

# DOUBLE VISION

*A Post-post-structuralist play in six twists*

By Eric Presland, from an idea by Robert Patrick

1987

## CAST

Gervase Cyril	A fading writer in his sixties. His lover, in his forties.
Jim Adam	An aspiring writer, in his twenties A possible lover, in his early twenties.
Eric Presland	An author

## SCENE

Two separate acting areas. In one, a faded chintz armchair, lit by a standard lamp. We imagine the rest of a panelled study. GERVASE, a man in his 50s, sits in a quilted smoking jacket with a large writing pad on his lap. He has the self-consciously dissolute, Byronic air of a professed 'artist'. There is a glass and a half-empty bottle of scotch at his feet.

In the other area, a Spartan modernist desk lit by an angle-poise. We imagine a high-rise flat with a view over the Thames. On the desk a word-processor<sup>1</sup> is being operated by JIM, a man in his early 20s. He is gym-toned, in a tight white t-shirt, because he knows the image he needs in order to become a best-selling author. He flosses obsessively.

The original production took place in the London Lesbian and Gay Centre in 1988, which is referenced on page 39. Alter this reference to whichever venue is being used in the production.

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<sup>1</sup> Those were the days!

DOUBLE VISION

*[As the lights come up, JIM is typing, while GERVASE is thinking, his hand hovering over his pad. Then GERVASE writes.:]*

GERVASE:           The young man stopped and read what he had written.

*[JIM stops and reads what he has written.]*

JIM:                 Gervase stared at the meagre few lines which his shaky hand had scrawled across the page.

*[GERVASE stares at the page.]*

As he did so, his fingers, Trembling, reached under the chair for the large glass of Scotch which lay there.

*[GERVASE reaches under the chair.]*

With the automatic skill which results from long years of addiction, the groping fingers found the glass and brought it to his thin, bitter mouth.

*[GERVASE puts the glass to his mouth.]*

Unfeeling, untasting, he gulped down the amber liquid on which he was so hopelessly, helplessly dependent.

*[GERVASE drinks.]*

With a cry of despair –

GERVASE:           Agh!

JIM:                 - he tore the page from the notebook, crumpled it, and threw it to the ground.

*[GERVASE does so.]*

In desperation he grabbed the bottle of Scotch and poured himself another generous tumblerful.

*[GERVASE does so.]*

The liquid sparkled against the hand-cut crystal. It was expensive crystal bought with the blood of his murdered talent, which churned out best-seller after public-pleasing best-seller. As he did so, a sardonic smile played around the corners of his ravaged mouth.

GERVASE: Jim nodded to himself in satisfaction.

*[JIM nods]*

This was good. In fact, this was the best he had ever written. From which you will be able to judge for yourselves, gentle readers, the standards of his previous outpourings. But Jim was not the sort of young man to entertain self-doubts. The word humility was not in his vocabulary. In fact, it was doubtful he could even spell it. He pauses to admire himself in the mirror by the side of his desk.

*[JIM looks out to the fourth wall]*

He squared his shoulders, patted his washboard stomach. "The Young Tyro at his Desk." He could have imagined the picture in the Times Literary Supplement, if he had heard of it. Instead he settled for the book page of *Gay Times*. He turned back to his work. No, this was not only good, it was great. And what is more, it seemed to be flowing from him as if he were merely the receiving medium for something greater than himself. He had dredged these dreary clichés from the sludge he called his soul, and because he knew no better, because he had experience of neither life nor literature, being at one of the new universities which are merely rebranded polytechnics, he mistook his hand-me-down stereotypes for High Art. And so the Young John Updike – for thus he liked to think of himself – returned to his task.

*[JIM starts typing again.]*

The words flowed onto the screen with the facility which comes so naturally only to the second-rate.

JIM: A laugh rose to his lips –

GERVASE: Ha!

JIM: Not so much a laugh as the forced escape of the pressure of oppression from the depths of his corset of self-disgust. Gervase had abandoned any trace of self-respect many years before. He was beyond any human feeling. It had been beaten out of him at his expensive public school, paid for in the blood and sweat of the exploited poor who had kept his family in luxury for generations. He laughed again –

GERVASE: Ha!

JIM: - and in the deluded fever of vigour brought on by alcohol, he plunged again to put his rambling thoughts and images on paper.

*[GERVASE starts writing again.]*

His pen scratched furiously at the paper. It was a pen of the finest jade with a solid gold nib, bought from the grandest pen shop in the Burlington Arcade, the fruits of his well-paid artistic prostitution. Spurred on by the dim consciousness in his befuddled brain, that time was running out in the long battle between himself and oblivion, he poured out his heart – no, not his heart, for heart he had none – his bile and spleen, projecting it with savage glee onto the helpless yet unconvincing puppets of his creation. His sense that his own youth had long-since passed, never to return, - spent to no purpose but to debase his once-great gifts to the pursuit of mammon – spurred him on, so that his pen was filled not with ink but with venom. It was a wonder that the page did not crumble to ashes beneath it, so acid were his outpourings.

GERVASE: *[Writing]* Venom... acid... The demands of genius on a great writer such as Jim did not extend to the niceties of avoiding a mixed metaphor. Jim felt himself possessed, as indeed he was. He was in love, not with writing, but

with the idea of being a writer. Being a writer – being a writer – what next?

*[JIM freezes at the keyboard.]*

He looked again in the mirror. Gosh he was handsome. *[JIM poses]* No – *[he scrubs that out]* Wow, but he was Hot. *[JIM changes his pose.]* He could stay there looking at himself for hours – or at least until I've had a piddle. This prostate is getting worse.

*[He exits, leaving JIM suspended in his pose. He returns.]*

GERVASE: Got it! You can always rely on the toilet to give you ideas. *{Starts writing again.}* So carried away with his creation was he that at first he did not hear the doorbell.

*[A doorbell rings. JIM carries on typing. It rings again. He notices the third ring.]*

GERVASE: He glanced at his Swatch. An exclamation rose to his lips.

JIM: Shit!

GERVASE: Six o'clock already. It was amazing how time flew when the sap was rising and the adrenolin was pumping. He looked in the mirror again to admire the fine contours of his flawless profile. Delicately he flicked the back of his mullet hairstyle so that it spread out more fashionably. Satisfied – self-satisfied – he answered the door.

*[JIM fits the actions to these words. A young man – ADAM – stands at the door with a bottle of wine. They are both awkward.]*

JIM: Hi!

ADAM: Hi! I'm not too early, am I?

GERVASE: Asked Adam anxiously

JIM: No, of course not.

ADAM: I got off work early from Peter Lord, see. I said I wasn't feeling very well, and Mr Wallace said I could go home. I'm sure he's homosexual. I think he fancies me.

JIM: And who could blame him?

GERVASE: Adam blushed at the cheap compliment.

ADAM: Give over.

JIM: Here, let me take that.

*[JIM takes the wine.]*

GERVASE: He took the bottle of medium sweet Europlonk, picked at random from the cheaper end of the shelves of Fine Fare. He bore the unpalatable fermentation to the kitchen.

*[JIM exits.]*

JIM: *[Off]* I'll let it chill in the fridge.

GERVASE: He called.

JIM: It should be just right by the time dinner's ready.

GERVASE: This he had vaguely read somewhere was the thing to do with white wine. Adam looked round the room. He paused at the Blues Boys calendar on the wall. A young man in boxer shorts was taking a shower and looking appealingly vulnerable. Adam approved. This was an affirmation, for him and for Jim. It was their kind of youth. Their delicacy, their beauty, their sensitivity immortalised on glossy 10 x 15s. They had arrived, they were desirable, they were New Men; which is, if the truth be told, nothing more than the same old men, but with hair gel. But Adam and Jim were not blessed with self-knowledge. To themselves they were cute, caring and full of Soul. And They Were Good. Ha!

*[JIM re-enters and stands behind ADAM.]*

JIM: Do you like him?

ADAM: Too right.

JIM: He looks a bit like you, you know.

ADAM: Get away!

GERVASE: Adam, pleased but embarrassed, turned away to the desk.

*[ADAM does so. He picks up a book from the table. It is Gore Vidal's 'Duluth'.]*

ADAM: Any good?

GERVASE: He asked, less out of interest than to change the subject. Unusually for his generation, he did not like talking about himself. This endeared him to Jim, who did not like competition.

JIM: It's very funny. And savage.

GERVASE: He tried to sound as if he knew what he was talking about.

JIM: Vidal describes it as a post-post-structuralist novel. Do you know what that means?

ADAM: I don't even know what structuralist means –

GERVASE: Neither do I...

*[He gets out of his chair and returns with a reference book.]*

ADAM: - let alone – what you said.

JIM: It's not that difficult really. Structuralism is a kind of criticism which insists that literature, like language, has inherent meaning and that its forms are self-referential, so that in order to understand any one work, such as a novel like *Great Expectations* –

*[GERVASE is mouthing the words as he reads them/JIM says them.]*

- It is first necessary to understand the whole, in this case, the nature of the novel itself. On the other hand, post-structuralism is – is –

*[He pauses, waving his hand vaguely, playing for time, while GERVASE flicks through the book to find the right reference.]*

GERVASE: Post-modern... post-mortem... post office... post-Renaissance ... Ah – Post Structuralism!

JIM: is... is the belief that all forms of criticism are equally valid – including structuralist criticism – and that the first requirement of understanding is to deconstruct the text,

GERVASE: I don't understand a word of that.

ADAM: I'm afraid I don't understand a word of that. I guess I must be pretty thick.

JIM: Of course you're not.

GERVASE: Said Jim, without much conviction.

JIM: It's pretty complicated, actually. One day when you've got a whole weekend spare, I'll explain it properly.

ADAM: What about this post-post – what you said?

JIM: Oh, that's just Gore Vidal's joke. It's a theory he builds the novel on, which is that when characters leave one novel, when the author kills them off or sends them away, they're free to turn up in any other novel; also, that any character can appear in any number of fictions simultaneously, because there are only so many characters and plots to go around. So in *Duluth*, there's the story in the town of Duluth, and there's a soap opera *Duluth*, a bit like *Dallas*, and there's also a historical romantic novel called *Rogue Duke*, and all the characters drop into one and out of the other – oh yes, and an American politician called Senator Hubert Humphrey, who was big in the 60s, turns up somewhere in a time warp, but I forget where. It's all pretty crazy. I guess you have to read to understand it.

GERVASE: Hmm. "Guess"? [*Writes again*] Jim always found himself reaching for Americanisms when he was aroused. And he was aroused now, by Adam, who stared at him with fascination. He had never heard anyone talk like this before. Coherently. Indeed, in the sort of loud discos which he habitually frequented, it was rare to hear anybody talk at all. But Jim... Jim, he felt, he could sit and listen to for hours. He knew so much, he had read so widely – one book at least, and all the way through. He had so much experience of life.

ADAM: Did you learn all this at College?

GERVASE: Adam asked.

JIM: I read a lot. It's important for a writer to have a sense of tradition.

GERVASE: Oh yes, my little peacock pillock. Yes indeed.

*[He pauses. ADAM and JIM stare at each other uncertainly.]*

GERVASE: Not enough information... Where did they meet? How did they get here?

ADAM: How did I get here?

JIM: On the bus like everyone else?

GERVASE: No, no, no.

*[He crosses out what he has written.]*

ADAM: What am I doing here?

JIM: *[Worried]* I invited you to dinner. Don't you remember?

GERVASE: Too clumsy, too obvious. *[He crosses out again.]*

ADAM: Strange. When I saw you across the dance floor at *G-A-Y*, I could sense immediately that you were Sensitive.

JIM: How?

ADAM: I don't know. A look in your eyes, I suppose. Something about the way you studied people.

GERVASE: Ha! He was cruising! [*He slaps his own wrist*] Stop it, Gervase.

ADAM: I didn't mean anything sexual; it was just as if you wanted to fix them in your mind.

JIM: That's it. That's exactly it.

GERVASE: Jim's eyes sparkled with excitement. Could it be that, amongst the posers and the toy-boys, he had, miraculously, found a soul-mate?

JIM: I noticed you at once, of course. The minute you came in. But I couldn't do anything because of the crush.

ADAM: It takes fifteen minutes to get across the bar, it's so crowded.

GERVASE: Or so I've been told by the Houseboy.

ADAM: Anyway, I was at *G-A-Y* with Cyril.

GERVASE: I didn't write that!

JIM: Who's Cyril?

ADAM: Nobody. Just a man I know. But I couldn't – it wouldn't have been fair – just to leave him.

JIM: I know. But at least I managed to give you my telephone number in the loo.

GERVASE: *[Considering]* A bit forced, but let it pass. It'll do.

JIM: I haven't shown you the view, have I? Come over here. Look.

GERVASE: Adam followed him onto the balcony. A vista of East London from Wapping to Greenwich lay before them.

ADAM: Wow!

JIM: These high rises have their advantages. That's the river there. You can just see it.

ADAM: Where?

GERVASE: Was it chance or was it design? Jim moved close to Adam so Adam could look down his arm in the direction he was pointing.

JIM: Just by that warehouse with the crane. See?

ADAM: Oh, yes.

JIM: At the weekend you can see the coloured sails of the yachts on the marina.

ADAM: It's beautiful.

GERVASE: Both could feel the warmth of each other's body. Should they move apart? Dare they move apart? Jim's hot breath was on the back of Adam's neck. Adam shuddered with delight at the feel of it. He felt a stirring in his massive loins...

*[GERVASE has turned himself on. He starts playing with himself, leaving ADAM and JIM standing. Despite his best efforts, GERVASE can't get a rise. He huffs in disappointment, returns to his pad.]*

GERVASE: Jim moved away.

JIM: And that's Greenwich Park over there. You see that dome in among the trees? That's the Observatory. You can just imagine Halley sitting up there at night three hundred years ago, making his observations on the comet by candlelight, a bottle of port at his elbow.

ADAM: You've got a wonderful imagination.

JIM: I love history.

ADAM: So do I. It's so – so – so old.

JIM: I know what you mean.

*[GERVASE is still turned on, despite his impotence. He cannot help it. He tries again.]*

GERVASE: Jim returned. Adam's warm glow seemed to spread through Jim. It grew with intensity, a furnace of desire.

It was too much for Jim. His senses were overpowered by the heady fumes of the new Calvin Klein Obsession for Men. Fiercely he took Adam in his strong arms and kissed him, there, on the – on the – on the balcony, not caring if the neighbours were watching or not. They clung together. Fire burned in their lips and tongues.

*[Again there is nothing going on down below. GERVASE this time reacts with anger, then sadness]*

GERVASE: And so they stood, oblivious of the way in which fire inevitably turns to ashes.

*[He sips his Scotch thoughtfully, then pulls himself together.]*

GERVASE: Eventually, reluctantly, they broke apart.

ADAM: I've been wanting to do that ever since I saw you.

GERVASE: Said Adam.

JIM: Me too.

GERVASE: Still their eyes devoured each other hungrily. The sexual electricity between them could have powered the whole of the Isle of Dogs. *[He stops himself.]* But a cold wind blew all the way from Wanstead Flats and broke the spell. Adam shivered slightly.

ADAM: What's for dinner then?

GERVASE: He asked.

JIM: Do you know, I haven't even thought about it. I've been so wrapped up in this novel I'm writing, it just went clean out of my head.

ADAM: You're writing a novel?

GERVASE: Adam was wide-eyed...

ADAM:                    *[Wide-eyed]* You're writing a novel?

GERVASE:                He was torn between jealousy and admiration. He did not like the idea of taking second place to a word processor, and he knew literary geniuses thought only of their work. And yet the fact that his prospective lover was a Writer filled him with pride. It was so romantic. Perhaps Jim would write about Adam, and he too would achieve immortality – besides being able to read about himself in print. And to have a relationship with a writer was proof of – nay, a testimony to – his, Adam's, own delicacy of feeling.

ADAM:                    That's a fine thing. You invite me on our first date, and then completely forget about it.

GERVASE:                A knowing smile lit up both their faces. Again their mouths sought each other, passionate, engulfing.

*[ADAM and JIM kiss again.]*

GERVASE:                *[Determined to quell his rogue eroticism]* Thus each thrust from his mind the knowledge of the cruel realities of the world which each knew, subconsciously was waiting for him. Outside lay Responsibility, Employment, Politics, Economics. A harsh and unforgiving world. *[Looking down at his rebellious groin.]* Will that shut you up?

They didn't want to think about it. Adam came to a decision. If he was to love Jim, he must love his work also. And since he couldn't beat this Great Novel, he must, ignorant as he was, join it.

*[The kiss stops.]*

ADAM:                    How's it going?

GERVASE: Adam asked brightly, with as much appearance of intelligence as he could muster.

JIM: What?

ADAM: The novel. How's it going?

JIM: Pretty good, actually.

ADAM: Can I see it?

JIM: No. Really. It's not finished.

ADAM: That doesn't matter.

JIM: I hate to show people anything before it's finished. And this is only the first draft.

GERVASE: He made it sound as if he was going this sort of thing all the time. In fact, it was the first time he had ever shown anything he had written. And he was dying to show his work to this oh-so-appreciative audience.

ADAM: It must be really marvellous. You have such talent.

JIM: No... really... I couldn't....

GERVASE: Just one more little push, Adam.

ADAM: I'd feel privileged, honest. I wouldn't say anything nasty.

JIM: No, you must be absolutely honest. If you don't like it, you must say so,

GERVASE: In other words, just you dare...

JIM: A writer can only learn from other people's opinions – constructively expressed, of course.

GERVASE: Oh, wash your mouth out with soap and water, little Jim.

ADAM: I've never seen a real manuscript beforew.

JIM: It's not a manuscript. It's on disk. On the Amstrad.

GERVASE: With this name-dropping, he switched on the machine and pushed a few buttons. A text appeared on the screen.

ADAM: Is that it?

JIM: Yes.

ADAM: And I can read it?

JIM: Well, OK. But I can't bear to watch you. It's too embarrassing.

GERVASE: "So modest", thought Adam.

JIM: Tell you what. I'll go into the kitchen and start making supper. Do you like Chinese?

ADAM: Love it.

JIM: Good. I'll just knock up a stir-fry in the wok. I've got a few bits and bobs lying around. It won't be much, I'm afraid.

GERVASE: It sounded wonderful. Was there no end to this man's talent. A genius at the computer, a virtuoso of the wok, a paragon of the gym...

JIM: Put some music on if you want.

ADAM: Thanks.

*[JIM exits]*

GERVASE: Adam cast his eye over the record collection [*Pause for thought, crosses it out*] CD collection.

[*He picks up a copy of the Daily Telegraph and flicks through.*] What's popular in the album charts? What would someone like Jim listen to? Morrissey? Prince? Barbra Streisand?

[*Writes again*]

Adam wasn't interested in Jim's taste in music. It was the words, the precious words, that called him. He sat down at the screen and read the fruits of Jim's all-consuming labours.

ADAM: [*Reading*] The old man paused and thought. The flash of energy brought on by alcohol was spent; briefly it had flickered through the furred arteries, washed through the wasted liver. A look of doubt came into his bleary eyes. It was competent – wasn't it? At best it was competent. He thought back to *City of Fire* which he had written thirty years before, and which had so nearly won him the Somerset Maugham Prize for new authors. Compared to that, this was a mere squib, a doodle in the margins of his previous achievements. Never again would he rise to such heights. His powers were spent, wasted by alcohol, squandered on the stereotypes of the second-rate TV series which had now become second nature to him. Above all, crushed by the all-pervading cynicism which had sprayed its deadly paraquat all over the garden of his soul. He thought back over the lines he had just written, which, however pallid, still conveyed through their limp cadences a pale reflection of the sexual intoxication his characters enjoyed. And which he no longer did. There were stirrings in his loins no longer. Desire did not propel his loins as in years of yore. He had forgotten the meaning of the word 'love'. It had died for him a long time ago. He was finished. Washed up. And he knew it. He reached under the chair again.

*[GERVASE does so]*

ADAM: He poured himself another full tumbler of Scotch in a last desperate attempt to recapture the elusive powers for which he was searching. Silently Cyril entered the gloomy, oak-panelled study, a suitcase in his hand.

*[CYRIL enters to GERVASE]*

He stood watching Gervase as he gulped at the fierce spirit which was both his comforter and his destroyer. A look of what might have been pity flitted across Cyril's still-handsome features. But it was swiftly replaced by stony resolution.

CYRIL: I'm leaving you, Gervase.

ADAM: Cyril said. Gervase turned unseeing in his armchair, the glass still in his hand. As he did so, the notebook in which he had been writing fell unregarded in his lap.

CYRIL: I can't stand it any more, Gervase. All the lies, all the deceit. All the hurt, all the humiliation. I have to leave you. Can't you understand?

GERVASE: After all this time? After all we've meant to each other?

ADAM: Gervase knew – he had known for so long – that the situation was hopeless. But still he had to make one last desperate plea.

GERVASE: Couldn't we -

CYRIL: No.

GERVASE: Shouldn't we –

CYRIL: No.

GERVASE: Can't we –

CYRIL: No.

GERVASE: Didn't we –

CYRIL: No.

CYRIL: Don't we –

GERVASE: We might –

CYRIL: No.

GERVASE: We must!

CYRIL: Which part of 'No' do you not understand? Do I have to spell it out for you? N – O. No.

GERVASE: How can you do this, Cyril? After everything that we've been to each other.

CYRIL: You already said that.

GERVASE: No I didn't. I said 'After all we've meant to each other'.

CYRIL: Sorry.

ADAM: Humiliated again, Cyril thought. Gervase tried to row back on his crushing pedantry.

GERVASE: Don't worry, it'll come out in the second draft.

ADAM: It was no use. In despair Cyril cried unto – unto? – [*looks again*] unto himself. Why oh why was it always him who was in the wrong. Gervase bit his lip. Why did he always have to say such hurtful things. They always seemed to rise unbidden to his lips, propelled by a force outside himself. But, once spoken, they could never be recalled. He stammered –

CYRIL: I – I – I

ADAM: - trying for once to express a little of the feeling he usually so ruthlessly repressed.

GERVASE: I – love you, Cyril. Yes, even after all this time. After all we've been through. You know I've always loved you. Passionately. Devotedly. Doggedly. Heart-breakingly. Mind-numbingly. Overwhelmingly,

CYRIL: Over-adverbially.

ADAM: No, that's a note in the margin.

GERVASE: There's never been anyone else.

CYRIL: What about Mark? And Patrick? And Finn? And Alex? And Ivor, and Noel, and Wylan. And the Triorchy Male Voice Choir?

GERVASE: That was different. That was the Eisteddfod. You know what bedlam they are.

CYRIL: You can always say no.

GERVASE: I couldn't get out of it. It wouldn't have been polite. All those men, none of them ever counted. There was only ever you. Deep down.

CYRIL: I'm sorry I couldn't go that deep. I didn't have a diving bell. And what about your books? What about your damned books? Night after night you sit there, staring into the fire. Poking it with a stoker.

ADAM: I think that must be a misprint.

CYRIL: You talk to yourself, you scribble away in those bloody notebooks, drinking yourself silly.

GERVASE: It's not too late. I can change. You'll see. Yes, I'll change. I'll give up drink. I promise I will. Look...

ADAM: Gervase picked up the still-open Scotch bottle and tried to pour the remains of his drink back into it.

*[GERVASE starts to do so.]*

ADAM: His hands trembled, and most of it spilled onto the carpet.

CYRIL: You're spilling it all over the carpet. Don't be such a bloody fool.

*[GERVASE makes a pathetic attempt to mop it up.]*

ADAM: Gervase made a pathetic attempt to mop it up. Cyril pushed him aside.

CYRIL: Stop that. Here, let me do it.

*[He takes a handkerchief out of his pocket and mops up expertly. As he does so:]*

CYRIL: My whole life has been spent following you around with a mop and a bucket.

GERVASE: I can do it. I can manage without this, as long as I have you still. You'll see. I'll pull myself together again. We'll go away. Yes, that's it. A long holiday. We haven't had a holiday in ages. We'll go to Greece – or Tangier, perhaps – you always liked Tangier –

CYRIL: It's too late for that, Gervase, and you know it. There was a time when it might have worked out. Before we both got tired and cynical.

ADAM: *[To himself]* No, that's wrong. Cyril isn't cynical, I know he isn't.

GERVASE: You're not cynical. Whatever you've been, you've never been cynical.

ADAM: That's better. *[Reads again]* For a moment Cyril felt a spasm of the old tenderness he had had for his companion of so many years. But he suppressed it ruthlessly.

CYRIL: For you it is too late.

*[He stands up from the floor]*

CYRIL: And that's the last time I clean up for you. Ever. I've still got some hope. Some life. If I can get out now, I can still –

*[A pause. GERVASE and CYRIL freeze.]*

ADAM: Damn! *[Calling to JIM]* How do I get to the next page?

JIM: *[off]* What?

ADAM: I've run out of text. How do I turn it over?

GERVASE: *[To Cyril]* Excuse me, I've just thought of something. I've got to write it down.

*[He picks up his notebook.]*

GERVASE: Jim came in from the kitchen, wiping flour from his hands onto a plastic apron.

JIM: Let me see. Right. You press that. And that. And up it comes. Easy.

GERVASE: Already it seemed as if Adam had always been there. Jim dropped an arm lightly over his shoulder, and kissed him softly on the top of his head as Adam greedily devoured the words.

CYRIL: Stop it!

ADAM: Screamed Cyril.

CYRIL: You're doing it again!

GERVASE: But I must. Before I forget...

CYRIL: Put that damned pad down while I'm shouting at you.

ADAM: Gervase let the manuscript fall from his nerveless grasp.

CYRIL: For once in your life you're going to listen to me, Gervase. Twenty years of my life I've given to you. I've looked after you, I've been your secretary, your editor, your best critic, your cook, your houseboy –

JIM: Role-play, see –

CYRIL: You're too old to be a houseboy, Cyril.

ADAM: Snarled Gervase. His damned tongue again. He regretted it instantly. Age was the one thing neither of them joked about. Cyril's lower lip trembled, and the tears welled in his eyes.

GERVASE: I'm sorry.

CYRIL: All right. I know I'm not young any more. But whose fault is that? You've made me what I am. I used to be bright, attractive, intelligent. When I was young, I could have been anything. But no, I had to meet you. I had to fall under the spell of the Great Novelist. The evil spell. I had to get sucked in –

GERVASE: You liked being sucked –

CYRIL: Don't be cheap. I had to cater to your every whim, because genius must be pandered to – yes, pandered to!

That's why I've got to get out. Before you destroy my soul as well as my body.

GERVASE: But you can't leave me like this!

CYRIL: Leave you?!

ADAM: Cyril laughed a bitter laugh.

CYRIL: Ha, ha, ha! That's it. That's exactly it. You, you, you. That's all you care about. Well, I'm thinking of me for a change. I'm not yet fifty. I've still got a life in front of me. I'm good for another thirty years at least.

GERVASE: There's – someone else. Isn't there?

CYRIL: Maybe...

JIM: I don't remember writing this.

GERVASE: Who is it?

CYRIL: None of your business.

JIM: I'm sure this isn't right.

GERVASE: Who is it? Tell me. I've got a right to know.

CYRIL: His name's Adam, if you must know.

JIM: This isn't my writing. What's going on? Who's Adam?

GERVASE: Who's Adam?

JIM: Adam's your name! Have you been fiddling with this?

ADAM: What's that smell? Almost like burning...

JIM: Christ, the wok!

*[He rushes out.]*

CYRIL: It doesn't matter who he is. He's irrelevant. I'd be leaving you whether there was someone else or not.

GERVASE: Don't give me that. You couldn't go to the lavatory without someone to give you permission.

CYRIL: That's what you think. Just imagine. I've got thirty years to be my own master; to make my own friends; to bring home whoever I want to bring home.

GERVASE: Whomever. Object not subject.

CYRIL: Stop it. No-one says whomever –

ADAM: Quite right, Cyril.

CYRIL: I'll be able to cook and eat what I like, when I like. I won't have to make boring conversation to your dreary literary friends at publishers' cocktail parties. I won't have to ferry you to TV studios at ungodly hours. I won't have to rustle up intimate little snacks for your agent, your publisher, your interviewers. The histess with the moistest, that's me. But not any more. Bigger Melvyn Bragg, that's what I say. I'm not tiptoeing around in case I disturb your labours ever again. What is it this time?

*[He sees the notebook and picks it up.]*

ADAM: Cyril picked up the tattered notebook and flicked through it.

GERVASE: It's nothing, really. Just a few notes. It's not even in chronological order. I'll sort it out later. Maybe it'll turn into something...

ADAM: Why was it that Cyril always made him feel so apologetic about his work? He always had done. A blinding revelation came to him.

*[GERVASE smites his head.]*

It was Cyril's fault. All of it. It was thanks to Cyril that he had come to this pass. Cyril, his 'best critic'/ Cyril whose belittling judgements over the years had been steadily chipping away at his self-confidence and his talents, like the steady drip-drip-drip of water which can wear away rocks over the passage of centuries.

GERVASE: Put that notebook down, Cyril!

ADAM: There was a new sharp urgency in Gervase's voice.

CYRIL: *[Reading sarcastically]* Jim returned with two plates of steaming vegetables coated with a glutinous brown sauce.

GERVASE: You wouldn't understand it. You've never appreciated my work.

ADAM: There was cold fury in his eyes.

JIM: All ready! I managed to save most of it, though one or two of the courgettes may be a bit charred at the edges.

CYRIL: He placed the plates on the table by the word processor.

ADAM: It smells wonderful.

CYRIL: Said Adam. And indeed it did. To him. Love can produce the strangest of alterations to the palate.

JIM: The vegetables are organic of course. I'm heavily into macrobiotics.

ADAM: Me too. I practise them every morning for half an hour.

- JIM: I'm pretty much a vegan. I can't bear to think of animals suffering.
- CYRIL: This compassion did not extend to sparing the world his literary attempts. *[To GERVASE]* Gervase, that is cheap. *[Reading again]*
- JIM: I'll just get the wine. It'll be nice and chilled.
- CYRIL: He disappeared back into the kitchen. Adam's eyes returned almost involuntarily to the screen. He was of a generation that, if there was an image to watch, had to watch it. A screen junkie with nothing but a withered imagination to show for his addiction.
- ADAM: Cyril turned to Gervase in disgust.
- CYRIL: Is this it?
- ADAM: He asked, incredulously.
- CYRIL: Is this all there is to show for your days and nights alone here with your Scotch? Just impotent senile rantings at the failings of the young, masquerading as social comment and strung together on an apology for a plot? It's pathetic.
- GERVASE: I told you that you wouldn't understand. Give it here.
- ADAM: Shouted Gervase, and leapt to his feet. The precious Scotch bottle went flying. Gervase fell to his knees to bring it upright before it spilled its priceless contents. Cyril danced round him, flicking over page after page, taunting him with his recitation, while Gervase desperately licked the carpet.
- CYRIL: Jim returned with the chilled bottle of Liebfrauplonk and two cheap tumblers of the kind which garages give away with gallons of petrol.

JIM: That should be just about right.

CYRIL: He said

JIM: Then there's one thing left to make it all perfect. Hey, switch that light off and push it to one side, will you?

*[ADAM does so.]*

CYRIL: Jim opened the drawer of the desk and pulled out a candle in a holder. He placed it on the table between them and lit it. A faint scent of roses wafter across the room. He filled the two timblers.

JIM: Here's to us –

CYRIL: He said.

ADAM: To us -

CYRIL: Echoed Adam obediently. Their eyes held, luminous in the candlelight, and each thought, this is the start of something wonderful.

GERVASE: Not like that. You're reading it all wrong.

JIM: Do you want to know how it goes on?

CYRIL: Asked Jim, his mouth full.

JIM: *[Spooning in some noodles]* Do you want to know how it goes on?

ADAM: Please...

JIM: Well, this is just rough, of course. I haven't got it exactly right, it's just an outline.

ADAM: Sure.

JIM: Well, Gervase is still on his knees with the bottle. He clutches it to him, like – like a mother clutches her baby to her breast. And he calls out in anguish.

GERVASE: Please, Cyril, stop. That's enough. I can't stand it.

JIM: He's begging, see. And Cyril gives in.

CYRIL: All right. You win. Here's your precious manuscript.

JIM: He tosses it contemptuously at Cyril's feet.

CYRIL: I wish you well of it. I hope it brings you the kind of happiness which I have obviously failed to provide.

JIM: He goes to the door.

GERVASE: Please, Cyril, please. Don't go.

CYRIL: It's no use pleading, Gervase. I'm leaving you forever, Gervase. This is final, Gervase. My mind is made up, and cannot be unmade. Goodbye, Gervase. Goodbye.

JIM: And with that he sweeps out of the room without so much of a backward glance.

*[CYRIL exits]*

Gervase is left on his knees alone in the huge old mansion.

ADAM: It's a mansion, is it? I didn't realise. I thought it was an old flat somewhere like – Kilburn.

JIM: Kilburn??

ADAM: Somewhere posh but crumbling, you know. But what do I know? Go on.

JIM: The wind howls through the desolate rooms, and Gervase shivers with cold.

ADAM: That's wonderful.

JIM: Wait. That's not it yet. Not quite anyway. His eye is drawn once more to the notebook. He picks it up and looks through it once more, trying to decide whether there is anything – any tiny little bit – that is worth saving; worth living for.

*[GERVASE does so.]*

JIM: How's your stir-fry.

ADAM: Bona.

GERVASE: No, that's not right.

*[He corrects the line.]*

JIM: How's your stir-fry?

ADAM: Brill.

GERVASE: That's better.

JIM: Then, you see, in order to keep his mind off what's just happened, he starts scribbling again, by the dying light of the embers of the fire. The chill of death has come upon the room, but he doesn't notice.

ADAM: He knows that he has to finish it off that night – before he finishes himself off!

JIM: Exactly! You should be a writer too! Before the last desperate act which is his final acknowledgement of the futile despair of his existence.

BOTH: Suicide!

JIM: Exactly!

GERVASE: Their eyes sparkled as they looked at each other over the candle. This was rapport of the rarest kind, thought Jim. He was not yet old enough to have realised that it was only the shallowest of minds which think alike. The brown mess of the stir-fry lay before them, congealing.

JIM: It's almost there, you see. Just that last little step to take. And then it's finished, actually finished.

GERVASE: No more talk of 'first drafts' now, such was Jim's conceit.

ADAM: That's amazing. Well, if you're that close to the end, you must finish it. Now.

GERVASE: He pushed the brown mush to one side, and hauled the word processor in front of Jim, admiration oozing from every naïve pore. Not for one second did he take his eyes away, as he mentally urged his toy boy lover on to new heights of supposed creativity.

JIM: *[Typing]* Gervase stopped for a moment. How cold the room was now. And dark. And cheerless. The wind resounded in the fireplace, it seemed to echo through the chambers of his mind, bringing half-remembered images of a skeleton, a scythe, a monk's hood –

ADAM: Like *Monty Python's Meaning of Life!*

JIM: I was thinking of *The Seventh Seal*. I like to throw in these references, and I saw it on BBC2 late night. Till I fell asleep.

ADAM: *The Seventh Sea?* Is that a wildlife film?

GERVASE: Too much... too much... *[Crosses it out, writes again.]*

JIM: *[Typing]* Desperately Gervase wondered, Was there no other way out?

ADAM: Yes. Go on.

JIM: Gervase reached for the bottle.

*[GERVASE does so.]*

There was no need for pretence any more. No need to fool himself or anyone else that the bottle was anything other than his master, his god. He unscrewed the top, and poured the liquid neat down his throat. The spirit seemed to bypass his stomach and go directly to his brain. He shuddered with his whole being. Then withdrew into himself, coiling like a spring before launching into one supreme effort, before ending it all.

GERVASE: We'll see about that. *[Thinks]* Suddenly the screen of the word processor went blank.

ADAM: What is it? What's gone wrong?

*[The lights begin to fade on GERVASE's area. By the time of his next speech, he is in darkness.]*

JIM: It's gone!

ADAM: What do you mean, gone?

JIM: I've lost it. The screen's just gone dead on me.

ADAM: It can't do that.

JIM: It just did.

ADAM: But – how?

JIM: How the hell should I know? One minute it was there and the next it had disappeared.

ADAM: You mean – all of it?

JIM: See for yourself. I can't get anything. The bloody thing's just –

GERVASE: *[Off]* What's the word? It's a technical word. And this little tosspot would know it. What is it? 'Crashed', that's it!

JIM: The whole bloody thing's just crashed.

ADAM: But it can't just vanish into thin air.

JIM: That's exactly what it has done, I tell you. 350 pages. Five years' work. All up the bloody spout.

GERVASE: *[Off]* Frantically Jim pressed button after button, but the screen remained obstinately dark. Of the great masterpiece, not a fragment could be found.

ADAM: You can always get it repaired.

GERVASE: Adam tried to be encouraging. It was not the right thing to do.

JIM: That won't bring the novel back, you airhead.

ADAM: But you can remember it, surely.

JIM: But I'll have to do it all over again.

ADAM: That doesn't matter.

JIM: Doesn't matter?!

ADAM: I mean, the important thing is –

JIM: How would you know what's important? Five bloody years....

ADAM:                   There's no need to shout.

JIM:                     I'll shout if I want to.

ADAM:                   Well don't shout at me, shout at your Amstrad. It's not my fault.

JIM:                     Oh, isn't it?

GERVASE:               *[off]* A flicker of suspicion crossed Jim's mind.

JIM:                     I should never have let you loose on that thing.

ADAM:                   I never - !

JIM:                     I'm not saying it was deliberate. Maybe accidentally. Show me what you pressed.

ADAM:                   I don't know what I pressed. I can't remember.

JIM:                     Think, damn you, think.

ADAM:                   Maybe you should –

JIM:                     Shut up. I'm trying to think. Five years. Five bloody years.

ADAM:                   I'm only trying to help.

JIM:                     If you want to help, then fuck off.

ADAM:                   And fuck you too!

JIM:                     Do I have to spell it out to get it through your thick head, you space cadet? The best way you can help me is to clear out and let me work this out for myself. In other words – fuck off!

GERVASE:               *[Off]* Ah! Young love! So pure, so deep. So fragile.

ADAM: All right then. I'm going back to Cyril.

GERVASE: *[Off]* Where did that come from?

JIM: Why don't you do just that? Book it, and good riddance.

ADAM: You're hateful. Stupid, arrogant, conceited, vain, overbearing, self-important, egotistical, puffed-up, big-headed and smug.

GERVASE: *[Off]* Some day he was going to make somebody a lovely thesaurus.

ADAM: And I hate you.

*[ADAM exits]*

GERVASE: As he rushed down the bare concrete steps of the high rise, there were tears in Adam's eyes. Jim, alone, turned to his word-processor with a look of grim determination on his face.

JIM: I know you're in there somewhere...

GERVASE: *[Off]* We'll see about that.

JIM: Back to first principles. What could have caused it?

GERVASE: *[Off]* I suppose you might call it a power surge.

JIM: Now...

*[He presses buttons]*

GERVASE: *[Off]* Wrong!

JIM: Well if it's not that....

*[Presses more buttons]*

GERVASE:            *[off]* Can't catch me!

JIM:                 It's got to be here somewhere.

*[He presses everything at once in desperation]*

GERVASE:           *[Off]* Better hurry. There's not much time.

*[JIM is hysterical now, savaging the keyboard.]*

GERVASE:           You're not even getting warm.

JIM:                 Oh, please, please. God in Heaven, I'll believe in you if you'll only bring it back.

GERVASE:           *[Off]* What foolishness this technology is! At least if I am to lose what I have written, I shall do it on purpose.

*[There is the harsh sound of paper being torn in two. The lights on JIM start to dim too.]*

JIM:                 Come on, come on.

*[He shakes the Amstrad roughly.]*

GERVASE:           If I am to die drunk, ignominiously and alone, then –

*[Another tear – lights continue to lower.]*

- at least, Samson like –

*[Another tear, stage almost in darkness]*

I shall make sure that the temple comes crashing down with me, dragging the rest in my wake.

*[The steady tearing of pages. The stage in blackness. The Communards "Don't leave me this way" swells. There is sudden silence. A spotlight comes*

*up at the back, between the two room areas. It is slightly other-worldly. Enter CYRIL into the spotlight.]*

CYRIL:                   Where am I? I don't remember this... We didn't rehearse anything...

*[He looks out the front, shading his eyes. As the actor:]*

Look, I'm terribly sorry about this, but my mind's a complete blank. What am I doing in this scene? What's my motivation?

ERIC:                   *[Off, sonorous and commanding]* Just relax. Be yourself.

CYRIL:                   But who am I?

*[ADAM enters to him]*

CYRIL:                   How the hell did you get here?

ADAM:                   I've had a dreadful time. You wouldn't believe it. I've been walking the streets for miles. I was just so angry. Then I saw this notice in the window, "London Lesbian and Gay Centre". It seemed to be calling me, so I came in. I've never been here before.

CYRIL:                   Me neither.

ADAM:                   I just came in to have a look round. They were very nice on the desk. Then I saw you'd signed yourself in.

CYRIL:                   Had I?

ADAM:                   They told me you were down here in the basement<sup>2</sup>.

CYRIL:                   I wasn't expecting you.

ADAM:                   I wasn't expecting you.

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<sup>2</sup> Rewrite this section for different venues.

CYRIL: In fact, I thought I'd lost you. After you left me at G-A-Y.

ADAM: I'm sorry. But it's not all my fault. It's not easy, having an affair with a man who's spoken for.

CYRIL: You mean, Gervase? That's all over now. You needn't worry. You're not the Other Feller any more.

ADAM: You mean, you've left him.

CYRIL: It wasn't easy. There was a hell of a scene. You know what Gervase is like, especially when he's pissed. Bette Davis one minute, Lana Turner the next.

ADAM: I don't know who they are, but it sounds awful.

CYRIL: It was. Seriously awful. *[He shudders]* I still feel a bit guilty.

ADAM: Don't.

*[He puts an arm round CYRIL's shoulder to comfort him.]*

JIM: *[Off]* I didn't write this. This isn't my novel. What's one of my characters doing in someone else's work?

GERVASE: *[Off]* Never mind your characters, that's my lover you're talking about. And he seems to be doing very nicely, thank you, with one of my characters.

JIM: *[Off]* You're a fine one to talk. What about my lover Adam?

GERVASE: *[Off]* You mean my character. He was never really your lover, you know. Mere infatuation. It would never have worked out.

JIM: *[Off]* How do you know?

GERVASE:           *[Off]* I know the ending. Sex – it never goes the distance.

JIM:                 *[Off]* Well it certainly didn't for you.

GERVASE:           Twenty years? That's not bad. Depends what your definition of 'last' is.

JIM:                 And what about all the bits on the side? The Triorchy Male Voice Choir?

CYRIL:             It feels like an amputation, you know. A great big hole, where once there was twenty years.

ADAM:             You'll get over it.

CYRIL:             I know. It's just, I don't know where to go from here. I'm not used to making decisions. I'm out of practice.

ADAM:             You can move in with me. If you want. Just till you get your own place sorted out. Whatever,

CYRIL:             You're very kind. Nobody's ever been really kind to me. Gervase never thought of anybody but himself.

GERVASE:           *[Off]* That's not true!

JIM:                 *[Off]* Isn't it?

ADAM:             Writers! They're all the same. Mine was just like that too. Obsessed. I thought he was really something at first, but he just liked the idea of being a writer. He didn't have any talent. Even I could see that.

JIM:                 *[Off]* That's not true!

GERVASE:           Isn't it?

ADAM: I could see if it came down to choosing between me and his Amstrad, he'd choose that machine any time. Then I realised what you must have been through. You know, you have the most beautiful sad eyes.

CYRIL: Sad? They're just bloodshot.

ADAM: Don't put yourself down.

CYRIL: Because there's plenty of others to do that for me.

ADAM: Cut it out. I'm not Gervase, right?

CYRIL: Sorry. Matter of habit. But – I just know that I don't deserve even five minutes' happiness with someone like you.

ADAM: There you go again.

CYRIL: What?

ADAM: 'Worth' – 'deserve'. For Chrissake, if we all got what we deserved, we might as well go and jump off the roof of the Centre right now. Here – *[puts out his hand]* – I'll show you what you 'deserve'.

*[He pulls Cyril towards him, and kisses him.]*

GERVASE: *[Off]* Look! They're kissing! That's not in my plot!

JIM: *[Off]* Nor mine, I assure you.

GERVASE: *[Off]* You can't do that with my lover.

JIM: *[Off]* My character. Look, just stop it, will you?

GERVASE: *[Off]* I'm not doing anything. It's you and your damned word processor.

JIM: *[Off]* My Amstrad broke, remember?

GERVASE:           *[Off]* The programme crashed. That's the word. I looked it up. I was rather pleased with it.

JIM:                 *[Off]* Oi! You two! Just cut it out, will you?

GERVASE:           *[Off]* Someone throw a bucket of cold water over them. Whatever else I write, I do not write pornography.

JIM:                 *[Off]* Are you sure about that?

*[ADAM and CYRIL break for air.]*

GERVASE:           *[Off]* That's better. I thought it would never stop.

ADAM:              You know what I really like about you, Cyril?

CYRIL:              What?

ADAM:              You actually care what I think. You listen.

CYRIL:              Well, what you think is rather flattering, isn't it?

ADAM:              It's not just that, don't be cynical. If I said I thought you were making a complete fool of yourself by leaving Gervase, what would you do?

CYRIL:              I don't know. I –

ADAM:              Would you go back to him?

CYRIL:              No...

ADAM:              But you'd have a second think, wouldn't you? You'd talk to me about it, right?

CYRIL:              I suppose so.

ADAM:              You see? You take me seriously.

- CYRIL: Yes. Yes I do. And you take me seriously too.
- ADAM: Most people think I'm just a toy boy. I hate that word. Everybody thinks that just because I've got looks, I haven't got anything else.
- CYRIL: It is rather unfair to have everything, you know.
- ADAM: Don't joke.
- CYRIL: I'm not joking. It's all about pigeon holes. Youth equals sex, and that's it.
- ADAM: But there's so much more, unless you see it through the eyes of someone like Gervase.
- CYRIL: Of course there is. Just as there's more to me than a pair of glasses and a cardie.
- ADAM: I think your cardie's quite sexy!
- CYRIL: You're in a minority of one. I've been stood here over an hour, and nobody's come up and commented on my sexy cardie.
- ADAM: I stand around in bars too. Sure, they look at me. And they think, "I couldn't half give that a poke". Or they think, "If I talk to him, he'll think I'm trying to pick him up," or "He couldn't possibly be interested in me, I'm not good enough."
- CYRIL: That last one is familiar.
- ADAM: Attractive is what attractive does, Cyril.
- CYRIL: Is that deep?
- ADAM: I don't know.
- GERVASE: *[Off]* I've never heard Cyril talking like this.

- JIM:                    *[Off]* I didn't know Adam had that sort of thoughtfulness in him.
- GERVASE:            *[Off]* Yes. That's a turn-up for the books.
- JIM:                    *[Off]* Book. Just one book. You were only writing one book.
- CYRIL:                People don't even glance at me. They just walk past, looking straight ahead. They don't even know I'm there.
- ADAM:                You don't take care of yourself. You don't dress properly.
- CYRIL:                I'm too old for acid-washed jeans. Or parachute pants.
- ADAM:                I didn't mean that.
- CYRIL:                But – I don't want you to be ashamed of me, Adam.
- ADAM:                What on earth are you talking about?
- CYRIL:                I don't want you to feel that you have to apologise for me. For being with me, when we're out together. Like that time at "The Bell". I know I looked a fish out of water.
- ADAM:                No, you've got that all wrong. That was me. I thought I wanted – what everyone else wanted. Because everyone else wanted it.
- CYRIL:                Maybe it's better that way.
- ADAM:                Safer, but not better.
- GERVASE:            *[Off]* Funny. Cyril never spoke to me like that.
- JIM:                    *[Off]* I don't recognise Adam either. Are you jealous?

GERVASE: *[Off]* Madly.

JIM: *[Off]* Me too.

ADAM: All the lovers I've ever had –

CYRIL: All the lovers...?

ADAM: Okay, both the lovers I've ever had wanted to own me in some way. Or show me off. Parade me around as a matching accessory. Jim didn't even want that, it seems. All he wanted was an admiring audience.

JIM: *[Off]* No!

CYRIL: Gervase didn't even want that. I'm not sure what he wanted really. Lord knows it wasn't sex. Or companionship. I think he just wanted to be comfortable. And having me around made him feel comfortable. Like an old doormat to wipe your boots on.

GERVASE: *[Off]* That's not true, it's not.

ADAM: Forget them. Forget both of them. It's all water under the bridge. They might as well both be dead.

GERVASE/JIM: *[Off]* No!

CYRIL: It's not as simple as that. Not for me anyway.

ADAM: I know. *[Pause]* Hey, it's getting cold. Let's get out of here.

CYRIL: Let's go home.

ADAM: Home?

CYRIL: *[Firmly]* Your place. Home.

ADAM:                    *[Laughing]* Right. Right.

*[They put their arms around each other and walk slowly out.]*

GERVASE:            *[Off]* No! Come back!

JIM:                    *[Off]* You can't just leave us like this.

GERVASE:            *[Off]* Can't you do anything?

JIM:                    *[After a long think]* I can't write it down but it might just work. *[Ad lib storytelling]* "Suddenly Cyril was overcome by a fit of remorse. He thought of Gervase sitting alone by the dying embers" – Come on, Gervase.

GERVASE:            "A sudden pang of guilt pierced Adam's heart; he longed to see Jim once more. Perhaps they could try again..."

*[Pause. The stage remains obstinately empty.]*

It's not working.

JIM:                    "Abruptly Cyril tore himself from the young man's arms..." *[Again nothing]* It's not my script, I tell you. It must be yours.

GERVASE:            "Adam rushed away from Cyril, and hurried home to Jim" – it's not my script, I didn't write any of this.

JIM:                    Well, if you didn't write it, and I didn't write it – who did?

ERIC:                    *[Off, booming and breathy]* I did.

GERVASE:            *[Off]* Who are you?

ERIC:                    *[Off]* My name – isn't – Orson Welles.

JIM:                    *[Off]* We demand a rewrite.

GERVASE:            *[Off]* That's right. Get out that pen, whoever you are.

ERIC: *[Off]* I don't write with a pen. *[Ham]* I write in blood.

GERVASE: *[Off]* Don't be such an old drama queen. That's my department. *[Commanding]* Rewrites – and make it snappy.

ERIC: *[Off]* No need to get upset. It's only a play.

GERVASE: *[Off]* It may be only a play to you, but it's life and death to me. If you remember, I was about to be topped ten minutes ago.

JIM: *[Off]* Come on, fair's fair.

ERIC: *[Off]* Who are you to talk about fair? You treat Cyril like shit, you treat Adam like shit, you treat each other like shit. Not an ounce of respect between you.

GERVASE: *[Off]* But I'm an artist. I'm entitled to.

JIM: *[Off]* Right. That's what artists do. If you don't put your art first, how can you be a genius?

ERIC: *[Off]* I don't quite know how to put this to you, Jim – but you are not a genius. Maybe, if you're lucky, a competent jobbing hack. But genius? No. Sorry.

GERVASE: *[Off]* He certainly isn't. The sooner he gives up writing and gets a proper job, the better. That's how my novel was going to end.

JIM: *[Off]* And you're a real writer, I suppose.

GERVASE: *[Off]* I've made a substantial living at it at least. And I like to think I've gained a certain modest recognition.

JIM: *[Off]* You call that writing? Adapting Barbara Taylor Bradford for Television miniseries. Turning it out by the yard. That's not writing that's making bog-paper.

- GERVASE:            *[Off]* You wouldn't understand. You haven't got the experience of life. You have to make compromises. But underneath you remain true to yourself. Anyway Barbara and I were like that! That woman has grit, like me.
- JIM:                    *[Off]* Your trouble, you've got nothing to remain true to. Admit it.
- ERIC:                   *[Off]* Who's being fair now?
- GERVASE/JIM:       *[Off simultaneously]* Of course it's fair. I know him. I wrote him. – Hang on, you didn't write me. I exist independently. I demand the right to a life of my own. I can think for myself. - No you can't. You're my creature, nothing more. – You mean I'm just a character in your novel? – Right!
- GERVASE:            *[Off]* Wait a minute, If I'm just a character in his novel, and he isn't a genius, then I'm but a shallow stereotype...
- ERIC:                   *[Off]* Shallow? Ha! Wait till you see the reviews...
- GERVASE:            *[Off, self-pitying]* A pale cliché who stubbornly refuses to come to life.
- ERIC:                   *[Off]* I can see it in *Time Out*.
- GERVASE:            *[Off]* But I'm more than that. I know I am.
- ERIC:                   Now do you see how Adam and Cyril felt?
- JIM:                    *[Off]* But if he's my character... and I'm his character...
- ERIC:                   *[Off]* And all of you are my characters...
- JIM:                    *[Off]* Whose character are you?

- ERIC: *[Off, singing]* Jesus Christ, Superstar
- GERVASE/JIM: *[Off, simultaneous]* Get away! And you thought I was conceited.
- ERIC: *[Off]* I'm my character too. I invented myself for dramatic purposes.
- JIM: *[Off]* Ah! But according to the post-post-Structuralist theories of *Duluth* "any character can appear in any number of fictions simultaneously".
- ERIC: *[Off]* So what?
- JIM: *[Off, firmly]* Write him in, Gervase. Then write him out.
- GERVASE: *[Off]* I don't understand.
- JIM: *[Off]* Make him your character too.
- GERVASE: *[Off]* Of course. But I've torn up my notebook. You tore up my notebook.
- JIM: *[Off]* Sorry. I'll write you another one. Start again.
- GERVASE: *[Off]* No. You write him. My mind's a blank.
- JIM: *[Off]* I can't. The Amstrad's crashed, right? I can't start it up again till you start it up.
- ERIC: *[Off]* What are you two plotting?
- GERVASE: *[Off]* Para-noia!
- JIM: *[Off]* I can help you by writing some of it in my head, like before. Listen... Gervase suddenly leapt to his feet.
- GERVASE: *[Off]* Yes! I'm on my feet...

JIM: *[Off]* The scotch bottle was forgotten. He went to the sideboard and drew out a fresh pad.

GERVASE: *[Off]* Got it!

JIM: *[Off]* His mind was full of a haunting fresh image which would not go away. What was it? He did not know. All he knew was that he had to write it down, that it was a starting point. For what? Only time and his fertile imagination would tell.

GERVASE: *[Off]* The recording session was going well. It was for Radio Three, where no-one can hear you scream. The deep resonant voice purred hypnotically into the microphone. The huge mysterious figure was pouring out his innermost thoughts in a stream of consciousness, the like of which had never been captured on tape.

ERIC: *[Off, deep, breathy]* ...The thought of death haunts our waking and our dreaming, the strand of black which only serves to throw the rest of the pattern into high and sharper relief. And yet, that black...

GERVASE: *[Off]* Who was he? Nobody knew. All that they knew was that he was not Orson Welles. Suddenly he stopped in mid-sentence and stepped back from the microphone.

ERIC: *[Off, at a slight distance]* What are you doing?

JIM: *[Off]* Gervase's pen sped surely across the page.

GERVASE: *[Off]* A look of horror came over the stranger's face. He gasped with surprise.

*[ERIC gasps]*

GERVASE: *[Off]* He turned to view his attacker

ERIC: *[Off]* Who...?

GERVASE:            *[Off]* But before he could complete the sentence, he slumped lifeless to the floor.

*[Ghastly death rattle from ERIC]*

A fish-gutting knife of the kind only used in the Shetland Islands protruded from between his shoulder blades. Slowly a pool of blood began to form.... Is that satisfactory? It's from a book spin-off from *The McGruder Files*.

JIM:                    *[Off]* Was that any relation to *The Paedo Files*?

GERVASE:            *[Off]* Behave yourself.

JIM:                    *[Off]* Sorry. In his booth, the sound engineer leapt to his feet –

GERVASE:            *[Off]* Murder!

JIM:                    *[Off]* He exclaimed

GERVASE:            *[Off]* This looks like a case for McGruder of the Yard!

*[Hurry Music]*

*[Off]* Join us for the next exciting episode at the same time next week.

JIM:                    *[Off]* Or maybe not.

GERVASE:            *[Off]* I don't think we want to go down that route. But we got rid of him...

GERVASE/JIM:      *[Off]* And that's teamwork.

JIM:                    *[Off]* Where were we?

GERVASE:            *[Off]* I don't know about you, but I was on my knees in the dark, pissed out of my skull and about to top myself.

It wasn't a very appetising prospect. So I shut you down. You can see why, can't you?

JIM: *[Off]* Yes...

GERVASE: *[Off]* We need each other.

JIM: *[Off]* If we don't help each other, nobody else will.

GERVASE: *[Off]* Face it, nobody likes writers. They think it all comes magically out of the air and onto the page while we just sit around.

JIM: *[Off]* They think actors make it up as they go along.

GERVASE: *[Off]* Give me a chance. Let me make choices. Let me live.

JIM: *[Off]* I should listen more. I must hear the voices...

GERVASE: *[Off]* Like Joan of Arc?

JIM: *[Off]* Don't you start?

GERVASE: *[Off]* I don't know why I said that.

JIM: *[Off]* It's not that bloody author come back from the dead, is it? Listen, you, if we hear one more peep out of you, you'll get a stake through your heart!

ERIC: *[Off, sheepish]* Sorry.

GERVASE: *[Off]* I must not prejudge. I mustn't assume the worst. I must let the characters breathe...

JIM: *[Off]* We know what we have to do now.

GERVASE: *[Off]* Back to work?

JIM: *[Off]* Yes.

GERVASE:           *[Off]* Just one thing. You won't kill be off, will you?

JIM:                 *[Off]* No, I promise.

GERVASE:           *[Off]* What about a sequel?

JIM:                 *[Off]* Don't push your luck.

GERVASE:           *[Off]* I promise I'll be very interesting.

JIM:                 *[Off]* And my book? By the way, I didn't tell you the title. It's called *The Withered Muse*.

GERVASE:           *[Off]* You can change that for a start. How about *The Swimming Pool Library*?

JIM:                 *[Off]* You haven't got a swimming pool.

GERVASE:           *[Off]* I have got a library. This is fiction for God's sake.

JIM:                 *[Off]* If you think so...

GERVASE:           *[Off]* It's a great title. I guarantee it'll win the Somerset Maugham prize – unlike me.

JIM:                 *[Off]* Really?

GERVASE:           *[Off]* Of course, you may have to change your name...

JIM:                 *[Off]* Anything.

GERVASE:           *[Off]* You know, it all seems a bit pointless now. Shallow.

JIM:                 *[Off]* Even so. It's better to finish it off.

GERVASE:           *[Off]* True. And there's always the next one. New eyes, new possibilities.

JIM: *[Off]* The choice is with you.

GERVASE: *[Off]* Thank you. Yes, it must definitely have a happy ending.

JIM: *[Off]* Much better than a sad one. Positive images...

GERVASE: *[Off]* Exactly.

JIM: *[Off]* Nothing wrong with a bit of gay romance...

GERVASE: *[Off]* I can always put it out under a pseudonym. Randi Alexander. With an 'I'.

JIM: *[Off]* And yes, you can have your sequel.

GERVASE: *[Off]* Promise?

JIM: *[Off]* Promise.

*['Don't Leave Me This Way' starts softly, growing louder.]*

GERVASE: *[Off]* The engineers had fixed the power outage at Wapping.

JIM: *[Off]* Do you like that word? 'Outage'. I thought it made you a bit more savvy.

GERVASE: *[Off]* Love it. The lights came back on.

*[The lights come up on the original areas. JIM at the word processor, ADAM at his side. GERVASE on his knees alone in the room.]*

JIM: Gervase looked at the bottle. He was alone now. There was no need to pretend any more. Just one swig. The temptation was overwhelming. For a long agonising moment he hesitated, then with a great cry –

GERVASE: No –o-o-o-o-o

- JIM: He threw the bottle away in disgust, far across the room. It smashed against the wall.
- GERVASE: *[To JIM]* No, not that. Someone will have to clean it up.
- JIM: Oblivious to the fate of the bottle, he seized his pen, lost in thought.
- GERVASE: Adam gazed fondly at the extraordinary man that fate had thrown in his path.
- JIM: He began writing, possessed with a new-found sense of confidence and purpose.
- ADAM: Yes,, yes.
- GERVASE: Cried Adam in extacy.
- JIM: He may have been alone in the world, but by God he would show the, He still had the fearsome talent which would have won the Somerset Maugham prize but for the vicious literary feuds of the time.
- GERVASE: Kingsley Amis –
- JIM: Exactly.
- GERVASE: Jim's fingers flicked across the keyboard as if guided by demons. Adam watched with amazement as the masterpiece took shape before his eyes.
- ADAM: *[Reading]* With the utter surety of a lifetime's experience Gervase etched the situation in a few dazzling strokes. Deftly he wove the loose ends of the plot.
- GERVASE: It was so nearly finished. The suspense was agonising.
- ADAM: Hurry, darling, hurry

GERVASE:               Whispered Adam.

JIM:                     So absorbed was he that he didn't hear the silent  
footfall behind him.

*[Re-enter CYRIL to GERVASE]*

It was Cyril. Dear faithful, loyal Cyril. Suddenly he was  
aware of the familiar presence He turned in his chair.

GERVASE:               Cyril!

JIM:                     He gasped with joy.

CYRIL:                 I've come back. I couldn't leave you.

GERVASE:               I know,

JIM:                     Said Gervase softly

GERVASE:               I know.

JIM:                     For a second he hesitated, but it was only for a second.  
He knew that, much as he cared passionately about his  
work, there was a time for Life and there was a time for  
Art. Carefully he laid the precious notebook to one  
side.

ADAM:                 Oh, symbolism, I love it.

JIM:                     And took Cyril in his arms.

*[CYRIL and GERVASE embrace]*

ADAM:                 Is that it?

JIM:                     Almost.

GERVASE:               I'm so glad you came back.

CYRIL: I just couldn't do it.

GERVASE: I realise now that without you I am nothing. All my books, all my talent – I owe it all to you. I'll never take you for granted again

CYRIL: Darling! How could I have been so blind?

GERVASE: Angel!

JIM: But even as they embraced, Gervase couldn't quite overcome the habits of a writing lifetime. His mind was still churning, working out the last, fine unforgettable sentence. He would change, as much as he could, but beyond that, he could do no more.

ADAM: Is that it?

JIM: Yes, that's finally it.

*[JIM and ADAM embrace excitedly]*

ADAM: It's wonderful. It's magnificent.

JIM: I'll send it off to a publisher first thing in the morning.

ADAM: Just think! Your own first novel.

JIM: Hardback, then paperback.

ADAM: Movie rights

JIM: The Booker Prize

ADAM: Serialisation

JIM: A Book at Bedtime!

ADAM: And always I shall be there by your side.

JIM: Wait! There's just one thing I've forgotten.

ADAM: What? Oh, I know.

*[JIM turns back to the computer.]*

ADAM: No, let me. Please.

JIM: OK, go ahead. *[He makes way for ADAM]*

ADAM: *[Sitting at the Amstrad]* And now I'll always know I wrote a part of your masterpiece. *[He types]*

GERVASE: The Ant

*[ADAM looks and corrects]*

CYRIL: The Ent

ADAM/JIM: The... End...

GERVASE/CYRIL: The – End.

**BLACKOUT**

