

Chickens Come Home to Roost (or) In GOD We Trust

A One Act Play in Three Scenes

Characters: (6 actors+2 female ushers for incidental audience roles)

The Playwright (PW): a 60 year old man

GOD: Voice of GOD 1= Stage Manager: A man with a big voice

GOD 2: Voice of GOD 2: A man with yet a deeper voice

Wife: a very old WOMAN

Baby Elephant 1: GOD 2 in elephant costume

Baby Elephant 2: GOD 1, i.e. Stage Manager, in an elephant costume

Eagle (Crow=Voice of GOD 2): a stuffed crow or raven

FBI MAN 1: dressed same as FBI MAN 2.

FBI MAN 2:

CAPTAIN: Played by GOD 2

Sargent: played by the Stage Manager

Setting: A stage in a theater. Other Props: ad lib

Scene 1

PW: *(walks on stage from left with a writing tablet in hand. Talks to the wing left)*. If you're ready we can start. *(Now faces the audience)* I'm the playwright. I want to get this straight from the beginning because otherwise we're going to get into a "can I suspend belief problem", you'll see. Maybe you're already thinking "he's an actor, isn't he? He's playing the playwright". Or worse, "he's an actor playing a stupid device for a playwright". Whatever you're thinking, just stop thinking here will you? Let it go. Let's get it down right. *(He takes his pen and acts as if to begin writing on the tablet)*. I'm the playwright and that's all there is to that. *(He looks up at the audience)*. No reason to be here if you won't accept that. Might as well get up and leave. *(mumbling)*...waste of your time... Bore you ta hell. *(WOMAN in audience starts to act like she's going to get up)* Wait miss, please...you there squirming in the _____ row. I don't really mean it. It's just.....*(WOMAN stands up and starts to edge out to isle)*. Well, ok...usher can you help her out? *(An usher helps the WOMAN but as she is heading out she turns to stage)*.

WOMAN: It's just I have to put money in the meter. *(She turns and leaves while PW just gawks)*

(Another WOMAN starts to act restless)

PW: Come on now. Would you give me a chance to get over this first hump? Get out of the starting gate? *(He's anxious and sweating; second WOMAN sits back down)* Rough start...another go...please.....I'm the playwright. I'll tell you why that's important. The other guy's just a voice. GOD's voice. That's a big enough issue right there. Is it a he? A she? A pretentious (or portentous) invention? If you don't believe in GOD, you're already rolling your eyes and if you do, I'm probably in worse trouble. So do you see my point? If I'm just the actor up here getting paid a few bucks to play an idiot playwright? See, there are people nodding. I struck a chord there. Now I can take it from the top. Don't go; stay in your seat and I'm the *(pause and shakes is head as if testing himself)* "heavy-handed" playwright. I think we can go on now.

GOD 1*(voice only, throughout)*: Playwright, what in hell are you doing?

PW: I'm preparing them for your entrance.

GOD 1: for my entrance?

PW: Of course.

GOD 1: I don't have an entrance. I am just everywhere.

PW: yes, I know. But we are going to have a dialogue. Give you a voice.

GOD 1: Oh, are we now?

PW: Well, that's the way I'm writing it.

GOD 1: (*sarcastically*) Is that so?

PW: seemed like a good idea to me.

GOD 1: did you ever watch Archie Bunker;.....he called the son in law "Meathead"?

PW: How can you turn to ridicule when we're just getting started?

GOD 1: It's self-evident.

PW: Is it now. Tell me then.

GOD 1: You're trying to take my role. Right down to that nonsense about "preparing them for my entrance". And you're writing my part too, like your GOD's gift to man. Or maybe Man's gift to GOD.

PW: so what's so bad about that?

GOD 1: Oh come on now. If you even believed in me you wouldn't be so damned arrogant about it.

PW: is that so?

GOD 1: You know otherwise?

PW: sure.

GOD 1: well, spill it then.

PW: Lots of people go around talking for you, in your name. They're all believers. They quote the Bible and such. They find quotes from you to make a stand for just about anything they want to say. And they're very inventive too. I don't know's they're creative, but at least inventive. They use you for whatever suits them.

GOD 1: except you? You're creative?

PW: now I didn't say that.

GOD 1: I want to back up a bit, before we get sidetracked.

PW: ok, it's your call.

GOD 1: are you a believer or not?

PW: are we going to degenerate into that?

GOD 1: seemed like a reasonable question to me and you just turn it aside.

PW: that's why you're not the playwright.

GOD 1: but the way you're doing it, I thought I was. And, of course, whatever I think, usually goes.

PW: so you're not going to let me write my own play?

GOD 1: I didn't say that. Go ahead, write your own play.

PW: then you agree to play the part the way I write it?

GOD 1: you've got to have your head examined. You can get any old sleazy actor to play the words you'll put in my mouth. If I stand in it will only give credibility to your pretensions. I am me. I don't need to pretend.

PW: so you are. But do you remember the Beatle lyrics from I am the Walrus.... 'I am he, as you are he, as you are me, and we are altogether, I am the Walrus, goo goo, gjoob'?

GOD 1: I remember everything.

PW: well it says "you are me".

GOD 1: Sure I'm me and I'm we and I'm you and I'm all together. No big deal.

PW: (*pauses.....*) Yes, the Beatles could see that too, but why not play the part?

GOD 1: because you're trying to take away my free will. Strange role for the Almighty. Am I stealing your voice?

PW: not so far. But you know I can't steal your voice. There's already too much competition there.

GOD 1: do you think competition is such a bad thing?

PW: no, that's not my point.

GOD 1: If I played your role that would seem to end the game there wouldn't it. People would know. You'd be king of the hill then, bigger than GOD himself. I won't do it.

PW: please?

GOD 1: what chutzpah. You don't get it.

PW: maybe I do get it.

GOD 1: Not that I can fathom.

PW: Well then, why did you say "bigger than GOD **himself**" back a second ago? Are you a man?

GOD: :YOU'RE THE MAN, MAN!! You know damn well I'm not a man. It was your own idea to give me a male voice. Didn't have much choice did you? Unless you were going to get sidetracked into that Earth GODdess stuff. You'd find yourself talking to plants and stars instead of your alter ego. Mind you, I'm ok with the Mother Earth female principle; just that anthropomorphism, either sex, is soooo..... you know,..... limiting,..... too literal. But that's what you're stuck with anyway, isn't it? Historical literalism. Overly concrete, like a schizophrenia. You've saddled yourselves with that, but I don't have to play the part. I won't do it.

PW: that was kind of long winded, GOD. I don't think I wrote it.

GOD 1: Of course you didn't write it. Haven't we got that straight yet. I've got the power; the free will. I'm playing myself here, not your stooge. I'm not in your play.

PW: Yet here you are in my play. Don't you see the audience? Isn't that a contradiction?

GOD 1: Playwright, playwright, you will turn me into a Dreiserian throw back. Get this: I do not see, I have no eyes, yet I know everything. Your audience is a mental construct, a microcosm of the archetypal audience of existence that I commune with at every moment. I am not in your play. I am giving you advice and sharing a cup of tea.

PW: Ahaa! How can you share a cup of tea if you don't even have a form, let alone a personage.

GOD 1: (sullen) I was speaking metaphorically, idiot. You will get absolutely nowhere as an author thinking that way.

PW.: (*contrite*) Oh, you're right. I'm sorry.

GOD 1: sorry, sorry. What's to be sorry about. Just get back to work and use your noodle, man.

PW: wait a second.

GOD 1: what now?

PW: This was a confrontational dialogue, but now I've just let you sort of parent me, in a sort of maternal way. I'm confused now for the moment. Whose doing what here?

GOD 1: You are! You always are the one. I'm just giving my thoughts. Get a grip.

PW: I'm a bit lost in this dialogue. I had thought perhaps of some other characters.

GOD 1: Yes, yes, I know. No man is an island, and all that etc. You'll just have to decide for yourself whether to get bogged down in the pedantry of the day to day or to stay on this acid ego trip in your head. No great pickens either way, given yourself..... I've got a question for you.

PW: So do I....., for you.

GOD 1: You've been reading Arthur Miller, haven't you? That little one about me and Lucifer?

PW: Well, yeah. But its about Adam, Eve and the sons too.

GOD 1: Sure, but that's not the point. You have pretentions to being an Arthur Miller.

PW: You've got to be kidding. How can someone as all-knowing as you say that?

GOD 1: Well, I admit it: your mind's just a blank. I'm trying to draw you out.

PW: Well is that fair?

GOD 1: If you're GOD, anything's fair. You're not to judge me.

PW: The thing is Miller's way too good for such thoughts; it's depressing for a youngish 60 year old novice like me. Even if I had any talent I'm too old to get onto the stage or to do it right. "The Creation of the World and other Business" is real and surreal at the same time; it's beyond my imagining, topologically in particular. It makes me cry. (*irritated*) But this is a distraction, man; it's just like your question about whether I'm a believer. You're messing with my play. You've sidetracked my question about whether you'd play the part, again.

GOD 1: Yes I have. (*Mumbling to himself...*) What a persistent son of a b...

PW: Good, at least we can dialogue on that.

GOD 1: not really; I've already made myself clear about 3 times. You can't take my free will. Just use your own. My power's my own. So bug-off.

PW: What if I don't write your part. You can write it yourself or ad lib.

GOD 1: Improv you mean. You know about improv?

PW: Of course I do, but I'm no good at it. Linear thinking and inadequate classical training are my main weaknesses I think.

GOD 1: That's an excuse, you may just have a mental block. You don't let your imagination run with the musical sounds.... I might help you with that.... But as to the play, improv sounds interesting. I'll consider it.

PW: When could you give me an answer?

GOD 1: Oh that. No, I'll consider it the night of the performance. I'll either do it or not.

PW: You mean I leave your part blank and then at the performance you'll either show or not? There might be just blank air, nothing?

GOD 1: Not my problem. It's your play.....

PW: That's absurd and not helpful at all. Are you really that undependable?

GOD 1: You've got a point there. What can I say?

PW: Look, you know I can't do that. It's like Andy Warhol or something (*uses his arms to express befuddlement and frustration*). Like, GOD speaks:”blank air”.

GOD 1: It would be a bit pop avant garde.

PW: But you're already here. I'm getting this on tape you know. It's gonna be written down.

GOD 1: You can do whatever you want with the words, Walter. I'm just the stage manager you know. You gave me an outline of my part and asked me to throw in anything I want for GOD's part. That's what I'm doing. It's your play.

PW:I'm not Walter, I'm the playwright. And as far as stage manager, I don't know what you're talking about. Don't play tricks.....(*stage manager comes on stage. His voice is same as GOD's*)

SM: Look Walter, glad to help out. I might consider a little acting career myself. They need me over on the other stage in 10 minutes so if you want me to do more work with you, you know my number. Oooo! Where did you get this audience?

PW: *(shakes his head as if coming out of a daze.....mildly)*: Thanks Miles. It went well. *(then as Miles leaves, he turns opposite and remonstrates)*: oh fuck *(stamps his foot and swings at the air)*

GOD 2: *(heavier bass voice)* Listen playwright? I've got to go too. There are a lot of loose ends I need to attend to. Everyone wants me to talk to them and it gets annoying. By the way nothing I say is recordable. My words come with an anamnestic—erases the memory, wipes machines clean too. That old vision of me talking out of a burning bush? just made up as a cover story.

PW: *(somewhat confused and dejected)* of course. I know what you mean.

GOD 2: But about the improv that came up with Miles? I'll consider it. It's your choice.

PW: *(perking up)* wait just a second. Here you show up. I thought: he's got no voice. We just give him a voice. But you're talking to me and you say you've got to go talk with all these people that want to hear from you?

GOD 2: so?

PW: Duh!! It's a contradiction.

GOD 2: nope. Again from the top. I'm not talking to you and I have no voice. Anything you remember in that way is fraudulent. You're hearing me in your brain and your imagination but you don't know the difference either. "Talk" remember? (Pause)... it's a metaphor. That's how language is used. I'm "talking" with all existence all the time. We've just done enough here for this session. I can't charge by the hour, you know....*(footsteps echo on marble floor, fading into the distance)*.

Scene II

(A small elephant sits on stage on a cushion or giant chair. PW walks on and gawks at elephant).

PW *(to audience)* Remember what I said at the beginning. I'm the playwright. Even that causes problems I'm afraid; you've seen it. Can you imagine trying to actually produce this? No I don't think so. *(To elephant)*: Ok, are you ready to play, GOD? *(Elephant lifts trunk and lets it fall)* Fine. Where were we?

GOD 2 voice: I'm not sure that question has a concise answer. *(a bag of peanuts is thrown on stage close to the elephant. Elephant picks it up with trunk and puts whole bag in mouth. Some peanuts fall to floor. GOD 2 belches)*. Excuse me, and thanks.

PW: This is my elephant. Does this mean you're willing to play the role in the form of the elephant?

GOD 2: I thought this was all settled. Your audience will skedaddle if you don't get off your one track mind. I'm not playing the elephant. I am the elephant. That doesn't mean I'll talk in your play. Elephants don't talk. This isn't Disneyland.

PW: Then what's the point of your talking to me as an elephant?

GOD 2: I'm only waiting to see what you're going to do with me, the elephant. There is such a thing as cruelty to animals, you know. Real or costumed it seems you're making fun of an elephant. It smells bad to me. But let's go share the part, will you. Oh, and before that, could you get me either some hay or a large tree from the savanna with succulent top leaves. I can see this could go on for a while and I'm a hungry captive here.

PW: How can GOD be a captive?

GOD 2: Have you or have you not put this poor baby elephant on stage in a theater. If this were Africa she'd still be with her mother in a breeding herd and they might stomp you; which naturally would teach you a thing or two about GOD. But since this isn't Africa we're just a captive. You don't get the privilege of being attacked.

PW: *(sarcastically)* I appreciate your kind words. If it's ok with you I'll go on with the play now. I'm not asking you to ad lib a part for the elephant. I'll write her part.

GOD 2: Thank GOD. *(A second elephant—the SM in costume—enters stage left. The first elephant is either led or wanders off stage left).*

Elephant 2 *(it's the SM-GOD 1)*: Walter, I can do it this afternoon, but I'm sorry, I just won't be able to play these roles regularly for you.

PW: Don't you see, GOD-- I mean Miles, man--we're building this thing with a live audience. We'll talk later; please get into your role.

Elephant 2: Oh yes, I'm sorry about that. Does GOD ad lib this scene or do you have a script for me to read?

PW: There's a script.....

Elephant 2: Ok, can I see it now?

PW: No, I mean it's not written down yet. You're helping with that.

Elephant 2: Well then do I ad lib or what?

PW: For now ad lib as best you can. You're GOD in the form of an elephant. Let's say you're Chac the meso American Elephant headed rain GOD or Ganesh. Can you make that work?

Elephant 2: Well that's kind of different from "**almighty**" GOD in the other scene. I don't know much about Chac.

PW: No, it doesn't matter. It's the same idea. Just play GOD.

Elephant 2: It's getting warm in here.

PW: Elephants live in hot climates, don't they?

Elephant 2: very funny.

PW: ok, here we go.....(*turns around to the audience with his back to elephant*) So GOD, can you tell us why you've shown up in the form of this baby female elephant?

WOMAN (*PW's wife enters stage left*): Oy vey! Thinks he's a playwright; talks to GOD and...can't keep a job...jumping from one college to the next, ignores me and the kids half the time. Now what are you going to do with that elephant in here?

PW: (*to wife*): I'm getting a headache.....what are you doing here? Are the kids in school today, or what? sit down and watch or I won't get any work done.

WOMAN: The kids? The kids are all grown and on their own. OK, I'll sit a while, but just tell me why you've got this elephant up here? (*She goes into the audience and sits*).

PW: (*speaking to wife who is now sitting in audience*) The elephant is playing GOD in my new play. Or at least she's a representation of the idea of GOD. I'm trying to work out the dialogue. Miles, the stage manager has been kind enough to help. He's inside the elephant costume. If it

actually gets finished I think I'll put his name on it too, as a co-playwright. *(to Miles)* if that's to your liking Miles. *(To wife)* The audience is playing the audience *(he gestures)*.

ELEPHANT 2: Walter, that's kind of you, But, as you said, we're off track. As long as there's a little break, excuse me while I head for the men's room. I'll be right back.

PW: ok, we'll break for just 3 minutes. *(Elephant 2 leaves stage right, but elephant 1 returns as Elephant 2 is leaving. They cross paths but don't notice each other)*

GOD 2 *(voice from wings)*: Wait a minute? Wait 3 minutes? I don't think so! Totally unnecessary, and with nothing resolved. How can you keep the audience waiting? Unless you're paying all these people, it's pretty nervy.

PW: Well anyway, I'm glad you came back. We don't need to break now. Have you decided to participate, then?

GOD 2: No, no. I just came back to talk with the WOMAN. I want her to know that you're heading into big trouble here. And she better not count on you. Hear that, Sadie?

PW: she already had that idea, herself.

GOD 2: I know, but I thought I'd rub it in.

PW: How can you be vindictive like that, GOD. It's like a threat; very unbecoming for GOD.

GOD 2: I'm just telling what I see; where you're headed. If its ok with you I'm moving on now and taking the elephant. I'll send you someone else to play with. *(Elephant 2 leaves the stage as PW stares in bewilderment. WOMAN comes back on stage from audience, goes to PW and hugs him sympathetically. While she's doing this either a real trained crow—or Myna—flies into a perch on stage. In the absence of a real trainable bird, a stuffed crow—as in Groucho Marx' show--drops from the eves and sits looking at them.)*

GOD 2: ok, ok, don't worry. I'm sorry if I was harsh. It's just your attitude is so.....over the top.

WOMAN: Well he's really not that bad, GOD. He's very trustworthy and principled; and he does do the dinner dishes.

GOD 2: Look, can't you see I'm just an Eagle. I can't fathom those deeper issues.

WOMAN: What do you mean, you're an Eagle. We can all see you're a crow.

GOD 2: Eagles are the most majestic and powerful of birds; their eyes are the sharpest. They fly exceedingly fast. Of course, I'm a crow too, but right now I'm an Eagle.

WOMAN: *(To no one in particular, almost an aside)* Again says he's an Eagle. Don't know crow when I see one..

GOD 2: My, My....I guess you're just like him. Did I make all humans this way? Too concrete? Or is that just American pragmatism, lack of depth and perspective? Can't you take my word for it? I'm an Eagle.

WOMAN: Why should I take your word on it when I see this crow standing here?

GOD 2: Because you can't know or see everything. Some things have to be taken on faith.

WOMAN: You mean on faith or on the authority of someone in charge?

GOD 2: No, I mean on faith.

WOMAN: Well, I have faith the sun will rise in the East tomorrow and that I have to die and we've all got to pay taxes. But I mean that's a crow, isn't it?

GOD 2: Perhaps it is....(silence)..... *(There is the sound of a strong howling wind, then the flapping of big wings. The flight of an eagle is projected onto the backdrop passing from off stage left across and up right, departing at the highest reaches of stage right. As the eagle transits the crow rises and goes off up left. The WOMAN watches all this in awe and then scratches her head. Through the entire dialogue preceding the PW is standing next to her bewildered, holding her hand and acting as if he does not hear the conversation; he watches the crow exit but doesn't see the Eagle).*

WOMAN: *(to PW)* What did you make of that, my dear?

PW: of what?

WOMAN: of the Eagle and GOD?

PW: you mean the crow?

WOMAN: no, I mean the Eagle.

PW: I couldn't say, I saw a crow *(Elephant 1–SM– enters with head piece in hand. He is accompanied by 2 men in dark suits)*

SM: Walter, these men want to talk with you.

PW: yes, what can I do for you?

MAN 1: we're with the FBI (*shows I.D.*) You're writing has been reported as un-American and sacrilegious.

PW: Who said that?

MAN 1: we're not authorized to give information only to investigate.

PW: And what if I have nothing to say?

MAN 2: We'll have to take you in for questioning.

PW: You mean you'll arrest me?

MAN 1: Didn't say that. You're not arrested, just "detained" under emergency decree 22.

PW: And what if I do answer your questions?

MAN 2: we're not authorized to say what we'll do in that case. But you'll be better off.

PW: You mean you might take me anyway. Isn't that what you mean? (*Up to here the interaction has been rather dispassionate, sort of the Joe Friday, give me the facts approach. From here on through the end of the play the feeling becomes progressively more tense.*)

MAN 1: This isn't going anywhere. I think you'd better come with us for your own protection.

PW: What do you mean for my own protection? I don't need any protection, except from you. I won't come with you.

MAN 2: yes you will.....(*he pulls out a pistol grabs PW's arm with the other hand and shakes pistol in PW's face*). Let's go now.

WOMAN: wait a second, you can't do this. He didn't do anything. GOD was just here talking with us. (*She approaches them trying to protect PW and to remove MAN 2's hand from PW*)

MAN 1: lady, back off.....I don't see GOD here, just the 5 of us and there's no sense in your getting hurt. We'll come back for you next if you don't cool down.

WOMAN: Where are you taking him? (*To PW*) I'll call a lawyer Walter. I'll come after you.

MAN 1: we're not authorized to tell you where he's being taken.

PW (*dazed*): yes, thank you Sadie, that's best; nothing to do here. Yes, thank you. (*He's prodded off stage between the two men; he appears dejected, crestfallen, passive rather than frightened.*)

Scene III

(Setting: an interrogation room. The walls are dark and vague but there is a well demarcated steel door upstage left through which people pass. It is closed. Present are the PW, MAN 1 and MAN 2.)

MAN 1: Your full name, please.

PW: Walter Mathias Brown

MAN 2: And you're Jewish aren't you?

PW: What's that got to do with anything?

MAN 1: We want to know how you got the name Brown. That's not a Jewish name. Are you trying to conceal your true identity? Was someone else in your family trying to conceal? Maybe someone with bad ideas or terrorist potential?

PW: My grandfather emigrated through New York in 1901. At Ellis Island they asked his name. He had a difficult Polish name to pronounce. They told him his name was Brown. They put it on his papers.

MAN 2: And how do you know that?

PW: Because that's what my father told me.

MAN 2: And you believed him?

PW: yes

MAN 1: Do you ever lie?

PW: What kind a question is that?

MAN 2: Let's get one thing straight, playwright. We are asking the questions, not you. At your universities you all get to both ask the questions and then answer them. That's not what this is about. If you don't answer we'll make you answer. If you ask questions like that, we have some ideas about how to stop that nonsense. If you talk back or get wise you may find that to be a liability also.....Now I asked you if you ever lie.

PW: Everyone lies at times. I am not lying about my name.

MAN 1: That's better. So, you are Jewish, but you're not lying about your name, correct?

PW: yes

MAN 2: And what do you do for a living?

PW: I teach and I write plays.

MAN 1: How many plays have you published

PW: three

MAN 2: And GOD appears in how many of these plays?

PW: all of them.

MAN 1: *(in a friendly tone)* Walter, do you attend church?

PW: Jews go to temple or synagogue. I go rarely.

MAN 2: Then can you explain why GOD appears so often in the plays of a playwright who rarely goes to church?

PW: no I can't explain that.

MAN 1: Perhaps you can tell us of your beliefs. Do you believe in GOD? Do you believe that the United States is "One Nation Under GOD"?

PW: You'd have to read my plays to have a satisfactory answer to those questions.

MAN 2: Yes, I see. In fact, we have read your plays. Now would you answer the questions?

PW: I do not have answers for those kinds of questions. The answers are my plays. My beliefs do not fit neatly into one sentence answers.

MAN 1: Let me try again. Are you a religious man, Playwright? Are you an agnostic, an atheist?

PW: I think I may be religious.

MAN 1: That is not a very good answer, playwright. It's vague and cloudy. Can you give me a yes or a no here?

PW: If I'm to tell the truth I can't do better than that.

MAN 2: Well let's leave that one be for the moment. How about America the Beautiful. Do you believe this is a beautiful and great country?

PW: Beautiful, indeed; great in many ways, yes.

MAN 1: What about great? Are you patriotic? Do you fly the flag?

PW: Very powerful yes; culturally very productive and diverse. No I don't fly any flags. I don't think that's the way to help our country mature. What else?

MAN 2: Remember you aren't asking the questions. You didn't fully answer whether America is a great nation; what you mean by "great in many ways"? What are the "un-great" ways? And what do you mean by helping us mature? Are we an immature nation?

PW: Well, I'm trying not to be glib. I'm as much an American as you, you know. We pioneered democracy. But we massacred the Indians in the process; we built an empire on the backs of slaves. We've been called the World's Policeman. There are other problems too. I'm not much of a nationalist. That, "my country right or wrong stuff"? It's like when you're bringing up your kids. You support them, but you have to be critical too. They make mistakes; act out or hurt people; you say: "they're my kids", but you have to teach them when they're wrong and not cover for them. And questioning government, that's always been part of the American system. We need a world of governments that are all allowed to question each other's motives and enforce common agreements.

MAN 1: Ah, yes. Then you would say you are more of an internationalist?

PW: Where is this going?

MAN 2: We warned you that your role in our play playwright is only to answer the questions.

MAN 1: *(calls to the wings)* Bring me the cart will you Sal? *(A cart full of paraphernalia is wheeled on stage).* Like you said playwright, they always make mistakes. And you just made a big mistake so we have to be a bit critical. *(He holds playwright down on the chair while MAN 2 attaches electric leads from one of the machines to his head, hands, and feet).*

MAN 2: Have you seen one of these before? They haven't been much in fashion in our country, until just now. But our ability to change and get healthier that's what brought them around to this. It shows what a great nation America is. *(PW looks frightened)* Oh I can tell from your expression that you have seen one of these gizmos. Can you tell us where you saw it?

PW: I've seen them in films about Latin America's dirty wars where they torture people.

MAN 1: Do you think we're going to use this on you?

PW: I hope not. I haven't done anything wrong. I don't have any information you want. I've tried to answer your questions honestly.

MAN 2: That's where you're wrong Walter. Your answers are far from truthful and we have to teach you the importance of being forthcoming. For example, you are an internationalist, and you don't like organized religions. It's there in your plays and your class lectures. You don't even like Capitalism. And how can an American be a patriot who doesn't like Capitalism?

PW: I haven't concealed anything from you. I told you I'm not a nationalist and that my views on religion are in the plays. My views on the political economy of Capitalism aren't un-American. I think any good citizen should want to make his country a fairer place for all.

MAN 1: See there. You're trying to worm your way out of it. But it won't work. Let's try him.

MAN 2: Ok, Walter, this is jeopardy. If you answer correctly nothing happens. If you answer incorrectly you get one crank on the machine. If you act out in anger or resist you can get 2 or 3 or 4 cranks. If you call us dirty names we put the wires on your genitals. Oh, yes there is one way to get us to stop. When we ask you questions about people you know, we can tell if you are telling the truth. If you corroborate what we have heard regarding all the people we ask about then you win the game and get to go home tonight.

PW: You are offering me my freedom if I say that my friends are un-American. And if I don't you will torture me?

MAN 1: was that a question?

PW: no, I'm just talking to myself for clarity.

MAN 2: name 5 of your closest friends.

PW: I have no close friends.

MAN 1: that's good. No concealment, just an open lie (*MAN 2 cranks the generator and PW cries out in pain as his body suddenly jerks once*).

MAN 2: True or false. Torture is now legal to obtain vital information from terrorist suspects?

PW: true

MAN 1: well done, no shock.

MAN 2: Back to your friends. Miles Altman, the stage manager is or is not a friend of yours.

PW: he's a friend

MAN 1: good. And what are his views about flying the American flag?

PW: I have no idea.

MAN 2: wrong (*MAN 1 cranks the machine twice and PW spasms two times and remains with a tortured grimace on his face*).

MAN 1: Have you ever been in a secret Communist organization?

PW: I can't do this.

MAN 2: too bad (*MAN 1 cranks the crank 4 times and PW lets out a piercing scream as his body jumps repeatedly. After the cranking stops he vomits and urine flows from his pants. He slumps over*).

MAN 1: Not much stamina eh?

MAN 2: Well he's soft; and he's getting on. I think we'll have to go slowly so we don't kill him.

MAN 1: Playwright, we're going to prolong this so we don't kill you. It looks like we'll be working with you on this play for several days at least. In the end you're going to tell us what we want to hear anyway, so you might as well consider that. Cooperating sooner, rather than later is in your own interest.

PW: (*Softly, but with a bit of irony*) Thank you.

MAN 2: Did I detect some sarcasm there?

MAN 1: I think you did. (*MAN 2 cranks the machine another 4 times. This time after screaming out the playwright falls unconscious; MAN 1 rushes over and checks his pulse and respiration*)

MAN 1: he's ok for now, just fainted.

MAN 2: I'm concerned he can't take it. We're not allowed to kill him.

GOD 2 (voice): So you're not going to kill him?

MAN 1: Who the hell are you? How did you get in here?

GOD 2: You boys are just full of questions, aren't you? But I'm not any better at answers than he is.

MAN 2: (*draws his gun*) come out and show yourself or we'll have an army in here in a second (*MAN 1 pushes a button on his cell phone and an alarm is heard in the distance*).

GOD 2: No need for all that. I'm no threat. And you need a different kind of help. They won't find me when they come in. I'm just projecting my voice into your space. New technology, you know.

MAN 1: We could use some help getting this playwright to admit he's an enemy of the government. But we want assurances that you're a patriot first.

GOD 2: Oh sure, whatever you say. But why in the world should the playwright do that? He's not even an activist.

MAN 2: Well his ideas are part of the MDNU—the Movement to Disrupt National Unity.

GOD 2: I've not heard of this movement. Where is it headquartered?

MAN 1: No headquarters, that's what's so sinister. It's a head organization, no paper trail, doesn't exist in real terms; damn conspiracy of intellectuals trying to head off the patriotic war on Terrorism by injecting doubts, ambivalence and contrary ideas into the national mind. It's plain as the nose on your face that if we're not united the terrorists get the upper hand.

MAN 2: They're already ahead of us because they took out our planes to bomb us back in 9/11 while we always have to use our own planes and drones to bomb back. Before ISIS they hid in countries leaving no clear military targets to take out; but our victory is assured, so long as we stop their head conspiracy.

GOD 2: So, you think this playwright is somehow aiding and abetting terrorism by writing plays about the meaning of GOD?

MAN 1: We've also seen strong evidence that he has friends who demonstrated with anarchists against Capitalist globalization in Genoa and Toronto. Our way of life is on the line here and our work is to turn over every rock to find the slime underneath.

GOD 2: Well you may be right about his friends, but I think I can help you out some with your playwright. Why don't you take that electrode number 4 and move it from his leg to the top of his scalp. (*MAN 2 does this as instructed*). Now stand away from him. (*They both comply....there is a sudden explosion with a flash and smoke. The playwright's body is hurled onto the floor and he is powder blackened. MAN 2 rushes over and checks his pulse and respiration*)

MAN 2: GOD damn you, you've killed him. Show yourself immediately or I'll shoot (*draws gun again*).

GOD 2: No it wasn't me who killed him. I just helped you out with advice on the electrode placement. Maybe you'll understand some day. (*A troupe of soldiers is heard running up to the steel door from outside. Two of them come crashing in with machine guns*)

CAPTAIN: What the hell is going on here? Who sounded an alarm? We've just heard an explosion from here.

MAN 1: I set off the alarm CAPTAIN. There was someone, somehow got in this cage with us, he threatened us and then killed the prisoner before escaping.

CAPTAIN: how did he get out? How did he get in? We saw no one (*checks the PW*).... This prisoner appears to have been tortured to death. You'd better come up with a better story than that son. The instructions are very clear that no prisoners die in captivity at this stage of operations.

MAN 2: It's true... there was a man in here.... He jumped us and turned up the juice on the playwright. All we could do was push the alarm.

CAPTAIN: This is not a credible story... But we'll see (*he gestures to the Sargent*). Sargent take that man downstairs and get a description of the alleged assailant. I'll question the other man here and we'll see if they both describe the same individual. Get a very detailed description. Bring him back when you're finished.

SARGENT: Yes sir. (*He leads MAN 1 out the door*)

CAPTAIN (*pulls his gun and sits MAN 2 on bench*): Ok son, tell me what this man looked like.

MAN 2: We never saw him.

CAPTAIN: (*surprised*) Can you explain that for me?

MAN 2: He got us from behind; he took our guns and kept us looking away from him; threatened to shoot if we looked. Then he killed the playwright with the juice machine and out the door. From behind he had a mask on.

CAPTAIN: What about his size and height, his color, his hair?

MAN 2: He appeared average height and weight; I never saw his skin, he wore gloves and a mask.

CAPTAIN: This sounds contrived. Who ordered you to pick up this playwright?

MAN 2: You did sir....

CAPTAIN: yes, yes, now I remember.... But I'm afraid you're likely to face the Terrorism Tribunal if your partner's story is different. *(Sargent and MAN 1 return)*Well, Sargent, what have you learned?

SARGENT: The guy that got in was a big rangy fellow; African American well over 6 feet tall and strong as an ox. He overpowered them. His voice was deep, he had a big head and a small beard.

CAPTAIN: Thank you Sargent. Their stories don't fit. This man saw a fellow of average build with a mask on and no skin exposed..... These men are under arrest for murder; take them to the next cell. *(As the Sargent draws his gun, MAN 2 knocks his hand aside and runs out through the steel doorway with the Sargent following him. As the Sargent reaches the door it swings inward from outside and smacks him in the face and he falls back to the ground stunned. Behind the door the WOMAN rushes in frantic. While the WOMAN speaks the Sargent slowly gets up, clears his head and runs out the door. As he exits the WOMAN screams).*

WOMAN: where is he? What have you done with my poor husband? She looks around frantically and sees the body on the ground. *(She rushes over to the PW and feels his forehead and realizes he is dead. She weeps and moans and screams out)* Why have you done this? Why have you murdered him? What did he ever do to anyone? Just an ordinary guy. His plays never even drew much of an audience. What evil have you unleashed in this world? This will be the end of you, as it was the end of him. *(With this last pronouncement she rises up somehow larger than life, her eyes blazing and furious. She reaches under her coat pulls out a hand grenade and pulls the pin and hold the grenade in her hand. The others stare at her in utter disbelief for 3 seconds and then there is a black out a flash of light and a huge explosion throwing everyone to the ground and the lights stay out for 15 seconds while the echo of the explosion goes on and on and on)*

Lights come up slowly to half. The stage is strewn with rubble. Along with the bodies of the CAPTAIN the WOMAN and the playwright. Stage Manager enters from left wing.

SM: Walter, Walter where are you? What is this? What a mess. I have some free time now to help you. *(He sees playwright on the floor dead. . He goes over to him, leans over)*Walter, are you ok? Do you want me to be in the elephant costume? Are you alright?

PW: *(slowly stirs, opens his eyes and gets himself propped up to a half lying position and lights come up to full; the CAPTAIN and the WOMAN get up and exit).* Miles, your timing isn't so good.

SM: I'm sorry Walter, I thought you wanted me to play GOD this afternoon. I never imagined your play was going to get all intense like this.

PW: Oh don't worry about it. Sure, if you can get back into the elephant costume in about 30 minutes. I need a break first.

SM: Ok Walter. Gee I'm really sorry if I got into the middle of the drama here without realizing it.
(He heads out but exits via the steel door).....(PW sits down on the wooden bench)....

GOD 2: Definitely not the way I would have chosen to end it, playwright.

PW: I'm tired.

GOD 2: I liked the growing tension, though.

PW: Thanks

GOD 2: I wouldn't have ended it like this....but I am learning to accept these things. And it is your play, so do what you want.

LIGHTS

End of Play