

To act is to do and to pretend.

What are we doing that is not pretending  
when we know that we are acting?

Nicholas Mosley  
*Catastrophe Practice*

*Again, for Nora*

*THERE WILL BE NO INTERMISSION*

*All stage directions are broadcast through the auditorium over the PA system. The sound is distressed to evoke a bullhorn roaring over the engine noise of a lumbering truck offstage.*

*Scene 1: A clearing in a fir forest, springing up behind the actors on steel catapults that turn into rigid supports for the prickly green-needled canopy.*

*Enter Stage Right: Icon is attired as an aristocrat arriving at a cotillion, black waistcoat trailing excessively long tails, with a top hat in his right hand and the dueling pistol swaggering in his left.*

*The manservant Gibbon is already onstage.*

ICON: Blood in the grass.

GIBBON (*gesturing toward a path through the wood with a fox tail nailed to a stick*): This way, sir.

ICON: Yours, I'm afraid.

*Icon raises the pistol and shoots.*

The actor must be true to the man.

I follow that rule myself. My surgeon is a friend. He has tickled my ventricles. We are to meet for dinner. We are friends who meet. As usual, I am going to play my part: the patient patient. He says he has an *interesting* surgery to recount from this very morning.

Dr Todorow is amused to think of my playing. He confesses for me that I can't help myself. A player from birth, congenital, incapable of acting without acting the part.

He does not know how wrong he is.

Neither is he above the seductions of the stage. He took me as a patient, I have no doubt, for the celebrity of my productions, for the notoriety of my performances. And especially for the mantle of *experimenter* that I don as imperiously as the doctor in his surgery dons the white coat. And now he has taken our friendship as a license to come to the theater when we are rehearsing, to whisper to the playwright who directs his own plays and who has been known to act in them anonymously, as if he, the medical man, could influence the action. He wishes to be seen influencing the scene.

So, who is playing to the better audience?

We will dine on the other side of a wall that is shared by the theater with a bustling trattoria, *La Bussa*. The doctor will indulge his weakness for marrow, *Ossobuco*. I will take the bone itself, the veal chop dressed with barely a teardrop of olive oil and embittered with a sprig of rosemary.

When Furio, our favorite waiter, owl-eyed behind his olive-green spectacles, affecting shoulder-length hair

parted in the middle, however thin and greying, flourishes his red-jacketed order pad above his head and turns briskly away from the table, I can see the eagerness glistening on Dr Todorow's lips. He is impatient to recount today's surgery, scene by scene.

"A five-chambered heart! Like a bee!"

How could I resist his enthusiasm for such a conceit?

He paused for me to show interest, to lean closer, until I was inhaling the allergenic scent of the oleander blossom drowned in the oversized table vase between us, no less bloated than the fetus in the bell jar.

"An infant heart, you understand. You appreciate the elements. And what waits in the wings? Let me block it out for you.

"When I am called to the OR, I am already plotting. In the breast pocket of my surgical smock a glass pipette, delicate as the most hairlike artery adorning the palpated muscle of the heart, stands erect. It is clasped in the taut seam of the vermilion pocket stamped with the hospital insignia. I have already inhaled the albino arachnid, no bigger than a crust from the corner of your eye, into the pipette's humidifying constriction. It waits.

"I stand close to the surgical table. I will not lean too far forward over the incision that yawns under the pressure of my index finger. I have my mark, as you might say. I'm standing on it. The paper sheath in which the sole of my shoe is sterilized would erase the markings on the floorboards of your stage. We would undo the performance by rehearsing it.

"My theater is different. We do not rehearse. The hand is the hand. The dome lamp shines as unquestion-

ably as the sun on the scenery. Dr Todorow, if I can be so immodest as to speak of myself in the third person, is a ray of light to his patients. He incandesces amidst the ceremonious and deferential bustling of his impeccably bleached team. In their white scrubs they flank him like the riffling feathers of wings that might be summoned to beat the air in a miracle of ascent.

“The lights, the costumes, the livid momentousness of the infant heartbeat, like a protagonist coming on stage for the first time. The bated breath. All are poised for the action.

“I take my cue. It is all buzzing in my head, all that is to be done, as I press the gleaming flange of the tiny scalpel between my finger pads. I carry the sting of the bee in my hand. Everyone chuckles to hear me call our patient, less than a week old, the *bee girl*. And, truth be told, she has no proper name yet, according to the nurse whose forehead furrows above her vellum mask.

“*Bee girl*. I lower my surgical microscope to the bridge of my nose. I pretend not to be amused by my minute witticism, though I am still looking up. Perhaps I am studying the diagrammatics of the problem. Once the heart is opened, the right atrium, anomalously bisected into two chambers by an interseptum, must be made unitary, whole. The membrane between the chambers may be tough as gristle or airy as a breath of gossamer. I make much of the scale of things. I make a show of finding my focus. I swivel the rings of my scope back and forth, calling attention to the ratcheting. I lean in. I am burrowing into the depth of field. The chambers of the infant heart are minute enough to excuse my

probing posture. I wish to give the appearance of a man descending into a hole that is not big enough to accommodate the pupil of the spying eye.

“I relish the eyes upon me like something salubrious in the mouth.

“Have we ordered?”

“Well, you can imagine, dear Pan, that as I commence the most delicate step of the operation my thoughts are awash with some kind of salivary foam. I think especially of the fretful parents tensed before the screen of the monitor that I have set up for them in a remote soundproof chamber, an enveloping white space in which the nervously dilating pupils of their eyes are flailing helplessly. When the latex tips of my fingers are as wet as their eyes, the operation is approaching its *dénouement*. I can see the parents’ expectant faces, by reciprocating circuit, on the small television screen reflected in the mirror that is hinged to my headpiece. The screen flickers behind me where no one else would think to look. The parents are holding hands.

“Like lovers at the theater, it occurs to me.

“Well, as you know, good Pan, the action must complicate.”

I see that Todorow sees my lashes flutter for him.

“Focus on my hand now. For I am laying down the scalpel. I am feigning a brusque adjustment of the microscope. I am reaching for the pipette in my breast pocket where my own heart is hovering. I will need to bow deeply enough to the table that my swiftest reach for it, the pipette, will be indistinguishable from the expert technician’s obligatory inspection of the exca-

vated organ, perhaps the size of a chicken liver. My eye is now where my hand will be in only a few minutes, when the thread of the first suture will plant its kiss upon the puckering tissue. It is, of course, not my eye. The protuberant lens of the eyepiece blinds even my closest collaborators to the furtive maneuver of my right hand, even more furtive by virtue of my ambidexterity. Everyone assumes I am left-handed. So, they are all looking at the point of the needle I lift high above the table in sparkling preparation for closing all the wounds.

“And with my unpredictable, inexplicable right hand, from the pocket that is luffing mere centimeters from the patient’s torn breast, I move the pipette to my waiting lips, everything on the same plane now, bent as I am in my official act of concentration. Who would imagine?

“A single, soundless puff dislodges the speck of the spider, like a bead of pollen in a humid breeze.

“Only now, with the privilege of the microscope, can one see the albino spider scintillate against the livid gleam of the ventricular wall. Clutching. Tarsus and claw.

“A life hanging in the balance. On a thread, you might say, if you were a spider lover.

“Letting my hand drift audibly against the folds of my surgical apron, I cover the sound of the pipette snapping between two knuckles. I let it drop to the brittle floor of the OR with the accompaniment of a camouflaging grunt. There the ball of my foot renders it dust.”

The arrival of the plates – at first the waiter misplaces the dishes, requiring a circuit around the table that causes Todorow to break the spell of his narrative



with a violent twisting of his neck – gives me a moment to digest, so to speak, the substance of the plot as it has been developed. But I am hungry, too. The fatty whiff of singed bone draws me to my own place at the table. The knife in my hand will be in no way as momentous as Dr Todorow's. But it will sever the tale from his lips.

Which is just as well. For the moment, it should suffice that we fill our mouths with meat. And as I might say to Todorow, though I don't dare, every play can benefit from an intermission. If nothing else, the break reminds the audience of their own time. It gives them pause. Time is time to think.

And what would they think of? That all that Todorow had meant to happen happened for show. That a licensed medical procedure in a well-regarded public hospital of our metropolis was co-opted to the private urges of a melodramatic temperament. There's no doubt of that. It would not have been unfair for me to say that "if you think life and death are more real in your play than in mine, let me remind you that you have never killed anyone." Unless you consider the spider. Would a speck of spider survive the closing of the wound, after all?

But I cannot ask the question without ruining the effect. The effect. It is what we both strive for. Even the audience is a prop of the play. I would no sooner let myself obtrude a fictitious skepticism about the unfolding of my dear friend's drama-in-mind than I would permit the collapse of a wall onstage to interfere with my plans to play things out to the end. I would not deny him his effect.

I let my mastication of the bloody chop speak for itself. As though he knew I were being charitable with him in the private perch of my critic's box, Todorow took up the slack of his playlet with a pricking word.

"Pierced. I had pierced the enchambering wall of an anomalous infant heart, you know. First, I had pierced it to determine its resistance to the keen edge of the scalpel. And when I had determined the membrane's vulnerability, when I understood what degree of focus it would give the blade by its resistance, I had sharpened that focus further against the whetstone of my eye and excised the membrane altogether. That was the success of the procedure. The spider, snugly sutured within the new chamber, was the itch of suspensefulness for me, of course."

His magician's gaze, scouring my face for any vestige of incredulity, assured me that his suspensefulness had a false bottom.

"I take it though, by the smoothness of your brow and by the salubrious ease of your chewing, my distracted Pan, that you have no fear of a mere dot of a spider, barely the spittle of my breath.

"But you forget the possibility of venom."

I had indeed imagined the curtain coming down upon my mind's-eye view of the applauding faces crowding the gurney and showering such light on the spectacle of the closing wound.

"Not so fast," he didn't say. But I knew this was the predicament Todorow had set for me. I had rushed myself. Such was the puzzlement he no doubt imagined he could wriggle onto the smooth brows of all those who

didn't even know there was a spider. Then how could they have known that a moment existed between the spider's ability to strike and its suffocation in the living tissue, suturing the life of the patient to a healthy future? I would have to think about that.

They would not have imagined it, unless it happened.

The question would so belatedly be, "How could it have happened?"

Then Todorow made note of the members of his audience, not least of all the relieved, for the moment, parents. They were held unwittingly captive in the cramped screen of the video monitor that was in fact Todorow's mind's-eye incarnate, nestled, as he had already confided to me it was, in the background of the action. Then there was the bright-eyed and smeary-mouthed anesthesiologist, already coiling his tubes into their snake-charmer baskets. The three nurses, clenching hands upon the rails of the gurney, are responsible for what happens now, now the worst dangers are past, or so they think. Confidence shines in their faces as gleamingly as the steel in their grip as they prepare the pilgrimage to the recovery room. Only the beeping, red-eyed heart monitor remains to be harnessed for the journey.

It was the monitor that caught them off guard. Suddenly shrilling. Without warning, the sound of emergency clamored urgently about them. Todorow could see them summoning the muscles in their faces to meet the alarm, as purposefully and as palpably as the hands they relaid upon the instruments they had only just relinquished.

He confided that he relished the likeness to naked

bathers scrambling to clothe themselves against the gaze of an unwelcome public breaking raucously into the secluded bower of a lazy riverbank where, having dropped the facade of dress, the innocents are dripping. One has seen it in paintings.

So, I might have known. Todorow had contrived it himself. He had tampered with the equipment in time to seize the moment for his most suspenseful purposes. They had all imagined they knew what was coming next.

Now something *was* coming, bearing down without direction, but with dire proximity. The startle reflex was enough to freeze the characters in gestures of ignorant intent. The parents, rushing to exit the white door in the white cubicle, saw the fingers of their hands spread out before them, wriggling blindly for a grip on the moment. The tottering stature of the anesthesiologist, he having already pricked his finger on the syringe of epinephrine, was thrown back against the wall of the OR in the pose of the snake charmer bitten by his familiar. The three nurses found each other's hands in the instrument bay where they had reached for handles, knowing blades lurked dangerously in their places.

Plain to see. A tableau. A scene of panic. But Todorow was peering at *me* through the marrow-less aperture of his last shin bone, his lips heedless of the orange drippings puddling his plate.

He obviously knew the fates of the others. Only I could wonder the fate or the fatality of the spider. I was the interesting one now. The one to watch. The one whose eyes would tell the success of the lurking surprise. Or so I thought he thought.

Wrong again.

Pre-empting any doubt as to his success, Todorow abruptly spoke. Pushed into the footlights by his stalwart company of players now the curtain was down, his smile was as sinuous as the author's most artful bow.

Nor was the author waiting for applause. Surely he noticed me sitting back in my chair, wiping a napkin haplessly over the wine blotches I had dribbled down my shirt front.

Already too delighted with himself, he divulged the secret in the most hastily self-congratulatory tone of voice: "And of course it was the test button on the heart monitor that so falsely alarmed the room. The pressure of my knee under the table. I mean the gurney.

"I call it *The Fall of the Wall of Atrium.*"

*Scene 6: A lofty turret room of the renegade Gonzogo's castle. Stone walls streaked with a furry dampness. Instruments of torture: a rack, pulleys, hooks.*

*Gonzogo is cinching Rosalinda's wrists to the rack. She barely resists.*

GONZOGO: Look upon these remnants of previous leather bindings. Are they not curled against the dowels like perched birds mortally fastened to bare lime twigs?

ROSALINDA: My limbs will not survive the test. Why not cut out my tongue to soothe your wrath, since it will warble the notes of my innocence forever in your hearing?

GONZOGO: That tongue I should have cuddled with my lips? It would have been my pleasure to make it my pet, were it not such a cur to the truth.

ROSALINDA: Signore, my only falsity was the truth of my love for Fernando, whose bones your axe set to as if you were a chopper of wood. So, you watered the tree of your hatred with his blood. We did see how it rose to the knees of your breeches, you waded so deep.

GONZOGO: I will go deeper yet.

ROSALINDA: In me, with your roughest blade. Be quick!

*Gonzogo reaches for the dagger in his belt.*

ROSALINDA: But stay. Do you not wish to know what it would have been like had I parted my lips for you? Thusly, at least you might know what you have slain.

GONZOGO: What? Give me reason to do honorably that which would otherwise have seemed dishonor? Defile a slut? By your leave mistress, I will.

*By the scruff of her neck, Gonzogo wrenches Rosalinda's mouth toward his own. When he crushes his mouth against hers, Gonzogo gives an agonized shriek and falls backwards to the floor. Rosalinda cries out. She bares her incarnadine teeth. The bloody tip of a sewing needle glints minutely in their grip. She spits.*

ROSALINDA: Quicker am I to the scabbard of my tongue than you to the scabbard on your belt, Signore. To be plain, the point of my blade was already tipped with the adder's bile. The bite at the other end of the needle was easy enough for me to bear, knowing how my taunting tongue, skewered on the very shaft of the needle, would bid you good death.

Marry, my tongue bleeds from the wound that wombed the needle's sting. I would not deny it. Unlike yourself, I do bleed the evidence of a murder.

But you, Signore, you are dead.

“Yes. The piece has a working title: *Killer Killing Killers*. Many scenes, but all superficially disarticulated from one another. Except of course that they are all scenes of murder. One after another. Murder keeps them interested.”

How many times have I begun the conversation with my potential backers this way?

As with my surgeon, we meet in restaurants. Or in the bars that are anterooms to restaurants. Pretexts for eating. For acting. It is an act of devotion, if I can conjure it from their hip pockets.

My potential backers wish to divine the meaning of their investment. It is my job to make them believers, in the very manner of the original mystery players. The devil could bare his backside onstage and no one would laugh at the shagginess of the hair that whipped the swagger of that dark orifice. Well, I want them to take it on faith that their money is already a token of sacred knowledge, which no accountant could ever divulge for them. They require instead the offices of a priest of dramaturgy.

Is it not art, after all, that we are discussing, glasses in hand, our mouths quite full?

“Think of *yourself* as the meaning of the play,” I tell them. “Do you not recognize your special sensitivity to the human condition?” Then I delve into the body cavity, stroking the choicest organs. The stomach, the heart. I conjure a plot, a fate. I make a character stoop. I unfold a fabric of suffering, spread it out before them.

“The production is a sort of tablecloth upon which we will break bread. Such knowledge of the human heart we



will purvey.” I inspire them to appreciate our partnership. “You in your capacity as a producer, me in my capacity as a producer of miracles.”

So I inveigle them, knowing how insatiable the hunger for the right feeling can be. Touching human organs is a tricky business. Not to say ‘sticky’. You want to breathe life into the idea of the play. You want them to feel the fragility, the shortness of that breath. And you want them to stomach it when you suck that breath away. But be chary of the heartstring too tautly strung. Don’t snap the bond by suturing things too tightly. Well, I sound like a medical man myself. No surprise there.

Believe me, I have spent my hours on the table dying to be the surgeon, not the rattling patient. Dying, if truth be told.

It can indeed be told.

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Dr Todorow stirred in his seat, in the fifth row, center of the Crooked Hat Theater, observing my high-stepping entrance from stage left. The stage set, a curved wall of mirrors, reversed that direction for the audience, held briefly as they might have been in the grip of illusion. Not least the illusion that here was a healthy specimen of an actor.

No such illusion would hold sway over the unconfoundable heart-carver. As he tells it, he was already alive with the foreknowledge that hums in the fingertips of a man whose senses press against unpredictable densities of tissue, even as they yield to the blade of whetted

steel. Such is the surgeon's preternatural attunement to what is next. We all squirm in our balcony seats with the tickle of such anticipation in our tails. Who can help it? Well, we are not doctors, after all – we cannot help.

As I set my tiptoeing foot to the floor behind Siegfried, the magician's wand-waving figure, the garrote dangling from my fingertips like a shimmering necklace, my entire physique shuddered with the first fist-thumping blows of the heart muscle within my breast. The even more massive thump of my entire body upon the floorboards of the stage, as tremorous as a sandbag plunging from the lighting grid above our heads, caused Siegfried the magician, meant as he was to be caught unawares by the garrote that was skittering across the stage, to flinch and cower. Precisely the response that my character's exaggerated lightfootedness was intended to forestall. The director should have halted the production.

But an unsubtle foot was now stomping its way from my chest to my shoulder and down my arm, finding its mark, so that the obligatory recognition scene of my personal Aristotelian tragedy, all too horribly recognizable to me now, might unfold to its fatal conclusion.

Luckily, luckily I had a secret collaborator in this drama that I could not have authored by myself. Dr Todorow's rush to the stage outpaced the giant foot treading upon the life that I now imagined to be a mouse scurrying frantically to escape the enclosure of my narrowing chest. He found me athwart the mark where the stage action was meant to have progressed, my eyes spread wide and overflowing with light from the pole

grid above our heads, my arms and legs flung awry, the body trying to save itself by reckless abandonment of the convulsing torso.

He knew what to do. He seized the mouse tail. With my pulse still throbbing under his thumb, he raised himself on one knee beneath the wash of a glaring spotlight that must have made the squinting spectators wonder if this wasn't a continuation of the drama in which they were so engrossed. Passing his open hand across the face of the audience, as if to wipe the greasy film from a window, he ordered the auditorium to be cleared.

The ambulance might have disgorged from his mouth, it appeared with such instantaneity. Its siren, hovering over my lurching stretcher as we raced out of the bleak tunnel of my breast-beating terror into the salvific illumination of the operating theater, still rings in my ears. Someone was holding my hand, leading me on. Voices spoke as though I were their echo chamber. They did not speak to me. I was scissored free of my clothes and shifted from gurney to table. A heavy glove was placed upon my mouth. I breathed it in as I was instructed. I felt vague fingers snuggling in my nostrils, in my throat.

As the fur grew thicker in my consciousness, I was nonetheless aware that another stage awaited my appearance. Dr Todorow's eyes beamed the key light that I chillingly recalled only the risen dead can give report of. My complete loss of consciousness at that moment did not dim the scene of action that was about to transpire, though I was no audience for it. They trotted out my heart. It took its bow.

I'm making an inference. I am, after all, alive.

An inference, fittingly enough, is what I ask of my potential backers. I don't deny it. For them it might be characterized as the leap of faith that one hopes will be fortuitously winged with success. I am the one, am I not, promising to make those wings sprout?

I felt the nibs of those wings scratching my throat while we waited for the first drinks to arrive. The bardic genius who first dipped his quill into the inkpot was at the feathered end of the bargain. So, I must flock to answer their questions. I am, after all, one of a company.

“Yes, the piece has a working title. *Killer Killing Killers*. You can take it either way. Either the killer is adjectivally motivated, a killing kind of killer. Or have it otherwise: the killer kills. Of course, if you try to go one way, the other will follow.”

My potential backers are of the world that knows the difference between an adjective and a noun. They aren't cunts, as our Pinter would have a character say. I have taken part in his audiences at the more fashionable theatrical houses, no doubt among the likes of the backers sitting before me now. They sport turtleneck sweaters, cashmere scarves, ascots – not cowboy hats and string ties. They speak languages that did not mother them. They have traveled extensively. They have gorged on exotic meats in exotic locations. They have attained their full stature as men and the occasional startlingly attractive woman. Their photographs, among the faces of other directors, playwrights and actors, stare out at us

from the walls of even such restaurants as this, where I invite my potential backers to swirl the wine in the glass, to lean back against padded leather and entertain my proposal. Yes, the drinks had arrived.

“But don’t get the wrong idea. There is humor. The humor, you see, is in the blood. Think of the old humors of the blood that would have bubbled in the bard’s time and you’re approaching the insight that is my tickling inspiration. I seem to give you only violence in my play – seemingly discrete scenes, like blood-soaked bread-crumbs dropped without a pathway to remember. But my audience will pick them up. They will see the humor of it in the end, because they have no choice.

“I’ve been accused by my critics of worse convolutions, believe me.

“So, yes, the play is one scene after another of killing. But one thing after another implies a history, does it not? The meaning will, of course, be recognizable to my audience by cues of costuming and scenery, if not by the distinct idioms echoing our hoary theatrical past. Each scene will be dressed out in the costuming and language of our Greeks, our Elizabethans, our Jacobean, our Victorians, our contentedly absurd Moderns, the whole playlist of our great masters. The dignity of the theater itself is to be honored in these scenes, despite the rampant gore.

“So, at least seemingly, it will be one scene after another of the knife piercing the eye, the garrote nearly severing the vertebrae (there are tricks to this trade), the bullet still smouldering in the victim’s chest, the poniard twisting in the groin, the anal penetrations with the fire-

dripping iron poker (tricks, as I say). But *seemingly* is the point.

“Because you haven’t heard the best part yet. You haven’t really understood what it is I am proposing. And that’s as it should be. Your suspense is the audience’s suspense. You will know what they will know, unexpectedly, as it happens in the most realistic way. I am a mimetic artist, you see, quite contrary to the label *experimentalist* which critics have stitched upon the fabric of my career and which, like all the white-coated laboratorists who so dutifully attend to our mortality, simply frightens the audience away. Some call them doctors.

“I tear that label out of the lining of every performance.

“Well, here is the proof of my plot-making proficiency. One scene after another of killing, etc. One scene after another of the knife piercing the eye, etc. Oh, they’ll get the gore, our audience. They may even be briefly startled by their capacity for boredom, the edge of their seats numbing the backs of their legs. They’ll get the gore. But they’ll have missed the point of the poniard, if you catch the flourish of its twinkling in my eye. Until they have seen enough, until they have seen past the costuming, even past the face paint.

“‘But he is already dead,’ they will now mutter to themselves. One killer killed by the next in scene after scene. Such is the appearance they will have been given by us jointly, should you take my hand in this venture. Now they will feel the confidence of their smug judgment in the smile-primped corners of their lasciviously rouged lips. Men are plumped with as much blood as

women in the snide curling of the lip that accompanies the presumption to criticize.

“For the killer has, with each killing, taken a bow of sorts. Releasing his weapon of choice to the incriminating clatter of the stage floor, the killer has turned full face to the aghast audience before abruptly exiting the scene, until the next scene, and the next, when the actor’s face will be recollected ever more sharply.

“So now they will be embarrassed for the actor, even more so for the writer and producer whom they will believe have let the theatrical sleight slip from the hand. They will begin to presume.

“‘The same actor,’ they will whisper to one another. ‘They are using the same actor. How are we meant to believe in these characters if we can see right through the disguises?’

“They won’t know that they were intended to mouth these criticisms until the actor speaks for herself.

“In the final scene she addresses herself directly to the audience.

“When she turns to peer over her shoulder, they feel the massive liquid queasiness of the passengers in a lifeboat lifted by a sudden swell rolling off the back of a whale. So, the memory comes to each member of the audience. In every one of the preceding scenes the killer has curiously paused, just so. Before taking the first steps towards his hasty escape, he has paused. He has turned his face to the audience in exactly this way, as if he has had something to say. Then, thinking better of it, tucking himself into the folds of silencing darkness that have closed behind him at the back of the stage, he is gone.

“But this time, after so many scenes of carnage, he speaks. She speaks. ‘I’ve been watching you. How did you not notice? I – I am always the killer.’

“What the audience thought they had unmasked as the disqualifying artifice of the performance was, of course, the point of the performance.

“Well, this reversal of roles is what I’m thinking of now. For the ending. Not bad, I admit. But much can change in the course of rehearsals and rewritings, the accidents of time that stretch before us to opening night. The final ending will come later. You must permit yourselves the suspense. What’s a plot without a reversal of fate? His? Or hers?