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A THIRD FRAGMENT

The following dialogue is designed to accompany T.S. Eliot's unfinished *Sweeney Agonistes* (1932). This dialogue, which is to be read as only another fragment of an incomplete play, attempts to sustain Eliot's "Aristophanic Melodrama," which suggests a union of high and low culture. Using Francis Macdonald Cornford's *The Origin of Attic Comedy* (1914), I've attempted to incorporate the Aristophanic humour and the melodramatic themes of sex and death put forward by Eliot in his two fragments. I believe that this hybrid remains clear in the voices of the characters and in the varying degrees of humour and symbolism throughout.

The action that unfolds is strange and, in a sense, anticlimactic. Classically, the *Agon* is a contest between two characters representing two opposing beliefs or principles, but Eliot's, and by extension, my adaptation, is not a traditional Aristophanic play. For Sweeney to represent one thing and Pereira another would be to attribute simple "hero" and "villain" qualities to each character. I feel that this was not Eliot's intention. What modernizes this play is the idea of characters that are not representatives of simple allegorical principles—such as that of good and evil. And while there is no character that seems to embody Life itself, Pereira's character certainly hangs over the fragments as symbolic for Death. Contrary to one character embodying an opposing force, it seems to me that the patrons of Doris's apartment collectively represent a new and strange restlessness in post-war life.

As mentioned, the action is anticlimactic. Perhaps it is difficult to imagine a more drawn-out contest taking place between Pereira and Sweeney because I understand them to be quite similar, and to be men who knew of each other but should never meet. Any dialogue between these two characters risks revealing too much about them, and their mysterious qualities are integral to the eerie feeling of the play. This blunt violent

act aligns with Sweeney's dark anti-hero quality; I believe the unaffected reactions of the other characters keeps with the detached—even apathetic—restlessness of the play.

This violence also refers to the “dramatic fertility rituals” outlined in *The Origin of Attic Comedy* (53). Eliot may hint to these rituals when Sweeney recalls the story of the man who “once did a girl in” (150). A fertility ritual is the “expulsion of death” for the “induction of life” (Cornford 53). The figure representing Death is beaten and “burnt, or thrown into the water, or otherwise destroyed” (53). This description is not unlike the man in Sweeney's story who keeps a dead woman in a bathtub: “Well he kept her there in a bath / With a gallon of lysol in a bath” (Eliot 150). In understanding Pereira's character as representative of Death, the reader may find this decision suitable to Eliot's original intentions.

Note: In keeping with some of the traditional structures of Aristophanes' plays, I have elected not to include further singing after the KNOCKing, which I take to cue the end of the Parabasis and a return to the action of the play.

SWEENEY. DORIS. DUSTY. KLIPSTEIN. KRUMPACKER. WAUCHOPE.
HORSFALL. SWARTS. SNOW.

DUSTY: Who would that be?

DORIS: I know who.

DUSTY: I know who too.

KLIPSTEIN: Who?

[Sweeney backs up next to the door]

DORIS: It's Pereira that's who.

DUSTY: *[To Klipstein]* You're a doctor.

KLIPSTEIN: I'm a doctor.

KRUMPACKER: Who's Pereira? Who am I?

DORIS: Shhhhh.

DUSTY: *[To Krumpacker]* No one.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

DORIS: Shhhhhhhhhhh.

KRUMPACKER: I'm no one?

DUSTY: *[Moving around the room, cleaning up bottles, gesturing toward Doris]* Help her
into bed. She's ill.

DORIS: You're both doctors.

WAUCHOPE: *[To Sweeney]* Pereira.

DUSTY: Pereira.

[Sweeney rests his hand around the neck of a heavy brass lamp]

DUSTY: You're both doctors and she's ill. *[To Wauchope, Horsfall, Swarts, and Snow]*
The rest of you...look mournful.

*[Wauchope, Horsfall, Swarts, and Snow remain as they are. Doris rests her
forearm over her head]*

DORIS: *[To the door]* Come in!

[The door opens slowly. Sweeney grips the lamp]

ENTER MRS. TURNER.

MRS. TURNER: [*Leaving the door open and moving toward Doris on the sofa*]

Checking in darlings. [*To Doris*] You're not well?

[*Sweeney loosens his grip on the lamp but remains behind the door*]

DORIS: Why? Have you talked to Pereira?

MRS. TURNER: Pereira? Why no. I could hear you through the door.

SNOW: Through the door.

WAUCHOPE: Well.

MRS. TURNER: [*Resting on the sofa, next to Doris*] Poor dear.

DORIS: I'm not ill.

ENTER PEREIRA.

[*Pereira leans against the door-jamb*]

PEREIRA: You're not ill?

DUSTY: Pereira!

KRUMPACKER: [*Whispering to Klipstein*] Pereira.

WAUCHOPE: [*Nodding to Sweeney*] Pereira.

DORIS: Pereira! Darling! How are you?

PEREIRA: How am I? [*Removing hat and stepping through the door*]

How are you?

[*Sweeney grips the brass lamp once again*]

DUSTY: She's perfectly well.

DORIS: Much better.

DUSTY: Dr. Klipstein and Dr. Kumpacker—

KRUMPACKER: Krumpacker.

DUSTY: Krumpacker—excuse me—have been most helpful.

KLIPSTEIN: Fluids.

PEREIRA: [*Not taking his eyes off Doris*] ...fluids.

KRUMPACKER: Just so.

DUSTY: Friends of Sam. Lucky for Doris.

KLIPSTEIN: No trouble at all.

KRUMPACKER: None at all.

PEREIRA: Friends of Sam.

KLIPSTEIN: Good ol' Sam.

WAUCHOPE: Well.

MRS. TURNER: I'll be off then, if all is well.

[Mrs. Turner moves to leave the room]

DUSTY: Oh do leave the door open!

DORIS: Oh please do!

MRS. TURNER: There's a god-awful draft coming through.

DUSTY: The air feels good.

DORIS: Quite lovely.

[All eyes, including Pereira's, on Mrs. Turner during three seconds of silence]

MRS. TURNER: All right.

EXIT MRS. TURNER.

[Pereira moves to sit on the arm of Doris's sofa]

PEREIRA: Quite a recovery.

[Doris sits up straight, unsettled]

DORIS: Just some air.

PEREIRA: And fluids.

DORIS: Yes.

PEREIRA: Amazing.

[Tense silence. Pereira rises from the arm of the sofa]

PEREIRA: Well, in that case, I would advise a coat. It's chilly.

[Pereira walks over to Sam, who's sitting by the window with a glass]

PEREIRA: Had some fluids too Sam?

WAUCHOPE: Well...

DORIS: But where are we going? Pereira, dear, what...what am I to bring?

PEREIRA: Just a coat. It's chilly.

[Pereira looks out the window. Sweeney quietly walks out from behind the door and raises the brass lamp unflinchingly]

PEREIRA: [*Still looking out the window*] I knew a man once—

[*Sweeney brings the base of the brass lamp down hard on Pereira's skull. Pereira falls to the floor. Silence holds the room for three seconds*]

DUSTY: Well what now then?

KLIPSTEIN: Someone ought to see if the bastard's breathing.

SWEENEY: He's dead.

KRUMPACKER: But someone ought to check.

SWEENEY: He's dead.

DORIS: Someone ought to check his pockets.

SWARTS: [*To Doris*] Maybe that ought to be you.

KLIPSTEIN: Christ, I'll check his pulse.

SWEENEY: He's dead.

DORIS: For a second I forgot that you're really not doctors.

KRUMPACKER: For a second I forgot that you're really—

KLIPSTEIN: Stone dead.

WAUCHOPE: Well.

SNOW: Yes. Well.

DUSTY: Well, what now?

SWEENEY: I'm going to need some help.

DORIS: Check his pockets.

SWARTS: Have some respect for—

DUSTY: Would someone please shut the door?

[*Sweeney shuts the door*]

SWEENEY: We'll have to take him out in parts.

WAUCHOPE: We?

DUSTY: In parts.

SWEENEY: Sections.

KRUMPACKER: We?

SWEENEY: There are six parts to a body.

[*Doris moves to lean on Sweeney's shoulder affectionately*]

DORIS: What a mess.

SNOW: I've no trouble keeping my mouth shut, but—

SWARTS: But quite a difference between keeping your mouth shut and walking
around with... [*Gesturing toward Pereira's body*]

SNOW: With a head in a sack.

SWARTS: Exactly.

WAUCHOPE: I'll say.

SWEENEY: [*To Doris*] Have you got a bathtub?

WORKS CITED

Cornford, Francis Macdonald. *The Origin of Attic Comedy*. London: Edward Arnold, 1914.

Eliot, T.S. *Sweeney Agonistes*. *Modernism: An Anthology*. Ed. Lawrence Rainey. Malden: Blackwell, 2005.