

EXTRACT

THE CAT IN THE BOX

Vivienne Glance

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NOTE ON THE SCRIPT

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A note from the playwright:

“By training I am a scientist; by vocation I am a writer.” With these words C. P. Snow began his seminal article, ‘The Conflict of Cultures’, published in 1959. I know what he means, as these words could equally apply to me. I studied botany and ecology at university before retraining as an actor and learning the craft of playwriting. I have found it fascinating to have lived in these two very different knowledge domains. But having said that, what strikes me again and again is that these are both very human, and so very emotional activities. Although science is fundamentally a rational endeavour, it is real people with complex emotional lives who undertake it. Similarly, artists work mainly in the realm of the emotions, but they must constantly function rationally in the world of economics, career progression and networking. Nonetheless, both are seeking a form of truth. Then there are two other major activities that potentially shape our lives: religion and politics. Religion, or a spiritual quest, searches for truth through faith, whilst politics, or more accurately, jostling and manoeuvring for power, often defines truth to suit its own ends. As a former scientist I am intrigued by how each of these human activities uses its own form of evidence to define truth, and as a writer all of these areas are equally fascinating and provide rich source material that continually informs my work.

The contrasts and similarities between art and science, religion and power are the main axes that run through *The Cat in the Box*. Through this play I’ve tried to juxtapose a kaleidoscope of ideas and personalities: the search for spiritual truth versus empirical truth; the seduction of a charismatic personality and the bluntness of an honest one; the use of knowledge for the good of all or its use for individual gain; and the practise of conceptual art alongside the concept of quantum indeterminacy (as proposed by Schrödinger and his famous cat ‘thought experiment’).

The action of this play takes place within a locked room with no explanation of how the characters got there or how they can leave. Whilst the theatrical convention of enclosing people within an unexplained space may be familiar, especially in the Absurdist and Surreal traditions of theatre, in *The Cat in the Box* I have tried to inform this convention with contemporary relevance. Recent world events show that society often fluctuates between order and chaos, certainty and uncertainty, and the microcosm of society that emerges during this play will, I hope, reflect some interesting parallels to our own.

The sparks and resonances that happen when all these elements are thrown into the crucible of theatre has been an exciting and at times confronting experiment for me to write – but at the same time a very enjoyable one. I hope that *The Cat in the Box* will not only make you laugh but also challenge you to question the nature of truth – including your own.

Vivienne Glance, July 2012

The Cat in the Box was first performed at The Blue Room Theatre on 2nd August 2012, with the following cast and company:

PEADON GAMBOGE	Kingsley Judd
ACALYPHA SCHWARZ	Anna Brockway
CINCEREA BLANCA	Summer Williams
REEP	James Helm
SINGER	Courtney Pittman

Director: Mark Barford
Composer: Jango Chapkhana
Lighting Design: Chris Donnelly
Production and Stage Manager: Paula Coops
Publicity: Tineke Van Der Eecken
Dramaturge: John Aitken
Design Concept: Mark Barford
Design Realisation and Props: Emma Flavell
Sound Effects: Ashleigh Doyle
Set Construction: Paula Coops, Matt McCabe, Emma Flavell, Vivienne Glance
Graphic Design: Harry Van Durme
Producer: Follow That Cat with the Blue Room Theatre



CHARACTERS

PEADON GAMBOGE
a young seeker of Truth, a 'hippie' dreamer

ACALYPHA SCHWARZ
a female installation artist, a disappointed idealist

CINCEREA BLANCA
a pragmatic and rational research scientist

REEP
a charismatic millionaire entrepreneur

SINGER
recorded voice

SCENE BREAKDOWN

ACT ONE

A locked room with a pyramid-shaped pile/mountain of benevolent junk at the back.

ACT TWO

Some time later... The same locked room with a huge pyramid-shaped pile/mountain of benevolent junk at the back. Real shrubs are growing on the pile/mountain.

Script note:

Punctuation is used to indicate delivery, not to conform to the rules of grammar.

A slash (/) indicates the point of interruption in overlapping dialogue, action or action and dialogue together.

Please note: when this script went to the printers for publication, the play was still in rehearsal. This playscript may vary slightly from the produced play.

ACT ONE

A half-seen SINGER in the shadows or a recorded voice

SINGER: Listen to the lines I spin around you

Don't know which way is out

Comfort in the lies so familiar

Don't know which words to shout

Fold you like a paper bird that never flies

Colour you in by numbers

Write instructions telling you how to dream

Colour you to my tune.

During the song, PEADON slowly climbs down a pile of junk that dominates a corner of the room. Objects on the pile appear in silhouette near him and cast shadows as if shrubs on a mountainside. PEADON awkwardly climbs and slips down into the dimly lit space.

PEADON is dressed in casual clothes that imply an alternative approach to life. He smiles often, but seems to have an air of confusion about him. PEADON reaches the bottom and walks around the dimly lit room. He finds a small torch and switches it on. He stumbles and nearly falls on a large cockroach scuttling across the floor.

PEADON: Ooops! Sorry! You're cool, hey?

The cockroach stops.

Didn't mean to scare you, you know? I won't harm you - I won't harm any living thing. Even a cockroach. *(He picks up the cockroach carefully)* Who were you in a previous life? Had a bit of bad karma, huh? Got to look after our karma. *(PAUSE)* I'm supposed to meet the Prophet here. I was told to wait. That was ages ago. Hey! Are you...?

He quickly puts the cockroach on the floor. The cockroach scuttles off towards the Pile.

PEADON: Are you the Prophet?

Suddenly PEADON realises he is not alone and he becomes aware of the audience. He cautiously moves towards them.

Hello? Didn't see you there... Are you waiting too? – Did you see that cockroach? Do you know if that's -?

Suddenly the door opens throwing a shaft of light into the room. ACALYPHA enters to camera flashes and loud applause. She is dressed in black, with a black backpack and a

black ski mask, leaving only her eyes visible. The door closes with a clang and plunges the room into darkness.

ACALYPHA: Who's there?

ACALYPHA turns on a light strapped to her head and sees PEADON.

Who are you? (SILENCE) WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU!!!!???!!

PEADON: Please don't hurt me.

ACALYPHA: So you *can* hear me. Now get out. Move!

PEADON: Sure, no problem. (PEADON tries the door.) Like, you know, it's locked.

ACALYPHA: No way! (Calling to people on the other side of the door) Hey! Hello! Open the door, please! Some idiot's snuck in here.

/ PEADON sits on the floor and starts meditating. ACALYPHA can't open the door.

ACALYPHA: / Hello! Open up! Hello?! Come on! / Shit!

PEADON: / Please don't shout, yeah? Peace. You know? Peace?

ACALYPHA: No, I don't fucking know. Jeez!

ACALYPHA tries the door again, but it is still locked. She spots the cockroach and she stamps on it.

PEADON: Bad karma, man, you know?

PEADON picks up the cockroach.

ACALYPHA: How the hell did you get in here? We had guards, security cameras, the lot.

PEADON: I'm Peadon and that poor cockroach / didn't deserve to die -

ACALYPHA: / I don't want to know who you are I just want you to leave.

PEADON: But... I mean, yes... No. Like... You want me to get out?

ACALYPHA: Right now. Go away.

PEADON: I was waiting for the Prophet.

ACALYPHA: Well, wait for him somewhere else!

ACALYPHA pulls again on the door. PEADON puts the cockroach on the Pile then tentatively begins to climb up it again.

Come on! Open this fucking door!! You can't expect me to work like this. (TO PEADON) What are you doing up there? The door's over here. Come here. Give me a hand. (PULLING AT THE DOOR) Now, not next week!

PEADON scrambles to her but trips over. The door opens throwing ACALYPHA back. She lands on top of PEADON. They roll around in a heap on the floor, illuminated by the light from the open door.

PEADON: / Arrgh!

ACALYPHA: / Get off!

CINCEREA emerges from the bright light. She has a thoughtful face, and wears a white laboratory coat with oversized buttons.

CINCEREA: Oh! I must have the wrong room. Sorry to interrupt...

The door closes behind her with a clang. She tries to open it, but it is locked again.

Can you open this?

ACALYPHA: What the...?

PEADON: No, no, like it's not what you think. / I was trying to leave... But fell, and... Then you... and –

/ ACALYPHA gets up and runs at the door, kicking, punching and pulling.

ACALYPHA: No! No! No!

CINCEREA finds a light switch and for the first time an overhead bulb fully illuminates the room and the door.

CINCEREA: There, let's shed some light on the subject.

At the back of the room is a pile of junk that disappears into darkness above. The junk consists of objects symbolic of the sterility of contemporary life, mixed up with allusions to the mythologies of the past.

I see. Yes, very funny.

ACALYPHA: Funny!?! You think this is funny? Who are you two fuckwits?

PEADON: Whoa! This is crazy, eh? What is this place?

CINCEREA: I'll just have to sit this out... until – Are you always this rude?

ACALYPHA glares at CINCEREA.

ACALYPHA: (*Knocking on the door*) Security! Do your job – you hear me? There're two of them now!

CINCEREA: Okay, I know these conferences can be tedious and certain people like to have a bit of fun, but . . . Oh no! He wouldn't!

PEADON: Who? Who?

CINCEREA: I had a note, from the head of my research group / saying I ...

ACALYPHA: / You're making this up.

CINCEREA: I'm not... I'm delivering an important paper this evening. My head of research suggested I attend this seminar. Relevant to my work, he said. / Now I can't deliver my paper, so he'll do it. And take all the credit! The bastard!

ACALYPHA: / Come on! Use your eyes. We're in the leading contemporary live art gallery in the country. This is my artwork.

CINCEREA: Your what?

PEADON: I think he's right, you know, about the conference but then this doesn't look like a gallery either.

ACALYPHA: Who are you calling a 'he'?

PEADON: Sorry... Like I... Please don't hit me.

ACALYPHA: Wouldn't waste my energy.

CINCEREA: But I was attending a conference when I came in / the door - Don't touch me.

/ PEADON tiptoes over and touches CINCEREA

PEADON: Sorry... I wanted to see if you were real. 'Cos sometimes reality – you know, gets weird.

CINCEREA: Of course I'm real... Although you have a point. May I? (*CINCEREA touches PEADON.*) Just as I thought.

PEADON: Like, am I real?

ACALYPHA: 'Am I real'? What kind of question is that? (*Whacks PEADON*) There! / Did that feel real?

PEADON: / Ouch!

CINCEREA: You really hit him. Hard.

ACALYPHA: He's annoying the shit out of me.

PEADON: Please! Let's all be nice, yeah? Violence is just ... like, pointless, you know?

CINCEREA: I agree. Now, I owe you an apology. You were right just now to touch me. I'd assumed you were real, but in your case, I was relying on my sense of smell. / Do you know how long you've been here, wherever 'here' may be?

ACALYPHA: / You stink.

PEADON: I don't know. I was waiting for The Prophet to come, yeah? ...

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