

© 2004. Anne Phelan. Sample. **The New York Play:** Inspired by Four Plays from the Wakefield Mystery Cycle. For scripts and performance rights, contact anne@annephelan.com.

Playwright's Note:

The Mystery Plays were the first plays written in English. Based on Bible stories, they were performed by male amateur actors for various religious feasts. The Wakefield Cycle (a.k.a. the Townley Cycle) of plays was performed on the Feast of Corpus Christi-32 plays in a single day. Religious drama was suppressed by Queen Elizabeth I, and the Mystery Plays as cycles were not performed again until the 1970s.

The New York Play is inspired by four of these plays: "Creation," "Cain and Abel," "Abraham and Isaac," and "The Second Shepherd's Play." **The New York Play** is less about religious content than taking these dense, evocative stories about the vagaries of human nature and looking at them in a contemporary context.

Scenes One and Seven were developed through the Hotter Than Hades Project (Julie Balzer, Director), Looking Glass Theatre, New York City, with actors Jeff Broitman, Chris Papagapitos, and Kirsten Walsh in July 2001. A workshop was part of the Looking Glass Theatre Spring Forum in June 2002 featuring Jeff Broitman, Siho Ellsworth, Jacob Grigolia, David Reinhart and Kirsten Walsh. M.L. Kinney directed both versions.

The New York Play was workshopped at The Juilliard School in February 2003, featuring the Drama Division's third year (Group 33), and directed by Michael Butler. The play was then further developed at the Jean Cocteau Repertory Theatre with their literary manager, Joe Brady, and presented as part of the Classic Reading Series in March 2004.

The playwright gratefully acknowledges the generosity of the Edward F. Albee Foundation in her ability to develop this play.

This play is in seven scenes. The roles can be doubled to five actors: two women and three men. Ideally, the same actress plays God in Scenes One through Six. In Scene Six, GOD also plays CONSUELO. In Scene Seven, GIL plays the ANGEL and MAK plays SAM. The playwright strongly suggest that a multicultural cast be used. If desired, an intermission may be taken between Scenes Six and Seven.

Setting: Scenes One and Seven take place in New York City next winter. Scenes Two, Three and Four take place in Central Park in the spring. Scene Five takes place in a community garden on the Lower East Side in the summer. Scene Six takes place in and around Washington Square and Union Square, on an autumn afternoon.

Scene One

Characters:

DOORMAN #1	male; the oldest of the three
DOORMAN #2	female; 20s/30s
DOORMAN #3	sometimes called Davy, the youngest of the three

Scene Two

Characters:

GOD	woman
LUCIFER	man, GOD's favorite angel, who later falls and becomes DEVIL #1
CHERUBIM	man, administrative angel-in-chief; vaguely reminiscent of Edward Everett Horton
LIGHTBORNE	man, LUCIFER's angel sidekick, who falls and becomes DEVIL #2
SERAPHIM	woman, CHERUBIM's angel sidekick, but with a better heart

Scene Three

Characters:

GOD
LUCIFER
CHERUBIM
LIGHTBORNE
SERAPHIM

Scene Four

Characters:

GOD
DEVIL #1
CHERUBIM
ADAM
EVE

Scene Five

Characters:

BOY
CAIN Cain's employee
former stock trader, currently doing community service as
part of HER parole from federal prison

ABEL
ANGEL Cain's younger brother, a simple-life *devoté*
male

GOD

Scene Six

Characters:

ABRAHAM circus owner; male; a knife-thrower, 100 years old

ISAAC ABRAHAM's son and assistant; male; whiteface clown; 30
years old

BABETTE female; roller skating acrobat; 20's

CONSUELO female; illusionist; 20's

GOD

ANGEL male

Scene Seven

Characters:

DOORMAN #1

DOORMAN #2

DOORMAN #3

MAK male; 20s/30s; former doorman

GILL MAK's wife; many children

ANGEL female

SAM male; 20s/30s; former web designer

Scene One

(A stuffed dog, JAMES, lies upstage)

DOORMAN #1:

(Enters. To the audience)

How can you live if you're hopeless? I try to figure that out every day. I can't sleep. I have to stay awake. For my job, so I can eat. Before, I was a real doorman. With a BMW, a pension, all that. Worked at a building on Park Avenue so beautiful it had a National Architectural Landmark plaque by the front door. Back when there were real apartment buildings. Once the power started going out, it all fell apart. At least it was the end of Frank Sinatra- I know he's dead. I could never stand him- smarmy bastard. I bet he was strange in the night all right. Even when my Yankees would win the Series, they'd ruin it by playing that jerk singing, "New York, New York." It's a song from a movie that was the longest three hours of my life. Sinatra blows the lyric in the recording studio but they release it anyhow, and some bureaucrat makes that the City's new anthem. Burned me up! Couldn't walk into Key Food without hearing him murder some classic. But now there's no more electric, and batteries are really expensive. I may never have to hear his lame cackle again. It's enough to make me believe in God. I do full-time what I used to do only for little old ladies who tipped big at Christmas. I walk dogs. That's what all the doormen have been reduced to. I am a Manhattan shepherd. I herd. I comb them. They kiss me. No one else wants to kiss a guy like me. Since the tidal wave came in, there's no more even pretending that the poor matter. If the rich say they want something for the good of the City, you can bet they'll be taking it out of the hides of the poor. It's what I always thought the Middle Ages would be like. Great if you're royalty, but being a peasant really sucks. And there are always more peasants, aren't there? The thing I never understand about the rich is the way they act like we owe them something- like it's not obviously the other way around. They're the nightmare I can't wake up from. I get the sweats. Sometimes I think my heart will explode. My stomach twists and twists, like salt water taffy on one of those machines at the Jersey shore. I keep thinking I'll die from it. It has to kill me or end, doesn't it? I mean, it can't just go on like this forever. I can't.

DOORMAN #1 (CONTD.):

Something will happen, somebody will bring these fat bastards down. I'm no Robin Hood wanna-be. I won't cross 'em. Heroes are stupid.

(Yawns)

Still, it feels good to say it out loud.

(Shakes HIMSELF)

Time to check on the dogs. I'll tell them all about it. They always listen. And the other doormen will come.

DOORMAN #2:

(Enters. To the audience)

Gee, I wish I hadn't left my mink coat at home. Yeah, right! This wind goes right through me. Times like this, the world takes you over. No way you can kid yourself you're different from anyone else. That life can't get at you. To think that now, here, you'd have to be mental. Keep telling yourself life used to be easier, and it'll kill you. Why did I ever think I wanted to get married? Was it the Bridal Barbie Santa brought for Christmas when I was six? Was it the parish priest- like he knew jack about women? Marriage is like Grandma's chicken yard- the rooster's the cock of the walk, and the hen looks on. Waiting. Expecting. I should be able to just walk away. Other people do it all the time, particularly these days. But I can't. It would be like cutting off my left tit without any anesthetic. He's from Brooklyn, you know? The borough of sitting on your stoop and watching the world pass you by. When we first got married he wasn't like this. But after things changed, his Brooklyn state of mind came back. He sits there, and watches the street. Passive as a Raggedy Andy. I'm not some victim, I just- I only- His spirit hovers over me, this gray life-sucking fog. But at the same time, he's not even there- I don't know where his mind goes. I think I could be murdered an inch from his face and he'd never notice. I never thought it could be this bad. Why didn't somebody warn me? These women who string along two, three guys- they must be masochists. I'm warning all of you who haven't gotten involved with some guy: don't do it. If you think you love them, pay no attention. Steer clear of all of them, and you can call your soul your own. If only I had.

DOORMAN #1:

Hey, are you blind and deaf?

DOORMAN #2:

I love you, too. Where's Davy?

DOORMAN #1:

No sign of him yet.

DOORMAN #2:

That doofus thinks he's a player. But he's full of hot air.

DOORMAN #1:

The only heat I know.

DOORMAN #2:

And it doesn't help that he's dumber than a box of hair.

DOORMAN #3:

(Enters. To the audience)

Hasn't been this cold since the blizzard of '03. I had a dark blue North Face down coat Mom bought me. So damn ugly- I looked like a total geek. But I wish I had it now. This whole city is so fragile and slimy and completely doomed. It's Wile E. Coyote waiting for the Road Runner to show up. Once, I had a 20 gallon aquarium for my fish. Nice, pretty fish, like underwater butterflies. Flutter, flutter. Nice bubbles from the bubble-maker. Regular, no surprises. Looking at my tank, I'd never think anything as peaceful as water could hurt anyone. Now, water scares me. Like the ghosts I see at night.

DOORMAN #1:

There aren't any ghosts!

DOORMAN #2:

It's only in your head.

DOORMAN #3:

How many people have died on this island? Smallpox, Dutch and British imperialism, disasters, HIV, botched abortions, TB, domestic violence, unnatural disasters, neglect? Who can even begin to measure grief like that? It can't disappear- it has got to go into ghosts.

DOORMAN #1:

So it's the ghosts held you up?

DOORMAN #3:

(Thinks this is way cool)

You know, in Singapore they have this festival every year where they feed the ghosts and stuff. They call it the "Hungry Ghost Festival."

DOORMAN #2:

You're so late I thought you were getting some.

DOORMAN #1:

(To DOORMAN #2)

Let him alone.

(To DOORMAN #3)

Can't you just call the ghosts your imaginary friends?

DOORMAN #3:

I'm not five years old! All I want is a double-no-fun latte and a t-bone steak.

DOORMAN #2:

You can't have 'em.

DOORMAN #3:

Let's play the game.

DOORMAN #1:

(Starts singing to the tune of "Them Bones")

"The A train's connected to the C train, the C train's connected to the E train--"

DOORMAN #3:

No, the other game.

(DOORMEN #1 and #2 exchange a look)

I miss watching the parade balloons get blown up on Central Park West the night before Thanksgiving.

DOORMAN #2:

I miss the statue of Saint George and the dragon outside the U.N.

DOORMAN #1:

That's enough.

DOORMAN #3:

I don't want to forget the way things were before.

It's better if you do.

DOORMAN #1:

But-

DOORMAN #3:

It's all gone. It won't come back.

DOORMAN #2:

You pretend like nothing's happened.

DOORMAN #3:

You have to learn not to see.

DOORMAN #2:

When the people are burning their fires at night, it's like all New York's gone back to the cave men.

DOORMAN #1:

I don't like going home to my basement at night. I don't like sleeping in it. I'm always afraid I'll see a rat, particularly one snacking on a corpse.

DOORMAN #3:

But you've lived there for months. And all the corpses are buried.

DOORMAN #2:

Yeah, but you can never be sure, can you? I found a finger in front of Bloomingdale's the other day.

DOORMAN #3:

Must've washed up from the sewer.

DOORMAN #1:

(Stretches)
Too much remembering wears me out.
(Settles down for a nap)

But what if I have a nightmare?

DOORMAN #3:
(As DOORMAN #2 lays down)

You won't.

DOORMAN #2:
(DOORMAN #3 settles down for his nap)

End of Scene

Scene Two

GOD:

(On HER throne centerstage)

I'm the first and last, the one God in three. I don't begin or end- that's why I'm the one on the throne. Everything that exists comes from my mind. First, I'll make a beautiful, blissful place that stretches on forever. This is Heaven- this is my pad. I will make angels to live with me. They'll serve me and praise me. And all be good singers.

(LUCIFER, LIGHTBORNE, CHERUBIM, and SERAPHIM enter. SHE names THEM)

Lucifer, Lightborne, Cherubim and Seraphim. Lucifer, you bear the brightest light.

LUCIFER:

(Bowing deeply)

As you say, my Lady.

GOD:

See how perfect he is? Lightborne?

LIGHTBORNE:

Yes, my Lady?

GOD:

You emulate Lucifer, and you'll do just fine. I do love your name the best.

LIGHTBORNE:

Me, too.

GOD:

So long as you are all as good as Lucifer, you have nothing to fear from me. I divide the darkness and light, the day and night. I have plans for this *Manna-Hatta*, the island of hills.

LUCIFER:

The sun rises in the east, the lights on Broadway rise in the west.

CHERUBIM:

(Holding up a score card that reads #1)

Thus endeth Day One.

GOD:

I divide the blue into water and sky. The Hudson River flows, carrying its ferry boats to Hoboken. I make it so.

SERAPHIM:

(Holding up a score card that reads #2)

Thus endeth Day Two.

GOD:

I gather the waters together and make the Seven Seas. The earth that remains bears linden trees and oaks, maples and elms-

LUCIFER:

And Trees of Heaven, that grow in Brooklyn.

GOD:

Each plant shall contain its seed, so it can reproduce in infinite number.

LIGHTBORNE:

(Holding up a score card that reads #3)

Thus endeth Day Three.

GOD:

I create the sun to shine at day and the moon to shine at night.

LUCIFER:

The ceiling of stars in Grand Central Station.

CHERUBIM:

The lights in the windows of skyscrapers that shimmer on foggy nights.

SERAPHIM:

The traffic lights that dance green to amber to red, as the cars' red brakelights along the avenues provide their counterpoint.

LIGHTBORNE:

The lights on the bridges that are like illuminated spider webs, touched by some mad fairy wand.

CHERUBIM:

(Holding up a score card that reads #4)

Thus endeth Day Four.

GOD:

Now, creeping, flying things to populate this space. Owls, crows, and grackles.
Caterpillars for the plants, worms for the dirt. Butterflies and hummingbirds for the
flowers. Frogs for the ponds. The land and water will feed them all.

LUCIFER:

What about mammals?

GOD:

Which do you prefer?

SERAPHIM:

Polar bears!

LIGHTBORNE:

Possums!

CHERUBIM:

Dendrobates azurius.

GOD:

You weren't listening- I've done the frogs.

CHERUBIM:

A chestnut-mandibled toucan?

GOD:

I've done the birds.

CHERUBIM:

A red panda.

SERAPHIM:

Goats!

LIGHTBORNE:

Bunnies.

LUCIFER:

Otters!

SERAPHIM:

Lady, I would like a whale.

GOD:

A whale? In Manhattan?

SERAPHIM:

Please, Lady.

GOD:

Okay, I'll hang one from the ceiling at the Natural History Museum.

SERAPHIM:

Yea!

GOD:

So shall it be- I bless them all.

SERAPHIM:

(Holding up a score card that reads #5)

Thus endeth Day Five.

(LIGHTBORNE, SERAPHIM and CHERUBIM
exit)

End of Scene

Scene Three

GOD:

(LUCIFER and GOD, alone)

Lucifer, my light, you've done it again.

LUCIFER:

Thanks, Lady.

GOD:

Creation is a big job, you know. Making sure the carnivores don't have too much of an upper hand over the herbivores.

LUCIFER:

The great chain of being- it's complicated stuff.

GOD:

That I can handle.

LUCIFER:

You don't get tired?

GOD:

The hardest part is the loneliness. I know I've got Jesus, but there's all that parent-child stuff going on. The Holy Ghost doesn't really lend herself to a bitch session. I always have this feeling that the other angels are sucking up to me because I'm the Alpha and the Omega. What's the point? It's not like they've got any chance for career advancement. You're really the only one I can talk to.

LUCIFER:

Gee, thanks, Lady.

GOD:

You've taken the whole free will concept and really run with it!

LUCIFER:

I've tried to.

GOD:

Good work, Lu!