Poor, Cankered Hearts: A Dramatic Exploration Of The Elizabethan World View

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POOR, CANKERED HEARTS

a

DRAMATIC EXPLORATION

of the ELIZABETHAN

WORLD VIEW

by

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March, 1983
This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the Department of English.

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3-19-83
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This play is the result of my meditations on the conflicting forces that shape society. Like our age, the Elizabethan Period was caught in the winds of profound change: the Medieval Age was dying, while the Modern Age was yet powerless to be born. In the face of these conflicting viewpoints, the Elizabethans did the best they could to synthesize and integrate these several world views. This synthesis, called the Elizabethan World View, is a way of looking at the world. The Elizabethans used it. Shakespeare used it. It is not necessary in my viewpoint that this particular world view with all of its mythological trappings and out-dated notions be adopted. It is my concern that people should adopt some world view, if only to keep their sanity in this world of shifting values. Though this particular world view is outdated, I adopted it because it stresses values and has enough variety to still appeal to an audience. My aim is to show that we might bring ourselves some peace in this age through adopting a world view.

A drama requires more than a world view, however. A drama requires conflict. I am indebted to Dr. Eric C. Hansen of the Carroll College History Department for the suggestion that I might cast my drama around the conflicts surrounding the suppression of the English Monasteries by Henry VIII, circa 1535. This subject, so well documented by the late David Knowles in
his authoritative work Bare Ruined Choirs certainly merits dramatic attention.

It is not necessary that a play written from the Elizabethan World View should be about Elizabethans. Indeed, this play is set years before the outlook was popularized. But this is also the case with Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar. It is also beside the point that this drama should be written in the dialect of the day. The reader will see that this play is written in modern English. If the reader will suspend dis-belief, I think he will perceive the ideas and feel the exact emotions I wish to convey by this means.

I am indebted to my Director, Mr. Henry Burgess, and my Readers; Dr. Joseph Ward and Fr. Jerry Sullivan for all of their kind effort, suggestions and time. I thank my housemates at the "Hightower Hilton, and Management," for their inspiration, understanding, and valuable criticism, especially Doug Dellwo, who has given this project undivided attention, even when my personal interest waned. I thank my brother Jim for the use of his office equipment, and his criticism and support. Ultimately, any merit this work has is due to the influence of my parents. I thank them for raising me to seek values. It is to my Mom and Dad that this thesis is lovingly dedicated.

Joseph Kujawa
March 19, 1983
...God's and kings rebels have the same good cause, 
To trample down divine and humane laws; 
Both wou'd be call'd Reformers, and their hate, 
Alike destructive both to church and state: 
The fruit proclaims the plant; a lawless Prince 
By luxury reform'd incontinence, 
By ruins, charity; by riots, abstinence. 
Confessions, fasts and penance set aside; 
Oh with what ease we follow such a guide! 
Where souls are starv'd, and senses gratify'd. 
Where marr'age pleasures, midnight pray'r supply, 
And mattin bells (a melancholy cry) 
Are tun'd to merrier notes, encrease and multiply. 
Religion shows a Rosie colour'd face; 
Not batter'd out with drudging works of grace; 
A down-hill Reformation rolls space. 
What flesh and blood wou'd croud the narrow gate, 
Or, till they waste their pampered paunches, wait? 
All wou'd be happy at the cheapest rate.

John Dryden
"The Hind and the Panther"
PRIOR LAWRENCE: Head of the controversial Priory of St. Anselm, the Prior is overcome by his tragic faults, a blind idealism and trust. He is a tall, forceful man who takes his beliefs seriously.

OSWALD: An ambitious novice, determined to advance himself at all costs, he finally realizes the cost is his own soul.

COOK: A superstitious part of the "old guard" who is forced to become involved.

The OLD ABBOT: Disillusioned by change, he is yet an idealist like the Prior. He has, through his long life, learned to temper idealism with caution.

BEDE

ARTHUR

NICKOLAS

THEODORE

THOMAS CROMWELL

HENRY VIII

RICHARD LAYTON, THOMAS LEIGH, KNIGHTS, SOLDIERS, JAILERS AND ACCOMPANYING EXTRAS

London, and Northern ENGLAND

1535 A.D.
POOR, CANKERED HEARTS

ACT I: SCENE 1

The setting is the Priory of St. Anselm in northern England, circa 1535. At RISE, PRIOR LAWRENCE enters with a train of postulant monks on their first tour of the monastic grounds...

PRIOR

Under ordinary circumstances Brother Nickolas, our Novice Master, would be showing you the grounds. But, since he is away on an errand you'll just have to put up with me. Over here you can see our fields; not too impressive, but adequate... and there, our fish pond. I hope you like fish? In spite of the "New Ways" we eat little flesh here. And of course we have a dairy.

OSWALD

Father? We don't all have to work in the fields, do we?

PRIOR

Why? Do you have some defect or handicap? You appear sound.

OSWALD

I am used to working with my mind. Physical labor goes against the
PRIOR
I don't know what kind of monastic life is lived where you come from, young man, but as a member of this house you will learn to do many things that "go against the grain". Are there any other questions?

THEODORE
I thought monks prayed all the time. That's all I want to do: pray.

PRIOR
Naturally prayer is the chief vocation of a monk. It is the road to perfection...

THEODORE
From what I've seen the monks around here work most of the day!

PRIOR
What did you say your name was, my son?

THEODORE
Theodore. Theodore, Father.

PRIOR
Very well, Theodore. I will teach you how labor may become prayer.

(At this point the COOK rushes up)
COOK
This has got to stop!

PRIOR
What, Brother?

COOK
This theft, for God's sake! I was taking the King's Commissioner through the cellar; for the inventory, you know, and here were empty wine flasks strewn all about. Everything in disarray. It looked bad, very bad...

PRIOR
For goodness sake, come aside!

(Out of hearing of POSTULANTS)

How many bottles lost?

COOK
This time, nine. Our best wine.

PRIOR
Did the Commissioner say anything?

COOK
He chuckled somewhat at the spectacle. Of course, I acted like it hadn't happened before.
PRIOR

Good. One can’t say what myths these King’s men will write in their reports. Just to be careful, see that the Commissioner and all his aids receive double portions at meals and every convenience. Have a brother groom their horses. Finally, put a guard on that cellar door!

COOK

But Father! Everyone is already overworked! These Royal Commissioners eat like their horses; require stewards to wait upon them at all hours; they can barely piss by themselves! I can’t spare anyone to watch the cellar. Not now.

PRIOR

Very well.

(Gesturing toward the POSTULANTS)

Come here.

(Addressing POSTULANTS)

I know you’re all new here, and haven’t even had time to find your cells, but, frankly, we are short on manpower due to the Commissioner’s inventory, and I need someone reliable for a special task...One that requires alertness!

COOK

Father! We can’t put a new man in charge of the cellar!
PRIOR

Shush! Brother. After all, we live in "progressive times," and we must learn to trust everyone, isn't that so? Even the French. Ah...Now, who is the one who doesn't like gardening?

(OSWALD steps forward)

What is your name, my son?

OSWALD

Oswald, Father.

PRIOR

Do you think, Oswald, that you can keep awake long hours, or does that also "go against your grain"?

OSWALD

Most recently I had been employed as a messenger for a wealthy merchant. I carried messages and valuables, often by night.

PRIOR

Serving a wealthy merchant is more lucrative than the ascetic life of the monk, surely. Why have you come here? Were you dismissed?

OSWALD

No, Father. I left of my own choice, much to my master's distress.
PRIOR

That doesn't seem very loyal, to me.

OSWALD

One grows tired of the pursuit of riches... One sets his compass to other, more exalted goals...

PRIOR

Ah! And what do you hope to accomplish in your new life?

OSWALD

The perfection of virtue; the full use of my God-given talent, of course.

PRIOR

Of course. Like a nip, now and then, do you?

OSWALD

Beg pardon?

PRIOR

Drink. Do you like to drink?

OSWALD

Perhaps a small amount of wine at meals. That is all.
PRIOR

Truly?

OSWALD

A messenger who drinks often falls victim to robbers. Personally I can't abide drunkards.

PRIOR

Good! An uncommon opinion in a very common age. Young man, stay with this Cook. He has an important task for you. Take care of him, Cook. And now, the rest of you men follow me and I'll show you where to sleep tonight...

(Exit PRIOR and other POSTULANTS)

COOK

Well, boy, what are you doing, dreaming?

OSWALD

He's a curious man.

COOK

Who? The Prior? He is, unfortunately, an idealist. Now the Abbot: there's a practical man; spends his time running around the countryside visiting his other priories, that is, when he's not sitting in Parliament pulling strings. In fact, he's in London now. Probably having himself a good time, too...
OSWALD

When will I meet the Abbot?

COOK

Not for a long time. He generally stays near London. But you be on your toes when the Prior's around. He doesn't permit any funny stuff. He's old fashioned, you know. Strictly by the Rule. You'd think we were Carthusians for God's sake!

OSWALD

You don't like the Prior, do you?

COOK

You kids are so full of damnable questions! The Prior just lives in another time, is all. Come on.

(Exit COOK and OSWALD. Enter two brothers: BEDE and ARTHUR, escorting BROTHER NICHOLAS; with rakes and other garden implements.)

BEDE

What did you see while you were in London, Nick?

ARTHUR

Yes, tell us.
NICKOLAS

Naturally I did the job I was sent to do. I delivered the Prior's letter to the Abbot.

BEDE

Then...?

NICKOLAS

Then?

BEDE

Then what did you do, you know, on the sly?

ARTHUR

He means how many whores did you visit?

NICKOLAS

(Mock indignation)

For shame, Brothers! To suggest that I, a holy monk of God, should be found in such company reeks of blasph-

BEDE/ARTHUR

Truth!

NICKOLAS

Well, if you must know...
I'll wager it was the light-haired one.

You lose already, Brother. It was, shall I say, an entirely new experience. Excelcimus!

Ho ho ho!

Silence! Here comes the Prior.

(They use their rakes.)
(Enter PRIOR)

Dominus vobiscum, Fratres!

Et cum spiritu tuo, Pater.

All hard at work... Nickolas! Back at last! I hope you had no trouble?
NICKOLAS

No, Father. The Abbot had a few chores for me to do. He detained me a little while. He sends his blessing.

PRIOR

Good. But did he send a reply to my letter?

NICKOLAS

No.

PRIOR

Strange.... Well, when you finish here Nick, could you place some mats in the dormitory. We've some new postulants.

NICKOLAS

Yes, of course, Father.

PRIOR

Good! Peace to you all!

(Exit PRIOR.)

BEDE

New postulants...yuck!

NICKOLAS

Thrilling! Damn them all!
BEDE
Everytime we get things set up our way he's got to bring someone new in.

ARTHUR
He thinks we're a bunch of saints like himself...

NICKOLAS
Soon enough we'll oust him. And anyone else who gets in our way, including these new boys.

ARTHUR
Don't let your feelings cloud your judgment, Nick. A better plan would be to have them join us.

BEDE
Yeah! Show 'em one good time and they'll hate the Prior like us.

ARTHUR
Hate won't do the Prior in, fool. He's well armed against it. But love...love can penetrate the thickest shield.

BEDE
He's so righteous I hate his every word, his every breath, his every heartbeat!
What was in the Prior's letter?

The Prior is worried about some gossip he's heard. Wanted to know what the feeling was in London.

Gossip? Feeling?

There's talk about change in the monasteries. The Prior, naturally, hopes this means reform: back to doing things strictly by the Rule.

Reform! I'll quit before we go back to the old ways.

Where would you go, fool?

But the Cardinal already tried a reform. Look where it got him.

Wolsey was a papist. But Cromwell accomplishes what he sets out to do. That's a polite way of saying he's a bastard.
ARTHUR

How did the Abbot react to the Prior's letter?

NICKOLAS

He just put the letter in his desk. Then he offered me a drink.

That reminds me...

(NICKOLAS fishes a flask of wine
from beneath his cowl.)

Here. Drink.

ARTHUR

So you're the one's been taking the wine! Don't you know the
Cook has been biting everyone's head off about it?

NICKOLAS

Do you think I'd waste my time stealing wine?

BEDE

Then where'd you get it?

NICKOLAS

Before I left for London I was in the cellar getting provisions. All
of a sudden that old coot, the former Abbot, stumbled out of a
NICKOLAS, (contd.)

corner, dead drunk. Since he'd been so generous as to help himself, I made him give me a bottle on condition I wouldn't report him to Prior Lawrence.

BEDE

So he's a drunk?

NICKOLAS

Damn near.

BEDE

Sick! Sick! Sick! Wait'll the Prior finds out.

NICKOLAS

You tell the Prior and I'll personally cut your tongue out! I've never had a better supply.

BEDE

Ok, ok! Seal of confession.

ARTHUR

I've always respected a man who liked to drink.
NICKOLAS

Oh, Arthur, you've always "respected" any man too much. Do you
"respect" any of the new postulants?

BEDE

Aw don't start that disgusting talk again. You know I can't stand it!

NICKOLAS

That's strange, Bede, coming from you.

BEDE

I can't help it! Arthur made me do it! Don't laugh!

NICKOLAS

Sure, sure, "venerable" Bede. Your secret's safe with me! Seal of confession! Benedicite sisters!

(Exit NICKOLAS, laughing.)

BEDE

Oh!!!

(Fadeout)
Scene ii
The setting is the cellar.
Enter COOK and OSWALD bearing candles or lanterns and books, etc.

COOK
When you catch the thief, ring this bell. Understand?

OSWALD
I'm to stay here and watch for the thief. If he comes, I'm supposed to stop him, but how?

( COOK glancing around, spots a bottle on wine rack.)

COOK
Hit him on the head with this! Now that's justice. Then ring the bell and I'll come.

OSWALD
Ok.

COOK
( Observing bottle.)
COOK, (Contd.)

May as well not waste it. Give it here.

(COOK opens bottle, taking a large swig. He spits it out, choking.)

Vinegar! God, I don't understand it! Suddenly all our wine is souring. Dion has abdicated his throne! I remember this batch, now. Planets unfavorable, I told him; but he wouldn't listen... I've got to wash this swill from my mouth. Goodnight!

OSWALD

Your books.

COOK

No. The Prior wants you to read them. But shade that lamp!

(COOK exits.)

OSWALD

I've got a bell, books and a candle. Add the wine and I've got a strange exorcism. First I'll "exorcise" the dust from this wooden floor and make a clean place to sit. Where's a broom?

(OSWALD sees a broom, and
begins to sweep. Large dust clouds form. OSWALD coughs.

Behind, he hears another choking sound. Startled, he stops, listening. Silence.)

Mice...?

(OSWALD sits down, adjusting his candle to barely light his corner. He sniffs at the wine which repels him. He picks up a book, reading...)

"Gregorian Chant" Hmmm. Tay-Dayum...No. Tea-Dayum...Tedium


Let the Prior respectfully perform what is enjoined him by his Abbot, and do nothing contrary to the Abbot's will or regulations; for the more he is set above the rest the more scrupulously should he observe the precepts of the rule. If it should be found that the Prior has serious faults, or that he is deceived by pride, and behaves arrogantly, or if he should be proved to be a despiser of the holy Rule, he shall be admonished. If he do not amend...

If he do not amend...

...let him be deposed from the office of Prior and another who is worthy be appointed in his place...
OSWALD, (Contd.)

I wonder what they do to bad Abbots?

(At this point the OLD ABBOT stumbles in. He has been drinking.)

OLD ABBOT

They just ignore them!

OSWALD

Holy St. Benedict!

OLD ABBOT

No. I'm just the Abbot.

OSWALD

(brandishing bottle)

To hell you are! I know the Abbot's in London. You're a thief!

OLD ABBOT

Nick, you said you'd let me be if I let you have some too. So take all you want. Just let...me...rest...here.

OSWALD

Who is Nick?
OLD ABBOT

You're not Nick? Oh my!

OSWALD

Wretched old man! How did you get in here?

OLD ABBOT

I told you I am...I was the Abbot. So I still have my keys.

OSWALD

And I suppose that's your cowl too. I'm minded to call the Cook.

(OSWALD reaches for bell)

OLD ABBOT

(On knees)

No...No, please! Don't do that. Have some compassion on an old man.

OSWALD

How can I have compassion on you? You're drunk...and a coward. If you are a member of this order like your clothing suggests, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! Why do you pretend to be the Abbot?

OLD ABBOT

I was the Abbot, but I got retired early. I'll prove to you
OLD ABBOT, (Contd.)

I was an Abbot. I'll say the Pater Noster. I'm an educated man, I'll say it in English!

OSWALD

So you think you can keep up with the times? Get off your knees, old man. I don't think you're a threat to me in your condition. No sense in waking up that cranky cook.

(OSWALD helps OLD ABBOT to sit down.)

OLD ABBOT

That he is indeed, I'll vouch!

OSWALD

I suppose you can sleep it off here. Tell me, why do you drink?

OLD ABBOT

It seems like years ago. I was the Shepherd and these monks, my faithful flock. Yes... what discord follows a shake-up in the established order of things... You may know of a See in Rome that claims overlordship here in matters spiritual; lately in disrepute due to the assumed prerogatives of "His Majesty."

OSWALD

Careful, old man. The drink makes your tongue bold, and treasonous.
OLD ABBOT

Oh they won't kill me. When I refused to sign the Oath of Supremacy my thoughtful flock saved my neck by declaring me senile. I didn't understand what I was doing, they said. So they pushed me aside and got themselves a new Abbot.

(OLD ABBOT takes a swig from bottle)

OSWALD

So now you entertain yourself here.

OLD ABBOT

An old man cannot just pick up and start a new life. When I was in charge here, we respected the Rule. Obedience, silence, humility all had their place. Like the divine pressure that keeps the heavenly spheres concentric, the Rule kept our lives centered. My monks owed obedience to me. I to the Bishop. The Bishop to Rome. Rome to Christ. The earthly hierarchy mirrored the heavenly. Talking parches the throat.

(OLD ABBOT takes a swig.)

Now Daniel's Abomination sits in the holy place...

OSWALD

You shouldn't talk so freely. Someone may hear.
OLD ABBOT

...Daily the crack widens. Unity is destroyed. The fount of Grace is cut off from above, and the young shoots wither for lack of life-giving water. I'm talking about you young monks now.

(OLD ABBOT yawns.)

OSWALD

I know.

OLD ABBOT

And worse can only follow. Degree, privilege, keeps the chaos of sin in check. Take degree away and the elements split. First society among nations goes. Then nations erupt in civil war. Then families betray their own, son against father, daughter against mother...

OSWALD

Monk against Abbot!

OLD ABBOT

Exactly! Then, the body sides against the spirit and the corrupted animal cannot hold the soul. The body decays into its elements, and, on the last day the very elements themselves will melt in the heat of their dissolving.
OSWALD
You criticize the Crown for taking action to preserve the unity of the nation. Have the terrible Wars of the Roses been forgotten already? Would you prefer an England at war with itself? There must be a lawful heir. We have to think about the expedient thing.

OLD ABBOT
Ah. That word again: "expediency." Youth is so easily swayed by popular terms. You shouldn't read such questionable authors as Machiavelli. "Expediency." The Prior and I thought the king would leave the church alone after he'd done the "expedient" thing.

OSWALD
Hah! You thought the King, after rejecting Rome's decree and taking a new wife would restore relations with Rome? You are a dreamer.

OLD ABBOT
Yes. I am a dreamer and I am drifting across the Lethe.

OSWALD
Don't sleep yet. You said you and the Prior are like-minded?

OLD ABBOT
Did I mention the Prior?
OSWALD

Yes.

OLD ABBOT

Poor man! He's been in a frenzy since the Oath. I'm tired...let this useless old man sleep...

(OLD ABBOT sleeps.)

OSWALD

Dream on, old man. Dream on... You're old, but not useless, to my plan.

(Fadeout)

Scene iii
The setting is the PRIOR'S Office.

OSWALD

I'm afraid I've scandalized you. I'm afraid I've done the old Abbot an injustice in reporting him to you.
Drunkenness is a terrible vice, too prevalent in England! All week long you can see them, Princes and friars, scholars and dandies, thieves and lawyers; all sorts of common and noble mixed, toasting each other in the taverns. It is that other great equalizer that beats all classes down to one level. No. It is not an injustice to report to your superior actions which are contrary to the good of our order. You need never fear telling the truth... Of course, I'm disappointed. The old abbot has been like a father to me. I knew things were hard on him; they've been hard on me too. But why couldn't I see what was coming?

OSWALD

But Father, what will happen to the old man?

PRIOR

The superior is equipped to deal with these things in a way that preserves the faulty brother's dignity, as well as the household's. I do things a little differently. Most Priors would force some public penance on a faulty brother. I work in secret. Some would have thrown out the monks I've corrected, but when I'm tempted to do this I just remember: He who had the most cause to render us just judgment shed His blood for our sins instead, and so redeemed us. Shouldn't we be as merciful?
OSWALD

That is very ideal and admirable. But how do you know whom you can trust? What if someone deliberately sets out to deceive you about his character? Someone who always presents a pleasant face but is working secretly for your downfall?

PRIOR

"By their fruits ye shall know them." I could keep constant watch over the monks here. But I've instituted a system based on respect and responsibility. We have house rules here too. I withhold a little more than what everyone wants, and they do it anyway, secretly. Then they have what they think they deserve. But if I gave immediately everything they ask for, they would take advantage of me and go too far. The system is self-regulating, and I'm sure nothing inappropriate happens.

OSWALD

I'm still concerned about my reputation. Should the other monks think I am an informer I'd be ruined!

PRIOR

Don't worry about that. I'm certain the old man wouldn't even recognize you....

OSWALD

One more thing. I think that Cook thinks your crazy...
PRIOR

Oh. Him! I wish he were guided a little more by reason and a little less by superstition.

OSWALD

The stars?

PRIOR

You might say that.

OSWALD

I thought that was something we'd gotten away from in these modern times. Charms, relics, the stars... There's no stars that determine my destiny!

PRIOR

We must take people the way we find them... Sometimes I think it's better to believe a lie or something doubtful than to lose the ability to believe. I mean we can doubt everything, but belief, now that's a miracle. I'd hate to be deprived of my faith...my dreams...

OSWALD

Your ideals... Sometimes, it's not our choice...

(Blackout.)
ACT II: SCENE 1

The setting is the private chamber of HENRY VIII. It is night, but HENRY has not been sleeping well.

(Enter PAGE)

PAGE

Your Majesty, Lord Cromwell has arrived.

HENRY

Send him in...now!

(Exit PAGE. One beat.

Enter CROMWELL.)

Thomas! Thomas, Thomas, Thomas... One of the greatest privileges of statesmanship is to share in your King's sleeplessness...

CROMWELL

My Lord, I came as soon as your summons reached me.

HENRY

We greatly appreciate your loyalty in these trying times.

CROMWELL

Your wish is my pleasure...
HENRY

Queen Anne is vexed with me. When I'm in bed I toss and turn... When I'm in bed... The affairs of state have too long camping in my bedchamber!

CROMWELL

There has been some concern among the Court for Your Majesty's health.

HENRY

Yes... Thomas, have you given any thought to the matter of the royal treasury since we last talked?

CROMWELL

I have thought that, should these campaigns in Ireland and France continue, the treasury will soon be depleted.

HENRY

It has come to Our attention that some of Our subjects think these wars are solely for Our own glorification. "A waste of the revenues," they say. Can't they focus on the positive aspects of this? Can't they see that unity must be maintained at all costs? We ourselves have had to make sacrifices. Will they not also sacrifice?

CROMWELL

Your Majesty has always led the effort for national unity...
HENRY

Yes. We have, haven't we. But if succeeding generations should misunderstand Our motives...? Shall they not see Henry as the playboy King who was not satisfied with one wife?...The pagan king who presumed to banish the Roman Pontiff?...A war-monger who taxed his subjects to poverty while he flitted around Europe in search of the glory of war?

CROMWELL

I should think they would rather see Your Majesty as the greatest of England's kings...The king who prevented another War of the Roses by strengthening national unity...The king who so loved his country that no sacrifice was too great...The courageous leader who sent the Papists scurrying back to Rome with their tails between their legs...An independant-minded king, not given to flattery...

HENRY

Yes! Yes! But what about the treasury? Have you any ideas?

CROMWELL

Naturally the campaigns cannot be stopped in mid-course. Naturally the Commons are incapable of more taxation. Of course, the Nobles won't part with any of their holdings.
HENRY

I should say so! Do you know that yesterday one hinted... strongly hinted...that he could provide me with more soldiers if he would be permitted to "annex" part of my favorite gaming forest! The gall!

CROMWELL

So, Your Majesty, the situation is becoming desperate.

HENRY

As you always say, desperate situations require desperate actions! So what desperate action have you devised to get Us out of this predicament?

CROMWELL

There are always ideas, Sire. Yet the idea that presents itself is so controversial that the Commons would be in an uproar...

HENRY

The Commons have been in an uproar before. Certainly precautions can be taken to lessen the blow? What is the idea?

CROMWELL

...And while the Nobles would like the idea at first; they would soon see that they wouldn't be the ultimate benefactors.
CROMWELL, (Contd.)

That would make them angry...

HENRY

What idea could so incite both the Commons and Nobles?

CROMWELL

And, of course, Parliament would refuse to go along with this plan, even should your Grace be the one to present it... Not to mention the Clergy...

HENRY

Damn it, Thomas. I just want the plan!

CROMWELL

Forgive me, Sire... I am ashamed to present this insignificant fruit of my meager intellect... But... We have recently completed a survey of the goods of the realm; a large part of which is under the stewardship of the Clergy; specifically the cloistered monks. I suggest that your Grace, acknowledged Head of the Church of England, and Chief Landlord of the realm, should, shall we say, "incorporate" these lands into the royal treasury. Then this land can be sold off to the Nobility, or wealthy merchants, or perhaps leased back to the monks. It is, as I said, a bad plan...
HENRY
Such a plan would certainly pit Parliament against me, with so many Abbots sitting in it. And, of course, the Commons would be furious. No. No. This won't do. We've got to do something else... Yet, it is a plan; perhaps the only one...

CROMWELL
Your Majesty has never hesitated to do that which national unity has demanded...

HENRY
The national unity... Yes... Don't these religious take some kind of vows? Poverty, chastity, obedience?

CROMWELL
Precisely.

HENRY
It has always galled me that those who vow poverty should have so much. If there were only some way to enlist popular support for this plan of yours...

CROMWELL
The rumor has been bandied about that Your Majesty, as Head of the Church, was planning something in the way of reform.
HENRY

"Reform"? Yes...I like that term. "Reform". It sounds positively beneficial. But what are people saying? Do they like the idea?

CROMWELL

The response has been surprisingly affirmative, especially among the more conservative Abbots. It seems, it seems there is a good deal of corruption going on. The monasteries are out of control. And the Abbots...those who care...would not mind the Crown doing their housekeeping...as long as their own goods are not disturbed...

HENRY

I have no intention of running a reform and then putting the same unprofitable stewards back in control. Better to do away with them totally.

CROMWELL

Some think so...

HENRY

If we could convince Parliament that the houses are corrupt, do you think they would permit the "annexation?" In the name of reform?

CROMWELL

Not only would they permit it, Parliament would try to take the credit.
HENRY

Can you provide conclusive evidence of this corruption?

CROMWELL

I can.

HENRY

This is not such a bad plan as you say... I feel better already. Come back in the morning with some definite plans. This idea is turning out to be one of our better ones...

CROMWELL

And why not? It is the expedient thing to do... Your wish, Sire, is as always, my pleasure!

(CROMWELL begins to leave.)

HENRY

Thomas!

CROMWELL

Yes, Sire?

HENRY

We thank you.

(Fadeout)
Scene ii
The setting is inside the monastery church. The monks are assembled to witness the Tonsure Ceremony which officially recognizes the postulants. We open at the point of the gospel.

PRIOR

Dominus vobiscum!

ALL

Et cum spiritu tuo.

PRIOR


ALL

Gloria tibi, Domine!

PRIOR

(Reading)
Jesus was walking through Jerusalem, and as some were saying of the temple that it was adorned with beautiful stones and offerings, he said, 'as for these things that you behold, the days will come in
which there will not be left one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.' And they asked him saying, 'Master, when are these things to happen? And what will be their sign?' He answered, 'Do not be led astray. There will come many in my name saying, "I am he." Do not go after them... Do not be terrified by wars and rumors of wars, for these things must first come to pass. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom... There will be earthquakes and pestilences and famines and terrors and great signs in the heavens... But before all these things they will arrest you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, dragging you before kings and governors for my name's sake. It shall lead to your bearing witness... Brothers shall betray brothers and fathers, sons. Some of you they will put to death. And there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations: men fainting for fear of the things that are coming, for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming upon a cloud with great power and majesty. But when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is at hand...

(PRIOR kisses book, saying...)

By the words of the Gospel, may our sins be taken away...

(PRIOR continues with Homily)

Scholars give us an idea of how magnificent the great temple at Jerusalem was. Our small church here at St. Anselm's is dwarfed by
comparison. Our church is made of small bricks you can hold in your hand. The Jewish temple at Jerusalem was made of man-sized blocks of stone. Looking at that structure the disciples surely thought—indestructable—yet the Temple was a pile of rubble less than forty years later, the victim of a foreign government, just as Jesus foretold. What can we conclude from this? Look about you. Our walls are still standing. Has not our Lord promised us that the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church? The Jews ignored Christ; put Him to death. And so we Gentiles inherited the sacred traditions that lead to salvation. And although some of our traditions have been altered by the Crown in this age of confusion, this so-called "modern era," our rituals are mostly intact. Anyone observing the outside world would certainly conclude that the end-times are upon us, especially after having meditated on the Gospel I just read. But I do not say it is the end of the world. I feel certain that the confusion of our times will be cleared up. We are living in a pool of murky water, but if we be still and pray, the mud will settle out and the pool will clear. This is the purpose of the monastic life, and the monastic tradition we invite four young men to share in whom we will Tonsure today. We live a life of stillness, and this, with our disciplined thought, responsibility and leadership and sobriety are stabilizing forces on all who look on our quiet work. Though you know I have often been pessimistic, I have reason for hope today. The first reason for hope has to do with the Tonsure Ceremony itself. It is
the point at which our ancient tradition makes contact with our youthful new vocations. When discipline and reason reign over the fires of youth a powerful tool for God's service is made. And so I am optimistic because of our young vocations. The other reason I have hope is that I have received today a dispatch from our Abbot in London. I would like to read sections of it to you:

(The PRIOR makes an effort to read the dispatch. As with the Gospel reading, he must hold the paper at a distance to see it. His far-sight is a manifestation of his in-ability to discern nearby problems and personalities.)

You know I have trouble seeing things up close...

Well, I can't seem to make out this handwriting in this light; but our Abbot has learned that His Majesty has appointed Lord Cromwell his Regent in spiritual matters. There are rumors that reform is again in the works; like that Cardinal Wolsey planned, I'd guess. Except this time, with God's help, I'm sure it'll be a success. I expect everyone to review the Rule. I intend that we'll set the standard for the other monasteries of England. You young men are in
an excellent position to carry through this "reformation." I'll be expecting it of you...Indeed, the eyes of the whole church are upon you!

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Ghost, amen.

(PRIOR now moves forward.)

Dearly beloved brothers:

Today in the presence of our monastic family, these brothers announce their intention to accept the responsibilities of our order. They publicly make this known to us all, whom with God's help they will soon join in ministry. They take this step in response to what they feel is the call of the Lord. And they ask us to confirm that call. Therefore, I ask them to step forward and submit the hairs of their heads, symbol of worldly vanity, to the cutting edge of the Gospel, that in due time they will be able to serve the body of Christ effectively.

(THEY step forward)

The Church joyfully accepts your statement of purpose. May God who began the good work in you bring it to fulfillment.

ALL

Amen!

(The PRIOR cuts THEIR hair. The PRIOR embraces
each new novice, and the Mass continues in subdued tones and light that the following may be audible. ARTHUR and NICKOLAS are observing from the audience's aspect and now address each other.)

ARTHUR

That does it. Now they're in...

NICKOLAS

Yes. Doesn't it sicken you how he dotes on them. Especially that Oswald.

ARTHUR

Interesting you should note that. I often wonder what the Prior's got planned for him. They're always together... He certainly gives him a lot of responsibility...

NICKOLAS

I suspect Oswald's trying to take my position.

ARTHUR

The day he becomes Novice Master is the day I leave for good!
NICKOLAS

Maybe it's all part of the Prior's "reform." Of course, you could find employ in the King's service with your intellect.

ARTHUR

Which is more than you could do, with your temper.

NICKOLAS

It's not my temper, it's my bad record. Lies, all lies.

ARTHUR

Admit it. You're a scoundrel hiding out in a monastery... I noticed the old abbot has taken a distinct dislike to you recently. You haven't carried out your extortion threat, have you?

NICKOLAS

What? Betray the old coot? For wine? You must be jesting! Even scoundrels have a code of honor. I may be base, and I may drink, and fornicate and lie, and cheat and steal; but I'm not a Judas!

ARTHUR

You did threaten him...
Alright! I said it but I'd never do it.

(Pause—five beats. In the background the Tonsure Mass has finished and all have left save OSWALD, now prostrate before the alter. The light increases on OSWALD. NICKOLAS and ARTHUR notice.)

Look at his holiness...

Time we initiated "his holiness"; don't you think?

Yeah.

(Accosting OSWALD)

What is this? Let me be!

We just wanted to show you a few monastic practises the Prior
ARThUR,(Contd.)

forgot to tell you about.

OSWALD

Such as?

NICKOLAS

Arthur likes the penance known as flagellation. Specifically, he likes to administer it... It goes with his nature. See, I hold you so you can't escape. Now you take off your clothing...

(He rips off cowl)

Now then, you recite your sins, and Arthur will whip them out of you...

OSWALD

You'll not get away with this!

(The whipping continues.)

ARThUR

Now confess! Tell us why you're here!

NICKOLAS

How many times have you gotten drunk? What sins against chastity have you committed?
ARTHUR
Did the Bishop send you to disturb our community? Or the Crown?

OSWALD
I don't know what you're talking about! You're...hurting me!

(Re-enter PRIOR)

PRIOR
Stop this at ONCE! What in the nine spheres of heaven is going on!

ARTHUR
(Sheepishly)
Uh... Hello Father... We were giving Oswald here a little introduction to penance....

PRIOR
Penance! He's bleeding! Do you call that penance, you bastard!
Get in my study right now and we'll discuss your leaving us!
And you! Brother Nicholas, how could you be a party to such beastiality! You can join Arthur!

(ARTHUR has the last word as he leaves.)

ARTHUR
Call me a bastard! But you'll be finished if you trust that weasel!
PRIOR

(Furiously.)
Get out! Get out of here RIGHT NOW!

(Addressing OSWALD)
Just look at your back! To think they'd have the nerve to touch you! I'd venture we'd do a lot better without those two. But I'm shocked that a Novice Master could be so cruel.

OSWALD
I could see right through their masks from the beginning.

PRIOR
Did you do anything to anger them?

OSWALD
One need only try to be good to be oppressed. That's this world's way.

PRIOR
Things will be different when we purge this place. We'll eliminate this vice, uproot it entirely. Set this house in good order...

(Pause, three beats.)
You'd better get to the infirmary and have those stripes cleaned. I'm going to boot those two out!

OSWALD
But Father!
PRIOR

Yes?

OSWALD

Maybe they shouldn't be expelled... Don't forget your gentle nature and all those things you told me once about being forgiving, and all those ideals...

PRIOR

What do you think I should do?

OSWALD

I've already forgiven them because that is what you would have done, except now you're angry and not responding; rather you're reacting...

PRIOR

I'm angry because they attacked you. We certainly can't have a monastery if our novices are abused.

OSWALD

Perhaps a lesser punishment? Or give them the option of leaving or submitting to our new emphasis on the Rule we've been working on; or perhaps a demotion would be just as effective?
PRIOR

I would be hard-put to replace Nickolas... But Arthur has never really been a part of the family; besides, he's cunning. It would be better for Arthur to leave... I've heard things about him...

OSWALD

That other one is hot-headed, but he's popular with the monks...

PRIOR

That's why I made Brother Nickolas Novice Master... Everyone followed him... But that'll have to change now. If he stays he'll have to be humbled...

OSWALD

I'm sure you'll think of something...

PRIOR

I'm fortunate to have you here, Oswald, to remind me of my better nature. I've got to see to those two now... Don't delay taking care of that back.

OSWALD

I'm just going to say a few more"Aves!" Salve!

(PRIOR exits.)
(OSWALD faces audience.
A ghastly blue light illumines him as he expresses his naive ambitions.)

OSWALD

So easy...
Where shall my ascending cease?
Prior? Abbot? Bishop?
Who shall not submit
to my practised leadership?
And why not? Tis' the expedient thing to do. Don't you think?
That those born leaders should be leading?
I shall...grasp... what opportunity they betray!
Carpe diem! Sieze the day!

Scene iii
London. Lord Cromwell's quarters.

CROMWELL

Layton, this is master Leigh. He will assist you on your "mission."
I want you to know that both of you are here because I've been told
CROMWELL, (Contd.)

you can be trusted to do a nasty job, right, the first time.

LAYTON

Just how nasty a job do you require, Lord?

CROMWELL

(Glancing at HENRY VIII's painting.)

Our Leige... has taken a fancy to the English monasteries. He wants them for the treasury, but it's an unpopular business. The King will issue an edict in Parliament calling for their supression due to their unalterable corruption. You men will provide evidence of that corruption. You will justify the Crown's supression of the monks... You'll be well paid, of course.

LEIGH

What kind of authority will we have?

CROMWELL

Here are the papers and decrees. Just get signed confessions. The secretary will provide you with means for your trip. Now get out!

(They exit.)

Hah! What men won't do for money!
ACT III: SCENE 1

The abbey kitchen. Potato peeling in progress.

BEDE

Potatoes. Po-ta-toes. What a funny name... I saw something extraordinary last night... Well, aren't you going to ask me what I saw?

COOK

I'd much rather have you peel those potatoes...

BEDE

After night prayer last night I was meditating on how the constellations parade around Polaris in the diurnal turning of the primum mobile. As I watched the sky a fiery red star shot up from the horizon...

COOK

And what is so amazing about that? We've all seen falling stars.

BEDE

This star did not fall. It came to the zenith and stopped, brightening. Then the constellations left their allegiance and swam about this new star... But soon it dimmed and fell...
Surely your jesting?

No. I really saw it!

Did anyone else see this momentous revelation?

I couldn't say... It was late. What does it mean?

You must have imagined this. But then, I doubt you have the requisite intelligence to make up such a story... I don't know why I don't see these things. I can appreciate them.

(PRIOR enters)

Good afternoon, brothers... I just thought I'd step in and see how the preparations are going...

Fine, just fine.
PRIOR

Very good. Carry on...

(PRIOR exits)

COOK

Himself has been jovial lately...

BEDE

Oswald has things under control. Prior's got nothing to do now.

COOK

I just don't understand how Oswald became Novice Master over night.

BEDE

All I know is Arthur was my friend, and Nickolas; then one day
Arthur has packed off somewhere and Nick isn't Master anymore and
nobody is saying anything about it!

COOK

Well Oswald can keep his nose out of my kitchen. Novice Master or
no! I don't trust him.

BEDE

It was generous of Oswald to make Nickolas his assistant novice
master, though.
"Assistant novice master," that's not specified in the Rule. It's not generous, it's an insult! Only some nasty business can unite those warring temperaments. Someday there'll be a fight, and I'm laying my bet on Nick.

BEDE

Oh no... Oswald has it all over Nick. Nick has brawn, but Master Oswald has a mind... Oswald is a born leader. He'll win out.

COOK

I thought Nick was your friend? But I see you run after charisma because you have none...

BEDE

That's not true!

COOK

You hounded Arthur for the same reason. Now Oswald is your father figure.

BEDE

Is not! You'll see! Just you wait until the New Order comes and I'll have a place and you won't!
New Order? What new order?

Oswald's New Order.

Hah!

Yes! It's coming.

What's this "Novus Ordo" based on?

Brother Oswald says discipline creates more problems than it solves. Instead of emphasizing conformity he emphasizes community. If we live as a community we will trust each other and conflicts will smooth out, like wrinkled blades of grass that have been stepped on will stand up again when the sun shines upon them...

Are those your words or his?
BEDE

His.

COOK

I thought as much. Does the Prior know about this?

BEDE

No. He lets Oswald do anything he wants with us.

COOK

Ah! I knew it was a mistake to make a novice novice master. The Prior trusts too much. But why does Oswald get his way?

BEDE

That's easy. Everybody likes Oswald! So they do what he asks. Even Nick! So the Prior thinks everything is running smoothly...and it is!

COOK

That's not the point. The Prior shouldn't have disturbed the natural order.

BEDE

"Natural order?" Come out of the dark. This is the Sixteenth Century! The modern age! Nobody believes in that, anymore.
COOK

I don't want to talk about it anymore. Now get those potatoes finished.

(Pause, a few beats.)

BEDE

I shouldn't have talked to you. Now you'll tell the Prior and have us all kicked out. You always take advantage of me.

COOK

What ever gave you that idea? As far as I'm concerned, this conversation never took place...

(Pause, a few beats)

Why would I want to tell the Prior? He has eyes and ears, doesn't he?

(Pause, a few beats)

Should I too shake the established order of things by also interfering? A man's fate is in his stars, not my hands. It's not my place. I've got my own job to do. Now, get me a basin and some water........I've got peelings all over my hands...

(Blackout)
Scene ii
At supper in the Refectory.
It is a custom that a brother read or preach while the meal is being consumed.

OSWALD

...But we live in an unsettled age; an age of rapid change. We can no longer remain blind to the reality that values are being questioned more and more. I suggest, it is not the values men question but the way these values are combined with lifestyle in this our modern age. It used to be that everything fit into a structure based on order...

OLD ABBOT

(Addressing PRIOR)
It sounds like he's chipping away at the natural law...

PRIOR

No... We talked about this. I'm sure he's following the strategy we mapped out. Just look how they listen to him!

OSWALD

...Those of a higher class always presumed to know the ideal, so they felt duty-bound to impose it on the lower classes. Until now
conformity has been the measure of commitment...

Now I ask you: Is this the way an Englishman should act? Shouldn't we take the example of our King and Head of the Church to heart and adopt a modern path of self-determination. Including our spiritual life? Shouldn't the other path be open? What is the value of free will if we cannot use it? Consider: We abstain from meat. We eat fish. This is a fast imposed on us. But can anyone impose a fast and have it be of any spiritual value? We should offer meat, and give people their God-given choice.

OLD ABBOT

I tell you... He's preaching anarchy!

PRIOR

Shhh. Just be silent and eat.

OSWALD

Values based on conformity are valueless. Besides, men who otherwise would join our community are discouraged. We could actually double our size and have a more joyful, loving community if we did away with rank and position...

OLD ABBOT

That's enough! This is heresy. Get down, young man. Now you listen
OLD ABBOT, (Contd.)

to me all of you! This talk will only make matters worse.
Authority...structure...hierarchy...are good! You...

PRIOR

Father! Please, your health!

OLD ABBOT

(Addressing PRIOR)

Health! Health! There's more health than the body's health; and a
stench more acrid than that of a rotten corpse! Good God! To think
I'd live to see my star pupil blind!

(OLD ABBOT coughs. Then addresses OSWALD again.)

Reform! Bah! Revolt! Rebellion!

CATCALL

The ol' jug-o-punch! Right? Abbot!

OLD ABBOT

All this is some more...fragmentation, that started when the King
rejected the Holy Father!

CATCALL

Papist!
OLD ABBOT

Oh yes! Kings have a Divine Right. But more so Popes! These late Wars of the Roses... what caused them but the deposing of a rightful ruler? And now another king takes into his own hands what is not his. Not just plate and lands, but the holy prerogative itself. Anyone can see the King deposes the Rock on which his own power rests... And you think God won't punish, children?

(OLD ABBOT continues coughing, choking violently.)

NICKOLAS

Treason! Treason! Shut him up!

OSWALD

No. Let him have his say.

PRIOR

Get him some water.

OLD ABBOT

(He motions with his hands. A tiny blood vessel in his head has burst. He is about to undergo a stroke. On the door of
death, he can suddenly
perceive the future.
Mysteriously:)

I warn you...no good can come of this... Suddenly I see things...
The Church split three ways. Blood and gore; the earth opens to
receive it. A King even lays his head on the block; then, until
Jacob, the age of the common man. But it will be too late: a throne
restored, but"the power" lies in numbers; Everyman king.

(He falls)

PRIOR

Help him! Is he...alive?

COOK

Stricken. Bede! Get the Virgin's Milk, quickly.

BEDE

But that's your most valuable relic...

COOK

Get it!

PRIOR

No. Bring him to the infirmary...
(All exit, bearing OLD ABBOT.)

Scene iii
Later. The infirmary. The OLD ABBOT is stretched out on a cot.

COOK
He could linger in this condition for days, Father. Why don't you get some sleep. I'll watch over him.

PRIOR
He still breathes, yet his eyes are set. He could go at any moment. I cannot go.

COOK
He could also linger on for a week.

PRIOR
He is my teacher...my friend. I cannot let him die alone.

COOK
But your responsibilities!
PRIOR

You take charge. You're next in authority.

COOK

I can't. There's nobody to cook the meals.

PRIOR

Let Oswald...fill my place then.

COOK

No! Didn't you hear what the Old Abbot said!

PRIOR

You know he was getting senile; and about his drinking.

COOK

Inscrutable gods! That put such words on blind men's lips, but don't teach them to their hearts.

PRIOR

So Oswald has his failings... Do you think men are born leading? Trial and failure... This is the way mettle is tested. This is Oswald's hour...
...And the Power of Darkness...

PRIOR
Damn it then! I'll teach you a lesson. We need young men here; and I haven't seen you inspire any vocations! Further, anybody with half Oswald's leadership could sway anyone to virtue. He'll have to sink or swim, and I'm giving him the chance!

COOK
Be persuaded: This is a mistake!

PRIOR
I'm investing Oswald as my Regent during this crisis. He is in charge, do you hear? Raise your hand and swear obedience to my Regent!

COOK
This is wholly unnecessary...

PRIOR
Swear!

COOK
(Exasperated)
For good or for evil then: I swear.
PRIOR

That's better... Now, carry my order to the others. I want to be alone with him...

(COOK exits)

PRIOR

(To OLD ABBOT, as if he could hear.)

He'll see. They'll all see. Oswald is sincere. He is a good man. I know you had doubts, but you didn't know him like I did, did you?

He has his rough edges. I know. We all do. But think... This could be the start of something big! Being in a position of authority will smooth his rough edges out...

We're getting old friend... and all this change is upsetting and confusing... Everything is blurring. Now even I'm infected with doubts. Am I wrong? Christ said all things work for the good of those that love Him... What good can come out of this?

Look at you... you can't move. You are like a stone; unmoving, unanswering. What are you seeing with those rigid eyes? I might sit here till the end of time, but you can't answer me.

(Fadeout.)
Scene iv

OSWALD tours the monastery grounds with the COOK, describing reforms to be made.

OSWALD

...and another thing: I don't like the wine served with meals. It has too much water in it.

COOK

I thought you didn't care about drink?

OSWALD

Personally I'm against it; but who am I to impose my personal standards on everyone?

COOK

I'll get a more expensive brand. Too bad our own supply has spoiled. Anything else I should get in town?

OSWALD

Oh, I don't want you going into town. Send Nickolas: I owe him a favor for all his help. Yes. Order some meat or bring back something to slaughter. I want meat as an option at every meal.
Not Fridays, of course.

Yes!

Don't you think this is too much? The Prior will be angry.

I don't see why a papist plot to improve the Roman fish markets should be of any concern to our Prior. Do you?

(Cook reluctantly)

No.

(Addressing a Brother)

Good day Brother.

Good day, Master Oswald!

Let's see that hoe. Look here, Cook. How can a man do a proper job with such antique tools? Order new hoes; I don't care about the cost!
Thank you very kindly, Master Oswald!

Not at all. I'm only doing what any good Prior would do for his monks.

(Continuing with COOK)

Yes, Cook, things are changing. The old structures are passing away, yielding to new forms. By the way, how is the old man?

The Old Abbot? Still waxing away day by day. And the Prior prays over him, hoping for God-knows-what.

That is too bad...too bad. I was starting to like the old man... But... times change. People must die. This society, this community, this monastery, must change. It must move with the times or face--

Extinction.

Exactly. Snuffed out like a candle. But see, the attitudes are
already changing. When I changed the hours of night prayer, the monks got better sleep. So our production is up.

COOK
Eliminating Latin studies for the novices made you very popular.

OSWALD
Of course. Mouldering languages have no place in the New Order.
What has Rome to do with England?

COOK
What has Rome to do with England? Here comes Nickolas.

OSWALD
Ah... Here's our Nickolas.

NICKOLAS
Oswald.

OSWALD
We were just talking about you.

NICKOLAS
Oh. You were?
OSWALD

Yes. We would like you to make some purchases in London. We thought we'd send our most trusted messenger...

NICKOLAS

Don't try to flatter me, Oswald...

OSWALD

I'll leave you gentlemen, now. Good day...

(NOSWALD exits.)

NICKOLAS

I can't abide him.

COOK

You are in a minority. Everyone else seems to love him.

NICKOLAS

Does that include you?

COOK

I don't get involved in politics. Here is a list of things to buy.

(He draws a letter from beneath his cowl.)

And here is a letter....that Novice Master Oswald wants brought to
COOK, (Contd.)

the Abbot in London, poste haste.

NICKOLAS

Novice Master Oswald...to London. How interesting... I wonder what it says?

COOK

Well I wouldn't open it...It's got the abbey seal on it...

NICKOLAS

I see.

COOK

Godspeed!

NICKOLAS

Godspeed to London, but I won't be back so quick...

COOK

Men will be men...

(NICKOLAS exits.)

COOK

(ASIDE)

The Prior has lost his senses! Letting Oswald take over like that
is wrong. I think he plans on toppling the Prior. He might topple me too! Not that I agree with the Prior; but I've got to credit his integrity. If I can't prevail upon his senses, the least I can do is inform the Abbot in London. He'll come back and straighten matters out. I just hope Nickolas delivers my letter in time.

(Exit COOK, stage right.
NICKOLAS enters, stage left, "enroute" to London. He is stopped by the ROYAL DELEGATION, entering stage right, enroute to the monastery.)

LAYTON
You there! Is this St. Anselm's Priory?

NICKOLAS
About 600 feet up this road.

LAYTON
Are you a monk?

NICKOLAS
No. I'm a highway robber in disguise.
ATTENDANT

(Striking NICKOLAS)

How dare you speak to their Excellencies in that manner?

LAYTON

(To LEIGH)

This is just an example of the insubordination Lord Cromwell told us about... What's your business on this road, Monk? Haven't you heard about the new law forbidding monks outside their monasteries? Of course you haven't! We're just now carrying it to your house.

NICKOLAS

Forgive me, Lords... I am sorry about my insubordination. The Prior, anticipating your arrival, of course...sent me forth to purchase better quality wine...and meat...for your Lord's comforts.

LEIGH

Well you had better get that food and get back here. Do you understand?

NICKOLAS

I understand.

LAYTON

Move along!
(DELEGATION exits.)

NICKOLAS
Royal visitors...new laws...what's next? There's no good behind this. Time for me to doff this cowl and get a job somewhere else... Oswald's letter be damned!

(He rips up letter and discards it.)
(NICKOLAS exits.)
(Blackout)

Scene v.
The Prior's office. OSWALD is seated in the prior's place going over accounts with COOK.
BEDE rushes in.

OSWALD
Fifteen bottles of wine; two bushels of grain, one wheat, one rye; ten gallons of sack; related expenses, ten pound-four shillings... Read that back, please.
COOK

Fifteen wine, two grain—one wheat, one rye; ten sack, ten pound—four expenses...

BEDE

Master Oswald! Master Oswald!

OSWALD

Hold on, Bede. Can't you see I'm busy... Now, give me the July figures.

COOK

I was just getting to them...

BEDE

Oswald!

OSWALD

Wait, Cook. Let me deal with this child; when are you going to learn some manners, Bede?

BEDE

THEY'RE here!

COOK

Who's here?
Bede
Some Royal Delegation. And they have soldiers!

Oswald
I haven't heard of any Royal Delegation coming.

Cook
Certainly you heard the Prior speaking of it. This is the promised reform that will put us on the map as the best-run house in England.

Oswald
That's preposterous! Show them in.

Layton
(Entering.)
He already has. Now, who's in charge here?

(Oswald rises and begins to step forward. The Cook restrains him.)

Cook
This Brother was just going to get the Prior. The Prior is in charge here. Go to the infirmary, Brother. Speak to the Prior. Tell him to come here directly...
OSWALD

(Giving COOK a dirty look)

Yes, Cook.

(Exit OSWALD)

LAYTON

I am Richard Layton. I have been commissioned by His Majesty to be the agent of reform in these monastic precincts. This is Master Leigh, my co-commissioner. As you know, His Majesty takes his title of Head of the Church very seriously. Certain charges have been leveled against the monastic houses of England, and to undo these slanders, His Majesty has empowered us as his agents to investigate and dispel these rumours, as well as carry certain injunctions and prohibitions to the monks.

LEIGH

We have a questionnaire which each monk must answer, under penalty of perjury, and to which he must sign his name.

PRIOR

(Entering.)

What sort of questioneer?

COOK

Excellencies; this is Father Lawrence, our Prior. Father, Masters
Layton and Leigh. They're with Lord Cromwell's Visitation.

PRIOR

I am happy to learn the reform is a fact.

LAYTON

If you look over these documents, I'm sure you'll find our authority in order.

PRIOR

I'm sure it is. I have long awaited this opportunity. I'm sure after you've stayed with us a few days you'll agree that we have one of the best kept, if not the best kept house in England. Of course, my enthusiasm's somewhat dampened by the grave illness of our former Abbot; an old man I greatly admire, who is a-bed with a stroke, and may die. I have kept these past two days by his side; therefore I am haggard...

LAYTON

It grieves us to hear of this illness, Father. But I am afraid such a lengthy stay as you envision is out of the question. We have many more religious houses to visit. We would like to finish today.

PRIOR

Today?! How can you possibly evaluate the house in a day?
LAYTON

We would be pleased to interview each religious, and after making our injunctions, we'll be off. Hopefully before sunset.

PRIOR

But everyone is at his task! This is unreasonable...

LEIGH

I remind you, Father, these interviews are not voluntary. They are mandated by law.

PRIOR

Very well... Bede. Go call everyone together. Have them gather outside this office and prepare to be interviewed. Go tell Master Oswald that the reform is underway. That'll give me time to study these documents in detail...

Cook. Get our guests something to drink. I'm sure they're thirsty after their long trip.

(Blackout.)
Scene vi

The stage is divided into two compartments. Stage left represents the exterior of the Prior's office. Stage right is the interior. As action occurs in one arena, sound and light are subdued in the other.

(Stage left)

BEDE

I've got everyone here, Master Oswald, except the Cook. He mumbled something about always having to prepare more meals at the last minute.

OSWALD

That's alright. We can do without him.

BEDE

What sort of interview is this going to be?

OSWALD

Everyone listen! We've talked about this day before: These men who are going to question us are polling us as part of a Royal Commission sent out to reform the monasteries of our great country. So tell them honestly what you feel. This is our best chance to bring about the meaningful changes we've discussed this last week. Since our Prior
OSWALD, (Contd.)

has been inopportunely by the illness of our aged former abbot, I have taken it upon myself to do things a little differently. You know how things were, and how they are now. I'm afraid I must confess I'm just not capable of leading this great monastery. The Prior wanted me to greatly enforce discipline, but look what I've done... I've permitted games of various sorts, I've relaxed the hours of prayer, I've let you monks go to the village when you wanted, I've permitted wine at any time... I just haven't done the kind of reforms I was supposed to do...

BROTHERS

But these are the kind of reforms we wanted!

OSWALD

You don't have to say that for my sake. I've put the Prior in a difficult position now. If there's trouble, the ax should fall on my head...

BROTHERS

We won't let them punish you, Oswald!

OSWALD

Please, Brothers! I know how you like the Prior's discipline. He is a poor disheartened man... Just remember all of these
liberties, all of these rotten, rotten privileges are due to my weakness, my lack of leadership. The power is in your hands. Give the Commissioners your mandate!

(Stage right. Inside)

PRIOR

(Reading documents)

I can't permit you to ask these questions! These matters are too private to be talked about except in confession! And these injunctions! Totally unreasonable.

LAYTON

How would you propose to carry out a reform? These signed confessions will be brought to Parliament as evidence of any corruption... Or, lack of corruption. Would you rather send all of your monks to London to witness on the stand?

PRIOR

How can such testimony help reform? Do you plan to legislate morality?

LAYTON

Do you?
PRIOR

I used to think I could. The longer I am a priest, the more I come to know the human condition. Original sin... But we can still strive to be good... If my efforts aren't fruitful, how can government expect to do better?

LAYTON

I'm not here to speculate on the motives of my superiors. If you object, you'll note the clause which permits you to resign the monastery, voluntarily, into the government's hands...

PRIOR

Never! I have no such right!

LAYTON

Let the questioning begin, then.

PRIOR

Let me remain in the room.

LAYTON

Out of the question. The monks will be unduly pressured. They might not tell the truth.
PRIOR

I know my monks! I love them; I am responsible for their souls.
I've seen the soldiers you have with you. Perhaps you might pressure them, yourself. I'll sit in that corner. No one need see me.

LAYTON

Do you, Prior? Do you know your monks? Alright! Bring one in.

(Enter BEDE)

LAYTON

Your name.

BEDE

Brother Bede.

LAYTON

Brother Bede, the Crown requires the following testimony from you in the effort to right the moral climate of England's monasteries. You are required by law under penalty of perjury to answer our questions. Do you understand?

BEDE

I think so.
LAYTON
Good. Are you happy here?

Bede
Certainly.

LAYTON
Wouldn't you rather be a layman? Married, perhaps?

Bede
Well I don't know...

LAYTON
Certainly you have, shall we say, many needs...better met in marriage than the celibate life of a monk?

Bede
Doesn't everyone?

LAYTON
That's not an answer. Tell me, how many secret sins have you indulged this past year? How many times have you broken your vow of chastity?

PRIOR
This interrogation is monstrous! Bede! You don't have to answer
PRIOR, (Contd.)

him! He's not your confessor!

LAYTON

Prior Lawrence! I warn you to be silent. If you utter another word, I'll have to have you removed!

BEDE

(Seeing PRIOR now.)

Prior! You scared me. I didn't see you.

(Aside)

If I tell this Commissioner what he wants to hear, he might get mad at the Prior and then Brother Oswald can be the Prior. I like Brother Oswald.)

LAYTON

Did you hear the question, Brother Bede?

BEDE

I'm still counting... About 250 times, more or less...

LAYTON

What! 250 times! This is a great lapse, Brother. I assume these sins were solitary?
More or less.

LAYTON

More or less! Do you mean you had the opportunity to fornicate? Have there been women here, or have you gone out of the monastic precinct?

BEDE

It wasn't my fault, sir. There was this monk here. He made me do things.

LAYTON

My God! Do you mean sodomy?

BEDE

Well, at least I never did what Nickolas does; going into town to a whore. Prior knew it too.

LAYTON

 Alright. Just sign here and we'll read you the injunctions later.

(BEDE exits.)

PRIOR

I swear to you. I had no idea this was going on.
LAYTON

I told you not to stay... Wrecks your illusions, doesn't it?

PRIOR

I knew the kid was disturbed, but I never imagined this... No. This is a singular case. There will be a few spoiled apples in every barrel. But I have my Novice Master Oswald working with these brothers. He's younger and more in touch with them.

LAYTON

We'll see.

(Outside)

(OSWALD is seen with BEDE, talking. Then OSWALD gathers the brothers around him:)

OSWALD

Brothers, this is a serious business. Brother Bede has just told me what's happening behind yonder door. These Commissioners have our Prior in there... Please think carefully about what you say in there... If they get the idea that these relaxed rules are his doing they might dismiss our Prior... Then, what do you think would happen? You'd have to put up with my poor leadership!
(A SOLDIER appears at office entrance.)

SOLDIER

Send in another monk!

(OSWALD gestures for a monk to enter.)

(COOK rushes up.)

COOK

I haven't missed anything, have I?

OSWALD

Not much.

COOK

Good. I've just been with the Old Abbot. I was thinking that it might do the old man some good if we got him a barber to bleed him? What do you think?

OSWALD

Bleeding sometimes helps a younger man; but though a barber and surgeon labor over a decrepit body without rest, the soul flees straight away. The body is yielded up to corruption...There is nothing left to fight for.
COOK

Some say a monastery is like the body, with each of its brothers a member...

OSWALD

Then it makes sense that a sluggish monastery must be bled to bring back its vigor?

COOK

So that's how you see yourself! A Barber. Whom do you plan on bleeding?

OSWALD

Look, Cook. We need you here... Don't make things difficult.

(SOLDIER re-enters.)

SOLDIER

Novice Master Oswald!

(OSWALD raises his eyebrows in surprise. He goes in.)

(Inside.)

LAYTON

Master Oswald?
Your name keeps coming up in our little talks here... I wanted to see what you look like.

I hope you find nothing amiss in my appearance, sir.

That's just it. The Devil himself can quote scripture in the guise of an angel of light...

Sir?

Oh we've heard all about your handling of the monastery this past week, Oswald. I must say, you've done quite a job of getting yourself popular at the expense of good morals and the good reputation of your Prior here... Not to mention your undoing in a single week the discipline that it took generations to develop. Your Prior is in shock, due to some of the reports we've heard. Incredible things! I have compiled a report so far that already
LAYTON, (Contd.)

outweighs all other houses I've interviewed. Such reports of perversion and lasciviousness, gambling, and vice, and drunkenness; belief in false relics and romanism and superstition...

OSWALD

I must protest, sir. This charge is unjust. I came to this monastery little more than a month ago. From the very first I saw its underlying corruption; the perversion, the malcontent. It took me little time to see that these rifts were present, even though the Prior has blinded himself to them. Because I could see, and he could not, he leaned unfairly on me, as a blind man leans on his guide. Then when this illness comes to the Old Abbot, he places the full weight of responsibility on me. He wanted reform... all I did was reveal the corruption that was already here.

LAYTON

Have you anything to answer to this charge, Prior?

PRIOR

Oswald, you did not obey my instructions...

OSWALD

Prior. You would have me put new wine in old wineskins. You didn't want just reform... you wanted to turn back the pages of history...
OSWALD, (Contd.)

I used whatever leadership I could muster to avert the violent explosion of tension that had been building for God knows how long. Had I made the restraints you suggested, all the monks would have left... And I would have been the patsy! Well you can't restore the past, you can't bring the Pope back to England, you can't-

LAYTON

What did you say?

(OSWALD stops himself. He has just implicated the Prior for Treason. Consciously or not? The PRIOR looks up in shock.)

OSWALD

Nothing.

(OSWALD looks at floor.)

LAYTON

Papism is treason, Prior. All of you here are signers to the Oath of Supremacy. To claim the bishop of Rome as head of the Church of England is high treason.

(To OSWALD)

Protecting a traitor is also treason...
(No response.)

LAYTON

Must I remind you, Master Oswald, of your duty as an Englishman... Your duty to the Crown...

You seem to be a man of some leadership, Oswald. It would be a shame that your leadership be wasted... Such potential... all because of some notion of loyalty to a man who may be a traitor.

OSWALD

Dismiss the Prior.

PRIOR

Why, Oswald? If you have a charge to make, why can't I hear it? Good men do not fear truth.

OSWALD

Good men... Good men... That's what he believed in. He thought I was good... He is so motivated by good that he can't see man's dark side. Yes... such a man deserves to be with God!

PRIOR

Say it, Oswald... This man's time is too precious to waste on me.

OSWALD

All right! Damn it! He hoped the Pope and king would be reconciled. By keeping papism alive, until the king was dead, he hoped
OSWALD, (Contd.)
a new king would work out a reconciliation! He tried to get me
to go along with him in his enterprise. He filled my mind with
all these sayings about what a leader I could be... But... you know
what I did! There. Are you satisfied?

LAYTON
Quite. You'll be well rewarded for turning in this criminal,
PRIOR OSWALD... Now, Father Lawrence, I arrest you under charge
of High Treason. Sergeant!

( LAYTON and SOLDIERS lead
PRIOR out. OSWALD sits in PRIOR'S
place, head on desk. COOK enters.)

(As PRIOR leaves, the crowd outside
mocks him.)

COOK
Tell them to wait! I haven't had my say!

OSWALD
They don't need any more.

(BEDE rushes in.)

BEDE
Everybody! He's dead! The Old Abbot is dead!

OSWALD
No. The Prior is dead.

(BLACKOUT)
ACT IV: SCENE 1

The House of Parliament.

CROMWELL addresses a joint session where he presents evidence collected by the Royal Commission. The audience assumes the role of Parliament, except for VOICES in the wings.)

CROMWELL

Lords and Commons, I hold in my hand a document I wish to enter as The Crown's chief exhibit: a collection of signed confessions submitted by the monks and nuns of England's religious houses. Attached to this report is a table summing up the specific offenses by house. The record is purely scandalous, as you will see.

VOICE

Lord Cromwell, would you recount to our assembly how this investigation came about? I'm sure more than one of my colleagues is as confused as I am.

CROMWELL

Certainly. As you recall, Our Soverign King Henry is solicitous for his title of Supreme Head of the Church. When His Majesty
heard allegations of corruption in the religious houses, he commanded me to cause an investigation. I in turn appointed a commission of Royal Visitors to go to each house and try these allegations. This led to the report before you.

ANOTHER VOICE

Tell us. Why did the King trouble himself to submit these findings to us? Why didn't he just act on his own intuitions?

CROMWELL

When I recounted to His Majesty the depth of corruption I had uncovered, he became sick at heart. He, filled with grief like Our Lord in the garden, said: "When any member of the Body is sick, does not the Head suffer along with that part? Yea, the entire Body." When you read this report, you too will conclude that the gangrene has set in. But, as I have said, our Royal Surgeon is loathe to amputate the festering part until the whole body consents to the loss... It would be unfortunate indeed should our Sovereign's intent be mis-construed.

VOICE

Are you suggesting that the religious houses should be closed?

CROMWELL

I think any reasonable man would conclude that, yes.
OTHER VOICE

I think we are overlooking one important factor here. The religious houses, all religious aspects aside, are part of the fabric of our nation's economy. The monks oversee vast holdings of farm land. They trade with the villages. They are a comfort to the common folk. The local Priory is the center of life in many localities. If we close the houses we could expect real opposition from the common people.

CROMWELL

These monks are, for the most part, unthrifty servants. Considering their waste and indulgence, I would think the Commons, say, under the leadership of any one of you Lords or Nobles here could oversee these vast land holdings much better? Don't you agree?

VOICE

I've been told that these monasteries are a last stronghold of papism in our land...

CROMWELL

Indeed they are! My court is currently prosecuting several cases of treason akin to the More and Fisher affair. I am holding one Prior who was trying to use his house as a training ground for papist-brand opposition.
VOICE

Indeed!

OTHER VOICE

I think we would like to hear some of these charges...

CROMWELL

Very well. I caution you that some of this material is somewhat offensive...

For brevity I'll read the Comperta of one of our smaller northern monasteries. You can, as a group, examine the charges in greater detail at your leisure...

(Reading)

...Dunforth Abbey, in Yorkshire County, held by the Black Canons of St. Augustine: Eleven religious, two priests; three incontinent, three practicing sodomists, two holding treasonous opinions; local superstitions:

(Resorting to visual aids.)

Here we have the comb "used by Mary Magdalen"; and here, the supposed coals with which St. Lawrence was roasted...

(Laughter)

Some other things we confiscated include dice and various gaming cards and implements, even-

(At this point there is a flourish of trumpets and Henry VIII enters.)
HENRY

My Lords and Commons! We have just a moment to stop by and let you know how we fully realize the pressure you are under in regard to this Bill calling for the suppression of the religious houses of England. We wish you to know that we have full confidence and trust in your better judgment that these houses should be given into our hands, for a better purpose, they neither being used to the honour of God nor to the benefit of our common weal... Know therefore that we support you in your effort for the good of England... We wish to impress upon you the necessity of deciding the case yourselves, and not permitting our interests and thoughts of what we might want to interfere with your judgment in which we have fine trust.

(HENRY exits)

CROMWEIL

His Majesty has promised to come again to see what this noble assembly has decided... And to thank it for its interest in the welfare of all England...

(Fadeout)
Scene ii

The PRIOR's prison cell.

PRIOR

I have been thinking this is what damnation is like.
This. This is damnation.

First, your trusted friend turns on you,
beguilement, betrayal.

It hurls you to the ground like a bolt of lightning.
First, it astonishes you. You can't speak. Then the pain comes,
throbs. Crushing pain. Here, over the heart...

... Locked away in this gloom, far from human kind,

from God, farther,

Having nothing to contend with but darkness,
The phantoms of the past,

And self...

Death, final ultimate dissolution, would be release from

these haunting thoughts, so real now.

Eternity is the curse.

I can see no reason...no purpose.

Why?

Oswald! I am convict of treason!

What weakness made you drop our cross?

This was not in our plan.

...
Who to turn to? God?

My mind knows He's here, but the burden is on my heart.

I cannot talk to Him. I am strangely estranged.

Can hell be more than this? Cut off from God and man, with full knowledge of the breach and nothing but endless hours to contemplate it?

I thought to do good. Is this justice?

Damn them, then. Damn them all...

***

Oswald! How can I call down a curse upon you?

I nurtured you. I gave you the best I had in me.

I tended you like a precious vine; but you brought forth poison fruit! Others saw you growing up before me. And warned me. I paid them no heed. I closed my eyes, convinced: better tending, more fertilizer, closer pruning... I should have torn you from the earth and burned you in a heap. But now your roots run deep, twining with my other vines.

Now my curse redounds upon my head, damning me!

I was blind. Now I see! I am the cause of my own fall.

Yet, I fell through love and trust:

Love, because we blind ourselves to others faults; loving ideals we think we see in others; and trust, because we never think our friends betray us.

There are less noble reasons to die than these.
PRIOR, (Contd.)

How foolish I was, thinking God never knew this! God, abandoned by his chosen. God, who sweated blood in Gethsemane. God, betrayed by a chosen apostle, a friend! Only despair can wreck it all. This suffering can turn to good. God! You have touched me and raised me above it. Now I go to death...Not to death but through death, to Thee. De Profundis, Domine!

(Blackout)

Scene iii
The Palace. CROMWELL enters.

HENRY

Well?

CROMWELL

They're still debating the issue, Sire.

HENRY

Do you think they're with us, or no?

CROMWELL

Hard to say. They were certainly scandalized by the Comperta. But practical matters concern them now.
HENRY

Did you hint to them we could better their real estate if they went along with us?

CROMWELL

Yes. They were very interested in what would become of the acquired lands.

HENRY

You made no specific promises!

CROMWELL

Of course not. I just titilated their expectations enough to bring them over to our position.

HENRY

Well done. I wouldn't want to keep promises I didn't make. I just wish...there was a more certain way than this Parliamentary process. I'm a king. I should be able to rule. I have a Divine Right, damn it! I say to a man'go; and he goes. Or to another'stay; and he should stay put! If I say to these monks, 'now be undone- give me your lands;' they should do it, no questions asked... Kingship just isn't what it used to be. Look at that Pope of Rome, I mean, Bishop of Rome! He sits all day in that throne of his, giving orders to this and that red-cap and they
do it! He doesn't have to contend with debate and voting and all these things. Why, someday they may decide they have no need for a king at all! What do you think, Thomas?

CROMWELL

I was thinking we may get around this tedious process by inventing a kind of legal fiction. For example, how does a sheriff dispose of a subject's property who has, say, been hanged for murder?

HENRY

Why, the sheriff auctions the property off: a portion goes to the widow and dependants, if any, and the rest goes into my coffers.

CROMWELL

Of course. Now treason is more serious than plain murder.

HENRY

Certainly!

CROMWELL

Now let's for once believe the fiction that a house of monks is a family, just like any other family. We can turn their idea of a "natural order" against them, for once. Let the Abbot or Prior be considered the "father" of the household. When the
"father" is found to be in treason, so may it be said of the whole "house!"

HENRY

Execute them all for treason!? 

CROMWELL

No...Just the Prior or Abbot... after a proper trial, of course. The rest of the poor, cankered hearts can be disbanded or moved, and the property seized and sold for profit, or leased back to the monks.

HENRY

I see! Devilish! Positively devilish! I'm delighted! But what makes you think you can find such treasonous abbots?

CROMWELL

Find them? I have a treasonous Prior already. When we execute him, we'll have the other superiors so frightened that they'll turn over their houses to us at the first hint of an investigation. We'll have a precedent based on existing law without resorting to Parliament.

HENRY

Wonderful! Execute that traitor! Seize that monastery. Set the precedent! (Fadeout)

CROMWELL

As you wish, Sire!
ACT V: SCENE 1
PRIOR's Office.

OSWALD

Damn it! Damn it to hell.

COOK

I just bring the mail; I don't send it.

OSWALD

These restrictions are unreasonable. The monks will never agree to stay inside the cloister. They won't give permission to walk outside even though I requested in writing! How do they expect us to trade with the village?

COOK

Did you write to the Abbot?

OSWALD

No. I have a friend at court. Before my monk days. Before I lived in this pit.

COOK

I hear the Abbot may appear any day now.
OSWALD

Sure! He's about as interested as the King of France! By the way, has my letter of confirmation as Prior come from London yet?

COOK

No.

OSWALD

First they put me in charge here, then they take away all my authority. Well, we'd better put out a lot of wine at dinner tonight because I'm afraid the monks aren't going to like these new restrictions...

COOK

Can't.

OSWALD

What do you mean, "can't"?

COOK

Can't put out wine. Don't you remember I told you some maniac had a little party in the cellar, then broke what he didn't drink?

OSWALD

Oh hell! I forgot. Here I am running around trying to keep this place a-float, and each time I plug one leak, three break out!
COOK
There was a time when wine wasn't needed to pacify the monks...

OSWALD
I resent that! Just think of some way to settle those monks down before dinner... Or you'll be joining him in the Tower!

COOK
Oh! I'm so frightened. Are you going to betray me too?

OSWALD
Shut up! Shut up, I say!

COOK
Why don't you write to London, and see if they'll release me from my vows?

(Blackout)

Scene ii
The Tower of London. PRIOR

LAWRENCE is kneeling in a corner.

JAILER
It grieves me, Father. It's almost dawn. Did you want to talk to anyone...?

PRIOR
You mean, another priest perhaps? No. That's not necessary.
JAILER

I'm going to miss you, Father. You've been the most interesting person I've known since Thomas More.

PRIOR

It's a hard life, John. And God's will is hard. Another time, different circumstances...Who knows? You could have been my son.

JAILER

Do you have anyone you want me to, you know, give your things to?

PRIOR

Give them to the poor. Except this. This is my breviary. I've had it since my ordination: the day I married Christ...You keep it...

JAILER

I will keep it, always. Oh! It's written in holy language!

PRIOR

Latin's not holy, John. Just old. But some of the world's finest men have spoken it... I'll miss you too, Son. Thank you for keeping me company this long Gethsemane.

JAILER

I can't believe you're going to death so joyfully.
PRIOR
I'm going home, John. Just do me a favor.

JAILER
Anything.

PRIOR
When they impale my severed head on London Bridge, and you pass by, give me a wink...

(Blackout)

Scene iii
Dinner.

OSWALD
Let me first convey my best wishes to you, Brothers. In spite of all of the conflict we have seen these past few weeks, there is still a feeling of community here at this table. And what is more exciting is the thought that through united action, we were able in a very short time to eliminate the cobwebs and gathered effluent of centuries of repression from our monastery. Now one may walk through our cloister and see brothers with smiles on their faces, instead of faces downcast in some false modesty. Yes, we wear the best and worst of our character on our sleeves now. Hypocrisy has been defeated. Now we live in a truly Christian climate where we order ourselves, instead of having
some Rule forced upon us. The watchword is "trust!"

(Pause.)

Naturally I expected some disorder for awhile, considering the revolution we have undergone; but I have somewhat against you, Brothers. I expected great things of you, but you have disappointed me! When external controls were eliminated, the idea was that self-control would prevail. What self-control have you shown? Look at yourselves! I risked my neck for you! And what do I get in return? You might notice we haven't any wine with our meals now. Doesn't it bother you that this is your own fault? That you permitted some brother to throw a totally undisciplined Bacchanalia in the cellar and the result was the loss of all the new wine! Mandatory quiet was eliminated, but does this mean we must have constant noise? You like to eat, you rarely miss a meal, but nobody seems to care about the grain burning up in our fields because you won't haul the water on your back from the well. And to listen to the quarreling at the table! One would think wild beasts could eat more respectfully! I am your Prior! Your leader! But do you think there is any pleasure, any satisfaction, in leading the kind of self-serving beasts you have become? I had great hopes for you! Why have you abandoned that dream?

(During OSWALD'S speech soldiers enter and escort monks out, one by one. OSWALD is oblivious to this.)
The background noise level is dropping, however, along with the light which is becoming very surrealistic. Eventually OSWALD must notice. Only the COOK remains.

OSWALD, (Contd.)

... You force me into a difficult position. That of zoo-keeper. Why? Don't you see how I've worked all my life to get to this point, and if your own interests don't motivate you, at least respect... respect mine!

Where did everyone go?

COOK

They left. They all left. I'm leaving too. The Crown gave them the choice of leaving the order or going to another monastery. You're finished.

OSWALD

But why?

COOK

Because Prior Lawrence was in treason, they say the whole house must dis-band or share his guilt. Some new thing. But I have my own theory.

OSWALD

What is it?
COOK

You rode the wheel of fortune 'till it catapulted you into a position of power, never thinking, in your natural innocence, that the same wheel would roll over you. Your tragic fault, like Prior Lawrence's, is your idealism. You have the idealism of a child, Oswald. But one thing Prior Lawrence had that you don't is a consciousness of Original Sin. He never expected better treatment at the hands of men, and you didn't give him it. His idealism was also grounded in a Heaven which I'm sure he now enjoys. You envision a heaven on earth, made by your own hands, according to your terms. Oh, you were content to lead everyone down a path of darkness where you could be their light!

OSWALD

But what will become of me? What will I do?

COOK

I don't know. What I do know is, you should make someone else the center of your life. Fall in love, if you must.

OSWALD

I've always had to look out for myself. I never had much of a life... I'm not sure I can change... What I could make of myself was my only goal, because, otherwise, life is so empty. It was
OSWALD, (Contd.)
conquer or be conquered... It's best if I end it all.

COOK
Don't throw away the only gift of God you still have. Rather, live your life in penance...

OSWALD
How can I live? Nobody trusts me now. I won't even be able to earn a living...

COOK
You need not worry about living expenses. The Crown has granted you, in addition to a life of leisure, a sizable pension. Each month... Thirty pieces of silver...

(The spotlight on the COOK blinks out. OSWALD sinks to the ground slowly in self-loathing. Then darkness, and two voices are heard:)

VOICE
Sin...Damnation...Eternal regret!

OTHER VOICE
Not yet! You've still a chance. Make someone else the center of your life... Fall in love, if you must.

CURTAIN