

Who is Heiner Müller Or the End of History

By Mark Jackson
(so he says)

Draft 2

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By Mark Jackson

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Who is Heiner Müller Or the End of History

Shall I talk of me I who
of whom do they talk when
they talk of me I who is that

*-Heiner Müller, from the preface to his
autobiography*

My drama didn't happen. The script got lost.

-From HAMLETMACHINE

CHARACTERS

*The Author, almost age 66, very
charismatic, good at wearing masks.*

*The Interrogator, almost age 66, very
charismatic, better at wearing masks in
that one seldom notices the mask.*

*Two boys and a girl, all about age 10
and really good actors.*

NOTES

*Though I have drawn on documented facts
about Heiner Müller, the situation
depicted here is entirely imagined. I
haven't concerned myself with fidelity
to his actual life and neither need any
actor, director, designer, or producer
of the play. It's theater.*

*Likewise, just because a character is
inspired by Heiner Müller doesn't mean
the actor playing that character has to
imitate the real Heiner Müller or even
have a German dialect.*

All that said, a study of Heiner Müller might nonetheless prove useful to directors and actors of the play. The sources I referenced most myself are detailed in the Bibliography at the end of the script. But I'll note up front my particular debt to the work of Bernard & Caroline Schütze, and Carl Weber, without whose published insights and translations of various Müller works and interviews this magpie's nest could not have been woven.

Regarding the play within the play. During the Cutting Ball Theater 2015 Risk Is This... Festival's public staged reading, for practical purposes the actor playing THE INTERROGATOR read the projected titles aloud, as well as many of the stage directions indicating which child is entering to play which role. It occurred to us that retaining the latter device in performance might be useful. It might also be entirely unnecessary. Productions should consider this and determine what works best for clarity of following the story in their staging.

Texts in [brackets] are possible alternatives or under consideration for the chopping block.

A line that starts with a dash (-) is to be taken tightly to the previous line.

Not every "... " is created equal.

Finally, despite the German subject, this is an American play about American concerns.

So. Toi toi toi.

SCENE

A small room, undecorated. There is one door. There is a window made of one-way glass. If there is anyone on the other side we don't know it.

There is a loudspeaker mounted near the ceiling in one corner. There is a simple table with two identical chairs. Is it an interrogation room, a stage set, or purgatory? An unequivocal answer to this question should not be provided.

THE INTERVIEW

Classical music is playing. THE AUTHOR is seated in a chair at the table, wishing to smoke the cigar for which he has no light, waiting...

And waiting...

The music cuts off abruptly...

...The music starts again, to THE AUTHOR'S chagrin.

...THE AUTHOR eventually looks out at the audience, taking them in slowly and individually. Whatever he might think of them, if anything, is impossible to discern.

The music stops again just as THE INTERROGATOR enters. HE sits across the table from THE AUTHOR. THE INTERROGATOR is dressed simply, professionally, without any indication that he gets paid more than modestly for what he does. HE has come with a briefcase out of which he produces a thick file, a pen, a freshly sharpened pencil, and a fresh pad of note paper. The only things THE AUTHOR has are the cigar and the likely expensive, purposely unassuming clothes on his back.

THE AUTHOR

I have something to tell you.

THE INTERROGATOR

Good. I have a few things to ask you.

THE AUTHOR

Our relationship will be well balanced.

THE INTERROGATOR

How's that?

THE AUTHOR

We're on the same page, so far.

THE INTERROGATOR

Yes, we'll see.

THE AUTHOR

Oh? Who else?

THE INTERROGATOR

What?

THE AUTHOR

Who else will see?

*THE AUTHOR has indicated the window.
THE INTERROGATOR does not answer, but
consults the thick file.*

THE AUTHOR (cont'd)

...So maybe we're not as well balanced as I thought. ...I can hardly imagine you have anything terribly surprising planned.

THE INTERROGATOR

You can't?

THE AUTHOR

When we're done here you'll either let me go, torture me, imprison me for life, murder me, or some combination thereof. In other words I assume you're not a very creative person - or, people. It's simply a matter of waiting. And I have all the time in the world. I've been told.

THE INTERROGATOR

I did say that, yes.

THE AUTHOR

Not the most original line, incidentally. You could use a better writer.

THE INTERROGATOR looks up abruptly for:

THE INTERROGATOR

-There was something you wanted to tell me?

THE AUTHOR

...I've said it, in so many words.

THE INTERROGATOR

You have a unique self-sufficiency. Impressive, really.

A silence while THE INTERROGATOR consults his file again. THE AUTHOR eventually breaks it with what we sense is a bit of spinning his wheels, to which THE INTERROGATOR appears to take no notice:

THE AUTHOR

...Well we'd all like to think of ourselves as being terribly unique. With our "individuality" and our "freedom." I'd say there aren't many unique individuals to speak of. Now less than ever. IF ever. Most people are not unlike any number of other people. How many Mother Theresas, how many Hitlers, how many Elvis Presleys are there, really? Most people are like most people. And for freedom freedom of what, thought? Forget it. Tell me: How many untethered thoughts have you actually had? Is this individuality? Thinking the same little things a million other free individuals have thought and are thinking right this very minute and will continue to think *ad nauseam*? "You are special" is a modern lie adults tell children to evade the crushing truth. No wonder we all feel betrayed by them once we finally leap out into the world and come face to face with that sea of familiar faces.

THE AUTHOR has looked out over the audience. THE INTERROGATOR abruptly begins.

THE INTERROGATOR

Where were you December 30th? Fifty-one years ago?

THE AUTHOR

From today?

THE INTERROGATOR

From December 30th.

THE AUTHOR

What's today?

THE INTERROGATOR

Where were you?

THE AUTHOR

Fifty-one years ago?

THE INTERROGATOR

(affirmative) December 30th.

THE AUTHOR

...December 30th or fifty-one years ago? ...I can't remember.

THE INTERROGATOR

You're sure.

THE AUTHOR

-Why don't you just say where you want me to have been? Make your statement, don't pretend to ask me a question.

THE INTERROGATOR

...Where were you?

THE AUTHOR tries to remember. Finally:

THE AUTHOR

...I can't remember. Like Reagan.

THE INTERROGATOR

...What happens when people die?

THE AUTHOR

They're put into the ground.

THE INTERROGATOR

What happens when people die?

THE AUTHOR

...They're buried.

THE INTERROGATOR

What happens when people die?

THE AUTHOR

Other people bury them.

THE INTERROGATOR

What happens when people die?

THE AUTHOR

They're buried. Or burned.

THE INTERROGATOR

What happens when people die?

THE AUTHOR

They're put on funeral pyres and burned.

THE INTERROGATOR

What happens when people die?

THE AUTHOR

They're burned or buried. And people mourn them.

THE INTERROGATOR

What happens when people die?

THE AUTHOR

They're mourned. They're mourned, and then remembered on holidays and on the day they died. Every year for fifty-one years.

THE INTERROGATOR

And then?

THE AUTHOR

They're forgotten. Eventually, they're forgotten.

THE INTERROGATOR

If I died, let's say, fifty years ago, where would I be now?

THE AUTHOR

...In the ground. Or burned.

THE INTERROGATOR

If I died fifty years ago, where would I be now?

THE AUTHOR

In the ground. In the dirt.

THE INTERROGATOR

If I died fifty years ago, where would I be now?

THE AUTHOR

In the dirt. Under a house. Under a street or a highway.

THE INTERROGATOR

If I died fifty years ago, where would I be now?

THE AUTHOR

Buried. Beneath a power plant or under an office building. In the foundation of a corporate office building.

THE INTERROGATOR

If I died fifty years ago, where would I be now?

THE AUTHOR

...It depends on where you were buried.

THE INTERROGATOR

...What happens when people die?

THE AUTHOR

...They're buried. And eventually. Forgotten. Unfortunately.

THE INTERROGATOR

Unfortunately?

THE AUTHOR

The dead should be remembered.

THE INTERROGATOR

I didn't take you for the sentimental type.

THE AUTHOR

Sentiment? Statistics. The dead are in the majority compared to the living. In their absence they are present, asking us to live with their legacy for better or worse. Yet we hardly understand them. Though we can if we take the time.

THE INTERROGATOR

-What kind of death would you wish for yourself?

THE AUTHOR

...I wouldn't formulate such a wish.

THE INTERROGATOR

Is it none of my business?

THE AUTHOR

No, it's none of MY business. When it comes to death, rather than pin my hopes on one in particular I'd rather assume there to be alternatives, either of quite sudden deaths or quite protracted ones, but possibilities anyway.

THE INTERROGATOR

Do you think about dying?

THE AUTHOR

Of course. Or do you mean dying on purpose?

THE INTERROGATOR

That too.

THE AUTHOR

I see no reason to kill myself.

THE INTERROGATOR

Fear of death might be a reason.

THE AUTHOR

To kill myself? Why?

THE INTERROGATOR

Because the only release from fear of death IS death.

THE AUTHOR

(pointedly) Survival is also a way out. ...Look, if you really want to talk about death, if you're not just trying to strike a foreboding tone with all this, then let's talk about the real meaning of death, let's talk about history.

THE INTERROGATOR

-Tell me about the incident in which you betrayed your father.

THE AUTHOR

I never betrayed my father.

THE INTERROGATOR

You've written about having done so. Quite famously. And you've said as much in interviews with the press.

THE AUTHOR

Why should I tell you about it? You know it already.

THE INTERROGATOR

I want to hear it from you.

THE AUTHOR

You can read it.

THE INTERROGATOR

I have.

THE AUTHOR

Then you know everything I do.

THE INTERROGATOR

I would like to hear an account of it from you. In your own words.

THE AUTHOR

Are the words I put down on paper no longer mine?

THE INTERROGATOR

...Tell me about the incident in which you betrayed your father.

THE AUTHOR

Fine. I will entertain you. At least I hope. ...You know, the most effective torture is that you allow me this (*the cigar*) but no light for it. ...Okay.

THE AUTHOR first sighs in preparation, then tells the story exceptionally simply and well.

THE AUTHOR (cont'd)

I was four years old. It was four a.m. I was asleep. I woke up, the sky outside my window was black, and there were noises coming from the other room - shouting, books being thrown. I heard my father's voice, higher and stranger than the other voices. I got up, went to the door, and through the keyhole I saw some men in brown uniforms hitting my father in the face. They were Nazis and they were arresting him for being a communist. I went back to my bed and pulled my blanket up to my chin. Then the door opened. It was my father standing in the doorway. The two men beside him were much bigger than he was. He was a very small man. I heard him softly say my name. But I didn't answer. I didn't move, and I stayed very quiet, my eyes closed. Then I heard him say, "He's sleeping." The door closed. And I listened as they took him away... This is the first scene of everything I write... (*then abruptly:*) Now can we have a drink?

THE INTERROGATOR

You tell your story very well.

THE AUTHOR

It happened very well. It was a gift.

THE INTERROGATOR

A gift?

THE AUTHOR

I've made a lot of money off that story. It got me going.

THE INTERROGATOR

When you wrote "The Father," your story about this incident, how did you manage to find the words?

THE AUTHOR

What a banal question. You're better than that.

THE INTERROGATOR

You're right.

THE INTERROGATOR considers the file for a moment.

THE AUTHOR

Don't try to be so clever. What is it you want to know?

THE INTERROGATOR

Tell me about the incident in which your father betrayed you.

THE AUTHOR

Again with my father. Are you really keeping me here to dig up something about my father? He's dead. There's nothing more he can do wrong or right. And at this point he has nothing to do with me.

THE INTERROGATOR

As you said, "In his absence he is present, asking us to live with his legacy, for better or for worse."

THE AUTHOR

"Yet I hardly understand him."

THE INTERROGATOR

"Though you can if you take the time."

THE AUTHOR

He was my father. I had plenty of time to try to understand him.

THE INTERROGATOR

Tell me about the incident in which your father betrayed you.

THE AUTHOR

...You're eventually going to tell me where this is going. And when we get there, you'll give me a light so I can celebrate. (*Holds up the cigar.*) ...Okay. The incident in which my father betrayed me. Eh-eh-ehm... This was three or four years after my father's arrest. After he was released from the concentration camp, nobody would give him a job. In school one day, an essay contest was announced. The best essay would be sent to Berlin and could be awarded a medal. The essay was to be about the Autobahn that Hitler had proposed building - which before he came to power he'd denounced as an expense meant to benefit aristocrats and Jewish Capitalists, but now in 1936 suddenly it was meant to provide all German people with mobility and jobs, when really it was for Nazi parades and tanks. Anyway, I came home. My mother wasn't there. She was working long hours in a factory. So I told my father about the essay contest and he waved his hand and said not to worry about it.

(MORE)

THE AUTHOR (cont'd)

So I forgot about it and went outside to play. Alone, of course. The neighbor children were not allowed to play with me.

THE INTERROGATOR

No?

THE AUTHOR

Because of my father. About two hours later my father called me inside and said "Let's eat!" And as he made the meal, he said to me "You should write that essay. And I will help you write it." And so as we ate he told me what I would write: that it was a good thing the Führer was building the Autobahn because my father, who is unemployed, might be given a job there. And I wrote the essay.

THE INTERROGATOR

YOU wrote the essay?

THE AUTHOR

Yes.

THE INTERROGATOR

You.

THE AUTHOR

Yes. My father was no writer.

THE INTERROGATOR

But you were.

THE AUTHOR

I got the prize.

THE INTERROGATOR

And your father?

THE AUTHOR

He got the job with the Autobahn.

THE INTERROGATOR

Because of the essay.

THE AUTHOR

Yes.

THE INTERROGATOR

That you wrote.

THE AUTHOR

The authorities liked it. They wanted examples that could be used as an alibi, and since I mentioned my father's troubles they gave him the job. This is how he betrayed me. By using me to get back in with the Nazis who had arrested him. He had me commit a treason.

THE INTERROGATOR

Through writing.

THE AUTHOR

Yes.

THE INTERROGATOR

Is this when it occurred to you to become a writer?

THE AUTHOR

...That's possible.

THE INTERROGATOR

-This moment of treason?

THE AUTHOR

Though at the time I was innocent of it. But the innocent always end up with blood on their hands.

THE INTERROGATOR

WERE you innocent when you wrote the essay?

THE AUTHOR

I think so.

THE INTERROGATOR

-Or did you know what you were doing?

THE AUTHOR

I was a father's son. I was doing what I was asked to do. I had no real conception then of Hitler's grand schemes. But somewhere in my little body I knew something was off. I sensed it in my father's enthusiasm to help me. Some duplicity. Which he made me a part of. Maybe that's why I eventually stopped writing prose and tried to clean my hands with drama, something more debatable.

THE INTERROGATOR

...And the story about your father betraying your mother?

THE AUTHOR

It's not so interesting.

THE INTERROGATOR

Can you tell it to me?

THE AUTHOR

He cheated on her with a neighbor. There's nothing else to tell.

THE INTERROGATOR

No?

THE AUTHOR

No.

THE INTERROGATOR

And the story of your mother's suicide.

THE AUTHOR

She didn't commit suicide.

THE INTERROGATOR

That's right, you wrote that it was your wife.

THE AUTHOR

It was my wife.

THE INTERROGATOR

And so?

THE AUTHOR

And so what?

THE INTERROGATOR

Tell it to me.

THE AUTHOR

No. You know it already. I wrote it, it was published, and you've read it. My recounting it to you means nothing.

THE INTERROGATOR

Assume for the moment that it does.

THE AUTHOR

I have no reason to assume that.

THE INTERROGATOR

Is it true you wanted to dig up your dead wife so that you could feel her bones?

THE AUTHOR

I wrote that in a play.

THE INTERROGATOR

You also talked about it in an interview.

THE AUTHOR

I lied.

THE INTERROGATOR

Why not tell the truth?

THE AUTHOR

Because I am not a documentarian. What I write is always fiction, and therefore true. I'm a writer. I find something true and raise it to a poetic form to create distance.

THE INTERROGATOR

From what?

THE AUTHOR

Reality.

THE INTERROGATOR

From the truth.

THE AUTHOR

No. Reality. This is a difference between you and I.

THE INTERROGATOR

What is?

THE AUTHOR

You don't get it. And I do. (*admonishing:*) Mixing up truth and reality. ...By the way, I think I'm beginning to understand something of your purpose here. You don't ask me political questions. And when I nevertheless answer you with politics, you don't pick up the cue. You're here for some personal reason. You're not going to ask me what I think about East Germany and communism? Everyone does. People are usually so curious. But not you?

THE INTERROGATOR

I can read about those things.

THE AUTHOR

You can read about me.

THE INTERROGATOR

But only you can confirm what if anything is between your lines.

THE AUTHOR

I can't confirm much of anything. What are you looking for?

THE INTERROGATOR

Truth.

THE AUTHOR

How cosmic.

THE INTERROGATOR

A truth.

THE AUTHOR

Ah. A particular truth. Something you already believe to be true. Something you want to make a point of to me. What is it?

THE INTERROGATOR

Let's say, a revelation.

THE AUTHOR

Cosmic again.

THE INTERROGATOR

It's much closer to the bone than the cosmos.

THE AUTHOR

(pleased:) Bones! There we are. You see, any line of conversation however hopeful inevitably leads back to the dead.

THE INTERROGATOR

Do you have children?

THE AUTHOR is disappointed to be derailed from the dead so soon.

THE AUTHOR

Three. But that's irrelevant.

THE INTERROGATOR

You don't like to give information about your family.

THE AUTHOR

It will all come out when the kids start fighting over the inheritance.

THE INTERROGATOR

A good point in favor of my doing away with you. ...Sorry. That was tasteless.

THE AUTHOR

It was a good point.

THE INTERROGATOR

It didn't upset you?

THE AUTHOR

It was a good line.

THE INTERROGATOR

Good writing is important to you.

THE AUTHOR

More important than good morals, anyway.

THE INTERROGATOR

Oh? Anyone's morals in particular?

THE AUTHOR

(impatient) Morals. It doesn't matter who they belong to. But in terms of your morals specifically, yes, of course, whatever they are or appear to be, thus far I do find them of lesser value than a good line. Since you seem to have no greater morals than a kitten playing with his first mouse. It's sport, this little game, played with clumsy little paws.

THE INTERROGATOR

I've offended you.

THE AUTHOR

Of course you have. You're playing a Little Game. I'd respect you more if you were honest about it. Just meow. I'll squeak, and then if we simply must play a LITTLE game, at least we'll be playing an HONEST little game.

THE INTERROGATOR

That's your perception of what this is?

THE AUTHOR

Yes, and perception matters. For example, you believe this meeting between us to be an interrogation you are conducting. Whereas I believe it to be a play I am writing.

THE INTERROGATOR

Oh, I see. And what's your play about?

THE AUTHOR

Something historic, I hope.

THE INTERROGATOR

Historic. You think very highly of yourself.

THE AUTHOR

No, not of myself. But of Time, yes. I'm not very important. But Time - Time is one of Shakespeare's most frequently used words.

THE INTERROGATOR

Of course.

THE AUTHOR

(a test:) Why of course?

THE INTERROGATOR

Because time is short.

THE AUTHOR

(approvingly) Exactly.

THE INTERROGATOR

-And so we're back to the subject of death.

THE AUTHOR

It was a matter of Time. Only please let's talk about it properly.

THE INTERROGATOR

What would be the proper way for you and I to talk about death. In your perception.

THE AUTHOR

(leaning forward) To talk about death, to really talk about it, is to talk about history. And to really talk about history is to talk about the Time in which we are living.

THE INTERROGATOR

I would agree.

THE AUTHOR

Oh good. Finally, something we can have a mutual conversation about.

THE INTERROGATOR

Perhaps.

THE AUTHOR

Now don't spoil it so soon. If you won't give me this (the cigar) at least indulge me with a topic of some interest.

THE INTERROGATOR

I'm perfectly content talking about you.

THE AUTHOR

I know you are. But I'm not. So it's not a level playing field for us. I'm not that interested in my own thoughts. I've thought them already. It's redundant to talk about them. And I really can't believe I'm here to be interviewed as if by some magazine writer! If you WERE a magazine writer, with a magazine writer's obsession with biography, we'd be sitting in a cafe or restaurant. Or my office. I'd be smoking this. But we're here. This is clearly not a place for personal interests. At least it shouldn't be. This is clearly a place where history is to be made.

THE INTERROGATOR

What kind of history.

THE AUTHOR

The only kind. The kind that matters.

THE INTERROGATOR

I'd say the personal behavior of one individual toward another matters very much. It can change their lives. Determine them, even. The actions between two people write their PERSONAL histories.

THE AUTHOR

Okay. You're right. But who cares other than those two people. If we have a conversation about us, literally about us, it ends at us. And we might even enjoy it or benefit from it - personally. But it doesn't matter.

THE INTERROGATOR

Must everything be of international significance?

THE AUTHOR

Anything worth talking about usually is. Let's take your questions about my father. Not that I want to discuss my feelings about my father with you. The story about my father is something I wrote.

THE INTERROGATOR

-It happened.

THE AUTHOR

-Fine. But the story I TELL about my father is something I wrote. What happened, happened. And that has only continued to matter in so far as it provides material for writing about the real subject of that story, which is the story of history.

THE INTERROGATOR

How is that?

THE AUTHOR

War. Ideologies in conflict with human nature. The details of that particular story are skin covering bones. And if I wrote it well then there's just enough flesh that the bones can be seen moving beneath, and one might be curious to get at those bones.

THE INTERROGATOR

This obsession with bones.

THE AUTHOR

Of course. They give us our shape. They determine our actions and how we respond to the world. In their marrow is much of what we need to live. Our flesh may contain who we are personally, but our bones... they connect us to history. I think that makes them worth breaking open from time to time.

THE INTERROGATOR

Risky.

THE AUTHOR

I accept that.

THE INTERROGATOR

It could leave you crippled.

THE AUTHOR

Yes, or someone else, depending on who's got the axe at the moment. But it's worth it. Without conflict not much would ever get done.

THE INTERROGATOR

You could talk with a person.

THE AUTHOR

Talk! There's no end of talk. Communication is overrated. Mostly thick layers of chatter. I believe in direct conflict. I don't believe in anything else. You don't get to know a person without a conflict.

THE INTERROGATOR

That's a hard way to live.

THE AUTHOR

Increasingly, yes, you're right. But it's the only way. I can't seem to help it, anyway. I can't walk down the street without looking everyone in the face. And that's conflict today! Looking someone in the eye when you pass them on the street! It means people are no longer confronting the real problems of the world. People with real problems appreciate the chance to nod and say hello.

THE INTERROGATOR

Are you saying that you have real problems?

THE AUTHOR

At the moment, perhaps; that remains to be revealed. But generally? No. No, I'm now quite comfortable in life. It's terrible for my writing.

THE INTERROGATOR

How do you mean?

THE AUTHOR

Twenty years ago I could still speak about God and the world and I thought I was very clever. These days I don't think I'm so clever anymore. In the past maybe I was still ignorant of certain things but at least I had a real reason to write.

THE INTERROGATOR

What was that?

THE AUTHOR

Conflict. To be honest, I miss the Berlin Wall.

THE INTERROGATOR

You miss it?

THE AUTHOR

What I liked about it was that it was a sign for a real situation, a situation the world is always in. And there you had it in concrete. You could see the end of history more clearly from there. Now that the wall itself is gone, we pretend it's not there in the world and we actually believe it isn't. The walls we build now are much more sophisticated. The best kind! And cheaper! Everyone maintains them without pouring a single drop of concrete. Not one brick is laid and these modern walls just get thicker and longer and higher. Of course it means the bricklayers have less work. But that's one price we pay for the computer age.

THE INTERROGATOR

You would prefer life before computers. All that waiting? Brick by brick?

THE AUTHOR

Maybe you are a magazine writer... I mean that information has become so inflated that nobody can possibly do anything with it. It's a new ice age, with a swarm of mosquito-ideas fattened on stolen blood and frozen for posterity as if they were important artifacts. The more information has become available, the less informed we are, and the more concerned we become for ourselves.

(MORE)

THE AUTHOR (cont'd)

Our desires for our daily lives now take precedence over our collective history, so, yes, there was a benefit to waiting. The truth is so easily and quickly rewritten now, and people confuse it with what they call "reality," which is whatever way of looking at the world happens to be in vogue. Maintaining this "reality" is a good way to hold on to your amnesia. Willful amnesia being a kind of terminal cancer.

THE INTERROGATOR

And willful cynicism? Surely this too is a cancer. I'd say quite terminal.

THE AUTHOR

I had a dream a while ago. It was a nightmare. I woke up and everything was in order.

THE INTERROGATOR

Where?

THE AUTHOR

In the dream. In the dream I woke up, and found the world was in complete order. This was the nightmare. To wake up to such a world. Now I think we actually DO wake up to this world. I feel more and more this way the more time I've spent in western Europe and America.

THE INTERROGATOR

Then why do you go?

THE AUTHOR

Like I said, I prefer conflict.

THE INTERROGATOR

Some would say it's just hypocrisy.

THE AUTHOR

(laughs:) Well. Of course they would. It would be easier if it were just that. That way people can dismiss any bothersome global problem as the hypocritical suggestion of one pompous intellectual, self-serving immigrant worker, or other.

THE INTERROGATOR

You're not really linking your intellectual plight to underpaid immigrants.

THE AUTHOR

These are just two examples of people that a majority of middle class society would rather not have to deal with. So if they can dismiss thinkers and poor people as somehow selfish, then they don't have to listen to them. Of course I would never trade places with an immigrant worker.

(MORE)

THE AUTHOR (cont'd)

I'm lucky and they are not. That doesn't mean I have nothing to do with them.

THE INTERROGATOR

It just sounds horribly pretentious.

THE AUTHOR

I understand.

THE INTERROGATOR

I wonder if you do.

THE AUTHOR

What's your understanding?

THE INTERROGATOR

This conversation is as much a distraction from our current circumstance in this room together as your dreaded computer age is from your treasured history of buried bones.

THE AUTHOR

I'm just passing the time. (*the cigar again:*) That's all you've allowed me. ...Something is eating away at me. I smoke too much. I drink too much. I'm dying too slowly.

THE INTERROGATOR

Amnesia Cancer?

THE AUTHOR

No.

THE INTERROGATOR

Cynical Cancer?

THE AUTHOR

Maybe.

THE INTERROGATOR

Regret?

THE AUTHOR

(*a half laugh at the absurdity of THAT suggestion:*) No! ...Ineffectiveness.

THE INTERROGATOR

Do you have any real compassion for the world? Why do you write plays for people if you have no love for them?

THE AUTHOR

Writing plays doesn't obligate me to love anybody. So don't drag love into this. Unless you really do want to talk about distractions.

THE INTERROGATOR

Love is a distraction? Compassion is a distraction?

THE AUTHOR

Quite often, yes. In the thin space of attraction between two star-crossed lovers we place all our hopes for the world and for history. If only Juliet and Romeo were to finally be permitted a public marriage, a lasting peace would certainly come to Israel and Palestine. Militant Muslims across the Middle East would lower their fists to shake hands with proud western Christians. And the wealthy of the world would without a doubt find unity with the poor if only young Romeo and Juliet were allowed their love. It's a nice idea, affordable to those who can afford theater tickets while most everyone else hopes to eat and not live in fear. If *plays* have any obligation it's to provoke thinking - together, in public - about WHY we feel what we do, to yank our imagination up a notch so it's got one foot in our heart and the other stretched up to our brain. That cannot be comfortable. It HAS to be precarious. Otherwise why move? It's not enough to BE moved. Move! ...There. How was that?

THE INTERROGATOR, who had actually got caught up in that, shakes his head.

THE INTERROGATOR

Do you believe anything you say? Do you have any real convictions?

THE AUTHOR

Haven't you read the reviews? Anything I say is stolen from Sophocles Shakespeare Brecht or someone; and this seems to confuse people about what's important. But, as the truth may well lie more in confusion than conviction,

THE INTERROGATOR

-Stop. You must know that a simple Yes or No could also be profound. Can it really be that you think this silly thing, Love, is of no use to the world? No, I revise the question. Do you really think love is of no use to you or me? Because when we talk about "The World" really we are talking about ourselves. How we impact each other. Compassion and its lack. Do you see any importance in this?

THE AUTHOR

Of course. People impacting one another create history.

THE INTERROGATOR

They also create their lives. Just their lives. Not everything can be tossed on either side of an ideology's wall. I can't believe even you would think life is that easy.

THE AUTHOR

I know it's not. But it can be, under the right conditions. In Germany after 1945. Everything had been destroyed, nothing worked. It was the most wonderful time! In front of us was a void and the past was rubble, so there was this incredible open space in which it was easy to move. All obstacles had been blown apart. Would I have ever left my small town and made such a life for myself, become who I am, otherwise?

THE INTERROGATOR

So what World War Two accomplished was to blow open the door to your success.

THE AUTHOR

It accomplished many things. That's the point. Look. In a war you know what's happening. You can get something done. Peace is a very dangerous time. Peace is not as honest as war.

THE INTERROGATOR

When we're talking about nations.

THE AUTHOR

When are we not talking about nations?

THE INTERROGATOR

Not every individual action is an international matter.

THE AUTHOR

Most individual actions are not. That's a problem. People need to be aware of their history as it's happening. Because it is happening. This idea that history is the past is a misconception. History is happening right now. And someone is determining it. How can it not be you?

THE INTERROGATOR

That's not a real question.

THE AUTHOR

Excuse me it is a very real question! It's a question of what shoes you choose to buy. Or if you fancy eating kiwis in apple season. Your answer to these questions determines the lives of people whom you would never want to trade places with. I'm sorry if it's harder to live life with such consciousness. I can't do it myself. So I understand.

THE INTERROGATOR

Your rhetoric is pointless.

THE AUTHOR

It is. This is my problem. I told you. I have no impact anymore. I write plays and people debate them and write about them in theater journals that even theater people don't read, and the world goes on spinning us all in circles so slowly that despite our lickety-split computer age, we don't even notice we're not getting anywhere. If we dealt with history, if we dug up the dead and looked them in their hollow eyes, we might stand a chance. Because we can't really bury the dead until we acknowledge them. Otherwise history's nightmares keep coming back, like Hamlet's father.

THE INTERROGATOR

...Do you listen when you say these things?

THE AUTHOR

Very closely.

THE INTERROGATOR

And what do you hear? Don't answer that. It's a rhetorical question, having to do with exactly why you are so easily and often dismissed as a cynical intellectual with no ultimate purpose. You only listen to what you say to make sure you've said it well, and to what others say to make sure you have something well-said to say in return. So what is the difference between you and all these computer age nincompoops you would dismiss as out of touch with the dead? If you really hope to reach someone, you have to talk about you. That is what another person, an actual person, can conceive. Something specific. Someone sitting directly in front of them. ...You really have no idea who I am.

There is a sense of a flabbergasted question in this last statement.

THE AUTHOR

I certainly have an idea.

THE INTERROGATOR

But you don't. Really. Do you. Know who I am.

THE AUTHOR

How could I? I only have your strange behavior in this strange little oddly specific room to go on. All I can do at this point is formulate an idea of you. Anything else would take more time than I think either of us are interested in spending on each other.

THE INTERROGATOR

...Last question.

THE AUTHOR

-Great! [OR: Finally!]

THE INTERROGATOR

-Who would you be now without the writers you stole from?

THE AUTHOR

Who would you be without YOUR parents? We're all the product of one tawdry night or another, aren't we?

THE INTERROGATOR can't help but laugh at the extent of THE AUTHOR'S cynicism, and stares at THE AUTHOR for a moment.

THE INTERROGATOR

If it's all so hopelessly tawdry. If it's all lies and walls and bones to be broken. Why did you, why do you, write plays? Why?

THE AUTHOR

Why do you do THIS? Despite everything, you must believe it has some purpose.

THE INTERROGATOR

And, so, answer the question. Why do you write plays?

THE AUTHOR

...To destroy things.

THE INTERROGATOR

Destroy things.

THE AUTHOR

Yes.

THE INTERROGATOR

"Things."

THE AUTHOR

...For example?

THE INTERROGATOR

Please.

THE AUTHOR

(nods, then:) For years I was obsessed with *Hamlet*. So I wrote a short play, *Hamletmachine*, which was my attempt to destroy *Hamlet*. History is another obsession for me. And I have tried to destroy this whole complex we call our history.

THE INTERROGATOR

This is important to you?

THE AUTHOR

I do think my strongest ability is to tear away a fleshy surface and reduce things to the bones.

THE INTERROGATOR

Why?

THE AUTHOR

To be finished with them.

THE INTERROGATOR

Finished.

THE AUTHOR

Yes. To understand them. How things happen. What holds history up. How does Hamlet, with his messy dramaturgy and his impulsive indecision, remain standing before us for so many years? And yes that question is a metaphor for history. Or, to make it more personal for you: How does a Nobody become a kidnapper and interrogator and eventually destroy another human being?

THE INTERROGATOR

...Is that what you think my purpose is?

THE AUTHOR

Is that not why you are here with me? To get inside MY bones?

THE INTERROGATOR

Is that what I'm accomplishing?

THE AUTHOR

...

THE INTERROGATOR

Shall I play your forearm like a flute? Your rib cage like a xylophone? Your spine like a saw?

THE AUTHOR

...You're not real. I might as WELL have written you. You have all these questions. You've worked them out. And you think they'll get you to something true about me.

(MORE)

THE AUTHOR (cont'd)

That like a scalpel they will open me up and lay bare some sinewy truth you're hoping to carve out of me and sculpt in the image of your little purpose. All these questions. Reveal more about you. Than my answers. Could ever possibly confirm about me. ...So what is our purpose here. Just tell me. Is this Hell or Purgatory that we're in. [Are we at some end, or is there a possibility we might get somewhere.] Just tell me. And I'll answer to that. What is our purpose? What have we actually been doing here, you and I?

THE INTERROGATOR

We have been sitting across a table from one another.

THE AUTHOR

Yes?

THE INTERROGATOR

For the first time.

THE AUTHOR

Yes?

THE INTERROGATOR

In years.

A quite significant silence during which THE AUTHOR scrutinizes THE INTERROGATOR. Finally:

THE AUTHOR

How many years?

After a beat, THE INTERROGATOR checks his watch. Then:

THE INTERROGATOR

...A short prologue. And then a play.

THE AUTHOR

There's a play?

THE INTERROGATOR

Of course.

THE AUTHOR

I'm intrigued.

THE INTERROGATOR

Good. I'd hoped you would be. ...Now I am going to ask that you not interrupt for a moment, while I deliver to you this prologue.

THE AUTHOR

Fair enough.

THE INTERROGATOR

Thank you. ...This has all been very interesting. We've talked about a great many things. This interview has not gone exactly as I had imagined, but that's not at all a bad thing. Nevertheless, and though much has already been said, now I'll say just a bit more as prologue to the main point.

THE AUTHOR

(enthusiastic) So there is a point.

THE INTERROGATOR

...

THE AUTHOR

Sorry.

By the slight lowering of his head THE INTERROGATOR is clearly impatient to have been thrown by the interruption. But THE AUTHOR is genuinely intrigued in anticipation of whatever is about to happen and genuinely deprecates:

THE AUTHOR (cont'd)

Sorry!

THE INTERROGATOR

...Yes, there is indeed a point. And I hope, by the end of the play, you will feel it. But first, brief, and already underway: the Prologue.

PROLOGUE

Something about the room subtly begins to change. Maybe it's the light.

THE INTERROGATOR

In which it is noted: that the best way to kill is to extinguish memory. Kill a person, kill a nation, which comes first, and whether memory and history be but equals, we shall leave to Epilogues. For now, the Prologue, in which it is asked: shall I talk of me? I, who of whom we talk when we talk of you, we, who is that? And the Prologue in which at last it is said: My drama didn't happen. The script got lost. Here it is finally. The green blink on a red horizon as the old sun sets his last. ...I call the play: The Mousetrap. The which if you with patient ears attend, what here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

THE INTERROGATOR exits. Music, if it's not playing already, plays from here through the end of the play, changing, coming and going, according to the given scene.

ACT 1 SCENE 1

A title is projected: "Act One 1928 to 1934." Then another is added: "Scene One in which the FATHER argues with the NEIGHBOR, and this play begins."

Enter a BOY and a GIRL. The BOY plays the father. The GIRL plays the neighbor. A sweet old love song from 1928 plays in contrast to the gravity of the scene.

GIRL NEIGHBOR

May I put my heart at your feet?

BOY FATHER

It will soil my floorboards.

GIRL NEIGHBOR

My heart is clean.

BOY FATHER

You are not my wife.

GIRL NEIGHBOR

You are not my husband.

BOY FATHER

I already have a wife. I already have a son.

GIRL NEIGHBOR

You should have thought of that. I'll have your heart if I must carve it out. You have mine already. Don't be greedy.

BOY FATHER

I already have a wife. I already have a son.

GIRL NEIGHBOR

I have no husband. I'm having your son. I don't have blood enough for two. I'll have your heart if I must carve it out.

BOY FATHER

It's bad enough I'm already a communist.

GIRL NEIGHBOR

You should have thought of that.

GIRL goes to BOY and surgically removes his heart.

GIRL NEIGHBOR (cont'd)

Your heart is a brick.

BOY takes his brick back and puts it back inside his chest.

BOY FATHER

(for her:) It beats for you beneath the floorboards. *(to her, but as if for a public:)* We never kissed.

GIRL NEIGHBOR

You should have thought. I have no husband. I'm having your son.

BOY FATHER

I already have a wife. I already have a son.

BOY exits. Girl looks at her stomach, her hand on it. GIRL exits.

ACT 1 SCENE 2

The added title changes: "Scene Two in which the FATHER has been arrested and the TWO SONS meet."

The FIRST BOY now plays Alexander, legitimate son of the Father. A SECOND BOY enters and plays Heiner, bastard son of the Neighbor and the Father.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Why are your cheeks wet?

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

Because my eyes are wet.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Why? What did you see?

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

I saw them take away my father.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Why? Who took him away?

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

Two big men in brown uniforms. They hit him in the face, and they took him away. But that's not why my eyes and cheeks are wet.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Why are they wet?

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

It's hard to say it.

*SECOND BOY puts a hand on the back of
FIRST BOY'S head.*

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

(cont'd)

It was four a.m. I was asleep. I woke up, the sky outside my window was black, and there were noises coming from the other room - shouting, books being thrown. I heard my father's voice, higher and stranger than the other voices. I got up, went to the door, and through the keyhole I saw some men in brown uniforms hitting my father in the face. I went back to my bed and pulled my blanket up to my chin. Then the door opened. It was my father standing in the doorway. The two men beside him were much bigger than he was. I heard him softly say my name. But I didn't answer. I didn't move, and I stayed very quiet, my eyes closed. Then I heard him say, "He's sleeping." The door closed. And I listened as they took him away... This is the first thought of every morning I wake up. ...Now can we have a drink?

GIRL enters and plays the Neighbor.

GIRL NEIGHBOR

Heiner! You are not to play with him!

SECOND BOY HEINER

But mama. Why not?

GIRL NEIGHBOR

Because-... Because his father is a communist. Come inside, and finish your writing for school.

SECOND BOY HEINER

I'm finished.

GIRL NEIGHBOR

Come inside and write something else.

SECOND BOY HEINER

(whispers) What is your name?

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

(whispers) Alexander.

SECOND BOY HEINER

(whispers) See you tomorrow, Alexander.

GIRL NEIGHBOR

Heiner!

SECOND BOY smiles. FIRST BOY smiles. SECOND BOY exits. GIRL stares at FIRST BOY for a moment. FIRST BOY stops smiling. GIRL exits.

ACT 1 SCENE 3

The added title changes: "Scene Three in which the NEIGHBOR visits the FATHER at the concentration camp and HE meets HEINER, their bastard son."

GIRL and SECOND BOY, as the Neighbor and Heiner, enter. FIRST BOY appears behind the one-way glass as the Father, wearing clothes that are too big for him, escorted into view by a Guard, who is played by THE INTERROGATOR.

THE INTERROGATOR GUARD

Make it quick.

While they talk, THE INTERROGATOR slices an apple to eat and does not pay attention.

FIRST BOY FATHER

Why have you come here?

GIRL NEIGHBOR

Nobody knows who I am here. It is my only chance to see you. They had to lock you up for me to see you.

FIRST BOY FATHER

Can't you see I'm already in enough trouble?

GIRL NEIGHBOR

I want you to meet your son.

FIRST BOY FATHER

I already have a son.

GIRL NEIGHBOR

Heiner.

SECOND BOY steps forward. FIRST BOY leans closer to the glass and puts a hand on it.

FIRST BOY FATHER

(eyes on his son) Take him away.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Who is this, Mama?

FIRST BOY FATHER

Don't tell him.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Why are you in trouble?

FIRST BOY FATHER

My heart is a brick.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Why don't you jump over the fence?

FIRST BOY FATHER

It's a heavy brick.

THE INTERROGATOR GUARD

Okay. That's enough. Don't worry son, your father will be home soon.

SECOND BOY HEINER

He's not my father.

FIRST BOY FATHER

He's not my son.

GIRL NEIGHBOR

He's not my husband.

THE INTERROGATOR GUARD

Who the hell is he then? C'mon let's go. Hey, I'm talkin' to you, Mister Nobody.

THE INTERROGATOR takes FIRST BOY away.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Who was he, Mama?

GIRL NEIGHBOR
He is your father.

SECOND BOY HEINER
Mister Nobody?

GIRL NEIGHBOR
And it's our secret.

SECOND BOY HEINER
Why?

GIRL NEIGHBOR
Because... Because he is a communist.

SECOND BOY HEINER
Why is his name Mister Nobody?

GIRL NEIGHBOR
Because he is a communist.

SECOND BOY HEINER
Why is he a communist?

GIRL NEIGHBOR
Because life is hard. Let's go.

GIRL and SECOND BOY exit.

ACT 2 SCENE 1

A new first title is projected: "Act Two 1936 to 1945." Then a second is added: "Scene One in which ALEXANDER doesn't know how to write and HEINER helps him."

FIRST BOY enters as Alexander. SECOND BOY enters as Heiner, no longer dressed for cold weather.

SECOND BOY HEINER
Alexander.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER
Hello Heiner.

SECOND BOY HEINER
Why are your cheeks wet?

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

Because my eyes are wet.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Why? What did you see?

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

My father, without a job since he came home.

SECOND BOY HEINER

...Why?

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

Because he's a communist. But that's not why my cheeks and eyes are wet.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Why are they wet.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

Because I don't know how to write. Shh. Tell nobody.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Nobody?

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

Nobody.

SECOND BOY HEINER

...Why not.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

Because I'm embarrassed.

SECOND BOY HEINER

I'll write for you.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

No.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Why not?

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

I don't want it to be written.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Why not? What is it?

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

An essay. About the Autobahn. The best essay will be sent to Berlin and could win a medal.

SECOND BOY HEINER

I can win the medal. I'll write it for you.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

No.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Why not? It could go to Berlin and win a medal.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

I don't want it to be written.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Why not?

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

My father wants to get a job with the men in brown uniforms.

SECOND BOY HEINER

...He does?

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

He says it would make him happy again.

SECOND BOY HEINER

It would? ...Then I'll write the essay for you.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

Why?

SECOND BOY HEINER

Your father isn't Nobody. The men in brown uniforms should give him a job. I'll write the essay.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

...No.

SECOND BOY HEINER

But it could go to Berlin and win a medal.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

...Okay.

The BOYS exit.

ACT 2 SCENE 2

The added title changes: "Scene Two in which HEINER and ALEXANDER are called to war and express their hopes for the future."

FIRST BOY as Alexander and SECOND BOY as Heiner enter, now dressed as teenagers.

Hello Heiner. FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

Hello Alexander. SECOND BOY HEINER

It's December 30th. FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

It is. SECOND BOY HEINER

Almost 1945. FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

Almost. SECOND BOY HEINER

This war must end soon. FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

It must. SECOND BOY HEINER

I received my orders from the army. FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

Me too. SECOND BOY HEINER

I'm to go west. FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

I'm to go east. SECOND BOY HEINER

A beat. FIRST BOY hugs SECOND BOY. Then FIRST BOY hands SECOND BOY a thick notebook.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

I'll return this to you, then. I read every story. Nine years worth.

SECOND BOY HEINER

And?

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

How did you know about my dream in which I saw my father at a concentration camp? I never told anyone I had that dream.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Uh. You must have told me.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

I should have gone to see him. I never did... For nine years you've put my feelings into words. Made my life your fiction. I feel more alive because of it. You took what is inside of me and made it real. Thank you for that.

SECOND BOY HEINER

You're welcome.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

Who knows what would have come of me had you not written that essay so many years ago.

SECOND BOY HEINER

How is your father?

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

One job leads to another.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Is he happier?

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

He's nobody.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Your father is not Nobody.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

I betrayed him, he betrayed me, our accounts were settled long ago. Now I'm going to war. The past may add up to nothing.

SECOND BOY HEINER

...Let's think about the future.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

What about it?

SECOND BOY HEINER

It will give us something to see across the battlefield.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

I can't see myself there.

SECOND BOY HEINER

I see myself writing it all down.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

I see myself in a pine box.

SECOND BOY HEINER

You have to see better.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

I see a pine tree waiting to be cut down.

SECOND BOY hands FIRST BOY the notebook.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Take these. They will remind you that you are alive.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

But they're yours. And I've read them.

SECOND BOY HEINER

You can return them to me when the war ends. So it's me you will see across the battlefield.

A beat. FIRST BOY takes the notebook. SECOND BOY hugs FIRST BOY. SECOND BOY exits.

FIRST BOY ALEXANDER

Thank you.

FIRST BOY exits.

ACT 2 SCENE 3

The added title changes: "Scene Three in which the NEIGHBOR and the WAR each come to an end."

GIRL enters as the Neighbor, aged by more than years.

SHE plays a sweet old love song from 1928 on a gramophone. Eventually SHE begins to methodically bash a brick into her head with increasing force until the brick bleeds and she falls to the ground unconscious.

A German radio announcement comes on over the song, announcing the end of the war and Germany's surrender. Projected super-titles translate. As the announcement plays, as if across the continent from one another, FIRST BOY as Alexander and SECOND BOY as Heiner, both dressed as soldiers, rise up with their hands in the air as if to surrender.

The announcement translated: "???"

When the announcement is over, SECOND BOY comes home to find the GIRL. HE sits near her and waits. FIRST BOY comes toward him, stops, considers the notebook of stories, considers SECOND BOY, puts the notebook back in his coat, and slips away.

ACT 3 SCENE 1

A new first title is projected: "Act Three 1985." Then a second is added: "Scene One, in which HEINER visits his FATHER in a hospital, and we learn what has become of HEINER versus ALEXANDER in the forty years since last they saw each other."

GIRL enters as a nurse. SECOND BOY enters as Heiner at age 56.

GIRL NURSE

Make it quick.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Do the doctors know what the problem is?

GIRL NURSE

Some kind of bacteria.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Is it cancer?

GIRL NURSE

Some kind of bacteria.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Is it terminal?

GIRL NURSE

Some kind of bacteria. That's all we know right now. That's why you need to stay on this side of the glass. Wait here. He'll come in a moment.

GIRL puts on a facial mask and exits. On the other side of the glass, FIRST BOY shuffles slowly into view dressed as the Father, very old and in a hospital gown. THEY look at each other. Maybe no music under this.

FIRST BOY FATHER

Who are you?

SECOND BOY HEINER

You probably don't remember me.

FIRST BOY FATHER

Why have you come here?

SECOND BOY HEINER

Nobody knows who I am here. It's my only chance to see you. They had to lock you in a hospital for me to see you.

FIRST BOY FATHER

Can't you see I'm already in enough trouble?

SECOND BOY HEINER

I want you to see your son.

FIRST BOY FATHER

I already have a son. He's famous.

SECOND BOY HEINER

I know he is. I want to ask you about him.

FIRST BOY FATHER

Who are you?

SECOND BOY HEINER

I'm afraid to tell you.

FIRST BOY FATHER

Why, are you in trouble?

SECOND BOY HEINER

My heart is a brick.

FIRST BOY FATHER

...Why bother me about that?

SECOND BOY HEINER

It's a heavy brick.

FIRST BOY FATHER

...If you read the papers then you know as much about my famous son as I do. He and I don't see each other. What do you want to know?

SECOND BOY HEINER

Why did he change his name from Alexander to Heiner Müller?

FIRST BOY FATHER

I don't know. He's an artist. They do those things.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Why did he stop writing stories about his childhood and start writing plays about history?

FIRST BOY FATHER

I don't know. He's an artist. They do those things. Who are you?

SECOND BOY HEINER

Me? I'm Nobody.

FIRST BOY FATHER

...Who?

SECOND BOY HEINER

I'm Nobody.

FIRST BOY FATHER

...Have we met?

SECOND BOY HEINER

Once.

FIRST BOY FATHER

Where. I don't remember you.

SECOND BOY HEINER

You were in the concentration camp. My mother brought me to meet you.

A very long silence. FIRST BOY leans closer to the glass and puts a hand on it.

FIRST BOY FATHER

I already have a wife. I already have a son.

SECOND BOY HEINER

I have no wife. I have no son.

FIRST BOY FATHER

I already have a wife. I already have a son. He's famous.

SECOND BOY HEINER

I have no parents. I've had no life. I'm nobody.

FIRST BOY FATHER

...Go away.

SECOND BOY HEINER

You know who I am.

FIRST BOY FATHER

...My heart is a brick.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Why don't you jump over this glass?

FIRST BOY FATHER

It's a heavy brick.

GIRL enters as the Nurse on the Father's side of the glass.

GIRL NURSE

Okay. That's enough. Don't worry son, your father will be home soon.

SECOND BOY HEINER

He's not my father.

FIRST BOY FATHER

He's not my son.

GIRL NURSE

Who the hell is he then? C'mon, let's go. Hey, I'm talkin' to you, Mister Nobody.

GIRL takes FIRST BOY away. Maybe music again here. As SECOND BOY speaks, THE INTERROGATOR assists him in changing his clothes into a suit just like THE INTERROGATOR'S.

SECOND BOY HEINER

Who was he, Mama?

He's your father.

Mister Nobody?

And it's our secret.

Why?

Because-... Because he's your father.

Why is his name Mister Nobody?

Because he's your father.

Why is he my father?

Because life is hard. Let's go.

Where shall we go?

To Berlin.

What shall we do there?

Change my name to Alexander.

Mister Nobody?

And it's our secret.

Why?

Because-... Because his name is Heiner Müller now.

Why is his name Heiner Müller now?

Because he couldn't see for himself how to cross the battlefield.

Why could he not see for himself how to cross the battlefield?

Because life is hard. Let's go.

What shall we do in Berlin as Alexander?

Get the right job.

As Mister Nobody?

And it's our secret.

Why?

Because-... Because his name is Heiner Müller now.

Why is his name Heiner Müller now?

Because he's your brother.

Why is he my brother?

Because life is hard. Let's go.

EPILOGUE

The projected titles go away. Enter GIRL and FIRST BOY, now also dressed like THE INTERROGATOR. All FOUR OF THEM speak as a Chorus.

A new first title is projected: "The Epilogue"

CHORUS

The Epilogue. In which it is noted: that the best way to kill is to extinguish memory, and let history say what it must. For now, the Epilogue in which it is asked: shall I talk of me? I, who of whom we talk when we talk of you, we, who is that? And the Epilogue in which at last it is said: My drama didn't happen. The script got lost. Here it is finally. The green blink on a red horizon as the old sun sets his last. ...I called the play: The Mousetrap. The which if you with patient ears attended, what here hath missed, our toil shall strive to mend it.

*The CHILDREN exit. The play is over.
The Epilogue title remains projected.
THE INTERROGATOR takes his seat
opposite THE AUTHOR. A stunned silence
before:*

THE AUTHOR

...I don't [even] know what to say about that.

THE INTERROGATOR

Has your question been answered?

THE AUTHOR

Which one?!

THE INTERROGATOR

As to our purpose.

THE AUTHOR

No!

THE INTERROGATOR

We're here because you killed Alexander Müller.

THE AUTHOR

I don't know this Alexander Müller.

THE INTERROGATOR

What kind of brother does not recognize his brother?

*A silence. THE AUTHOR appears to grope
through his memory's files, but
fruitlessly.*

THE AUTHOR

...You are Alexander?

THE INTERROGATOR

No. You are Alexander. I am Heiner Müller.

THE AUTHOR

What are you talking about?

THE INTERROGATOR

You just saw the play.

THE AUTHOR

This is-?

THE INTERROGATOR

-Please don't pretend that you don't understand.

THE AUTHOR

I really don't.

THE INTERROGATOR

...The war was over. My mother was dead. Our father had gone, I didn't know where. I waited for you to return. And you did not. I assumed you had been killed, why else would you not come back? And now it was I who couldn't see across the battlefield. And so there I sat, for years, and did nothing. Meanwhile, you had embarked on making the world believe you were me. And you succeeded marvelously. So marvelously that your achievement eventually made its way back to our little local newspaper. I was shocked to read what a success I had become in Berlin.

THE AUTHOR

You-

THE INTERROGATOR

-While I continued to languish in the corner of a margin. You rewrote my life. After making your way through the stories in my notebook, you then stacked the bricks of your plays on my foundation. While I lived off money from friends - well, not really friends; people with money - you ate the blood of my youth like a vampire. And what a life you sucked from mine. Wives. Children. Success. And finally, after years of this, I died again.

THE AUTHOR

You died again.

THE INTERROGATOR

I remember the day precisely. Another December 30th, like the last day we saw each other. I went to visit our father in the hospital. Did you ever do that?

THE AUTHOR

Visit my father in the hospital? No.

THE INTERROGATOR

Well I did. Through my clerical position at the Stasi headquarters I tracked him down. He was the only thing you and I still shared. And when I realized that still, after all those years, he could not resist continuing to betray me, preferring his famous son who never came to see him to his forgotten one who did, finally, I took YOUR name, Alexander - a poor consolation prize, it not being worth terribly much - and went about laying my own bricks in a long road to this moment.

THE AUTHOR

...What?!

THE INTERROGATOR

And so here we are. And all my questions have indeed revealed what I'd hoped. That still, after all these years, after scraping my way into a position that I might get at you, and now finally having got you, still, down to my unforgetting bones, still, even now at the end of History: I am Heiner Müller! And just like you, I'll have killed my brother Alexander.

THE AUTHOR points at THE INTERROGATOR in stunned recognition.

THE AUTHOR

Oh my god. Heiner!

THE INTERROGATOR

Finally, Alexander. You've cracked the bone.

THE AUTHOR

We're brothers? I'm-. I'm-...

THE INTERROGATOR

...Looks like it is Amnesia Cancer after all. Though I'm sure the Cynical Cancer hasn't helped.

It takes a while, but something releases in THE AUTHOR, a kind of acceptance alongside his bewilderment, and he succumbs to the two feelings having met. HIS head collapses into his hand for a moment. Then:

THE AUTHOR

...Okay. I don't know what to say.

THE INTERROGATOR

Why did you do it? Why my work AND my name? All that was mine.

THE AUTHOR

It isn't all yours. You wrote the stories. But then I wrote the plays. And they're most of it.

THE INTERROGATOR

Why my name?

THE AUTHOR

I thought I needed a clean break. My father, being a communist-. It doesn't matter if I really needed to do it or not, I THOUGHT I did, (*shrugs*)! The dial of the entire country had been set back to zero; I thought I could do the same.

THE INTERROGATOR

By betraying me.

THE AUTHOR

You could still have written.

THE INTERROGATOR

Everything was in rubble. I was under it.

THE AUTHOR

That's not my fault.

THE INTERROGATOR

You can't blame History for this. This belongs to you. You made a choice.

THE AUTHOR

In response to history!

THE INTERROGATOR

(*warning*) Alexander, I really wouldn't take this as another opportunity to validate your ideas about the historical versus the personal. Under the circumstances it would be very bad form.

THE AUTHOR

But it would be a great example, you have to admit. It would be a perfect example!

THE INTERROGATOR stares at THE AUTHOR for a moment. Then he closes the file and sets the paper and pens neatly on top of it.

THE INTERROGATOR

...Our time here must come to its end, I'm afraid.

THE AUTHOR

Heiner.

THE INTERROGATOR

-Any regrets?

THE AUTHOR

...I would have liked to stage *Macbeth* on top of the World Trade Center for an audience in helicopters. But it wasn't meant to be.

THE INTERROGATOR can't believe this response, and half laughs. But HE is done. HE puts away the files, pen, pencil, and paper. Then HE holds out a light. THE AUTHOR takes up the cue and allows THE INTERROGATOR to light the cigar, which THE AUTHOR smokes. Then THE INTERROGATOR pulls out a brick and sets it on the table in front of THE AUTHOR.

THE AUTHOR (cont'd)

What am I supposed to do with that?

THE INTERROGATOR turns to the audience and says:

THE INTERROGATOR

Heiner Müller died in Berlin on December 30, 1995. The official cause of death was listed as "terminal cancer." End of play.

THE INTERROGATOR exits and THE AUTHOR watches him go. Classical music plays.

...THE AUTHOR looks at the brick. He picks it up. There is still dried blood on it.

The music cuts off abruptly and THE AUTHOR looks at the door where THE INTERROGATOR exited...

...The music starts again.

...THE AUTHOR looks back to the brick,
then eventually out at the audience,
taking them in slowly and individually.
Whatever HE might think of them, if
anything, is impossible to discern.

End of play.

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The following books and essays by the following people made this play possible. I am indebted to their work, and hope that given the subject they might appreciate my brazen raid of their accomplishments.

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