

EXTRACT

Honour

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Currency Press, Sydney

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Front cover shows William Zappa as Gus and Janet Andrewartha as Honor in the 2004 Melbourne Theatre Company production. Back cover shows William Zappa as Gus and Amanda Douge as Claudia in the 2004 Melbourne Theatre Company production. Photos: Jeff Busby.

Honour was first performed by Playbox Theatre Centre of Monash University, at the CUB Malthouse, on 14 November 1995 with the following cast:

HONOR

Julia Blake

GUS

John Gregg

CLAUDIA

Natasha Herbert

SOPHIE

Belinda McClory

Director, Ariette Taylor

Designer, Trina Parker

Lighting Designer, Philip Lethlean

Original Music, Peter Crosbie

CHARACTERS

HONOR, a beautiful, elegant woman, around sixty

GUS, Honor's husband. An attractive, youthful man, around sixty

SOPHIE, their twenty-four-year-old daughter

CLAUDIA, a striking young woman around thirty

SCENE ONE

The stage is in darkness. Only GEORGE's voice can be heard.

GEORGE: First and foremost, a communicator. [*Beat.*] Unafraid to tackle the real issues. [*Beat.*] No. No. Always ready to plumb the depths of social and political change, he has—he has—convincingly merged an intellectual prowess with literary—no with a literary, no—with a distinctive literary style. No. No. [*Beat.*] An adventurer into the heartland of a nation's cultural—An adventurer into the cultural heartland of a nation's—It's all a little too pith helmet. Wait a minute. [*Beat.*] Award-winning—is that awful? It's probably unprofessional *not* to mention the awards. Bestowed with the odd literary gong—pretentiously casual—Why not just say it? Recipient of *awards* too numerous to—No—No— [*Beat.*] All right. Okay. [*Confidently*] George Spencer has been the authoritative—the single most res[pected]—George Spencer has been the incisive voice of—The intellectual establishment has long acknowledged—For twenty—no—for—Love him or hate him—George Spencer, the fearlessly articulate—*Fuck!* [*Beat.*] Look, this is awful—so, so—I *loathe* the people who talk about themselves in the third person!

Lights up. CLAUDIA and GEORGE sit comfortably facing one another.

CLAUDIA: I asked you—

GEORGE: Yes—

CLAUDIA: I need your help. I need ideas—

GEORGE: Yes—

CLAUDIA: It's so hard to fit everything—to summarise a *life* in a couple of paragraphs!

GEORGE: It *is* an art.

CLAUDIA: I hope you don't mind—

GEORGE: Not at all—not at all—

CLAUDIA: It's very interesting—

GEORGE: Is it?

CLAUDIA: Oh, yes!

GEORGE: Because, you know, a lifetime of interviewing can make one an

intolerably long-winded interviewee—as if one finally allays one’s sense of outrage at how much *more* interesting *oneself* is.

CLAUDIA: Not at all.

GEORGE: As an interviewer, one waits interminably for the question that never comes: What About You, Then? So you see, now I’m on the *other* side—I have a vast impulse to bore.

CLAUDIA: Well, your impulse is failing you.

GEORGE: I’m like some ancient explorer reminiscing—tracing over rivulets of technique, remembering philosophical oceans—

CLAUDIA: But you’re so *inspiring*! Some of the others were really, well, lethargic.

GEORGE: They were?

CLAUDIA: Yes. *Yes*. They were just these old men. These irrelevant old men.

GEORGE: And I’m not?

CLAUDIA: Last time we talked, I came away... *dazzled*.

GEORGE: Really?

CLAUDIA: Absolutely!

GEORGE: I know what you’re doing, young lady—

CLAUDIA: No—really—

GEORGE: Melting my defences—

CLAUDIA: Honestly—

GEORGE: So I ‘open up’.

CLAUDIA: Well...

GEORGE: It’s not a criticism...

CLAUDIA: Isn’t it?

GEORGE: Not at all. I’m impressed. You have strategy.

CLAUDIA: I do?

GEORGE: And strategy is important. It’s always important.

CLAUDIA: And is it working?

GEORGE: [*laughing*] I think it might be...

Beat.

CLAUDIA: The truth is, I found that interview stuff very interesting. Especially since *I’m* interviewing *you*.

GEORGE: You know, a kind of vulgarity has insinuated itself into journalism via the television set. I always say an interview comes down to secrets...

CLAUDIA: Secrets?

GEORGE: One's life revolves around secrets. A good interview does not need to expose a secret. It simply reveals to us *why* a secret is fundamental to someone's life.

CLAUDIA: Fascinating!

GEORGE: Not really—

CLAUDIA: Yes—yes!

GEORGE: What about you then?

They laugh.

What *about* you, then?

CLAUDIA: I'm nothing. I'm no one.

GEORGE: How can you say that?

CLAUDIA: I've got no illusions.

GEORGE: If they chose you—

CLAUDIA: They saw in me a bright graduate with—with tenacity—and they knew I'd be flattered to do it so they needn't pay me much.

GEORGE: I'm sure you're too modest.

CLAUDIA: That's fine. That's really fine. Because it's true. I—*am* flattered. And it will look good on my resumé.

GEORGE: The dreaded resumé!

CLAUDIA: Middle-class girls are all the same. That's why we have to spend our whole lives singling ourselves out. The publishers are using me, but then—I'm using them.

GEORGE: Isn't that a little cynical?

CLAUDIA: Actually, an exploitative relationship is in many ways the most dependable relationship. I need them and they need me. No one's going to fuck anyone over.

Beat.

GEORGE: Do you have a title yet?

CLAUDIA: 'Movers and Shakers: Power and Influence in The Media.'
Pretty dry.

GEORGE: I like it!

They laugh.

Well, they wouldn't have wasted their time with someone who wasn't very talented.

Beat.

CLAUDIA: Thank you.

Beat.

GEORGE: You want to write?

CLAUDIA: Everyone wants to write!

GEORGE: Well, yes—

CLAUDIA: The truth is, I *do* write. Fiction. And I intend to become a very good writer. But I find it so pathetic—so indulgent to express that wish—

GEORGE: Well—

CLAUDIA: It's what one *does*, in the end.

GEORGE: Well, yes. But when you're young it's all ahead—it's *all* wishing. *Wishing* has the same currency that *doing* does in middle age.

CLAUDIA: We *all* intend. Only some of us achieve. I've always—Oh no—this is *your* interview!

GEORGE: Go on...

CLAUDIA: I feel so comfortable talking to you. You really—you seem to—

GEORGE: I'm interested.

CLAUDIA: I've always been able to imagine things I want for myself and it's as if my imaginings are so perfect, so pedantic that reality just obliges them.

GEORGE: Like this—

CLAUDIA: Like this book.

GEORGE: And what else?

CLAUDIA: What else?

GEORGE: What else do you imagine having?

Beat.

CLAUDIA: Oh, that's secret...



SCENE TWO

GEORGE: And?

HONOR: I was with her in the kitchen—

GEORGE: I was with him in the garden—