

Clownes

A one act play

By B E Turner

SET: The set should be kept as simple as possible, just blacks with two chairs for the actors to sit on plus appurtenances on which to hang the various costumes that are required to indicate the different characters. (The costumes could be in a large chest or wicker basket, or on a coat stand or could be arranged in some imaginative way.)

TIME: Any time.

PLACE: Various.

CAST: There are two actors in the play each playing several parts.

THE ACTRESS:

BRIONY:	A female clown.
VERONICA:	A gush.
BELLE:	A Southern belle.
NEWS:	A newscaster.
SEPTIC:	A sceptic.
ARCADIA	A woman of arcadia.
DONNE:	A university don.
BABY:	Mewling and spitting.
MOTHER:	Mother of Earth.

THE ACTOR:

DAN:	A male clown.
COLONEL:	A Southern gentleman.
DANIEL:	A Southern beau.
CRICKET:	A theatre critic.
GURU:	A novice guru.
DON:	A university don.
SOLDIER:	Hup one two.

PRODUCTION NOTE: The actors are dressed as clowns. The various characters can be quickly achieved by donning an item of suitable apparel, which should be on the set throughout the play. The acting style is slick, superficial, two dimensional, such as is suitable for theatre of the absurd, although this play is not strictly absurdist. Some of the stage directions are not achievable on stage and may be cut. Some of the instructions in the mimes will not be achievable. They are included in order to assist the actors in developing reality. The actors should be encouraged to ad lib and to change the geographical and topical references as desired.

Enter Dan and Briony as clowns.

DAN: Art gets to the essence.

BRIONY: What did you say?

DAN: I said Art gets to the essence.

BRIONY: I thought you said it made no sense.

DAN: Usually it doesn't.

BRIONY: Isn't that a strange thing to say?

DAN: What?

BRIONY: That Art gets to the essence.

DAN: No, I don't think it is a strange thing to say.

BRIONY: Art is form.

DAN: What.

BRIONY: If you create Art you create a form. That is all that Art is.

DAN: How terribly interesting.

BRIONY: Do you really think so?

DAN: No I don't, I think it's all bull.

BRIONY: What did you say?

DAN: Dust. Bulldust.

BRIONY: You must explain yourself in more detail.

DAN: It's the essence that generates the form.

BRIONY: The form is the reality.

DAN: Essence is the reality, form is the deception. "The unreal has no existence, the real never ceases to be."

BRIONY: Where did we meet?

DAN: At a cocktail party.

BRIONY: I'm sure it was a dance. They don't have cocktail parties any more, Did you ever go to one?

DAN: I went to several, when I was in England. (*Or somewhere else.*)

BRIONY: You've never been to England.

DAN: It was a party with wine. Wasn't it a book launching?

BRIONY: It might have been an opening of an exhibition of paintings.

DAN: It was Gushing Veronica that introduced us.

(Veronica is achieved by donning a large floppy hat with a red ribbon)

VERONICA: Lovely to see you again. I was saying to Marjory just the other day that we haven't seen lovely old Dan for such a long time. Oh and would you believe it but Jennifer Stokes-Smythe has been seen with that terrible Bartholemew boy from down by the railroad tracks. Wouldn't you think that she would be absolutely the last person to be capable of deceiving her husband.

DAN: All is deception.

VERONICA: Yes, well I knew you would say something like that, with your religious convictions. I was speaking to the Reverend Hutchinson just the other day and he told me that all the gurus in India paint their toenails yellow.

DAN: But he is biased.

VERONICA: It's such a beautiful party. Have you read the book? It's by a group of authors who have been on a course. They've called the book Pteros, the god who has the virtue of bestowing wings.

DAN: I just came for the wine.

VERONICA: Oh what a simply adorable man over the other side of the room. Do you mind so terribly, I simply must go over and talk to him, he's simply divine. Oh Briony, meet Dan. I simply must rush.

She puts the hat back on the rack and becomes Briony.

DAN: All is maya. All is unreal. All is deception.

BRIONY: We haven't met yet?

DAN: Yes we have.

BRIONY: When.

DAN: Just now. Veronica introduced us.

BRIONY: Oh her.

DAN: Do you come here often?

BRIONY: Only in the book launching season.

DAN: Oh? Really?

BRIONY: Yes. And you?

DAN: Just circulating.

BRIONY: It's a round.

DAN: We're tied to the wheel.

BRIONY: It goes round in circles.

DAN: I think I'll have a beer.

BRIONY: The wine I drink is golden.

DAN: He called them golden. He said they ended but I think they still walked with him. I call them green. Salad days. The sun and the sand are yellow, but the leaf is green.

BRIONY: The colour is important.

DAN: And there are green twigs. They are green when they are young but they go brown as they get older.

BRIONY: *(Holds out her hand)* I thought I felt a spot of rain.

DAN: It could have been a bird.

BRIONY: Where?

DAN: The sharks circle.

BRIONY: Do they?

DAN: In the stratosphere.

BRIONY: Is it over then?

DAN: What?

BRIONY: Our first meeting.

DAN: I don't know if we've met yet.

(Dan climbs to the top of the tower of Babel and spits in the eye of king Midas.)

BRIONY: I thought it was a dance. Wasn't it a night of glittering splendour?

DAN: It could have been a disco after the party.

BRIONY: No, it was a ball. The old mans daughter had returned home after her life had been ruined by a profligate and he said that tonight he thought he would dance. It was a baroque ballroom with gilt-painted cherubim and cobwebs trailing from the crumbling chandelier.

Dan has become a southern gentleman. Briony becomes a southern belle.

COLONEL: God-dammit daughter it's fine to have you home again.

BELLE: Outside the moon hung above the trees in the mangrove swamp and cast it's ghastly glow through the open casement onto the revellers inside.

COLONEL: I think that tonight I shall dance. While you were away I would sit here night after night with my whisky drinking cronies and my black mistress, waiting for you to return.

BELLE: Oh father dear.

COLONEL: There you see, on the other side of the room, Daniel Saunders, the son of Major Saunders, who owns one thousand acres of the best cotton. Allow me to introduce you to handsome Daniel, a man who has never made love to a white woman in his entire life.

He takes her arm. They promenade. He whirls around and becomes young Daniel with a southern accent.

DANIEL: Do you come here often?

BELLE: Only in the cotton pickin' season.

DANIEL: May I have the pleasure of the dance.

BELLE: Be careful, the Phantom of the Opera is haunting the wings waiting for the chance to send the crystal chandelier crashing to the ballroom floor.

DANIEL: It's phantasmagorical.

BRIONY: There is a hint of thunder. (The accent has gone)

DAN: It all seems like a dream. (Back to Dan)

BRIONY: It all is.

DAN: Life slips away. We float on a stream. We float away for a little while. It's an idle dream. We don't make the river flow, we don't know how to make it flow. We're pieces of aimless jetsam, carried away by arbitrary currents.

BRIONY: Did we really meet at a dance.

DAN: Yes, if that's what you believe.

BRIONY: And there were bats hanging from the ceiling.

DAN: Bats?

BRIONY: They could have been frightened mice.

DAN: The only thing I ever heard were buffaloes.

BRIONY: Then it must have been a play.

DAN: And the pterodactyls were circling in the flies.

BRIONY: Do pterodactyls circle?

DAN: Possibly.

BRIONY: Is it over then?

DAN: What?

BRIONY: Our first meeting.

DAN: Yes, it must be.

BRIONY: Good, I can go away and leave you to your own devices.

Exit Briony

DAN: She's gone. Well what do we do now? Have to think of something. Can't stand here all day doing nothing.. I know, I've got a speech here somewhere... (*Searches his pockets but can't find it*) Where did I put it now? Well we'll have speeches later. Nothing seems to be certain does it? We look for the gorgeous... gorgeous... gorgeous something or other, but they dissolve into grains of sand and slip through our fingers. I have no solid reality for you, I only have dreams.

Come on Briony I can't keep them entertained all day.

There is a sudden earthquake. Force ten point four on the beaufort scale. The kitten puts her arm through the wall and plays with the fluttering flags. A rose bush sprouts through the floor. The roses are pink and the dewdrop fresh. A mason-fly settles on the rose. Enter Briony

BRIONY: I'm back. Well now that we've met we should have an affair.

DAN: But we haven't gone out together.

BRIONY: Do we have to?

DAN: It's the done thing.

BRIONY: "The done thing"? What does that mean?

DAN: It means it's done.
BRIONY: That makes sense. Well let's go out then.
DAN: Umm... Ah...
BRIONY: What's the problem?
DAN: I'm not sure what we do.
BRIONY: When?
DAN: When we go out.
BRIONY: We could go to a restaurant and dine.
DAN: Is that acceptable?
BRIONY: Of course.
DAN: All right then. Where do we go?
BRIONY: The Ritz of course.
DAN: Of course.

Exit Briony. Dan dons a waiters apron.

The chair mime

The properties mentioned in this mime do not appear on stage.

Dan sets the table (tablecloth, knives and forks polished on his apron, wine glasses, carnation in a slender vase) and adjusts the two chairs.

The chairs are ornate cast-iron chairs, painted white, with gold highlights.

Briony enters in evening dress.

Dan escorts her to the table.

He holds the chair for her to sit on.

As she sits down he pulls it away behind her.

Briony sits as though the chair were still there.

Dan scratches his head.

He puts the chair back where Briony is sitting.

Briony falls onto the floor as though the chair were no longer there.

Dan goes to help her up.

She attacks him with her handbag.

He retreats around the other side of the table.

He suddenly gets an idea.

He hands her the carnation which is in the vase on the table.

She takes it and smells it, it has a lovely odour.

She acts coy.

He sidles up to her.

She pretends to be enraptured with the flower, but when he gets close to her she gives him a real whack with the handbag.

He falls to the floor knocking over a chair.

Briony puts her hands on her hips in disgust.

She picks up the chairs and puts them back in place.

She gestures to Dan to sit on one of the chairs.

As he does so she pulls it away.

He falls on his bum on the floor.

Briony walks out.

Dan gets up and sets the table again.

He picks up a chair and looks at it in surprise.

The chair changes into a beautiful princess.

He bows and asks her for a dance.

She is shy and fans her face.

Dan gets down on his knees.

She agrees to dance.

They dance a slow and sombre waltz.

They dance out of the ballroom.

Briony re-enters the deserted room and kicks at the discarded tinsel left lying on the floor.

He goes to the table and picks up the remaining chair.

He places it in the middle of the stage.

Dan re-enters with the princess leaning on his shoulder.

Briony greets them.

Dan shows the princess the chair and she sits on it.

The princess changes back into a chair.

Dan picks it up and places it beside the other.

Dan is sad.

Briony hands him a handy.

Dan dries his eyes and smiles.

Dan and Briony dance a lonely waltz.

The stars come out and they rest in each other's arms.

It is all a dream.

BRIONY: You're a sad boy?

DAN: Yes, I cried. I gave her a flower and she rejected it. My sword was broken.

BRIONY: Your sword? That's very symbolical.

DAN: Yes.

BRIONY: It means you can't fight battles any more.

DAN: You're not a man if you don't have a sword.

BRIONY: Very symbolical. What is it you really want?

DAN: A lover who will look after me.

BRIONY: So we're lovers at last are we?

DAN: Yes.

BRIONY: What are you going to do then?.

DAN: Play cricket.

Dan goes to his hat-stand and dons a cricket blazer and cap and picks up a cricket bat.

BRIONY: That's typical of men. They get what they want and then go off and leave you to your own devices.

DAN: Anyone for a game? (Dan bangs his bat down on the floor)

BRIONY: Whatever are you doing?

DAN: Crickets. I'm sure I saw a cricket.

BRIONY: It's a theatre, it's bound to be full of them.

DAN: Well, it's time for reviews.

BRIONY: You can't have reviews yet. Wait till it's over.

An effulgence descends and carries Briony to cloud nine. She metamorphoses into a news-caster and looks down into the eyes of the suffering saviour.

DAN: Oh who cares about that.

The director may cut the following scene a little.

NEWS: Captain Marbles goes into the telephone booth and utters the magic word; SHAZAM! Lightening strikes and behold; Quasimodo the cricket, drooling at the mouth,

fouled by his own dung, besmirched and bemired by his own puke, mewling and spitting, a strange misshapen creature. The bells of the cathedral ring, but they are out of tune.

Dan is now a pedantic critic.

CRICKET: It is hard to tell whether the author of this play is being serious or not. It is true to say that he has a good ear for the inserbitent, but one cricket does not make you want to swallow.

NEWS: The forecast on the stock market looks brighter than usual. The Dow Jones principle has been inexorably overtaken by the forces of entropy and outer darkness.

CRICKET: The dramatic intrucience is hardly eluctible because real drama has to have rhubarb fronds. The only place where this play has rhubarb fronds is in the speech by the cricket, which is this one, which is the only sensible thing in the whole piece.

NEWS: From the sports room I have to advise that Foxtton Untried managed to score a goal in the last minute of the match and thus sealed the fate of the Footfall Agglomeration Cup.

CRICKET: This play is a self immolation to appease Narcissus and to exorcise the demon that keeps the individual distant from people.

NEWS: The situation from the war front is much as expected. After weighing up the number of casualties on both sides and dividing by the first surd number less than ten it was decided that there had been no significant advances by either army.

CRICKET: Self indulgence is the keynote of the whole play, just two characters circling around each other like pterodactyls, pondering on the great ironies of life with no relationship to others. If you wish to create a character in the theatre you have to have interaction. All the parts exist merely as ciphers, they are just chattels.

NEWS: I am happy to report that, for the first time in history, man has descended into the stratosphere in a hot air balloon. This event occurred outside parliament when the leader of the back-benches, Sir Hogtrot Dubloon, and the Prime Minister, The Right Honourable Ivan Legpull, inadvertently stepped into the basket as it was about to descend. Sightings of sharks are unconfirmed.

CRICKET: They are people in the worst sense of the word, communing with themselves to the exclusion of all else. They are victims of the myth created by the middle-class to keep the Arts safe and the Artist poor. True art is one of the most dangerous weapons known to society because it reveals a concealed truth. This play reveals nothing because it has denied society.

NEWS: Later in the day a display was given of martial dancing. This proved to be very popular with the crowds that had gathered to witness the occasion. One disappointing aspect of the afternoon was the absence of rhubarb fronds. It is hoped that this defect will be remedied on future anniversaries.

CRICKET: I recommend that the box office be continually manned during a performance in case patrons ask for their money to be refunded. In reclusion I must reiterate the only way to correctly perform metamorphosis is to utter the magic word SHAZAM! (*Nothing happens*) What? I said SHAZAM! (*Nothing happens*) Oh ye gods will I be forever tortured. SHAZAM! (*Nothing happens*) Oh I forgot, I must mention the name of the progenitor of the economic miracle. FUGLEWATSIT! (*The name of your favourite politician.*)

Crash of thunder. Blackout.

NEWS: Zeus looks down from heaven and is well pleased. The cricket is transformed into a vastly superior being. (*Sound of a frog croaking.*) A handsome princess comes and kisses the frog. (*Thunder. Sound of a cacophony of frogs. Sound fades. Lights up on Briony and Dan.*)

DAN: That was a bit of fun.

BRIONY: While it lasted.

DAN: There certainly were a plenitude of platitudes.

BRIONY: An outrageous and unwarranted collection of trifles. What was it about anyway?

DAN: It was about the time we went to bed for the first time.

BRIONY: Was it such a disaster?

DAN: I can't remember.

BRIONY: No. You can never remember. But at least we have had our first meeting.

DAN: It was far away in space, on another planet, in another time, in a bright world of... No, I can't seem to remember.

BRIONY: It's your mind that creates these fancies.

DAN: No, I seem to hear music. A drum that beats, differently. Out of time.

BRIONY: How strange. I don't hear a thing.

DAN: But that is the deeper reality.

BRIONY: I don't know anything about that.

DAN: Let me put on my saffron robe.

He puts on a yellow robe and becomes guru.

BRIONY: Aren't you going to shave your hair.

DAN: Not yet. I'm only an acolyte.

SEPTIC: Then I'll become a septic. (*Puts on horn rimmed glasses and becomes a septic.*) What is it you seek?

GURU: It is covered.

SEPTIC: Covered?

GURU: Covered by darkness.

SEPTIC: Covered by darkness?

GURU: Yes.

SEPTIC: What?

GURU: It needs light.

SEPTIC: What?

GURU: Light. To enlighten it.

SEPTIC: What would you light?

GURU: Just a small...

SEPTIC: What?

GURU: Just...

SEPTIC: What?

GURU: Just a small...

SEPTIC: What?

GURU: Candle.

SEPTIC: What?

GURU: Just a small candle.

SEPTIC: Why?

GURU: I always wanted it.

SEPTIC: What?

GURU: That light.

SEPTIC: What light?

GURU: That spiritual light.

SEPTIC: Spiritual?

GURU: They call it effulgence.

SEPTIC: Who do?

GURU: The gurus in India.

SEPTIC: The gurus? Don't they paint their toenails red?

GURU: Red?

SEPTIC: Yes.

GURU: The colour is, sometimes, red.

SEPTIC: Are you sure?

GURU: I always wanted to...

SEPTIC: What?

GURU: Know all about...

SEPTIC: What?

GURU: I always wanted to know...

SEPTIC: What?

GURU: About it all?

SEPTIC: Did you?

GURU: What?

SEPTIC: Learn about it all?

GURU: No.

SEPTIC: No?

GURU: No. I never did.

SEPTIC: That's a pity.

GURU: Yes.

SEPTIC: Don't worry.

GURU: Why not?

SEPTIC: Perhaps, if you are suitably reverent, it all will come.

GURU: Perhaps.

Silence

A sudden incandescence becomes apparent in the firmament. It casts its sublime radiance over the shepherds crouching in the snow. It dances to the music of the spheres past the planets Jupiter, sauterne, Uranus and Neptune.

SEPTIC: It could have been green.

GURU: What?

SEPTIC: The colour of their toenails.

GURU: Green?

SEPTIC: Yes.

GURU: It was, sometimes red.

SEPTIC: What?

GURU: Sometimes red.

SEPTIC: Is that all that you know?

GURU: That is all, that I managed to find out.

SEPTIC: What?

GURU: The colour of their toenails.

SEPTIC: In that case you shall never become enlightened.

GURU: No. Never. Here take my robe.

He removes his robe and becomes Dan. She removes her glasses and becomes Briony.

BRIONY: Such a sad story.

DAN: He never found the truth.

BRIONY: No.

DAN: Mrs. Earwicker's little boy started out with such bright expectations. He gathered flowers when it was spring and caught fish from under the ice in winter.

BRIONY: Innocence. What happened to him then?

DAN: He left home and went to the city.

BRIONY: What city?

DAN: Necropolis.

BRIONY: The city of death?

DAN: Yes. He was forced to wander in the empty streets for the rest of his days.

BRIONY: For the rest of his days.

DAN: The skyscrapers were like tombstones.

BRIONY: Populated by the dead.

DAN: The maggots squirm inside the carcass. Mechanical man in the graveyard of dreams. He was drawn to those silver coins, like moons in the overcast. He became imprisoned in their desire, their craving to touch.

BRIONY: Why did he go there?

DAN: It was exciting. The neon signs flashed, and there were so many things to see and do. Shops and cinemas and women with silken smiles. A fatal attraction.

BRIONY: Attachment. He clung to the things of the world. What happened to him in the end? Whatever happened to Mrs Earwicker's little boy?

DAN: He fell down into a crack in the pavement and became lost forever.

BRIONY: What a sad story.

DAN: Not really. He was never missed. The world got on quite well without him. The fact that he lived and died made not the slightest jot of difference.

BRIONY: But he might have been a famous musician.

DAN: It doesn't matter, there's plenty of music already. Enough to keep the concert programme going forever.

BRIONY: It's sad, but clownes are sometimes unhappy. It's the comedy of life that's so sad, the universal drama, I don't know whether to laugh or cry. And of course I don't know whether it makes sense or not.

DAN: It doesn't have to make sense, it just has to entertain.

BRIONY: What shall we do now then?

DAN: Another entertainment. As inconsequential as that piece of string you have in your pocket.

The string mime. (The string is imaginary.)

Dan watches.

The string is about a metre long.

She unravels it.

She holds one end between the thumb and next finger. She runs the string through the fingers of the other hand until it is extended to full length.

Dan nods with satisfaction.

He watches with amazement as the string changes colour. He tries to signify to the audience what has happened but fails.

Briony nonchalantly plays yoyo.

Dan pretends to lose interest.

The string suddenly becomes wet.

The water is from an unknown source.

Drops of water fall on the floor.

They splash.

Briony wrings out the string.

Water keeps flowing out.

The ground becomes muddy.

It becomes a quagmire.

Dan becomes bogged down in the mud. He has great difficulty moving his feet and starts sinking in.

Briony hangs the string on the branch of a tree.

It still keeps dripping. Briony reaches out to Dan, trying not to get herself caught in the mud.

She grasps hold of the tree.

After some difficulty she manages to extricate him.

They cling to each other beside the tree.

The string stops dripping. Dan picks it from the branch and lets it dangle from his fingers.

The sun comes out.

It is very hot.

The water in the bog dries up.

The surface mud becomes cracked, dry and powdery.

The string becomes very stiff with the quick drying.

Dan and Briony are surprised at this.

Dan tries to bend the string but cannot.

Briony watches with surprise.

Dan balances the string on the tip of his finger.

The string starts to grow.

Longer.

Then thicker.

It becomes heavier and requires two hands to hold it up.

A bulb appears at the top.

It becomes a big round ball.

Dan teeters around the stage.

The heavy weight overbalances.

The ball falls from the top of the pole.

Briony has to move fast to evade it.

It embeds itself in the earth.

They put their hands around it to show the shape.

The ball cracks.

A shoot emerges.

It grows up.

It becomes a tree with large broad leaves.

It bursts into bloom.

It is beautiful.

Ah.

BRIONY: It really is beautiful.

DAN: What?

BRIONY: The tree, the one with the large leaves.

DAN: And flowers.

BRIONY: Were there? It depends on what you think you see.

(She becomes a woman of Arcadia).

DAN: "The unreal has no existence, the real never ceases to be."

ARCADIA I feel so languid.

DAN: Why is that?

ARCADIA It's the perfect rural life I lead. The mowers mowing, and the reapers reaping.

DAN: The blowers blowing and the bloopers bleeping.

ARCADIA I don't know what your are talking about.

DAN: Reality.

ARCADIA The river flows, so clear. As I lean over the bank I can see my reflection. The ripples on the water make a slight disturbance to the perfection of my features. Rose petals, newly plucked, float on the silver-mirrored surface. Everything is simple. We are in Arcadia.

DAN: But under the surface...

ARCADIA What?

DAN: There might be matters for disquiet.

ARCADIA Such as what?

DAN: The sharks circle...

Arcadia rips off her Grecian robe (or whatever) and becomes Briony.

BRIONY: You spoil everything.

DAN: It can't last.

BRIONY: What?

DAN: Perfection.

BRIONY: No. *(Pause)* What shall we do then?

DAN: Speeches.

BRIONY: Speeches?

DAN: Yes, speeches by teachers from the ac-ca-ca-capolexy.

BRIONY: Goody goody I love speeches. Me first.

DAN: What are you going to talk about.

BRIONY: A biography.

DAN: That could be interesting. A biography of who?

BRIONY: A famous writer.

DAN: A writer? How about talking about something human?!

Briony dons an academic gown and becomes a Donne. (i.e. a female don)

DONNE: Although discredited and unknown during his life-time it was subsequently discovered that he was a fully accredited schizophrenic and thus eminently suited for a career as a writer.

DAN: Ho hum.

DONNE: Having first eschewed the safe but mundane existence in a newspaper office he embarked upon a series of disreputable adventures into the dens of iniquity on several continents. It is difficult to estimate what effect these experiences had on the development of a distinct and individualistic style as shown in the early *Diary in a Madhouse* or the more mature *Son of Diary in a Madhouse* .

Dan gives her the slow hand

DONNE: Officer. Please remove the cause of that disturbance. Thank you. Having undertaken this preliminary excursion into the school of hard knocks he married and settled down to live in the suburbs. It was only after his wife ran off with a vacuum cleaner salesperson that certain characteristic traits became apparent in his work; notably the development of an incompetence at spelling and punctuation. The early works were ordinary enough, having a recognisable plot and characters that were related to actual living beings. The errors in grammar that now intruded were a harbinger to the important developments to follow, however these would never have reached fruition had he not met with a certain Norville Bligh in a writers class.

Dan gives her the raspberry.

DONNE: Sir, kindly refrain. There may be some responsible people in the audience who wish to hear what I have to say.

DAN: What audience?

DONNE: Bligh was an escaped psychiatrist and persuaded him to have a backyard pre-frontal lobotomy. This operation was a complete success and totally impaired his ability to relate facts together in a logical manner. This left only two possibilities for a future career, writing or politics. As his inchoate contributions to the class were greeted with acclaim he decided to choose the former. There then followed two works which laid the foundation for imperishable fame: Return of Diary in a Madhouse, and Return of Son of Diary in a Madhouse.

Dan yawns loudly (all this is upstage.)

DONNE: Excuse me sir, I am almost finished. It is fruitless to speculate on what he may have achieved had he been able to complete his life's work, however it is sufficient to record that he destroyed the manuscript of Diary in a Madhouse II in a fit of rage after it had been assessed by a cricket. He then abandoned writing and devoted the rest of his life to the perfection of Donald Duck impersonations.

That is all. I thank you for your attention.

Dan applauds. Donne becomes Briony again.

DAN: Pretty boring. Now it's my turn.

Dan puts on the same academic gown and becomes don.

DON: Well here I am standing nervously by myself in the middle of the stage.

Why is that?

Because I have to make a speech of course.

Now that I'm here I have to say something don't I. I mean it wouldn't be a speech if there weren't any words to say.

Would it?

So I'll have to say, something sensible. Something with a plot, something to amuse and divert you.

Like this.

(The following is delivered in a hyperbolic manner)

One should beware that one should deliver a logical construesion to please the acacopopoleptics and endear creativity to the insensate sensual sapiens and embalm thought in the mould of the slippery surface of the shape of the world.

What did you say sir?

You want to go to the toilet?

Well put up your hand in the proper manner.

Hurry up or we'll have a nasty mess on the floor.

Now where was I?

The conventional cast of thought lies on the skin, creating a logical construesion bisected by the fin-triangular. One should beware of the choppy waves on the silver, on the silver top, for therein belies the inevitable incarceration of the ineluctable modality of the invisible.

Do I make myself clear? Indeed you may say it is all non but the sense is perfectly oblivious if you take the trouble to listen.

I thought you'd agree.

What did you say madam?

You don't like politics.

This isn't parliament you know. Would I say anything that made sense if it was?

To proceed.

The current lacklustre performance of the prevalent economic theories can be put down to the etiolated visages of the personnel involved and to no other reason, for without sufficient illumination there can be no light and hence a general lack of effulgence will pervade and as a result this enervating attempt at innovation is bound to have disastrous consequences.

It's all right, you can take your seat now.

Was it a relief.

Yes it can be painful, I've had it myself. You shouldn't have spent so much time in the pub before you came.

Where was I?

Ah yes.

In the pursuance of our final conclusion we must pass through various trials and tribulations, highs and lows, plusses and minuses, wives and mistresses, cakes and ale, drains and swills, all praise be, for the piece that passeth shall come to pass and we shall on to our final consolation, so be it, and in reclusion let me reiterate that when I have finished there shall be no more, but do not get up and leave just yet for the recension is yet to come, as it shall be evermore, words without end, for our coming up and our going down are the same sun and we are inapprehensive about the former but not so about the latter and when we see that blazing glow of the noonday there shall be no hereafter, or there may be one according to the referee's decision, which is certain to be biased in favour of the home team, so help me plod.

That is all.

Applause

BRIONY: I don't think that made sense at all.

Don becomes Dan

DAN: Of course it did. I was in the best tradition of modern critical analysis.

BRIONY: Would anybody be interested in that?

DAN: They have to be if they want to pass their exams.

BRIONY: Yes. *(Pause)* You know what worries me?

DAN: What is that?

BRIONY: We don't develop, we don't go anywhere, we just go round and round in circles never getting anywhere.

DAN: Yes it is a problem isn't it.

BRIONY: Even pterodactyls developed.

DAN: Did they?

BRIONY: They evolved into birds, with feathers.

DAN: *(Looks at his hat-stand)* Well I haven't got any feathers amongst my stuff.

BRIONY: It's not you silly, it's pterodactyls.

DAN: Not sharks.

BRIONY: Who ever heard of sharks with feathers?

DAN: Well there could be.

BRIONY: What, sharks with feathers?

DAN: Yes.

BRIONY: Where. Where would you find a shark with feathers?

DAN: Somewhere where I've never been.

BRIONY: Oh you are an innocent little boy.

DAN: I don't know. There are many places in the atmosphere where humans have not set foot. There could be anything lurking in those unknown depths.

BRIONY: You are dreaming.

DAN: It's the true reality.

BRIONY: What's this solidness then?

DAN: It's nothing. It doesn't really exist.

BRIONY: And this thing we're acting out?

DAN: It seems a bit of a business altogether.

BRIONY: Yes, it does.

DAN: I don't know quite how to work it out. It does have an ending doesn't it?

BRIONY: I don't know. The universe is still expanding.

DAN: But what's happening now?

BRIONY: We're in the middle bit.

DAN: The middle bit?

BRIONY: The bit that's in between the start and the finish.

DAN: I knew I should have kept my mouth shut. What's it about then?

BRIONY: It's about life.

DAN: Life?

BRIONY: The merry-go-round.

DAN: The carousel?

BRIONY: Yes. The roundabout.

DAN: The Ferris wheel.

BRIONY: The whirligig.

DAN: The roller coaster.

BRIONY: The wheel of light.

DAN: The dodgems.

BRIONY: The ghost train.

DAN: Kupee dolls.

BRIONY: The wall of death.

DAN: The Great Mystico.

BRIONY: The tattooed lady.

DAN: The bearded lady.

BRIONY: The house of wax.

DAN: The phantom of the opera.

BRIONY: The daring young man on the flying trapeze.

DAN: The Gypsy fortune teller with her crystal ball.

BRIONY: The Punch and Judy.

DAN: The marionettes.

BRIONY: The puppet show.

DAN: The shadow box.

BRIONY: The Mardi gras.

DAN: The festival.

BRIONY: The spring show.

DAN: The amusement park.

BRIONY: The great magician.

DAN: Mystifying.

BRIONY: Stupendous.

DAN: Marvellous.

BRIONY: We wait for her arrival.

Pause. Change of rhythm.

DAN: It's all an exhibition of paintings isn't it?

BRIONY: What?

DAN: Life.

BRIONY: No, it's just Vishnu dreaming.

DAN: I knew it was something significant.

BRIONY: (*Spoken as a quote from somewhere.*) All complications of the dualistic universe are aspects of the same reality.

DAN: I'm sure that would mean something if I could understand it.

BRIONY: One person in his or her time plays many parts.

DAN: That sounds like something I read once.

BRIONY: You have to be politically correct.

DAN: Naive did you say?

BRIONY: You can be who you like.

DAN: A soldier. (Dan becomes a soldier. Quick changes here)

BRIONY: Like a chameleon it changes. The malleable fabric of the illusion.

SOLDIER: Left, right, left, right, left,, left,, left. Squaaaaad hal'. Aaaaat eas'. Staaand easy. Sholdrrrr arms. Preseeeen' tarms.

BRIONY: Are you going to fight a war?

SOLDIER: Hup two three, hup two three (etc). (*Hups about the stage*) The role of the modern army in this civilization is to protect the citizens from death.

BRIONY: How do you do that?

SOLDIER: I shoot the enemy. The ones in the other parish. I collect medals, guns, campaign ribbons, scars in unlikely places. I don't wear a jersey in cold weather. I roll my sleeves up too.

President Eisenhower enters and bestows a medal. A land mine explodes and envelopes the stage in orange smoke. When the smoke clears the soldier has gone. (You could have the smoke if you can't manage the president.) Briony becomes a mother of earth with a baby in her arms. She plays the part of baby and mother. (The baby is just mimed.)

BABY: Wah wah. Wah wah.

DAN: Koochie koo.

BABY: (*Louder*) Wah wah. Wah wah.

DAN: Diddums. Diddums. Daddy change its nappies.

BABY: (*Louder still*) Wah wah. Wah wah.

DAN: What's the trouble.

MOTHER: I think it's teething.

DAN: Throw it out with the bathwater. I don't think we need any babies here.

MOTHER: (*Throws the baby away.*) It's where we all start from.

DAN: It could grow up to be a soldier and destroy the world.

MOTHER: It could be a playwright.

DAN: That would be even worse.

Mother reverts to Briony

BRIONY: Seems to be going on alright.

DAN: It's all nonsense.

BRIONY: In the best tradition of modern theatre. What do we do now then?

DAN: Nothing. Just play with a ball.

The ball mime

Dan is bouncing a ball.

He bounces it on the ground and catches it underhand on the way up.

Briony walks past and thinks: "what a childish game."

She is disdainful.

Dan throws the ball too her.

*Her reactions are too slow and it hits her on the body.
 They look to where the ball has fallen (between them).
 Briony refuses to pick it up.
 Dan picks it up.
 Briony shrugs.
 Dan bounces the ball and catches it.
 He bounces it again but this time does not catch it. It bounces up slightly higher than the point where he let it go.
 The next bounce is slightly higher again.
 The next four bounces are each higher.
 The next bounce is as high as the ceiling.
 The next bounce does not come down.
 They walk about the stage looking high and low, perplexed.
 Briony is looking at the floor when the ball at last comes down beside her.
 She is surprised.
 The next few bounces of the ball are each lower.
 At last it comes to rest on the floor.
 Dan picks it up.
 He bounces it off the back of his hand and catches it behind him.
 Extemporise some tricks.
 Dan throws the ball to Briony.
 She catches it this time, using both hands.
 Suddenly the ball becomes very heavy.
 Briony is surprised and lets it fall to the floor.
 She tries to pick it up but it is too heavy.
 Dan comes over and picks it up.
 It is as light as a feather.
 He blesses the ball and hands it to Briony. She balances the feather-light ball on the tips of her fingers.
 It grows... And grows...
 It rests on the tips of fingers of both hands.
 It turns into a beautiful multi-coloured balloon.
 It floats off into the air.
 It floats right up to heaven and takes their thoughts with it.*

BRIONY: It's beautiful.

DAN: Yes.

BRIONY: It became a thistle-down and floated away to heaven.

DAN: A flower in the garden of chaos from which the world began and to which it shall return.

BRIONY: Not a flower, a seed. The world was created from a thing seminal.

DAN: And from the seed a flower. It is the same thing.

BRIONY: A flower?

DAN: A great fire. A great seething. A growing. A brilliant bloom. A cauldron from which the child was born.

BRIONY: A seething? In the cauldron? (*Pause*) Did peace come? Was nirvana achieved?

DAN: No. The universe is still expanding. When it stops the flower shall bloom. It shall climb over the wall of our indifference and see the sun.

BRIONY: And after it stops expanding....

DAN: It shall decline.

BRIONY: Of course. *(Pause)* What now then?

DAN: It's time to part.

BRIONY: Time to part?

DAN: Yes.

BRIONY: Why do we have to part?

DAN: Because we have meeting at the beginning and parting at the end.

BRIONY: Can't we have a "happy ever after"?

DAN: No.

BRIONY: Why?

DAN: Because if you wanted to have a "happy ever after" you would have to live forever.

BRIONY: I see. *(Pause)* Where did we part then?

DAN: At a cocktail party.

BRIONY: I'm sure it was a dance. They don't have cocktail parties any more, Did you ever go to one?

DAN: I went to several, when I was in America. *(or somewhere else)*

BRIONY: You've never been to America.

DAN: It was a party with sour dough. Wasn't it a book launching?

BRIONY: It might have been an opening of an exhibition of paintings.

DAN: It was Gushing Veronica caused us to part.

(Veronica is achieved by donning a large floppy hat with a red ribbon)

VERONICA: Lovely to see you again. I was saying to Marjory just the other day that we haven't seen lovely old Dan for such a long time. Oh and would you believe it that girl Briony I introduced you too last time we met has been going with that terrible Bartholemew boy from down by the railroad tracks. I always thought she had very bad taste in men.

DAN: All is deception.

VERONICA: Yes, well I knew you would say something like that, with your religious convictions. I was speaking to the Reverend Hutchinson just the other day and he told me that all the gurus in India paint their toenails yellow.

DAN: But he is biased.

VERONICA: It's such a beautiful party. Have you read the book? It's by a group of authors who have been on a course. They've called it Pteros, the god who has the virtue of bestowing wings.

DAN: I just came for the sour dough.

VERONICA: Oh what a simply adorable man over the other side of the room. Do you mind so terribly, I simply must go over and talk to him, he's simply divine. Oh Briony, I didn't realise you were here. I simply must rush.

She puts the hat back on the rack and becomes Briony.

DAN: All is maya. All is unreal. All is deception.

BRIONY: We haven't parted yet?

DAN: We are about to.

BRIONY: When?

DAN: Now. Veronica told me all about it.

BRIONY: Oh her. What are we doing here?

DAN: Just circulating.

BRIONY: It's a round.

DAN: We're tied to the wheel.

BRIONY: It goes round in circles.

DAN: I think I'll have a piece of bread.

BRIONY: The sour dough I eat is golden.

DAN: He called them the golden days. They walked together in the gloaming. I call them grey, the twilight years. The sun and the sand are yellow, but the skin is wrinkled, like paper.

BRIONY: The colour is important.

DAN: And there are brown twigs. They were green once but they but they go brown as they get older.

BRIONY: (*Holds out her hand*) I thought I felt a spot of rain.

DAN: Really?

BRIONY: It could have been a bird.

DAN: The sharks circle.

BRIONY: Do they?

DAN: In the stratosphere.

BRIONY: Is it over then?

DAN: What?

BRIONY: Our affair of the heart.

DAN: I don't know if we've met yet.

(Briony climbs down the well of forgetfulness and drinks the waters of lethe)

BRIONY: I thought it was a dance. Wasn't it a night of glittering splendour?

DAN: It could have been a disco after the party.

BRIONY: No, it was a ball. The old man held a dance for the coming of age of his beautiful motherless daughter. It was a baroque ballroom with gilt-painted cherubim and cobwebs trailing from the crumbling chandelier.

Dan has donned a southern gentleman's goatee, federation hat & cigar. Briony becomes a southern belle.

COLONEL: It's fine to see you so happy daughter.

BELLE: Outside the moon hung above the trees in the mangrove swamp and cast it's ghastly glow through the open casement onto the revellers inside.

COLONEL: I sit here with my whisky drinking cronies and my black mistress thinking how happy your dear mother would have been to have seen you looking like this.

BELLE: Oh, what a wonderful pappy you are.

COLONEL: There you see, on the other side of the room, Daniel Saunders, the son of Major Saunders, who owns one thousand acres of the best cotton. Allow me to introduce you to handsome Dan, a man who has never made love to a white woman in his entire life.

BELLE: But father dear, he is not the man I desire.

COLONEL: He is not the man you desire?!

BELLE: No. My heart is given to another.

COLONEL: Another?! And who may this man be!?

BELLE: Bartholemew. Bartholemew McGrew.

COLONEL: Bartholemew McGrew?! Never!

BELLE: But I love him.

COLONEL: If you have him you shall go. He is a misguided profligate. You shall never darken my door again. I shall cut you off without a penny. I shall disown you forever. Begone ungrateful wretch!

They revert to Briony and Dan.

BRIONY: That was quite dramatic.

DAN: Phantasmagorical.

BRIONY: There was a hint of thunder.

DAN: It all seems like a dream.

BRIONY: It all is.

DAN: Life slips away. We float on a stream. We float away for a little while. It's an idle dream. We don't make the river flow, we don't know how to make it flow. We're pieces of aimless jetsam, carried away by arbitrary currents.

BRIONY: Did we really part at a dance.

DAN: Yes, if that's what you believe.

BRIONY: And there were bats hanging from the ceiling.

DAN: Bats?

BRIONY: They could have been frightened mice.

DAN: The only thing I ever heard were buffaloes.

BRIONY: Then it must have been a play.

DAN: And the pterodactyls were circling in the flies.

BRIONY: Do pterodactyls circle?

DAN: Possibly.

BRIONY: Is it over then?

DAN: What?

BRIONY: Our parting.

DAN: I think there's just one more thing to do.

BRIONY: What is that?

DAN: Art gets to the essence.

BRIONY: What did you say?

DAN: I said Art gets to the essence.

BRIONY: I thought you said it made no sense.

DAN: Usually it doesn't.

BRIONY: Isn't that a strange thing to say?

DAN: What?

BRIONY: That Art gets to the essence.

DAN: I don't really think it is a strange thing to say.

BRIONY: Art is form.

DAN: What?

BRIONY: If you create Art you create a form. That is all that Art is.

DAN: How terribly interesting.

BRIONY: Do you really think so?

DAN: No I don't, I think it's all bull.

BRIONY: What did you say?

DAN: Dust. Bulldust.

BRIONY: You must explain yourself in more detail.

DAN: It's the essence that generates the form.

BRIONY: The form is the reality.

DAN: Essence is the reality, form is the deception. "The unreal has no existence, the real never ceases to be."

BRIONY: And that's what we each believe isn't it?

DAN: In a nutshell.

BRIONY: Which contains the world.

DAN: And all my bad dreams.

BRIONY: We have different ideas.

DAN: Yes.

BRIONY: Different ideas about things.

DAN: Yes.

BRIONY: And so we should part.

DAN: Yes.

BRIONY: Good-bye then.

DAN: Good-bye.

CURTAIN.