calms herself and tends to the coffee.

MRS. DELAWARE: ...But you know, Rose, I think there is something

more than Ben's navy work that brings them back

from Washington. I just have this feeling.

LILLY: But what, MaMère, what?

MRS. DELAWARE: Well, just think, Rose. Two years. Two years

since the wedding. A married woman for two

years. Just think what that means.

Lilly has no idea what that means.

(cont) Oh, Rose, not once a mention in all her letters in all that time. Not one mention of the patter of little feet...the angel's joy. Don't you see? She wants to be home with the family for the

blessed event.

LILLY: Oh! Well, yes, I did think that too, MaMère, but

not to say anything at all in her letters. That's not a very nice thing for a daughter to leave

out.

MRS. DELAWARE: She wants it to be a surprise, you see. I'm sure

of it.

LILLY: Oh, MaMère, the patter of little feet running

through the house. I remember my little feet pattering down the stairs trying to hide from your sunny Kate, who wanted so much to catch me. She did! And you know what, MaMère? You know what the penalty was I had to give for being

caught and found under the stairs? It was a kiss on the lips I had to give her and never mind the blush on my cheeks and the giggles in her mouth. She was so fond of me, she was. On the lips it was

and nothing else would do.

MRS. DELAWARE: Oh, I don't think so Rose.

LILLY: It was so too. You weren't there MaMère. You

didn't really know how close we were. Practising she called it. And it was me she had to practise

with, she'd not let no-one else.

MRS. DELAWARE: But you were just children. Playing.

LILLY: Yes we were and weren't we pretty together?

You said so yourself. Sisters you called us. Just

like sisters, you said.

MRS. DELAWARE: Now, Rose...

LILLY: Oh!

MRS. DELAWARE: What?!

LILLY: The coffee's getting cold.

MRS. DELAWARE: Lan' sakes, Rose. You give me such a fright

sometimes when really it's nothing at all.

LILLY: Silly, MaMère.

They sip their coffee.

MRS DELAWARE: (carefully) Now, before my Kate gets here,

Rose...

LILLY: (interrupting) Now, it's Cousin Laura that

married Joseph Blaine, isn't that right MaMère?

And they have two children, Louisa and

Billington.

MRS DELAWARE: Billington is a Lane, Rose, not a Blaine. Billington,

such a clumsy name, he's Cousin Eleanor's eldest. But yes, Cousin Laura married Joseph Blaine and they have three children, Louisa, Sally and now

Adam. And thank the Lord; a boy at last.

LILLY: But where do the Browns fit in?

MRS DELAWARE: Flosey Brown married Carter Poole who's my

grandson which makes her my grand-daughter-inlaw, if we ever used such a name, so she's not really a Brown anymore and we don't know them very well but generally we've agreed that they're

not related, only by marriage.

LILLY: But aren't I related to the Browns?

MRS DELAWARE: Well, not really Rose. Flosey Brown is your cousin-

in-law but Flosey's niece, Geraldine Carter, looks like getting engaged soon to Michael Andrews, your half-brother and my Mary's grand-son so I suppose you will be soon, if Michael has his way, but only by marriage so it really doesn't count. But

Rose...

LILLY: But I remember...

MRS DELAWARE: Rose! Ah Ah Ah! I can see where this is leading

and you know the rules and even if they are my dear late husband's rules they are the rules of this

house: your Momma's name is not to be

mentioned.

LILLY: You've spilt cake crumbs all over the rug.

MRS DELAWARE: Oh dear. That's what comes of your prying

chatter.

LILLY: But we're to be talking babies and everything

when Kate is here: cousins and nephews and what

not and I just...

MRS DELAWARE: Rose! Rose! Rose!

They glare at each other.

Lilly suddenly gasps and covers her mouth with her hand.

LILLY: Ah! I think I heard a trolley car!

MRS DELAWARE: What?

LILLY: They've come!

She runs from the room leaving **Mrs Delaware** in a flap: brushing crumbs, collecting coffee things. **Lilly** returns moment later.

Must've been the soda man.

MRS DELAWARE: Lan' sakes Rose, you do my heart no good

with your silly...

LILLY: (fearfully) MaMère, you will remember to speak to

Kate, you did say you would. It's just that I worry so because of how she can be like sometimes.

MRS DELAWARE: In my own time, Rose. I need to pick my time. I

told you that. But you mustn't say anything

yourself.

LILLY: It's so important MaMère.

MRS DELAWARE: In my own time. And you must be patient. You

know the rules. It's hard enough for me to bring up ... you know...without disobeying the rules that Mr Delaware, God bless his bones, made very

clear to me - and to you too.

LILLY: But that was years ago.

MRS DELAWARE: Yes, it was but this is still his house and you are

still living under his roof and I'll not hear another

word.

There are voices off: a woman's and two men's.

Oh lordy. Rose! It IS them! Clear these things.

Hurry.

**Lilly** obeys as **Mrs Delaware** exits. The voices become louder and **Mrs Delaware's** high-pitched greetings are added to the noise. Now that the moment has arrived **Lilly**, still holding the tray of coffee things, is no longer as confident as she was. She hurries to the door as it opens and **Katherine Pinkerton** enters eager to see the room. She does not see Lilly hidden by the open door. She stands and gazes at the room and its contents.

KATHERINE: Oh, my lord. This room. Ah! Full of fears, running

children and places one could never go; tears and misplaced expectations. Oh my...my... it's still so

#### close in here. Oh, hello Lilly.

She exits. Lilly goes to leave but **Katherine Pinkerton** re-enters with **Mrs Delaware** who is trying to help with the luggage. They are closely followed by **Lieutenant Commander B.F. Pinkerton** and **Sharpless**, smartly dressed. Both conversations are simultaneous and begin in the hall and the noise and people tumble into the room. Lilly is caught, trapped with the tray, uneasy.

KATHERINE: Momma, don't. That's far too heavy for you. Benjamin can take care of those later.

MRS DELAWARE: Yes, I know, but we can all stretch an arm. There's such a lot of luggage. I am so pleased because of it.

PINKERTON: Sharpless. Good Gosh! This is something for the diary.

SHARPLESS: I hope I haven't come at an inconvenient time.

PINKERTON: Good Gosh no. We've just arrived that's all.

KATHERINE: But there's no need, there's Lilly. She can do it, we're in no rush. She has all afternoon.

LILLY: Oh, Kate you look so....

KATHERINE: Just leave it, Momma. Besides we don't want the bags in the parlor, we want them in the Green Room. You have made up the Green Room? I specifically wrote you about it.

LILLY: Yes, well, you see Miss Ka......

MRS DELAWARE: Kate, dear, yes, of course I made up that room. It's just not Green anymore.

LILLY: It was such a trouble but...

SHARPLESS: Well, yes, in that case maybe I should come back another time. Family and everything.

PINKERTON: No. No. There's a girl to look after the bags. But I must introduce you. Katherine. Katherine.

SHARPLESS: But, Ben this is a reunion. I feel as if I'm intruding.

PINKERTON: Did you say how long you'll be in San Francisco? Tell me we'll have some time together. I have just the plan. We'll get a yacht. I know just the man. We were in the academy together. You'll like him I'm sure. Katherine.

MRS DELAWARE: Benjamin, you'll love the Yellow Room.

LILY: ...it's so grandly...grand, PINKERTON: Of courses, Mrs D.

don't cha know. Let me...

KATHERINE: I loathe yellow!

PINKERTON: ...introduce my dear friend. Sharpless, this is my

Mother -in-law, Mrs Delaware. Mrs D this is

Sharpless.

LILLY: Maybe I...

MRS DELAWARE: Yes, I saw you arrive. It's a pleasure to tray down and get some tea.

meet you Mr...er...Sharpless. Momma?

Katherine studies Sharpless. Lilly hovers.

SHARPLESS: Likewise, Mrs Delaware. Ben really, I hope I...

PINKERTON: Nonsense, Sharpless. And this is my wife,

Katherine. Katherine? Katherine, this is

Sharpless.

KATHERINE: Yes, Hello. A friend of Benjamin's?

**Katherine** and **Sharpless** do not shake hands.

PINKERTON: Not just a friend; a comrade, a brother. We were

once, you might say, inseparable.

KATHERINE: Lilly...shoo..

MRS DELAWARE: Rose, please, don't just stand there.

LILLY: (to Mrs Delaware) But,

you promised.

MRS DELAWARE: I know, Rose.

KATHERINE: So, Mr Sharpless hope we can see more of you while we are in San Francisco.

SHARPLESS: That would be my pleasure.

MRS DELAWARE: Kate dear...

KATHERINE: You live in San Francisco, Mr Sharpless?

PINKERTON: Sharpless is our consul in Japan.

KATHERINE: Japan?

SHARPLESS: Yes, but I've taken a protracted sabbatical.

MRS DELAWARE: Kate, please...

PINKERTON: Wonderful news. So we'll have you for how

long do you think?

SHARPLESS: I'm here 'till the fall.

KATHERINE: Well, Mr Sharpless, we shall see you often,

perhaps.

PINKERTON: You can count on it.

KATHERINE: You're here on business?

SHARPLESS: And pleasure. I'm actually on leave but I've

brought a little work with me and some papers,

Ben, that I think may interest you.

PINKERTON: Of course, anything for your company.

MRS DELAWARE: Katherine...

KATHERINE: Then don't let us stop you from your business

with Benjamin, Mr Sharpless. We ladies have some business of our own to attend to. Please

excuse us.

KATHERINE: What Momma?

what is it?

MRS DELAWARE: You haven't

said hello to her yet.

KATHERINE: Yes I did.

MRS DELAWARE: Not yet, dear.

KATHERINE: Yes I did. Lilly, the bags. There's a lot of unpacking

to do.

(LILLY: Oh, it's so good to see (you Miss Kate. Katherine. I'll just

(do that.

(MRS DELAWARE: Yes, that's a (good idea Rose. Put the tray (down, dear.

LILLY: Remember the naughty song we used to dance to? "Sally was a naughty girl With a fanny far too small for 'em So when she danced.."

Katherine hears Pinkerton's interruption.

MRS DELAWARE: Rose!

LILLY: Oh, you remember Kate?

KATHERINE: No I don't. And my name is Katherine. Singing in the house is so common. Momma?

PINKERTON: Papers? Why would you have papers for me, of all people?

SHARPLESS: Well, not so much papers...letters. Several letters.

He shows him the letters

PINKERTON: Oh. You've come all this way just to deliver me letters?

SHARPLESS: No, but as I was coming to California on leave I took it upon myself to run this little errand. This matter is getting a little serious.

PINKERTON: What do you mean serious? Let's not spoil our reunion with something serious, Sharpless...

SHARPLESS: Ben, the woman...

PINKERTON: (interrupting) Not here! Please.

SHARPLESS: Have you replied to any of the others?

PINKERTON: No.

LILLY:

Oh, but you must remember. But we'll talk about that later. We've been so busy the last few days, Kate, Katherine. Me an' MaMère have been clattering about in this big box of a house getting everything just so for your visiting.

MRS DELAWARE: Yes, Rose...

KATHERINE: (to Mrs Delaware)

What?

MRS DELAWARE: ...that will do.

The bags now please.

LILLY: Just a moment, MaMère. I too have been waiting just as long as you have. I haven't seen

Kate since we were.....

KATHERINE: I beg your pardon!

LILLY: ....so high and running

around this room.

MRS DELAWARE: The bags!

Please.

LILLY: Ooooo, MaMère. Alright.

Lilly passes the tray to Mrs

Delaware.

LILLY: (cont) Your Momma's a bit of a bossy-boots sometimes, Kate. (to Mrs Delaware) And don't forget what you promised.

Lilly exits.

SHARPLESS: Ben, the child is

nearly...

PINKERTON: Sharpless, please. I promise we will deal with this but not now. I don't want to spoil our unexpected reunion. Oh,

Sharpless, my man.

SHARPLESS: Er...Ben. There are

no...(children)?

PINKERTON: No.

SHARPLESS: I see.

PINKERTON: It's become very

complicated.

SHARPLESS: Ben, it became

complicated when you married.

PINKERTON: What was I

supposed to do?

Over there is over there; here is

here.

SHARPLESS: I understand. You

know I do; I always have.

But something has to be done.

KATHERINE: (to Mrs Delaware) And what was that all about?

MRS DELAWARE: (putting the tray down) Oh, nothing, Kate, dear. It's just her way of talking.

KATHERINE: And what did she call you?

MRS DELAWARE: It's just a little name for me she picked up in one of my books.

KATHERINE: She's been reading our books?!

MRS DELAWARE: Now, Kate, please. You've only been home five minutes and you're arguing with me.

KATHERINE: By the sound of things, Momma, you deserve to be argued with. And what did you call her?

MRS DELAWARE: It's nothing, Kate. Just a little pet name she likes me to use.

KATHERINE: A pet name! Her name is Lilly.
She looks like a Lilly. She behaves like a Lilly. She has the brain of a Lilly.
What has been going on here while I've been away? I didn't expect to have to put things right here as well.

PINKERTON: Listen to those women. When they see each other every day they talk like parrots. When they haven't seen each other for years they talk like geese.

SHARPLESS: So, yes. Alright. Later. But soon.

PINKERTON: And what about you and marriage?

SHARPLESS: Alas, no. Well, perhaps "Alas" is no longer of any import. I've grown into my bachelorhood and with a slight adjustment to my moral landscape it fits me rather well.

PINKERTON: A slight adjustment? If I remember correctly you were rather particular.

SHARPLESS: Oh I'm still 'rather particular', as you put it, but I no longer make moral judgements for the second party. I keep my fluctuating moral assessments to myself.

PINKERTON: And does your moral landscape include any third parties?

SHARPLESS: Ah. Well, you obviously haven't forgotten much of my past; pity that you haven't, Let me simply say that a threemonth holiday became an option I couldn't afford to refuse.

MRS DELAWARE: Kate, you're being far too harsh.

KATHERINE: Her name is Lilly. And my name is Katherine.

MRS DELAWARE: She would like you to call her Rose.

KATHERINE: She already has a name.

MRS DELAWARE: Couldn't you just do it to please me?

KATHERINE: Her name is Lilly and I'll hear no more about it. But I will let you break the news to her. It's the least I can do.

And like our new strangelynamed friend, Mr Sharpless; I wish he wouldn't call Benjamin Ben. His name is Benjamin.

A name is a name.

Now what's this about the Green Room being yellow?

The second and third parties involved will be over it by the time I get back. Well, that's the plan anyway.

PINKERTON: Maybe you need a little distraction on this holiday of yours.

SHARPLESS: That could be entirely possible and very much welcome.

PINKERTON: Well I can't say I'm up with the social landscape of San Francisco, Summer, 1905, but I do know a few families that may be of use to you. A few eligible daughters.

SHARPLESS: A few bored wives.

PINKERTON: Sharpless! Please! I promise not to ask you any more impertinent questions so let's plan our time together...

SHARPLESS: Let them attend to their own moral landscapes.

PINKERTON: ...and there's no time like the present. Let's make

a start. What about dinner here tonight?

SHARPLESS: I have a better idea. Mrs Delaware!

MRS DELAWARE: Mr Sharple!

KATHERINE: Mr Sharpless.

SHARPLESS: Ladies....

PINKERTON: I thought Sharpless could stay for dinner.

**Lilly** enters

LILLY: I've put all the bags, even the heavy ones, in

the Yellow Room for you Kate. It's such a nice room for the time of year. (to Pinkerton) Hello. You may not remember me. I'm Rose. A childhood friend of Kate's but she's probably told you so. So close we were. (to Sharpless) Hello.

SHARPLESS: Hello.

KATHERINE: Momma...!

MRS DELAWARE: Now, dear, Mr Sharpless will be staying for

dinner so please check the larder, you may

have to do some more potatoes.

LILLY: Oh there's quite enough of them. I did a whole

bag.

MRS DELAWARE: (as she leads Lilly to the door) Rose, please. I'll

be in to help you in a minute.

LILLY: But there's so much for us......

MRS DELAWARE: But Rose, first things first so bring in fresh coffee

things? Please.

LILLY: Oh!

Lilly exits.

KATHERINE: What is wrong with that girl? And this "Rose"

business is so unnecessary.

MRS DELAWARE: She doesn't like being called Lilly.

KATHERINE: It's her name. I've told you.

MRS DELAWARE: I know, dear, but she's grown up so much since

you left and she feels she's out-grown Lilly.

KATHERINE: How ridiculous.

PINKERTON: If the poor girl wants to be called Rose there

doesn't seem to be any harm in it. What do you

think Sharpless?

SHARPLESS: I think she should forget about the potatoes,

Mrs Delaware, I have a table booked tonight at the City Hall Dining Room and it would give me the greatest pleasure if you all would be my guests. I have an open invitation from the

Mayor; he's an old friend of mine.

MRS DELAWARE: Oh, Mr Sharpless, that would be wonderful.

KATHERINE: Mr Sharpless, we can't possibly impose on your

plans.

SHARPLESS: Not at all. All I need to do is make a telephone

call.

KATHERINE: But such an expense.

PINKERTON: I think it's a wonderful idea. Sharpless, what a

treat.

MRS DELAWARE: Mr Sharpless, I was only talking to Mrs Schmitz,

the Mayor's mother, last week and she was speaking in exorcisms - as she's wont to do - about the new decor of the City Hall Dining Room. It would give me such a pleasure next time she goes on about it to say "Yes, my dear, I know."

KATHERINE: My mother was always prone to gossip.

MRS DELAWARE: I don't gossip dear, I just want the facts.

SHARPLESS: I'm more than pleased to give you such

pleasure, Mrs Delaware.

MRS DELAWARE: But if the Mayor is there tonight don't mention

the Orientals, especially the Japanese if you care. He's set against them, made a stand.

KATHERINE: One can never be too careful with foreigners.

SHARPLESS: Eugene has always been strongly opinionated.

MRS DELAWARE: He thinks they're over-enlightened and

therefore evil and cheap.

PINKERTON: Are you sure you've got that right, Mrs D?

KATHERINE: Surely he means under-enlightened.

MRS DELAWARE: He used all those words in the same sentence,

I'm sure; quoted by Mr Leffingwell in the

newspaper.

SHARPLESS: I'll check his whereabouts when I call. I won't be

long.

PINKERTON: You're not going now, are you?

KATHERINE: If the man wants to, Benjamin. Don't be so

controlling.

SHARPLESS: I thought I'd take this opportunity of going

back to my rooms to change. I'll call from

there.

KATHERINE: But we have a telephone caller in the hall.

MRS DELAWARE: Such a confounded contraption, this telephone.

I never know when to start speaking. I wonder if

I'll ever get used to it.

KATHERINE: Oh, Momma.

SHARPLESS: It's a wonder of our age, Mrs Delaware; a sign of

the superiority of this wonderful country of ours.

KATHERINE: Back east we have them in the parlor so you can

sit when you talk.

MRS DELAWARE: Really! You mean like knitting? How modern!

PINKERTON: I've heard that soon we'll be able to speak to

San Francisco from Washington.

MRS DELAWARE: Lan' sakes Benjamin! What will they think of

tomorrow?

KATHERINE: (to Pinkerton) You never told me that.

SHARPLESS: Maybe one day a call from San Francisco

to...to...Japan!

MRS. DELAWARE: Japan!

KATHERINE: Why would anyone want to do that?

MRS. DELAWARE: Yes, why indeed?

PINKERTON: I expect someone must be teaching them English.

KATHERINE: Is that really necessary?

MRS DELAWARE: Who makes these decisions?

SHARPLESS: Progress, Mrs Delaware.

KATHERINE: In fact I read something somewhere about that

very thing. We mustn't forget, Momma, that we

are not just a nation, we are an empire.

MRS DELAWARE: Is that right? Are you sure?

KATHERINE: Oh, yes. And an empire can be nothing if not

progressive.

PINKERTON: We have territories, Mrs D; islands all over the

world.

MRS DELAWARE: You mean Hawaii?

SHARPLESS: And Cuba.

MRS DELAWARE: Cuba? Don't we have our own Indians to deal

with?

KATHERINE: And don't we have the Philippine<sup>1</sup> Islands? In the

East somewhere? Who told me that?

SHARPLESS: "The American Empire" has a certain ring to it,

wouldn't you say?

KATHERINE: Other countries then had better take stock.

MRS DELAWARE: Glory be! I guess we must be doing things right

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Katherine mispronounces this word.

then. I feel a whole lot better. Going to dinner at City Hall in one's own country is well enough but going to dinner at City Hall in one's own empire is

something quite - uplifting.

KATHERINE: We can walk tall, Momma.

MRS DELAWARE: Well, I think we must!

SHARPLESS: Ah, Mrs Delaware I must make sure you sit next to

me a dinner; I'm sure our conversation is going to

be lively and amusing.

KATHERINE: Oh really. I'm sure Mr Sharpless and Benjamin

think they have more important things to talk

about.

MRS DELAWARE: Mr Sharpless, I'm afraid my powers of

conversation may be a little squeaky.

SHARPLESS: I think you underestimate yourself. Now I must

go. Mrs...

PINKERTON: But Sharpless, it seems you've only just arrived

and now to lose you so soon.

KATHERINE: Benjamin, Mr Sharpless was about to speak to

me.

SHARPLESS: Just a few errands to run and a change of

clothes. Ben, we've got many weeks up our

sleeve.

PINKERTON: But coffee first, please. Allow me to boast a

little hospitality. I've been stuck on a train with a carriage full of women for days on end and I feel

I need to hold on to any male company that

comes my way.

KATHERINE: You'd think the poor man had caught

something distasteful.

SHARPLESS: I won't be long Ben. Besides, coffee gives me

heartburn. But I'll come straight back. And tea

will be fine.

KATHERINE: Momma and I will make sure we give Benjamin

another female dose of whatever it is he thinks he's caught so he'll be even more grateful for

your company.

SHARPLESS: Ah, I see a line of wit runs in the family, Mrs

Pinkerton.

KATHERINE: Wit?

MRS DELAWARE: I'll just tell Rose to hold the coffee...

KATHERINE: Momma, I may like some coffee.

MRS DELAWARE: Fine, I'll tell her to make it three not four.

KATHERINE: Leave it. Stay here. It doesn't matter. Come and

tell me all about what you have been doing since

we last saw each other.

MRS DELAWARE: But I can see Mr Sharpless to the door and then I

can go and help Rose with the...

KATHERINE: Momma! Just ring for her. Ring for Lilly.

MRS DELAWARE: Leave her with her little peculiarities. It makes my

life so much smoother.

PINKERTON: But you'll have tea first, right?

MRS DELAWARE: But if Mr Sharpless has things to do he has things

to do.

SHARPLESS: I'll organise a coach. I won't be long.

MRS DELAWARE: Besides a few moments in the hall alone with Mr

Sharpless will do my old heart a treat.

KATHERINE: Momma!

PINKERTON: Sharpless...

SHARPLESS: Ben, think about what I said. Come Mrs Delaware.

MRS DELAWARE: Yes, Mr Sharpless.

SHARPLESS: Mrs Pinkerton.

They shake hands.

KATHERINE: Oh.

Mrs Delaware and Sharpless exit. Katherine and Pinkerton do not speak. The air is tense.

Eventually **Mrs Delaware** returns behind **Lilly** who is carrying a tray with the coffee things. Mrs Delaware wrestles it away from Lilly and she proceeds to set, arrange and pour.

KATHERINE: Momma, Lilly can do that.

MRS DELAWARE: I'm very capable, Kate...Katherine.

**Lilly** exits disgruntled. During Mrs Delaware's speech **Katherine** mulls over an idea that has just occurred to her. **Pinkerton** reads some of the letters. He is troubled by their contents.

MRS DELAWARE: Now, Katherine, before this day is any older we

must put some thought to when, how and where the rest of the family can get to see you. Your brothers will want to show you their new babies and you'll just adore Henrietta and Jefferson. You remember Katherine, I wrote you, Henrietta is Ronald's latest - such a difficult birth but then Ann was always one for problems falling in her lap. And Jefferson is Calvin's, a very quiet baby which is so

unusual these days. Rachel is convinced

something is wrong but Calvin won't hear of it.

As **Mrs Delaware** continues the door opens emitting a bright and unnatural light. A young **Japanese girl** in traditional costume enters, Japanese style, with a **child** of four years of age. The Japanese girl, with the child in tow, walks over to **Pinkerton** and watches him. The child turns his head and watches **Katherine**.

MRS DELAWARE:(cont)And I suppose Laurence will want to see you separately. He still can't get along with his

brothers. Ever since that swimming competition but then you know all about that. But it's still going on. I've tried to talk to them about it but, of course, they just won't listen. Anyway, I'm not afraid of telling you this but maybe I wrote to you about it. Laurence's two, Earnest and Marjorie are still my favourites.

The **child** leaves the young Japanese girl's side and walks over close to **Katherine** as she clears a space among the standing photographs as if making room for another one. The young **Japanese girl** walks over to the reading **Pinkerton** and deposits another letter in front of him.

MRS DELAWARE: (cont)Funny though that they've only had two. It's not like Laurence to slip behind but I can't say anything, of course, Dyler is so sensitive about me saying anything at all but then all the Thane's are like that. And then there's your Aunt Martha and her brood and Mary and hers. And I suppose

The young **Japanese girl** turns, gathers the **child** and they exit Japanese style and the lighting returns to 'normal' with **Katherine** and **Pinkerton** deep within their individual thoughts.

MRS DELAWARE: (cont)Letitia will want to see you but we'll have to arrange it so it's just her. Her grandchildren are so boisterous and Cleveland still thinks it's a sign of health and happiness, poor man and he goes on and on about his boys. All about his boys. But that's what boys are for, didn't someone say once, somewhere? Boys are there to give you hope and my late husband used to say what else is there? I mean...

# Sharpless enters.

MRS DELAWARE:(cont) Mr Sharpless! Can't find a coach?

SHARPLESS: Change of plans. The City Hall dining room is too

busy to take us at eight. We need to come much

earlier or not at all.

MRS DELAWARE: Its reputation must've changed. How odd!

SHARPLESS: Something certainly has. I'm very sorry but my

protestations and string tugging were only

partially successful. It seems my living in the Far East has lessened my powers of persuasion.

SHARPLESS: (cont) Or the silly girl who took the call didn't understand

how these things work. How riling!

MRS DELAWARE: Well, how long do we have?

SHARPLESS: (ignoring her) That stupid girl was totally unaware

of who I am. I simply can't bear insolence from

others who should know better.

KATHERINE: I totally agree with you, Mr Sharpless. It happens less back East but when it does

**Katherine** turns and studies him.

it's no less galling.

MRS DELAWARE: Oh, dear. Mr Sharpless, you really have a hot collar! I'm so very sorry for you.

SHARPLESS: Mm! (controlling his anger but not very well) My

apologies ladies but......

KATHERINE: Forget such others, Mr Sharpless. You're with us

now.

MRS DELAWARE: So...erm...Mr Sharpless.....?

SHARPLESS: We need to be there well within the hour.

MRS DELAWARE: Oh my! So we go as we are?

KATHERINE: Nonsense, Momma, you need to change.

MRS DELAWARE: Really, Kate, do I...

KATHERINE: Katherine.

MRS DELAWARE: ...look so plain and house-bound?

KATHERINE: And you too Benjamin. Apparently we don't have

much time. Benjamin?

MRS DELAWARE: And you...Katherine? How long will you need?

KATHERINE: I can't possibly change. Wear the blue. The one

you wrote me about. Besides, I'd like to see you in

it.

MRS DELAWARE: But surely dear, you'll want to be more

comfortable out in public.

KATHERINE: Would I indeed? Benjamin?

PINKERTON: But if our time is so short...

KATHERINE: It is so much easier when you are agreeable.

PINKERTON: Alright.

MRS DELAWARE: If that's what you want and think...

KATHERINE: (as she sees them to the door) It is and I do.

MRS DELAWARE: But I would like to see you in some of your new

Eastern clothes.

KATHERINE: You will but not tonight. Take a seat Mr Sharpless.

Relax. They are all crushed, Momma. In a bag for days! They all need to be pressed and pressed

well.

#### Mrs Delaware and Pinkerton exit.

KATHERINE: (cont) (as she closes the door behind them) I'll tend to

Mr Sharpless.

This is a very generous offer you're made to a family you hardly know. I hope you won't be

bored.

SHARPLESS: I feel I've known you all for years.

KATHERINE: I hope the tea was satisfactory.

SHARPLESS: Your Mother was so kind.

KATHERINE: I'm afraid the standard of help in this house

has deteriorated since I lived here.

SHARPLESS: I'm sure you can put it right. I'm sure you

could put anything right.

### Katherine studies him.

SHARPLESS: (cont) You wish to ask me a guestion? Give me

advice? Straighten my tie?

KATHERINE: How forward you are. I'm a little shocked.

SHARPLESS: Forgive me, but I find it incongruous for the

wife of my best friend to be a stranger.

KATHERINE: But you can't assume that because you know

him you know me.

SHARPLESS: Perhaps not, but wives of friends should be part of

that friendship. It's just that distance, in this case,

has altered the circumstances.

KATHERINE: As you say, so let's blame distance for your

blunder and you can start again.

SHARPLESS: Start again?

KATHERINE: To get to know me.

SHARPLESS: I've got to know you already.

KATHERINE: Oh My. Do you think me an open book...?

SHARPLESS: Not at all.

KATHERINE: ...with you merely, still, on page one.

SHARPLESS: I think I've learnt something from the

diplomatic service.

KATHERINE: The Diplomatic Service. Ah. So when shaking

hands with diplomat's wives do you always tickle

their palms?

SHARPLESS: Oh. Only with the palms of the most beautiful.

KATHERINE: My husband should've warned me about...

SHARPLESS: My charm?

KATHERINE: I had another word in mind.

SHARPLESS: I'll lean on my gentlemanly wiles and not ask

you which.

KATHERINE: Ask away. My womanly ones wouldn't allow me

to tell you.

SHARPLESS: However, mine should force me now to

apologise for that little un-mannerly slip. It was indiscrete of me and insulting not only to you but also to my friend, your husband.

KATHERINE: If my husband were here he'd accept your

apology no doubt. Men to a man usually do. But I, on the other hand, found it absolutely

outrageous.

SHARPLESS: And not tempered with a little...something else?

KATHERINE: You're a wicked man, Mr Sharpless.

SHARPLESS: Just Sharpless, please.

KATHERINE: Curious name.

SHARPLESS: It's me to a T.

KATHERINE: And what does your wife think of Japan?

SHARPLESS: I'm not married.

KATHERINE: Not now or ever?

SHARPLESS: No.

KATHERINE: I see.

SHARPLESS: And what do you see?

KATHERINE: It's a figure of speech.

SHARPLESS: But you meant something by it.

KATHERINE: Need I?

Tell me? Japan. Where is it exactly?

SHARPLESS: West. On the other side of the Pacific Ocean.

KATHERINE: Really? I always thought it was in the East; far

away in the east. That's what we call it, isn't it:

the Far East?

SHARPLESS: It is.

KATHERINE: So why do you travel west to get to it?

SHARPLESS: The earth is round.

KATHERINE: Yes, I suppose it is. Then I wish our language

would adapt itself to it. Otherwise confusion

sets in.

SHARPLESS: Yes, you're absolutely right. Points of the compass

were invented well before it was discovered that

one became the other.

KATHERINE: I suppose you think that's interesting.

Do you have other interesting things to tell me

about Japan?

SHARPLESS: What has Ben told you about Japan?

KATHERINE: Benjamin has told me very little. Just, he was

there.

SHARPLESS: Nothing more?

KATHERINE: I assumed there wasn't much to tell. No two-

headed monsters; no absurdly beautiful sunsets; no quaint customs. But then there is nothing more boring than being told about quaint customs, no

matter where they are.

SHARPLESS; Didn't you ask?

KATHERINE: I don't see the point of curiosity. I find it shows

a lack of solidarity and negligence of one's

own society.

SHARPLESS: You asked me about Japan just now; wasn't

that a brief moment of curiosity?

KATHERINE: No.

SHARPLESS: What then?

KATHERINE: Politeness.

SHARPLESS: And if I had told you something fascinating

about Japan would it have satisfied your

definition of interesting?

KATHERINE: What a nonsense of a question! You said nothing

about Japan so I assumed, again, there was nothing to tell. I had nothing to "satisfy my definition of interesting". What a funny way of

talking.

SHARPLESS: What if I told you that their form of theatre is

very much older than Shakespeare's? And now it

is so refined that nothing ever happens.

KATHERINE: How silly. What is the point of a story where

nothing ever happens? A lot happens, in

Shakespeare, you know, according to Mr Lamb. So

what do the actors do? Just stand there?

SHARPLESS: They sing and dance in the most quietly and

beautifully simplified fashion, not to tell a story - we all know the story - but to create a feeling in our consciousness; to move the emotions to places they may have never been before; a story of heart-felt feelings which actually happens deep in our hearts. Their faces are hidden behind masks and they move ever so slowly, singing, wailing sometimes, to music of its simplest components and to words of exquisite beauty; to coax the feelings out of the air with a slight movement of the head, the shoulder, an arm; with melodies that sound like water falling over rocks. The actors glide effortlessly across the stage in front of a

great big tree painted on a cloth.

KATHERINE: Sounds ghastly.

SHARPLESS: The whole audience sits there still and stone-

faced with their cheeks awash with tears.

KATHERINE: How ridiculous!

SHARPLESS: Yes! It is excruciatingly boring!

KATHERINE: Ah!

SHARPLESS: The worst four hours of my life! I thought I'd

died and gone to hell.

KATHERINE: Oh, my, Mr Sharpless, you've been playing with

me.

SHARPLESS: And you've been enjoying yourself.

KATHERINE: Is this how you've remained a bachelor for all

this time; toying with women until they simply

don't know what they're doing?

SHARPLESS: I'm not the only one who does the toying.

KATHERINE: You imply that you've had some success with

women.

SHARPLESS: And you thought otherwise?

KATHERINE: Men fall into two groups: those that are

successful with women and those that aren't.

SHARPLESS: Does the former translate as married men and

the latter as bachelors?

KATHERINE: Men who are unsuccessful with women but who

find themselves suddenly married to one still

remain unsuccessful with women.

SHARPLESS: You are obviously a great observer of human

nature.

KATHERINE: I take pride in what I learn from my fellow beings.

SHARPLESS: So I'm sure you've met married men who fall into

both groups.

KATHERINE: That's a ridiculous thing to say so I'll ignore it. And

how do the women in Japan take to you?

SHARPLESS: Do you mean the native women or the

Americans I know?

KATHERINE; Are there many American women in Japan?

SHARPLESS: Thousands.

KATHERINE: How strange. What do they all do?

SHARPLESS: Some care for their husbands and some don't care

at all.

KATHERINE: Ah, so Mr Sharpless, all your conquests have been

of married women. Lordy me, you are a very

wicked man.

SHARPLESS: It takes two to play with wickedness.

KATHERINE: But only one to think of it.

SHARPLESS: In my experience by the time one's thought of it

it's already in the mind of the other.

KATHERINE: That's a very cynical view of us women.

SHARPLESS: When *you women* want something it's easy to be

cynical. But I did say "in my experience."

KATHERINE: Such foreignness you must've discovered in

Japan. They must be so very different.

SHARPLESS: Only dress and history make people different.

KATHERINE: And what do you do with a woman without any

...history?

SHARPLESS: Careful, Mrs Pinkerton, your politeness is slipping

into curiosity.

KATHERINE: Please, call me Katherine.

SHARPLESS: I will.

KATHERINE: And what of those native women?

SHARPLESS: Japanese women are quiet, simple creatures.

Obedient, hard-working and devoted to their children especially their male children; their female children they tend to abandon to wolves.

KATHERINE: What savages!

SHARPLESS: They understand their importance to the world

and therefore carry out their duty as if it's law. They are peace-loving and extremely delicate: they even walk delicately. And they don't argue.

KATHERINE: But are they beautiful?

SHARPLESS: Painfully so.

KATHERINE: You're playing with me again, Mr Sharpless.

SHARPLESS: I'm serious, Mrs Pinkerton. I've seen a man so

enraptured with a native girl that you can see

the pain oozing out of his face.

KATHERINE: Oh dear, how can you bear to be near them?

SHARPLESS: It's not good for a man to have ambrosia every

day. Sometimes he must seek out spun sugar. When was the last time your husband told you

how beautiful you are?

KATHERINE: He doesn't have to now. He did once.

SHARPLESS: Doesn't have to or doesn't need to?

KATHERINE: Who taught you how to use guestions so

indelicately?

SHARPLESS: My Mother.

KATHERINE: She must have been good at it.

SHARPLESS: The best.

KATHERINE: I love my husband very much, Mr Sharpless.

SHARPLESS: I know.

KATHERINE: And he loves me.

SHARPLESS: I'm glad you confirm it.

KATHERINE: Why do you say that when your eyes say

something else?

SHARPLESS: And what do my eyes say exactly?

KATHERINE: Answering a question with a question signifies

cunning.

SHARPLESS: I should think so. A man without his cunning is

like a woman without her wiles.

KATHERINE: I meant your over-abundance of cunning.

SHARPLESS: I could say the same about your wiles.

KATHERINE: Oh, Mr Sharpless.

SHARPLESS: But I am curious to know what you see in my

eyes.

KATHERINE: Apart from their green-ness?

SHARPLESS: Are they green? I always thought they were

brown.

KATHERINE: Tonight they're green.

SHARPLESS: So what else do you see?

KATHERINE: Things to make me look away.

SHARPLESS: Then why don't you?

KATHERINE: Because I am who I am.

SHARPLESS: I like strength in a woman.

KATHERINE: Then why am I feeling so warm and cold at the

same time?

SHARPLESS: Sadness.

KATHERINE: You presume too much.

SHARPLESS: Nothing is more beautiful and alluring than a

sad woman full of love.

KATHERINE: It's very presumptuous of you but you seem to

want to cure this ... my so-called sadness?

SHARPLESS: Possibly I do.

KATHERINE: I think not.

SHARPLESS: Then move away.

KATHERINE: I should ask you to move away.

SHARPLESS: Ask me and I might.

They kiss. Lilly enters

LILLY: I was just hoping to...Oh!

**Katherine** quickly strides across the room and slaps Lilly hard across the side of her head. Several framed photographs fall over.

KATHERINE: How dare you come into this room without

knocking! You are a servant in this house and the roof over your head belongs to my family not yours. If it wasn't for your sluttish mother and

our good grace and charity you wouldn't be

here at all. Now get out!

**Lilly** runs from the room.

SHARPLESS: Katherine...

Mrs Delaware enters dressed in blue.

MRS DELAWARE: What's up with Rose? Katherine, you weren't

mean to her, were you?

KATHERINE: Mean! I'm never mean, Momma. I simply

reminded Lilly of her place.

MRS DELAWARE: Oh, lordy. Well, dear I suppose you know best.

KATHERINE: Yes I do, and I'm rather disappointed in you,

Momma, for ignoring Father's wishes.

MRS DELAWARE: Oh Katherine, I've tried very hard to deal with

her over-zealous aspirations here in your

father's house without ruining her comfort to me

which I'm... and now to say that to me...

KATHERINE: She won't leave you if that's what you're afraid of.

Where would she go?

MRS DELAWARE: We'd become friends.

KATHERINE; Well, that is the problem. Company she can be, a

friend she can't.

MRS DELAWARE: Oh Kate.

KATHERINE: Katherine.

SHARPLESS: Mrs Delaware, you look magnificent. I almost

hope Mrs Schmitz is there tonight to see you

looking as you do.

MRS DELAWARE: Thank you Mr Sharpless.

SHARPLESS: And don't worry yourself about the girl. In my

experience she'll have a little cry and be over it in a day or two. She knows the charity is hers

and here she'll stay.

KATHERINE: Of course, Mr Sharpless, always quick with the

right words.

SHARPLESS: And I'm sure that in the magazine in my hotel

room there is a copy of that very dress, Mrs Delaware, but in gray. How wise of you to have

got it in blue.

MRS DELAWARE: Yes, well, it was from the newest catalogue. What

do you think Katherine?

KATHERINE: It's charming, Momma. Remind me to send you

the latest ones.

Pinkerton enters, also dressed for dinner.

PINKERTON: What's the new name of the girl again. I called

her Rose and she ran off to the kitchen blubbering like a baby. It's Rose isn't it?

KATHERINE: Her name is Lilly.

PINKERTON: Yes, I know that but didn't she...

KATHERINE: Benjamin. Her name is Lilly and she'll be fine in

the morning. We're all going out so it really doesn't matter anymore. She's the maid. She'll

be fine.

PINKERTON: If you say so.

KATHERINE: I do. But how I'm going to get through an

evening with the likes of San Francisco society I'll

never know.

MRS DELAWARE: Oh Katherine, you must try and enjoy yourself.

You're home. It's been two years and so many

people will want to see you.

KATHERINE: Seeing me they can do. It's talking to me that

makes me shudder.

PINKERTON: San Francisco society is very different from

back East. They're far more down to earth. Something about living on the edge of the world that might split in two at any moment.

What do you say Sharpless?

SHARPLESS: I hear it from very good authority that all this

conjecture about earthquakes is completely erroneous. We're safe as mountains. But enough of that and more of tonight: I've only been here a

short time and I've not been back east for over ten years but in my estimation the Pinkertons and the Delawares are going to have a very good time and everyone will be clamouring to... leave us

alone.

KATHERINE: Ha! Mr Sharpless, touché!

PINKERTON: Sharpless, a diplomat to the core.

MRS DELAWARE: Oh, Mr Sharpless, do you think we could sit

together?

SHARPLESS: Didn't I give my word that it would be my

pleasure.

MRS DELAWARE: Yes, but I thought it was your natural good

humour.

SHARPLESS: My natural good humour is at your service.

KATHERINE: So Momma, you can have the splendid time

you've been cooking up in the bathroom and

with Mr Sharpless' assistance you're

guaranteed it. Just let me sit quietly with this

head of mine.

PINKERTON: Oh, Katherine, you're not going to spoil things

with a headache?

KATHERINE: You make me out to be a hypochondriac.

PINKERTON: No, seriously Katherine. I've been looking

forward to tonight ever since Sharpless

mentioned it. It'll be fun and I hope to make a few contacts. I certainly don't want to leave to

bring you home with one of your heads.

KATHERINE: A headache is a headache. It's not completely up

to me as you imply.

MRS DELAWARE: Katherine, once we are there there'll be so

much to see and talk about you won't even

know you've got a head.

PINKERTON: Well said Mrs D.

MRS DELAWARE: I'm going to enjoy myself.

**Mrs Delaware** pulls the servant cord.

SHARPLESS: Mrs Pinkerton, and so are you.

PINKERTON: Katherine, be positive, please. We're here to have

a good time.

KATHERINE: Of course but if it goes the way it's feeling...

SHARPLESS: Ben, don't worry. If Mrs Pinkerton's headache

develops as she feels it might I will be more

than happy to escort her home.

PINKERTON: I can't expect you to do that.

SHARPLESS: Not at all. I've dined there several times since

I've been here, so I won't mind at all.

KATHERINE: Thank you Mr Sharpless. I'm sure that I'll be

fine but if not I gratefully accept your offer.

PINKERTON: Are you sure?

MRS. DELAWARE: And Benjamin with us left in each other's company

I can finally behave like a good Momma-in-law and

ask very impertinent questions.

A puffy eyed **Lilly** enters, after knocking, with various coats.

PINKERTON: Of course, Mrs D, but I rest on my position of son-

in-law to provide appropriately evasive answers.

But, Katherine...

KATHERINE: I'll be fine, I'm sure. Now where's that girl with

our coats? Ah.

They put on their coats. No-one acknowledges **Lilly**.

PINKERTON: Sharpless, don't let Mrs D. monopolise you too

much there are a few interesting ideas I'd like to run by you. I've always believed in musical chairs at tables full SHARPLESS: of warm and talkative people. MRS DELAWARE: What a wonderful turn of phrase and a charming idea. Let's all not acknowledge any body until they KATHERINE: call us over. MRS DELAWARE: Why ever for? KATHERINE: Trust me. It's the only way to eat your meat in peace. They exit. **Sharpless** and **Katherine** last. SHARPLESS: Mrs Pinkerton. KATHERINE: Sharpless. SHARPLESS: Katherine. They exit and close the door leaving **Lilly** standing alone. LILLY: It's not fair.

**Lilly** cries uncontrollably.

Black.

## **ACT 1 SCENE 2**

The same, several months later. Late at night

**Sharpless** enters quickly. He is very upset. He pours himself a whiskey and ice, paces, drinks and exits still with the drink in his hand. **Mrs Delaware** enters and inspects the room. She counts the glasses and checks the ice. She pulls the servant cord. Eventually **Lilly**, in uniform, enters with a tray containing glasses, ice and water.

MRS. DELAWARE: Now, Lilly, be guick now. Are the guests all

gone from the table?

LILLY: Not sure Madam. I'll go check, Madam.

MRS. DELAWARE: No Lilly. Lilly. Put that down. I need to talk to

you. Please.

LILLY: Yes, Madam.

MRS. DELAWARE: Lilly, listen to me.

LILLY: Yes, Madam.

MRS DELAWARE: Oh, Lilly! It's just us.

LILLY: Yes, Madam.

MRS. DELAWARE: They are here now, Lilly, but they're not

going to be living here forever.

LILLY: Yes, Madam.

MRS. DELAWARE: Rose!

LILLY: What?

MRS. DELAWARE: I know it's difficult for you now but it's just until

the Lieutenant Commander finds out where his work will take him. And even if that work keeps him here in San Francisco they won't be living here forever. So there's no need to mope about like you

do. We used to be such good friends.

LILLY: Three months it's been. Three months.

MRS. DELAWARE: No, Rose, two months. But two months isn't

forever.

LILLY: It feels like it.

MRS. DELAWARE: Yes, I know. But as soon as there's a baby on the

way, they will want their own house to live in to

raise their family. It's only natural.

LILLY: Katherine's tummy is as flat as Kansas and it's

likely to stay that way if the truth be known.

MRS. DELAWARE: Rose! Hush your mouth! You don't know

that and it's wicked of you to say so.

LILLY: I've seen the way she looks at him and so

have you.

MRS. DELAWARE: Marriages, Lilly. Tos and fros and ups and downs.

LILLY: And she looks at him in the same way as

she looks at that other critter.

MRS. DELAWARE: Lan' sakes, Rose! It's not your place, or mine, to

say, or even think, such things.

LILLY: But it's just *us* you said.

MRS. DELAWARE: Mr Sharpless is a guest in this house.

LILLY: I'd use a different word if I knew what it

was.

MRS. DELAWARE: Rose, such spite!

LILLY: And the looks he gives her! They'd boil water.

MRS. DELAWARE: Rose!

LILLY: There's something strange going on in this

house that words can't name.

MRS. DELAWARE: There's that imagination of yours again.

LILLY: Well, no church-type words anyway.

MRS. DELAWARE: Lilly!

LILLY: Yes, Madam.

MRS. DELAWARE: Go back to the kitchen. You have dishes to do and

cutlery to polish.

LILLY: Yes, Madam.

MRS. DELAWARE: And don't you go to your room until I've

inspected what you've done.

LILLY: Yes, Madam.

MRS. DELAWARE: And, Lilly?

LILLY: Yes, Madam?

MRS DELAWARE: ...Oh, Rose...

**Sharpless** enters.

LILLY: Yes, madam. Evening, Sir.

Lilly exits.

MRS. DELAWARE: Mr. Sharpless. Can I get you anything?

SHARPLESS: No. Nothing at all.

MRS. DELAWARE: Well, my bedtime's a long time gone.

SHARPLESS: Yes, of course. No, I'm fine thank you. Fine.

Fine.

MRS. DELAWARE: Pardon?

SHARPLESS: What?

MRS. DELAWARE: I'll say good night then.

SHARPLESS: Yes, yes. Good night.

Mrs. Delaware exits. Sharpless paces. Pinkerton enters.

PINKERTON: Sharpless, whatever is the matter?

SHARPLESS: Are they gone?

PINKERTON: Not, yet. Katherine is seeing them out.

SHARPLESS: You should be with her. I'm worried what

she might say to them.

PINKERTON: What's got into you?

SHARPLESS: Ben, I'm with you on your suspicions of our

president and his autocratic tendencies. On this we agree. But your wife, Ben. I'm sorry, but she did everything in her power tonight to foil our every approach to these people. She doesn't understand about the democratic ideal. I'm sorry Ben but I can't stay around this house any longer.

Ever!

PINKERTON: My Lord, Sharpless! Calm down. I find it hard to

believe that Katherine's naive interference is the

reason for such a melodramatic outburst.

SHARPLESS: I've had to deal with Taft as Secretary of War and

as Governor of the Philippines. I know what the man is like. And the thought of him as President is, well, it's ludicrous. I'm serious Ben. You remember

our first discussion?

PINKERTON: I certainly do, the night you took us all to dinner

at City Hall, weeks ago.

SHARPLESS: Yes. Two months ago.

PINKERTON: Has it been that long? You didn't seem that

passionate about it then. Interested, yes, but this

fervour of yours is something else. Then you

seemed blasé even.

SHARPLESS: That's not true, Ben.

PINKERTON: Well, if I remember the night...Yes. You took

Katherine home with one of her headaches.

SHARPLESS: She's capable of undermining us, Ben. She

doesn't understand what we are trying to do...if we ever get around to doing anything.

She just doesn't understand.

PINKERTON: Tonight was a heated discussion over dinner.

Hundreds of such discussions happen over

dinner all over the country.

SHARPLESS: It's no good. I have to back out.

PINKERTON: Has she said something to you?

SHARPLESS: What? No No No.

PINKERTON: Have you had a disagreement?

SHARPLESS: No, Ben. No.

PINKERTON: I don't believe you.

SHARPLESS: Ah.

PINKERTON: There is something between you two, ever since

that night at City Hall. Did something happen on

the way home? Was Lilly involved?

SHARPLESS: What? No! Nothing like that.

PINKERTON: Well, it is something. Every time Kate opens

her mouth you seem eager to contradict her.

SHARPLESS: Ben, I don't mean to offend you. She's your

wife.

PINKERTON: Don't misunderstand me. Katherine's quite capable

of verbally looking after herself. I certainly don't

need to run to her defence. But there is

something. Sharpless?

SHARPLESS: Oh, Ben.

PINKERTON: I see. Are you going to tell me?

SHARPLESS: I thought I was in love with her.

PINKERTON: And what made you think that?

SHARPLESS: Ben, it was all my fault. I behaved extremely

badly. And I'm very, very sorry.

PINKERTON: Yes. I'm sure you are. And how long have you held

this...this belief?

SHARPLESS: A very short time. But that night...

PINKERTON: Something *did* happen.

SHARPLESS: I'm afraid so. I let my nature get the better of me

again and...

PINKERTON: No need to go on Sharpless.

SHARPLESS: But I must and by some means try to explain.

PINKERTON: It's not your explanation I should be seeking.

SHARPLESS: Ben, I... Of course I'll leave...

PINKERTON: Oh, Sharpless, any blame or animosity I feel

towards you is overshadowed by far stronger

emotions.

SHARPLESS: I feel so ashamed.

PINKERTON: Yes, and so you should and used too no doubt.

And that I can understand.

SHARPLESS: Ben, I'm not sure what you mean but I assure you

there's no room here for chivalrous blame-sharing.

PINKERTON: Nor self-pity either. You may understand me more

clearly if I tell you - that night, she - covered her tracks, rather forcedly - if you get my meaning.

SHARPLESS: ...Oh, I see.

PINKERTON: And so now do you really think my wife is

turning into a political liability? What am I to do

with her?

SHARPLESS: She seems to want to be your wife not only to

share your name but also your beliefs but she

finds those beliefs....traitorous.

PINKERTON: So what do you think she's trying to do?

SHARPLESS: Convert you.

PINKERTON: To what?

SHARPLESS: To the man she wants you to be.

PINKERTON: Sharpless, why is it that your fearless rush to

provide an answer never seems to trip you up?

SHARPLESS: I'll take that as rhetorical and as a reprimand.

PINKERTON It was meant as a compliment.

SHARPLESS: You're too good to me Ben.

PINKERTON: This new humility, Sharpless, doesn't suit you at

all.

SHARPLESS: The consequences, I'm afraid, of my bad

behavior.

PINKERTON: Your little dalliance with my wife is over?

SHARPLESS: Oh yes.

PINKERTON: Then your confession and apology I accept and we

both know why it happened.

SHARPLESS: Yes, but Ben it was...

PINKERTON: Sharpless! It's over and forgiven. Now, you were

saying something about Katherine wanting me to

be the...what kind of man?

SHARPLESS: Patriotic and kind.

PINKERTON: I think I'm both of those things, don't you?

SHARPLESS: Certainly.

PINKERTON: And why doesn't she see me like you do?

SHARPLESS: She doesn't understand anything at all about

politics and - like so many miseducated people in

this country - she wants someone, anyone, to just get on with it. And she desperately wants a

child. You must tell her the truth.

PINKERTON: You may be in love with my wife but you don't

know her very well.

SHARPLESS: It's been a long time now since I realised I don't

understand love, its effect and all its flavors...but

whatever I felt...it's over.

PINKERTON: She's hurt you very deeply hasn't she?

SHARPLESS: No, not hurt just disappointment at confirmation

of my own nature, set, as it is, like concrete. Isn't it amusing how truth can be standing right next to you - taking root even - and you still can't see it. But once you do and look it squarely in the eye you wonder how you ever got along without it.

PINKERTON: I'm afraid the truth is something I don't dare

reveal to her.

SHARPLESS: But you must. How many letters is it now

from Nagasaki? Five? Six?

PINKERTON: If only I could get her to see a doctor.

SHARPLESS: Isn't that the coward's way out?

PINKERTON: Yes, I suppose it is.

SHARPLESS: Self-pity isn't a quality you wear very well.

PINKERTON: And what if I tell her she's as barren as the west

of Texas. She'll think her life over; our marriage will certainly be, divorce, disgrace, abandonment. Look what she's tried to do believing I'm at fault. Anything to procure a child. How many more have there been besides you? How far will a respectable

woman sink in order to preserve her

respectability? Challenging respect in order to gain it. What will she do next? No, the truth is

impossible. There must be another way.

The door flies open and **Katherine** enters. She is wearing a magnificent

red evening dress and is a little drunk.

KATHERINE: Ah! Look at that. Men. Two men. Two

manly men.

PINKERTON: What did you say?

KATHERINE: My dear Pinkerton, I'm sure you heard me quite

clearly. I need a drink. Sharpless, fix me a

bourbon. And Pinkerton you quite lose your looks

when you look so stern.

PINKERTON: (quietly locking the door) I have reason to look

stern.

KATHERINE: Yes, I suppose you do but like most things that

annoy you it all comes down to your own errors

of judgement in the first place.

PINKERTON: It's only fair to tell you that considering how

much you've had to drink tonight I'm

discounting everything you say.

KATHERINE: Ha. Always the conciliator.

PINKERTON: I thought I was being kind.

KATHERINE: Diplomatic then.

PINKERTON: Why not kind? Why never kind?

KATHERINE: If you were a kind man you never would've

married me.

PINKERTON: I married you because I love you.

KATHERINE: Oh!

## Katherine begins to cry.

KATHERINE: (Cont) See. Such diplomacy is wasted on me

because I fall for it so disastrously. But a little out of place now don't you think: a little too late? Your evening of political manipulation is

over. Your guests have gone.

SHARPLESS: Heaven only knows what they made of tonight's

proceedings.

KATHERINE: And you, you Jekyll, turning on me because I

happen to think you a fool.

PINKERTON: Katherine, our guests have gone. It is now just

us. And besides I know you mean to insult Sharpless but Dr Jekyll was the good one.

KATHERINE: And I supposed you think that's clever. Were you

insulted, Sharpless? If so, then I think I must be

very sorry.

PINKERTON: You were very argumentative tonight.

KATHERINE: Someone has to counter your intentions.

PINKERTON: What do you know of my intentions?

KATHERINE: You want those sweet, stupid people to back

you, and those like you, against the freely

elected President of the United States of America.

PINKERTON: Your boldness and innocence leave you very

wide of the mark.

KATHERINE: But isn't your intention to take power away

from the President?

PINKERTON: My intentions have nothing to do with the

President but all to do with the Presidency.

KATHERINE: See, you admit your treachery. Oh Benjamin.

**Katherine** begins to cry again.

KATHERINE: (cont) People have been shot for less.

PINKERTON: Don't be so melodramatic. My beliefs and my

actions are based solely on the simple fact that a president, any president, that is successful at winning an election may not be so successful at

running the country. And given the President we

may get ...

KATHERINE: William Taft is a fine man. And if he is good

enough for President Roosevelt he is good

enough for me.

PINKERTON: I agree; a fine man and an excellent lawyer. But

not, it is becoming increasingly evident, a very good leader. And when that scenario impedes this country's potential, or its safety, we need men of the highest calibre to get the work done with the

highest possible standards.

KATHERINE: How undemocratic of you.

PINKERTON: If democracy was at the core of this argument I

would have nothing to say but it is our President's undemocratic whim to push this man over the line

that I take exception to.

KATHERINE: We are an empire! The most prosperous and the

safest county in the world.

PINKERTON: Exactly and I would like to keep it that way.

KATHERINE: By undermining our leader, no less.

PINKERTON: By strengthening our governance to avoid a

potentially weak presidency.

KATHERINE: I should report you to the special police or

whoever it is that shoots traitors at dawn for

saying such things.

PINKERTON: Be careful what you call people. Names can

often be misleading. Eh, Sharpless?

KATHERINE: Oh yes. Sharp in dress and nature but not in

name. Curious that: where your name comes

from. Do you actually know?

PINKERTON: Katherine, it's just a school name.

KATHERINE: How can it be a school name? Family names

don't come from schools. A name is chosen by God and Mothers. It is as important as the

thoughts in your head. So what do you mean by a

school name?

PINKERTON: Katherine, please, you're being silly.

KATHERINE: (indignant) I am not being silly. How dare you

call me silly.

PINKERTON: Perverse then.

SHARPLESS: (conciliatory) It's a name I was called at school.

It began as a joke I suppose and it stuck.

KATHERINE: A joke! You can't be serious.

PINKERTON: Katherine, it's a child's game: making up

names. You know what children can be like.

KATHERINE: Yes, I do, actually.

SHARPLESS: It's a pun on my real name.

KATHERINE: You're Arthur Sharpless. You were introduced

to me as Arthur Sharpless. You've always been Arthur Sharpless. And now you're saying it's

not your rightful name?

SHARPLESS: I thought it was common knowledge.

KATHERINE: For Heaven's sake, how shallow you think I

must be. If Sharpless isn't your name then in

God's name what is it?

PINKERTON: I can't believe Katherine that you seriously

don't know - or can't guess.

KATHERINE: Well I don't know. I only know what I've been

told. Why should I think it was anything different. So if not Sharpless, then what!?

PINKERTON: Oh, Katherine.

SHARPLESS: Blunt.

KATHERINE: What?

SHARPLESS: My name is Arthur Blunt.

KATHERINE: Don't be ridiculous!

PINKERTON: Katherine! I think the man should know his

own name.

KATHERINE: Well obviously not if he lets everyone call him

something he's not.

SHARPLESS: I'm sorry you don't approve.

KATHERINE: No I don't. Names are names. One has one

and one should use it.

PINKERTON: Think of it then as a term of affection. Surely

you don't begrudge intelligent beings the use of

pet names for their intimates.

KATHERINE: But it's so childish and unnecessary. I expect

more from intelligent beings.

PINKERTON: Why can't affection allow such endearments?

KATHERINE: Would you like it if I called you...Pinky?

PINKERTON: Perhaps in the privacy of our room it may've

been nice.

KATHERINE: Now you are making fun of me.

PINKERTON: Well, to be frank, you're leaving yourself wide

open to be made fun of.

KATHERINE: So it's ridicule now to add to the list is it?

PINKERTON: List? What list? You have a list? And what else is

on this list?

KATHERINE: Indifference. Intolerance.

PINKERTON: These are names, are they not, but of a different

sort entirely. Any more?

KATHERINE: ... Condescension.

PINKERTON: And what reasons do you ascribe to this litany of

sins against you?

KATHERINE: We should not be saying such things to each

other in another's company.

SHARPLESS: I'll gladly...

PINKERTON: You will stay, Sharpless. For you might as well

know that we only ever talk to each other in the company of others. When we're alone it's silence all round. Isn't that true Katherine?

KATHERINE: Now you're being a bully.

PINKERTON: So you can now add oppression to the list.

KATHERINE: It's alarming how easily anger bubbles up in

you these days.

PINKERTON: And why shouldn't I be angry? I've just

discovered that my wife thinks I'm a bully, indifferent to her, intolerant and that I wound her with my condescension. Haven't I the right

to know why she thinks so ill of me?

KATHERINE: Mr...Blunt. Will you kindly leave the room?

PINKERTON: Sharpless stays.

KATHERINE: All right Pinkerton! You go too far. You force me

to say what I feel through anger. I can't

guarantee your reaction.

PINKERTON: ...well!

KATHERINE: You desperately want a child and you despise me

for not giving you one.

(cont) I'm right aren't I? I knew it!

SHARPLESS: Katherine, please, there's something...

PINKERTON: Sharpless, No!

SHARPLESS: But, Ben, how can you let...?

PINKERTON: It's not your place.

KATHERINE: What are you two saying?

PINKERTON: Katherine, sit down please.

KATHERINE: No, I will not sit down. I am tired and frayed to

my wit's end at your continuing hapless treatment of me. Laying blame where it has never been due. You only have to look around this room to realise the child-bearing capacity of my family - I can't believe you haven't understood this. My siblings, my cousins, first and second removed, on both sides and not one family, not one, is there where the number of children is less than five. And only three still-born - may God rest their souls - out of fifty eight. Fifty-eight! Health abounds in my family. Oh my dear Benjamin it must be a terrible blow to you. I would give up everything, do anything - and you know I would - for this not to be true. But you must come to understand your incapacity to father a child. This is the only explanation. But, Benjamin, let us not abandon hope altogether for you have not as yet sought expert medical advice. I have, however, sought it on your behalf - and I hope you will forgive me for that - but once I explained the circumstances to the doctor he led me to believe that there was the possibility of a cure. A slim chance, it must be said, but a glimmer of hope nonetheless if only you will consent to an examination. Oh Benjamin has it never occurred to you? Have you never suspected for only the briefest of moments the truth of your affliction? Oh Benjamin please, please say something to me.

PINKERTON: Katherine.

KATHERINE: Oh, Benjamin. Yes, yes.

PINKERTON: This doctor.

KATHERINE: Oh yes. Dr. Albrechtson. He's at the University.

Such a wonderful man. He gave me his card.

PINKERTON: I will submit to an examination by this Dr.

Albrechtson.

KATHERINE: Oh thank you Benjamin. I knew, I hoped, you

would see reason. It may be that everything

will be all right after all.

PINKERTON: I will submit to this examination...if you do as

well.

KATHERINE: Whatever can you mean?

PINKERTON: I will agree to an examination if you too will

agree to an examination. I cannot be plainer.

KATHERINE: But that is ridiculous. It's completely

unnecessary.

PINKERTON: Will you agree?

KATHERINE: No. But why? Is it possible that you still don't

understand?

PINKERTON: I understand, everything. And you will too

when you are privy to all the facts.

KATHERINE: For Heaven's sake, Benjamin. There can be

only one explanation for your recalcitrance. I've obviously underestimated the dimensions of your male pride. Surely there is no need to hang on to such egotisms in this company. So no, let me finish - if it is at all possible to heal this rift between us with the truth and if you prefer that truth to come from another man then yes, I will do as you wish and submit to an examination as well. Will that make you happy?

SHARPLESS: Ben, for God's sake, you can't let another man

- a total stranger...

KATHERINE: A medical expert can hardly be categorised as a

total stranger as their unfamiliarity with their patients is what makes them impartial and

therefore effective.

SHARPLESS: That's not what I meant.

KATHERINE: Then what do you mean?

SHARPLESS: Ben...?

PINKERTON: I thought you wanted me to tell all. You frustrate

me with your prevarication.

SHARPLESS: Things that need to be said should not be said

in anger.

KATHERINE: What are you talking about? Oh! Please don't

add insult to injury by piling confusion about what you mean on top of confusion about who

you are.

PINKERTON: There is no need to insult Sharpless.

KATHERINE: What is it with you two men?! I demand to

know what provokes your bloodless reaction to the truth of our situation and your involvement.

PINKERTON: You've been unfaithful to me with Sharpless here,

your defenceless tool. You can't deny that you've flaunted this fact before both of us with your flippant and sarcastic remarks. Oh there's no need to think that Sharpless betrayed you in this. He's been the model of decorum. It's something that I've known for some time. Call it intuition although I know that that is something never attributed to my sex but I can assure you it dawned on me as surely as day follows night. But you have no need to fear, Katherine, I hold nothing against you. I know how important a

family is to you, so important, in fact, that your desire to present me with a child so outweighed your sense of decency and dignity - which we all know is as refined and civilised as any American can be - that you were willing to sacrifice that same decency and dignity to achieve those very same qualities you believed to be paramount to a wife and mother. I should, in fact, fall at your feet in honour of the lengths you were willing to go in order to make our marriage whole and I have to flatter myself that you may have indeed done such things because of the great love you bare me. And it would be easy for me to see out the rest of my life and our marriage believing it.

KATHERINE: But...!

PINKERTON: But I know you could not let that happen. You

cannot see past the void left by the silence that

a childless marriage creates.

KATHERINE: All I want is a little proof that my heart's desire

cannot be fulfilled and with that knowledge can come a possible solution. It's not my fault that

both of you suffer the same affliction.

PINKERTON: And what would that mean exactly? Let us say

that you are right. That the two men you have

been intimate with...are there more?

KATHERINE: How dare you!

PINKERTON: Under the circumstances it's a fair question.

But let's stick to what we know. If these two men are indeed infertile as you infer, what then? Persuasive amnesia? Divorce? Does our

love for each other mean nothing?

KATHERINE: I need to be a Momma. I was born to be a

Momma. This I know. This I feel. And I will not believe that God can be so cruel as to deny what he has himself created in me. It is

impossible, ungodlike. So what I believe about these two men is the truth, and God knows it.

PINKERTON: Katherine, listen to me. I can save you. But I

have to hurt you more.

KATHERINE: Please spare me any more of your heroics. You

wound me with them.

SHARPLESS: Tell her. For God's sake, Ben, if you

don't I will.

KATHERINE: Listen and look at you both! Like conspirators you

are; like games-men plotting a kill. You look so silly! Is this what I'm finally learning about men? I've always heard older women, silly women I thought, who you think should've had the advantage of wisdom but sprout nothing but clichés. Is it possible that they were right all along? that men are indeed a distinct species and

run like a tribe: sticking together in a crisis, siding with each other in a storm, sharing mannerisms,

likes and dislikes, as if they're brothers with the same misguided and overworked Mother. I think I'm understanding how this can be true.

PINKERTON: I already have a child.

SHARPLESS: So the reason for your marriage being barren

cannot lie with him. It is your proof but also

your salvation.

KATHERINE: Oh my, what rot you talk.

PINKERTON: What I say is true and Sharpless can confirm it.

KATHERINE: You have been unfaithful to me?

PINKERTON: I think it best that infidelity be left out of this

discussion for your sake more than mine. Your behaviour has rendered the word, as it impinges on our marriage, totally superfluous. But no, I have been faithful to our marriage. My child was conceived several years before you and I met. In

Japan.

KATHERINE: You've been with a whore?

PINKERTON: Absolutely not.

KATHERINE: Then what then?

PINKERTON: If you were to ask her that question she would

say "wife".

KATHERINE: So you are a bigamist?

PINKERTON: I was married to this girl in the garden of her

house by a priest of her religion. You will

understand me better if I say it does not count.

KATHERINE: A child?

PINKERTON: A little boy. About four by now I think.

KATHERINE: What kind of fool do you two take me for? So this

is what you two have been cooking up behind my back with your secrets and little asides. And you

thought I would be taken in by this...

preposterous story? How thick you two are. And foolish for thinking you could convince me...no! No, wait a minute. I am incensed at your audacity at even thinking you have to make up such a story. What could you possibly gain by it?

SHARPLESS: What indeed?

KATHERINE: No. No, it cannot be possible

#### Sharpless hands her a letter.

KATHERINE: What's this?

SHARPLESS: This is the latest letter.

KATHERINE: Letter from whom?

SHARPLESS: A marriage broker in Nagasaki.

KATHERINE: Where?

SHARPLESS: It's a city in Japan. His name is Goro.

KATHERINE: That's a name?

SHARPLESS: One anyone could hardly make up.

#### **Katherine** reads the letter and breaks down.

PINKERTON: Katherine.

( to Sharpless) I told you the truth would do nothing but destroy her. Where do we go from here? Heh? My wife and my marriage both

destroyed.

SHARPLESS: There is a way out of this.

PINKERTON: Look at her! Look at her!

SHARPLESS: Katherine. Listen to me.

KATHERINE: You've been scheming over this for months,

haven't you? Planning to kill me with this news.

SHARPLESS: Katherine. No. I can see how it must look to

you but there is still a way out.

KATHERINE: And what makes you think I should listen to

you? I don't even know who you are.

.

SHARPLESS: You can still be a mother?

PINKERTON: What are you saying, Sharpless? Are you mad?

SHARPLESS: No no. It can be done.

KATHERINE: What do you mean?

SHARPLESS: I'm sure it can be done. This little boy's mother is

single, his father is married...

KATHERINE: Adopt it!? If you think I'm going to raise a nip!...

and be a stepmother to a stolen child...?

PINKERTON: Oh Katherine...stolen?

SHARPLESS: What's the alternative then? Divorce? Go sit on the

single bench again waiting for another man to come along? You think that's an option? You're no

young slip of a girl any more. Oh, and your choices are somewhat reduced because as you said yourself you're born to be a mother. You know that for a fact. That's what you said. So not

any ol' man will do this time, this one will have to

be a man with children. But don't you see

Katherine? You already have a man with a child. Look at all these women in these photographs - lots of women - all sitting, standing with their children. Yes, their children, but they're also sitting, standing with their husband's children. And you too can have your photograph taken sitting with your husband's child. It may not be

exactly your heart's desire but it's close.

KATHERINE: (incredulously) Oh, what is happening to me?

SHARPLESS: Oh, and Katherine, Japan will love you. You are

everything they aspire to, your clothes, your stature, your very American-ness. They love anything from the West. You will glide through that beautiful country with a halo around you. Katherine, listen to me. Japan is like a sponge, soaking up anything: from German philosophy to Mark Twain, from top hats to Tolstoy. And only last year Japan won a very modern war with Russia and it won easily. Great things are going to happen in Japan which is why War Secretary, Taft, is leading a diplomatic and trade delegation to Japan. He sails in the Fall. I'm on that boat, Katherine, returning to my post. I can get a berth for you. I will get a berth for both of you.

Katherine. A few weeks in Japan and you and your family can be home by Christmas. By Christmas, Katherine, your son could be, at last, decorating the Christmas tree here in this very room. Ben,

Katherine, claim your child.

PINKERTON: My child, our child, yes.

SHARPLESS: For everyone's sake. She's impoverished. God

> knows what she's living on. A husbandless mother has no respected place, no definable rights. You

will be doing everyone a service.

It's possible, Katherine. He's not quite four yet. PINKERTON:

There's still a great deal of mothering to do. Could

you love a child like that? Could you love my

child? Could you see him as our child?

Could I...do I...love you enough to love your KATHERINE:

child....I think is the correct question.

PINKERTON: Katherine, I would give you the world if you

could only say yes to that question.

KATHERINE: He doesn't know me. He might be frightened of

me.

PINKERTON: He doesn't know me. He might be frightened of

SHARPLESS: He's not even four yet. PINKERTON: Goro says he's tall for his age.

SHARPLESS: Of the few alternatives you have to move

on...this is the one that's closest to what you

want. He could learn to sit on your lap.

PINKERTON: We can teach him everything it means to be a

happy little boy.

SHARPLESS: In the most prosperous and safest country in the

world. The American Empire, Katherine, needs

mothers like you.

KATHERINE: What? To steal......

SHARPLESS: Where is the crime when the mother will be better

off? Where is the crime when the son will be an

American?

PINKERTON: (softly) *Is* an American.

SHARPLESS: Where is the crime when you will have your

heart's desire? You think this wrong? What is a wrong when three rights are the result of it? Katherine, you will be bringing him to The United States of America; you will be creating another American; giving birth to a little American!

PINKERTON: The girl would be a fool to deny him the

opportunity. And I'm his father. And we will tell everyone the truth. Like all good parents should

do.

KATHERINE: What is his name?

PINKERTON What would you like his name to be?

KATHERINE: Oh!

PINKERTON: Katherine?

KATHERINE: ...Benjamin.

PINKERTON: Ah.

SHARPLESS: Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton the Second.

PINKERTON: It would be a family first: numbering the

patronym. Lieutenant & Mrs Pinkerton with their

young son, Benjamin Franklin Junior.

SHARPLESS: Master Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton the Second on

his first day at school with his proud parents.

PINKERTON: Master Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton the Second on

his tenth birthday.

SHARPLESS: Master Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton Junior with

this favourite Uncle Sharpless.

PINKERTON: Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton the Second in the

Navy cadets.

SHARPLESS: Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton the Second at his

Junior School graduation.

PINKERTON: Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton the Second..

SHARPLESS: ...sitting on his Momma's knee.

PINKERTON: Katherine...?

The set slowly disappears to reveal a Japanese garden open to the sky, airy and light. It contains many Noh features including a large backdrop containing a painting of an old and gnarled cypress tree. The entrance to a small dwelling can be seen to one side. A musician sits cross-legged. A young Japanese girl in traditional costume stands upstage gazing off; waiting.

End of Act 1.

### <u>Nagasaki</u>

#### Act 2 Scene 1

Before the lights go down and when the buzz of the audience is at its height an uneasy **Katherine Pinkerton** wanders onto the stage, taking in the auditorium, the audience. She smiles at people. The audience of course quietens. She takes in the set which is alien to her. She sees the musician but doesn't understand the reason for one. She becomes confused and uncomfortable: this is not a world she knows. She eventually notices the **Japanese girl**.

KATHERINE: Hello! You there! Hey!

The young Japanese girl eventually turns her head and notices her. She slowly turns. The music begins and continues to comment on the action throughout the play which unsettles Katherine even more. The young Japanese girl slowly makes her way towards Katherine who is much annoyed at the time she is taking.

(cont) I don't have much time.

The girl (**Suzuki**) eventually reaches her.

(cont) Hi there. I wonder if you could help me. You're Miss San, right?

Katherine holds out her hand.

(cont) My name is Katherine...

**Suzuki** bows low in welcome. **Katherine** turns her hand, palm down, thinking it is to be kissed but suddenly, aware of her error, retracts it.

(cont) ...Oh!

SUZUKI: Do you have washing?

KATHERINE: I need you to speak English.

SUZUKI: Do you want a pick up?

KATHERINE: You'll have to speak English, young lady,

otherwise we're not going to get anywhere.

SUZUKI: Oh poo! No washing! Perhaps...Are you lost?

KATHERINE: Miss San? Miss ChoCho San?

SUZUKI: Yes, Yes, ChoCho San. ChoCho San, yes.

KATHERINE: Well, that's something.

SUZUKI: We do very good washing and folding.

KATHERINE: You know, I really love your country. It's so

beautiful, it really is. The trees, the flowers – the architecture; and such lovely views. You're really very lucky, you know, you've won my heart. You

really have. Truly! Erm...

I believe you drink a lot of tea. I like tea. I drink more coffee at home though but sometimes I drink tea, iced tea, especially when the weather is warm. I like tea. Very much. It's great. But, take care now, I like it strong and sweet. Two lumps.

SUZUKI: (a sigh) Would you like some tea?

KATHERINE: Oh, my lord. You must know some English.

SUZUKI: Maybe if we wait, Baby will be home soon.

Perhaps we should sit. Sit?

KATHERINE: What?

SUZUKI: I will show you. Wait. Don't go away. Baby will

be so cross if I miss a customer.

**Suzuki** turns towards the small house.

KATHERINE: Where are you going? Stay. Hey! You need

to understand me.

SUZUKI: Don't go away. Stay. Baby will be here soon.

**Suzuki** exits into the house and almost immediately returns with two old bamboo mats, one of which she throws at Katherine's feet.

(cont) There. Sit. Guests must sit first. Sit!

KATHERINE: (picking up the mat) It's a very nice mat. An

heirloom perhaps.

SUZUKI: No. No. You sit on it. Oh poo! Like this.

**Suzuki** makes gestures to **Katherine** that she has to sit on the mat. **Katherine** finally understands and sits clumsily and uncomfortably. **Suzuki** kneels and sits elegantly. They stare at each other.

KATHERINE: I think you have a little boy. A little boy. A child.

I'd like to see your little boy.

SUZUKI: Tea! Oh, yes! Yes. I shall do tea.

**Suzuki** gets up and exits into the house. **Katherine** prepares herself for her first sight of her little boy.

KATHERINE: (rehearsing) Hello. You're a beautiful...very

handsome little boy. My name is...Oh, my lord. Hello. Would you like to play a game? No no no. (she sings) "Take me out to the ball game. Take

me out..." I have a present for you.

**Katherine** takes out of her pocket a small American flag on a stick.

Do you know what this is? It's a flag. It's called The Stars and Stripes. This is my...This is your country. America. Can you say that? America. The

United States of America.

**Suzuki** returns with a tray of tea making things: a hot water pot, a wooden ladle, bamboo brush, bowls and a lidded pot of green tea powder.

KATHERINE: What about your little boy?

SUZUKI: Shush, now. Shush. Tea ceremony is very

important.

**Suzuki** places the tray on the ground, sits gently and prepares the tea. The music accompanies the almost ballet-like movements. First she ladles hot water into a bowl, stirs it with the brush and presents it to Katherine for her inspection. **Katherine** reaches to take the bowl.

(cont) No no no! This is just the washing bit. So you can see that I have done the washing well and to warm the bowl. My instructor told me that this is a modern thing to do. It instils confidence with one's guests so a traveller can be content.

KATHERINE: I'm sure it'll be fine.

**Suzuki** tips the water into another bowl on which she places a lid. She takes a napkin and dries the bowl and places it just so. Then she opens the powder pot and puts one spoonful of green tea powder into the bowl, adds the hot water and stirs it with the bamboo brush. She then gently presents the bowl of tea to **Katherine**, who takes it and drinks. She obviously doesn't like it.

(cont) How disgusting.

SUZUKI: What a face! It's just tea.

KATHERINE: Do you have any cream?

SUZUKI: You want something? Ah.

Suzuki takes the bowl as if to repeat the procedure.

KATHERINE: (gesturing) No, no. It's lovely, but no.

SUZUKI:

But you wanted more... (you silly woman.)
Oh poo! And Baby still not back. What will I do
now? All I know so far is tea making and dancing.
Ah. Let me show you a new dance.

Suzuki rises, dances and sings to the music.

Song: Obasute.

(cont) "Like the lady-flower nipped by time The lady-flower past its season, I wither in robes of grass; Trying to forget that long ago I was cast aside, abandoned, I have come again to Mount Obasute. How it shames me now to show my face In Sarashina's moonlight, where all can see! Ah, well, this world is all a dream-Best I speak not, think not, But in these grasses of remembrance," My unwantedness is mine Like death in never-ending time.

Suzuki bows and sits. They stare at each other.

KATHERINE: (rising) Well, "When in Boston..." as they say.

Katherine sings and dances.

Song: Yankee Doodle Dandy.

(cont) Yankee Doodle went to town A-riding on a pony, He stuck a feather in his cap And called it macaroni'.

Yankee Doodle keep it up, Yankee Doodle dandy, Don't mind the music and the step,

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> from the Noh play The Deserted Crone (*Obasute*) by Zeami Motokiyo (1363-1443); translated by Stanleigh H Jones, Jn. From Jones, S. H., (1963) The No Plays: Obasute and Kanehira. *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 18, No. 1/4. Sophia University. Tokyo

But with the girls be handy.

They eat the lasses every day,

T'would keep a house<sup>3</sup>...no, no, no, that's not right. Oh dear, I'm sorry I've forgotten the words. It's a silly song really; god knows what it means.

Katherine sits. They stare at each other.

(cont) Your little boy? (gestures) Little boy.

SUZUKI: (repeats gesture) Little Cherry Blossom?

Asleep. It is shameful that Baby does not carry the child on her back when she visits a customer but I cannot say anything. And children can be a little naughty so yesterday Baby prepared a draught. I do not approve but I am only a lowly

relative.

KATHERINE: (gestures) Can you bring him to me?

SUZUKI: (gestures) Asleep. A draught; very good for

sleeping, especially when they don't want to.

KATHERINE: But it is getting late. I need to see him. Can

you bring him to me? What is his name? Name?

(gestures) I am Katherine Pinkerton.

SUZUKI: (gasps) Oh! "Pinkerton!"

KATHERINE: Ah. The magic word.

SUZUKI: "Lieutenant B. F. Pinkerton"

KATHERINE: Step number one.

SUZUKI: Oh Poo! What am I to do? What am I to do?

Baby! Baby! Why are you so long?

KATHERINE: Miss San, you must try and understand. I am a

good person. I can give your son, my husband's son, many things. Many good things. This is what I feel in my heart. I only have leve in my heart.

feel in my heart. I only have love in my heart.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Adapted from the traditional American song, Yankee Doodle Dandy. Original lyrics by Richard Shuckburgh [?], circa 1770

Goodness in my heart.

SUZUKI: (reacting to Katherine's hand-on-heart

earnestness) Are you in pain?

KATHERINE: What? I don't think you're trying to understand

me. Look at me. Listen to me. It's really for your own good. Good for you. It will be good for you.

**ChoCho San** enters. She is dressed in a simple but grubby house-dress and carries a basket of washing on her hip.

CHOCHO SAN: A customer! Where's her washing?

SUZUKI: (rises and 'hurries' to her). Oh Baby Baby! Where

have you been for so very long?

CHOCHO SAN: Earning us a living as if you didn't know. So

who is this woman without any washing?

SUZUKI: Oh Baby! She is an American I think.

KATHERINE: Listen to me. I'm trying to explain to you.

CHOCHO SAN: I can see that. An Easterner. We have bullies to

the west of us and devils to the east.

KATHERINE: This isn't easy for me.

SUZUKI: Oh, Baby! How can I tell you?

CHOCHO SAN: You're not at work anymore; enough of your

theatrics. I'll deal with her.

SUZUKI: Baby!

CHOCHO SAN: What?!

SUZUKI: She is the sister of Lieutenant B.F. Pinkerton.

CHOCHO SAN: ....So my lovely coward sends a woman.

Strange how I heard that name,

That name I thought noble, regal, mine. My ears practised hearing that name

But my heart would not let my lips repeat it.

I imagined what would happen

When I heard that name

But now I wait. No thunder. No earthquake. No pain. No robins singing. Just something dull, Like a thud, like a gasp, like a sigh in my skull.

(to Suzuki) Go inside. And take off that silly costume and makeup. You look ridiculous.

SUZUKI: (hurrying off) Oh Baby. And no robins in sight.

This is not a good omen.

Suzuki exits.

KATHERINE: Hey! Come back! Where are you going? We

were just getting somewhere here.

CHOCHO SAN: It is sometimes hard for a woman to

understand that the man she loves is weak and indecisive, easily persuaded and slow to grasp

the mettle.

KATHERINE: Unless you can speak English there is no use

going on. I am here on a delicate mission and I can certainly do without rude interruptions. English. English. And I need to speak to that

woman.

CHOCHO SAN: Ah. We have a saying in my family: devils copy

devils.

KATHERINE: I cannot be plainer.

CHOCHO SAN: Tradition and a Mother's firm thumb demands

that I be hospitable to you. I, at least, hope

your brother has mentioned my name. (bowing) I am ChoCho San, wife of....

KATHERINE: ChoCho San?

CHOCHO SAN: ChoCho San.

KATHERINE: You! ChoCho San?

CHOCHO SAN: ChoCho San is my name, wife of...

KATHERINE: You? But this is not what I expected.

CHOCHO SAN: I see surprise in your eyes. Is it possible that you

thought...? (she laughs). My little dim-witted cousin is useful for only one thing but at least it

brings in a little welcome cash.

KATHERINE: But, my husband and you? You are the mother

of...?

CHOCHO SAN: I see the easterner's eyes do not like what they

see. I see easterner's eyes were not taught good

manners.

KATHERINE: If you are ChoCho San, then (gestures) who

was....?

CHOCHO SAN: You eastern devils only see what you want.

Bowing in kimonos and taking small steps; a nice little Japanese-wife picture. Something to hang on

your wall, tell your friends, nod and smile. (gestures) Me, ChoCho San. She, Suzuki.

KATHERINE: Soo..?

CHOCHO SAN: Suzuki, Suzuki,

KATHERINE: Suzuki.

CHOCHO SAN: Five out of five.

(gestures) I see Suzuki has given you tea?

KATHERINE: No more, no.

CHOCHO SAN: Your furrowed nose betrays your lack of tact.

KATHERINE: I have come to talk to you about...

(gestures) ...my...husband's son.

CHOCHO SAN: Ah, the child. Your brother wants to know

about his child.

KATHERINE: You see...I love children and...

CHOCHO SAN: A son is a blessing from heaven. A son is an

anchor tied to a husband's heart: he won't stray

far from that which uplifts him in the eyes of others. This is what I have been taught. This is what we all have been taught but I no longer believe this. A son can be a prickle in your sock. But better a son than a daughter: a son may be a prickle, a daughter is a curse.

**Suzuki** enters with a small **child** clinging to her skirts. Katherine sees him and approaches. The child hides further in the folds of Suzuki's house-dress.

KATHERINE: What is his name? Name? (gestures). Me,

Katherine; you, ChoCho San, she, Socuki...;

he...?

CHOCHO SAN: Ah, yesterday it was Snivel. Today it is Trouble.

SUZUKI: You belittle the child with your coldness and

your dishonest names.

CHOCHO SAN: Perhaps today Prickle is a better name. Yes,

Prickle.

KATHERINE: What is his name?

SUZUKI: Now, little Blossom, this is your aunty. She

wants to say hello to you.

**Suzuki** pushes the reluctant child towards Katherine. She manages to take the child's hand, but then doesn't quite know what to do.

CHOCHO SAN: My husband's sister, I see, is childless.

The **child** breaks away and retreats to Suzuki's dress.

KATHERINE: Poor thing. He is so shy. And a little small for his

age, I think. I will feed you well. Roast beef and black-eye peas are what you need; pancakes and maple syrup like my Momma taught me to ... **Katherine** begins to cry and walks away to hide her tears.

(cont) He is so beautiful. He has Benjamin's

chin.

## ChoCho San suddenly goes rigid.

CHOCHO SAN: Who are you?

KATHERINE: A brave firm Pinkerton chin.

CHOCHO SAN: You are no aunt. They are not tears of an aunt.

KATHERINE: But will his Pinkerton eyes see another mother?

CHOCHO SAN: It is time, I think, for more formal introductions.

KATHERINE: So innocent.

CHOCHO SAN: (gestures) I am ChoCho San.

KATHERINE: Yes, I know, ChoCho San.

CHOCHO SAN: I am ChoCho San. (gestures) You are...?

KATHERINE: What is the matter?

CHOCHO SAN: I am ChoCho San. (gestures) You are...?!

KATHERINE: I am Katherine, Mrs B. F. Pinkerton.

Suzuki gasps.

CHOCHO SAN: "Mrs Lieutenant B. F. Pinkerton".

KATHERINE: Mrs Lieutenant Commander B. F. Pin...

CHOCHO SAN: (interrupting) "Mrs Lieutenant B.F. Pinkerton". So

he not only sends a woman but a woman with my

name.

### ChoCho San walks slowly towards Katherine.

KATHERINE: I've told you my name. Is there something you

don't understand? I have tried to speak as plainly

as I know how. If you could only try...

ChoCho San slaps her. Katherine gasps. The child runs inside.

SUZUKI: Baby! No!

CHOCHO SAN: I have been abandoned, burdened with a child I

hate and love; forced to think that every sunrise

will see the end of longing. Only to be

disappointed by noon. Yet my hope, hope, like a rope round my neck, so strong that I had to look to the birds in the trees for confirmation of it, just so that I could breathe again. And then to find, by sunset, that hope turned into expectation once more, and just so I could softly close my eyes at night I told my head that I looked forward to the sunrise knowing in my belly that it was only the beginning of the cycle all over again. Like a mouse in a wheel. Even you must know how we women delude ourselves. But now I delude myself no longer. No more round and round. Now I am just

angry; flat and angry.

KATHERINE: How dare you!

CHOCHO SAN: Shut up!

KATHERINE: I have come here in good...

CHOCHO SAN: Shut up!!

SUZUKI: Baby, you cannot...

CHOCHO SAN: Shut up!!

KATHERINE: I am your guest from a civilised country! And

jabbering away like...

CHOCHO SAN: (interrupting) I don't know your words nor do I

want to know. The look in your eyes is all I

know. Look in my eyes! Look in my eyes!

KATHERINE: How can you be angry? You are a mother. A child

needs a mother...a good mother.

CHOCHO SAN: You don't know how to look into eyes like mine.

SUZUKI: Baby! What are you doing? She is an honoured

guest. This is not our way.

CHOCHO SAN: A quest, perhaps, but honour is applied only by

the condescension of others. And I withdraw my

condescension. It is too mistreated!

SUZUKI: But what will happen to us if you go on like

this? Goro will be so angry.

**Katherine** looks for the child and exits into the little hut.

CHOCHO SAN: I am used to the anger of men, and to their

treachery, and to their weakness. I know this about men, more than you will ever know, even if every night for the rest of your miserable life you

pander to their every whim.

SUZUKI: You have only had one man.

CHOCHO SAN: You think the truth will flood my eyes with tears? I

have no more tears, you stupid girl!

SUZUKI: And look at you. Look at us both. You are no

better than me. You think your washing of other peoples' clothes is any cleaner than my washing

of richer men's feet?

CHOCHO SAN: My husband loves me!

SUZUKI: Your husband left you.

CHOCHO SAN: My husband is a fool. My husband does not

know what to do when two different pairs of hands want to tie his shoe-laces. I know this about my husband. I taught him about love and I know he is still unused to it. I also know that because he is like he is he doesn't have love for this eastern

devil.

SUZUKI: He, too, is an eastern devil.

CHOCHO SAN: I know everything there is to know about my

husband. Our love does not understand Distance and Justification and words such as yours. You think your words are like knives; they are nothing but blossoms falling on my face. You think you can

talk to me like this because you have money.

SUZUKI: My money puts rice in your mouth.

CHOCHO SAN: Your money puts shame on my face.

SUZUKI: Oh, Baby. What are we saying?

CHOCHO SAN: It will be tears now, I think.

SUZUKI: Oh, Baby.

Suzuki sings.

Song: Like Rice to Us.

You are my family. I am your family.

One sun shines in our eyes.

The same rain falls on our heads.

We hear the same robins, We smell the same blossoms.

Your mother and my mother shared the same

mother. She grew rice for us.

We promised them together, love and honour for

each other would be

like rice to us.

I dressed you on your wedding night.

You kissed me goodnight before you kissed him.

I waited with you. I longed with you.

You suckled your child. I suckled your child.

**Suzuki** and **ChoCho San** are reconciled. They dance. During the dance **Katherine** comes out of the house and is amazed and does not understand what she sees.

KATHERINE: What can you be doing? You have to understand

what is happening here. I cannot find him. Oh my

lord. Give me strength!

**Katherine** tries to join in but she does not fit; they do not include her; she does not understand. **Suzuki** and **ChoCho San** sing and dance together.

SUZUKI &

CHOCHO SAN: You are my family. I am your family

One sun shines in our eyes.

The same rain falls on our heads.

We hear the same robins, We smell the same blossoms.

Your mother and my mother shared the same

mother. She grew rice for us. We promised them together,

Love and honour

For each other would be

Like rice to us.

Family is like rice to us.

Like rice to us.

KATHERINE: Look at me. Look at me. I am trying to make

something from nothing here. I want to create a family where there isn't one. This is not a place for growing up, becoming strong, making a stand, taking his place in the world. He must take his place in the world. He is an American. It follows, he must be in America. So! He is not in the garden so he must be in the house. This little boy must be

in America.

**Katherine** moves to the house again but the **child** runs out of the house at her dragging a large samurai sword as if a toy.

KATHERINE: Little boy. Little boy. It's me. It's only me.

SUZUKI: Blossom!

CHOCHO SAN: Hah! Look, a brave little soldier willing to fight

the eastern Devil.

KATHERINE: I don't think you should be playing with that dear.

You might hurt yourself.

SUZUKI: Blossom. Little one. Give that to me.

**ChoCho San** walks to the child and takes the sword from him. He runs to Suzuki.

CHOCHO SAN: The sword of my ancestors.

## Sharpless enters.

KATHERINE: Sharpless! Perhaps you can make these women understand the good of what I am trying to do. They simply refuse to see what is best for the boy. And I could not have spoken plainer. And the world they live in, it's like something out of a novel written by some fantasist.

CHOCHO SAN: Ah, Mr Sharpless.

SUZUKI: Oh, Mr Sharpless! Mr Sharpless! Help us. We don't know what to do with this American woman.

CHOCHO SAN: I knew you would be a part of this tragic story.

SHARPLESS: Katherine. Are you all right?

KATHERINE: Yes. But, of all things, she's got a sword.

SHARPLESS: ChoCho San. (bowing)

May your ancestors smile on you.

SUZUKI: (bowing) We ask that you treat us kindly.

SHARPLESS: I am here ready to serve you.

What has been going on here?

KATHERINE: You know their words.

SHARPLESS: I have lived in Japan a long time.

CHOCHO SAN: My guest and I have been getting to know each

other. I think she would like to tell us about

America.

SHARPLESS: Americans love their country very much.

CHOCHO SAN: Ah. "My Country! My Country!" cries the scoundrel

from the scaffold.

SHARPLESS: Patriotism is nobler than you think.

CHOCHO SAN: To eastern devils in their lair perhaps.

SHARPLESS: And so you're trying to frighten her?

CHOCHO SAN: The sword of my ancestors.

SHARPLESS: And what's it doing out here?

CHOCHO SAN: My little Trouble was protecting me from devils.

KATHERINE: Sharpless! Do something.

SHARPLESS: Can I see it?

CHOCHO SAN: No. You have seen it many times before.

**ChoCho San** kneels with the sword across her lap.

CHOCHO SAN: Trouble. Come here. Come here. Suzuki bring the

child to me.

SUZUKI: Oh, Baby.

CHOCHO SAN: Don't wail, cousin. The child is ours; will always be

ours no matter where he lives.

Suzuki leads the child to ChoCho San.

(cont)This sword belonged to my Great

Grandfather. He was a mighty warrior, a favourite of the Shogun. And he was faithful to the Shogun.

His son, my Grandfather was faithful to the Shogun; so faithful that when the Shogun lost everything, my Grandfather lost everything.

Everything, except this sword. It is a warrior's sword. When the eastern devils sailed into Nagasaki harbour my Grandfather was called before the Shogun, who disembowelled himself. My Grandfather went away to the privacy of his own garden and did the same. A noble and proud man who taught me many things about being a woman. It is better to be a man. A man has honour. Honour defines a man. But now I think it cannot be yours. Honour you will have to earn. It is a terrible thing to be a woman in Japan; a terrible thing. But you will always be my little boy.

No matter what anyone might say.

KATHERINE: What is she saying, Sharpless?

CHOCHO SAN: I also know, Mr Sharpless, that you did not come

alone.

SHARPLESS: No.

CHOCHO SAN: Ah. And how far behind you is he?

SHARPLESS: He's waiting at the gate.

CHOCHO SAN: Waiting? He is waiting. He won't be able to wait

long. Oh, such a weak man. I know about waiting.

SHARPLESS: I thought it best.

KATHERINE: Stop this talking. You must do something.

CHOCHO SAN: Then I shall wait some more. He won't be long.

Weak men can never wait too long.

SHARPLESS: I said I would come and get him.

KATHERINE: What are you saying, for lan' sakes? She has a

> sword. And the child. What could you possibly be talking about? Do something! You must tell her

why I am here.

SHARPLESS: She knows why you are here.

KATHERINE: But can't you see what she means to do?

CHOCHO SAN: You are like the foolish money-lender, Mr Sharpless, proud to be speaking to both the giver

and the taker. You can say to Mrs

B. F. Pinkerton that she can have her wish. I think she wants to be a mother. Not being able to be one herself, she has come to me. The eastern devil wants a favour from the little Japanese

woman.

SUZUKI: Oh Baby. Think about the future. What will you

do?

CHOCHO SAN: Hush hush, cousin. I think about nothing but the

future. Soon you will be able to sing and dance

until your robins come home to roost.

SUZUKI: Oh, Baby.

KATHERINE: Why is she crying? Sharpless, what did she

say?

SHARPLESS: Stay still, Katherine. Leave this to me.

PINKERTON: (off) Sharpless?

CHOCHO SAN: Ah. Now my little prickle in my sock, my love.

We're going to play a little game. You must get used to playing games now that you're going to

live in America.

SHARPLESS: ChoCho San. These are ones from another world.

PINKERTON: (off) Sharpless!

CHOCHO SAN: (taking a scarf from her sleeve) He'll be just

coming up to the laurel tree. Now my darling little boy, my soldier of the USA. Your father will be here soon and you must promise me to run into his arms the moment you see him. Americans like that. Tell Mrs B. F. Pinkerton that she can call the child hers but she will never feel his love: he from

another's womb.

**Pinkerton** enters. He and **ChoCho San** do not take their eyes off each other.

KATHERINE: Oh Benjamin, these women don't seem to

understand anything. I've been as plain as I can be. Even Sharpless is having little success and he seems to understand them. You must make them see that we are only here to make things better for them. And look at where they live. There is no furniture in the house, Benjamin. They don't even own a chair. She must be made to see that her momentary grief is a small fee to pay for a better future. And it seems, may I tell you, that the other

one does the caring, this one seems almost

indifferent to the kid.

SHARPLESS: Katherine, I think...

KATHERINE: Sharpless, he needs my support: he needs both of us to aid him through this. He is not the man I thought him to be.

Look at him!

CHOCHO SAN: Oh, my heart. It is so noisy. Can I breathe? All I see is your eyes looking at me. They look at me like mirrors. I cannot do it.

Butterfly. PINKERTON:

KATHERINE: What!?

SUZUKI: Oh, Mr. Sharpless, she has been ranting again.

SHARPLESS: Suzuki, I want you to promise you will be honest with me.

SUZUKI: It is Lieutenant B.F. Pinkerton's American wife?

Is this true?

SHARPLESS: Yes, Suzuki, they have come to take the child.

SUZUKI: But is it right to take a child away from its mother?

SHARPLESS: Is it wrong to give a child to its father? But there is something else you must do.

CHOCHO SAN: Ah, my husband, your little Butterfly has been fighting with the robins: three times they tried to build their nests but I destroyed them so they nest here no more.

PINKERTON: Oh, Butterfly, I feel so ashamed.

KATHERINE: Why do you call her that?

CHOCHO SAN: But you are here now. The past is now just a moment ago now that you are here. (touching him) Are you real?

PINKERTON: You make me feel so

small.

KATHERINE: You understand her?

SUZUKI: But this is little Blossom's home.

SHARPLESS: But you have no money. ChoCho San refuses to marry.

SUZUKI: She is already married.

SHARPLESS: But you need to live. How do you live? I can help you with this.

SUZUKI: We live. We work. We live.

SHARPLESS: But the boy is an American. He needs to live well.

SUZUKI: Blossom has two loves in Japan; in American, no loves.

SHARPLESS: Lieutenant Commander Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton is his father; has always been his father.

SUZUKI: Love cannot travel across the sea.

SHARPLESS: But what about you, Suzuki? You must at some time think of yourself. You must think of me as not just a friend but as a way out. You have a life of you own.

SUZUKI: They are like rice to me; like rice to me.

SHARPLESS: Rice is only one thing you need.

PINKERTON: Her words are gibberish to me but I have never been in any doubt about her feelings that inspire them.

KATHERINE: You're taking rubbish.

PINKERTON: It's different now.

KATHERINE: It is not different.

PINKERTON: I'm different now.

KATHERINE: I know who you are.

CHOCHO SAN: Are you my love's love?

KATHERINE: You are my husband.

CHOCHO SAN: Are they the same love?

KATHERINE: You are the same man.

PINKERTON: I'm not so sure.

CHOCHO SAN: Lieutenant B. F.

Pinkerton.

KATHERINE: Lieutenant Commander Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton.

PINKERTON: Katherine, I don't know now what to do.

KATHERINE: I know what you have to do. You told me what you have to do; what we have to do.

A mouthful of rice given with duty is food; a mouthful of

rice given with love is nourishment.

SHARPLESS: This is out of your hands, Suzuki.

SUZUKI:

SUZUKI: But you cannot come and just take, right or no right.

CHOCHO SAN: Do you remember you would not look away as I undressed.

PINKERTON: You were a plaything in my hands.

KATHERINE: You pleaded with me, you two men at my flanks. You two men, wearing different shades of guilt, coerced and cajoled me into this plan. I was not left a choice.

SHARPLESS: This will happen. You cannot stop it. But Suzuki. Suzuki!

SUZUKI: Mr Sharpless?

SHARPLESS: You have to think of your future. The child will go but what will you do then?

SUZUKI: The future is blank if the child is taken.

SHARPLESS: Your future could be my future, Suzuki.

SUZUKI: You want a Japanese girl?

SHARPLESS: I think it is time that I had a wife.

SUZUKI: You mean a girl?

SHARPLESS: I know you.

SUZUKI: You paid me, Mr Sharpless.

SHARPLESS: You pleased me, Suzuki.

SUZUKI: It was my business to please you.

SHARPLESS: You can please me still.

SUZUKI: Ah. You want a girl to call a wife.

SHARPLESS: Your years are few but your experiences are many.

SUZUKI: Love by night, Mr Sharpless, is different CHOCHO SAN: I wanted to hide but you would not let me.

PINKERTON: I thought of nothing beyond that bedroom.

CHOCHO SAN: The angry disappointments of my relations were ringing in my ears.

PINKERTON: I could not believe that something so small, soft and beautiful was really mine.

CHOCHO SAN: But their rejection gave me courage. Made me special.

PINKERTON: Because what I was doing was possible I thought it was right.

CHOCHO SAN: And I undressed for you.

PINKERTON: And you were everything every man said you would be. I decided to love you.

CHOCHO SAN: I bathed in your hot, hot eyes.

PINKERTON: But I hurt you with my country, my duty.

CHOCHO SAN: I did not know that desire could feel so safe.

You showed me a way out. You were both convinced that my Godgiven biology was at fault something I still haven't quite embraced, or believe. I will not be a fool to let two men of such weakness and unclear ambition derail a plan that will give me at last what I deserve. I flatter, I behave as a convivial guest and I get slapped and abused by a woman who knows what it is like to have a child but forgets, I think, what it is like not to have to have one.

Yes, I am a fine woman and I will make a wonderful mother. I could etch it on my forehead if I wasn't convinced that it is there already, in letters that shine. A million miles of ocean I might have travelled but I am still the woman who agreed to this man-hatched scheme and I will follow it through. And you said you loved me too. In a church. In front of my family and yours and everyone who ever believed you. Would that they were here now to see you, Benjamin, blubbering over a woman that none of them have ever seen or know anything about. What kind of treachery is that to a family? A family! It's a wonderful word and Kind of treachery is that to a family? A family! It's a wonderful word and one that has always

to love by day.	PINKERTON: I did not	sugared my mouth. And
	know that desire could be	that is all I want to do:
SHARPLESS: I'm offering	so blunt.	create one family from
you more than love.		where there is none. A
	CHOCHO SAN: I loved	noble task I would've
SUZUKI: Ah, eastern	you. I hated you. I loved	thought. Benjamin!
love.	you. I hated you. I loved	Sharpless! Do you see
	you. Like sunrise and	what I mean? The desire
SHARPLESS: No. My	sunset follows sunrise	for a family is the end
love.	and sunset.	result of all this
1.0.1.0.1		confusion.
	PINKERTON: I think I did	Yes?
SUZUKI: A love that	love you; have always	Stop.
makes me do as you say.	loved you.	3.00.
makes me do as you say.	loved you.	
	CHOCHO SAN: But now it	
		Will you stop2!
	is morning again. Always	Will you stop?!
	morning.	

CHOCHO SAN: And now, I think, a few storm clouds gather.

KATHERINE: (to the musician) Stop! Listen to me! Listen.

Silence

KATHERINE:

We all live in the same universe. I was raised by parents in a country with rules and beliefs, with an education and a way of doing things that we all agreed was the right way. Everyone lives in such a place. I travel a thousand miles to Washington to people I don't know but I understand what they do even if I don't agree with what they do. I travel a million miles to a place with trees, earth, air and water that laps on the sand and falls from the sky, just as it should, but here the rules are alien. I have love in my heart and a desire to see people prosper even when they don't believe me when I offer a way to make them prosper. But I'm not believed. This is puzzling, frustrating and totally unnecessary.

**Katherine** takes out the little American flag on a stick.

All I ask is for people to let me walk on their land, to simply get from here to there, to do no harm and - maybe, if I feel like it, if I can - to do some good. And, surely, if we wish to do good (and why wouldn't we?), we must be allowed to do good - otherwise there is no point; and to be allowed to do good we must teach them that our way is best.

# Katherine picks up the sword.

And it must be best because America is so successful and prosperous. We must urge them to this belief. We must charm them to this belief. This is what I want to do. This is what I know. It is called goodness. It is not too much to ask: to be allowed to do this. This woman is living in squalor and malnourishment and I come to this place to relieve her suffering and make it possible for her to find a husband and start a family just like I want to do. This is what women do. They make families. I see my actions as making two families where there are none. This is a noble cause and we Americans celebrate noble causes. Our history is studded with noble causes that we have fought for the right to fight for. This is what it means to do good in the world. We are free to do good in the world. We sing, us Americans, about freedom; we even sing of the choice of freedom so free are we. We sing about the right to choose between the 'land of the brave' or 'the land of the free'. This is freedom at its best. I was raised to believe this. It is a noble ambition and one that I, as a good American, will not shy away from. So my belief in my good work is undaunted and if I lose the respect of my weak-willed husband and his fickle friend I will yet gain a son.

I will buy him! I will buy him with good green American money that will change your life forever; that will give you a life of dignity and freedom despite your wish to stay in this hovel because that is what money can do. That is what American money can do. And I will bring up my husband's son to be a freedom-loving man with all the advantages and opportunities that my country can conjure. Yes, I will buy this little boy,

**Katherine** drops the sword and picks up the child; tidies and studies him closely.

this brave little boy, with his father's chin, and he will become an American hero; a plain speaking, god-fearing gentleman that anyone, everyone, will be proud of and want to be near. The half of you that is an American will be nurtured and polished like a silver cup to shine and dazzle all that come near you. And so they will no longer see, or remember, your unfortunate beginnings, so good, right and shiny will you be. Oh my little boy cradled here in my arms like a photo on the dresser in the parlor. Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton the Second. Oh, my darling, you will... you will be my...

**Katherine** studies him and re-arranges him in her arms and we can see that something is not right. She ruffles his hair, straightens his jacket, touches his toes. The music registers her concern, then her suspicion and then her realisation.

Eventually she walks over to Pinkerton and holds the child out to him.

The music builds...then stops.

(cont) It's a girl.

Katherine is alone.

(cont) It's not fair.

Blackout.

End of play.