



The Purple Rose Theatre Company

The Late Great
HENRY
BOYLE

by David MacGregor



The Purple Rose Theatre Company

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The Purple Rose Theatre Company
137 Park Street
Chelsea, Michigan 48118
www.purplerosetheatre.org

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HENRY
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The Late Great Henry Boyle
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Published 2008, First Edition

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This play was originally developed through the New Plays Initiative of the Heartlande Theatre Company based in Birmingham, Michigan.

The World Premiere of *The Late Great Henry Boyle* was presented by the B Street Theatre in Sacramento, California (2002);

Timothy Busfield, Founder, Buck Busfield, Artistic Director,
Dina Howard, Managing Director.

The production was directed by Dana Brooke.

The Late Great Henry Boyle was subsequently produced by The Purple Rose Theatre Company (2006); Jeff Daniels, Executive Director, Guy Sanville, Artistic Director, Alan Ribant, Managing Director.

The production was directed by Guy Sanville.

Once earth has been surpassed it gives the stars.
- Boethius

The Late Great Henry Boyle premiered at the B Street Theatre in Sacramento, California, on January 11, 2002. The play was directed by Dana Brooke; the set design was by Kevin Gibbs; the costume design was by Abby Parker; the lighting design was by Ron Dumonschelle; the properties design was by Anthony Shank; and the stage manager was Andreanna Konomos. The cast was as follows:

HENRY BOYLE.....Ken Roht
WINSLOW SAXONHOUSE & OTHERS ...Anthony De Fonte
RACHEL VIALLI Jamie Jones
TURK LOGAN & OTHERS Kurt Johnson

The Late Great Henry Boyle was subsequently produced by The Purple Rose Theatre Company in Chelsea, Michigan; the production opened on April 14, 2006. The play was directed by Guy Sanville; the set design was by Daniel C. Walker; the costume design was by Darcy Elora Hofer; the lighting design was by Dana White; the sound design was by Quintessa Gallinat; the properties design was by Danna Segrest; and the stage manager was Amy Hickman. The cast was as follows:

HENRY BOYLE..... John Lepard
WINSLOW SAXONHOUSE / CAPYBARAPaul Hopper
RACHEL VIALLI / AMY ELLIS / DENISE Inga R. Wilson
TURK LOGAN..... Wayne David Parker
NATURE SPECIAL NARRATOR /
CHIP BRADLEY / ARTHUR ZOKOR /
GHOST OF BOETHIUS Randall Godwin

CHARACTERS

HENRY BOYLE

Professor of Medieval Studies, 30s-40s

WINSLOW SAXONHOUSE

Professor of Film, 30s-40s

RACHEL VIALLI

Waitress, 20s-40s

TURK LOGAN

Literary Agent, 20s-40s

NOTE: the following characters should be doubled. If desired, a fifth actor may be added to the cast to fill the roles of ARTHUR ZOKOR, CAPYBARA and/or the GHOST OF BOETHIUS, in addition to the roles of CHIP BRADLEY and NATURE SPECIAL NARRATOR. The role of AMY ELLIS should be played by the actor playing RACHEL; this actor may also play the voice-over role of DENISE.

AMY ELLIS

Correspondent for National Public Radio

ARTHUR ZOKOR

Book Collector

CAPYBARA

Largest Rodent in the World

GHOST OF BOETHIUS

Deceased Philosopher

PLACE

in and around the office of HENRY BOYLE at a private university in the Midwest

TIME

now and then

The Late Great Henry Boyle

ACT ONE

An academic office stuffed to the rafters with books, papers, and medieval curios. At center stage there is a desk and chair, with a phone and some papers on the desk. There is a small wastepaper basket next to the desk and two additional chairs are upstage left and right against the bookshelves. Downstage left and right are some rough stone blocks that look as if they were torn from the ruins of a medieval castle. Curled beneath the desk, fast asleep, is HENRY BOYLE, Professor of Medieval Studies. A gentle soul in full retreat from the modern world and his own life, HENRY's office is both his sanctum and his prison. His pillow is a folded up suit jacket and his blanket is a maroon sheet that will later double as a tablecloth. HENRY's fingers are stuck between the pages of a book and his glasses are still on. WINSLOW SAXONHOUSE enters, every inch the urbane Professor of Film.

WINSLOW Hello, I'm Professor Winslow Saxonhouse, and welcome to the first class ever offered, to my knowledge, that will explore in detail the life and work of the late Henry Boyle. It is, of course, highly appropriate that these lectures take place in this, the Henry Boyle Memorial Auditorium. Now then, I think I can assume that most of you have read Henry's novel, because it has been on the best-seller lists for nearly three years now. In fact, the recently released collector's edition of the novel includes a DVD which contains clips from Henry's

various television appearances, and of course, the video that Henry himself made of his rather spectacular demise at the Stromboli volcano in Italy. On a personal note, I'm delighted that this material is now available to the general public, because above and beyond his single novel, I have always believed that Henry's life was, in fact, his greatest work. But before we get too involved with that, I think we would do well to consider precisely where Henry's journey began ...

Lights shift as WINSLOW exits. A bell begins to toll eight times. HENRY rouses a little, then bolts awake. He pulls out a pocket watch, looks at it, then scrambles from beneath the desk. He throws the sheet over the back of his chair, opens a drawer in the desk and pulls out an electric razor. He turns it on and attempts to keep reading his book, but the razor's batteries die in seconds. He shoves the razor back in the drawer then grabs a shirt that is draped over the chair. He sniffs it to make sure it's okay, then slips it on as the phone rings. He reaches for the phone, then stops. The phone rings twice more as HENRY stares at it in despair. He shakes off his dark thoughts, tucks in his shirt, picks up his book and comes downstage. Lights shift as HENRY addresses the audience as if it's his Medieval Studies class.

HENRY ... the point being that Chaucer, as opposed to say, Gower, was more interested in the story than the moral of the story ... well, not in every case, but for the most part, with certain exceptions, I suppose, in both directions for ... well, both of them. Chaucer and Gower, that is. So, that wraps up the connections between the philosophical writings of Boethius and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* ... pretty much anyway. Are there any questions? (*listens*) Yes, Boethius was, in fact, executed in Pavia around the year 524 ... or maybe 525. There's some dispute — what's that? Well, apparently

he wrote something that attracted a lot of attention, the wrong kind of attention, so he was bludgeoned to death ... No, I'm afraid I don't know what he was bludgeoned with ... presumably a bludgeon-like weapon. Now then, are there any questions pertinent to the general philosophical outlook of Boethius? ... Nothing? All right, you should have this by now. (*holds up a paperback copy of Piers Plowman*) This is *Piers Plowman*, the ... what version is this ... ? (*checks the cover of the book*) ... the B-Text ... right. So ... read it. And please don't put it off until the last minute. Remember what Boethius once wrote, "You know there is no constancy in human affairs, when a single hour can bring a man to nothing."

Lights shift as HENRY retreats back behind his desk. The phone rings and again HENRY refuses to answer until his answering machine switches on.

HENRY'S ANSWERING MACHINE (v.o.) Hello. You have reached the, um ... office of Professor Henry Boyle. Please leave a message.

The insistent yet somewhat aroused voice of HENRY's soon-to-be ex-wife DENISE fills the office.

DENISE (v.o.) Henry, this is Denise. I know my attorneys have been calling you about the divorce papers, but I still haven't received them ... (*giggles*) ... Dmitri, stop it! Henry, I really, really need those papers signed. Dmitri and I are travelling to St. Petersburg in two weeks and we plan on getting married there ... ooh, don't honey ... just wait two seconds ... God, I love it when you do that ... Henry, I have to get off the phone! If you haven't sent the papers yet, please do it now ... oh, and Dmitri says "hi."

The message ends as HENRY's universe collapses around him. He pulls a legal size envelope from a desk drawer, then comes in front of the desk and sits on the floor. He pulls the divorce papers out and

stares at them as WINSLOW enters.

WINSLOW Henry! I've been looking for you! How are things on the dark and distant Planet Boyle? Henry? What's the matter? (*spots the divorce papers*) Oh. I see. (*pulls out a three hundred dollar fountain pen and hands it to HENRY, who starts to sign page after page*) Ah well. 'Tis better to have loved and lost than to ... let loose the dogs of war.

HENRY You ... what did you say? You were looking for me? Why?

WINSLOW Well, I'm afraid this isn't purely a social call. I've been sent here on a mission by the grande-dame herself, Chairwoman Higham.

HENRY Susan? How is she?

WINSLOW Well, she's worried, Henry. Worried about you. Worried that you haven't presented or published a paper in over a year. Worried that students are avoiding your classes like the Plague. And she's especially worried about the persistent rumors that you are, in fact, living in your office.

HENRY But I am living in —

WINSLOW No, no, no! Don't say a word! I am not here to interrogate or judge you.

HENRY Then why are you here?

WINSLOW Henry, you're not exactly the most social fellow in the world and I know you don't have many friends in the department — as far as I know you don't have any friends at all. And to be perfectly honest, there is only one person on the planet that I am even remotely interested in, and that's me. However, as Higham made it a point to remind me, and loathe though I am to admit it ... I owe you one.

HENRY You do? For what?

WINSLOW Well, you remember, that unfortunate "student conference" business a few years back.

HENRY Oh. Well, you said nothing happened. I don't know why no one else believed you.

WINSLOW Precisely! Now then, according to Higham,

she said she's tried talking to you, tried e-mailing you, and that she even sent you some formal disciplinary letters. Is that true?

HENRY I got some letters ...

WINSLOW (*plucks three letters from the desk*) Ah, here we are! (*reads*) Yes, this is just what she was saying to me — "... lack of scholarly production ... liability to the department's image ... initiating procedures to have your tenure revoked ..." (*tosses the letters into the trash*) My God, Henry! Don't you see what's happening here? She's threatening to send you out into the ... the real world!

HENRY Now?

WINSLOW Well, no, not this very minute. You see, while I was talking to Higham I remembered you telling me about this definitive study you were working on — something to do with some Roman philosopher's influence on medieval writers.

HENRY Boethius.

WINSLOW Yes, Boethius! That's the very man! And I told Higham, what with your wife waltzing off to Oxford with a Russian Classicist, that would give you more time to devote to your studies. I mean, as I recall, even when you and Denise lived together you spent most of your time in this office working anyway.

Finished with the documents, HENRY hands WINSLOW back his pen.

HENRY I know. I made a terrible mistake.

WINSLOW Well, the point is, what about that book on Boethius? You must be nearly finished with it by now and —

HENRY I deleted it.

WINSLOW You what?

HENRY Deleted it ... erased it. It just didn't seem to matter anymore after ... (*picks up the divorce papers*) ... all this.

WINSLOW No, I suppose not. (*tries to break the mood*)

with a sharp clap of his hands) Well, that's that then! You know what I say, "Women: can't live with 'em, can't live with 'em." You can take my word for it, Henry. There's no use moping over these things. Divorces ... I've been through three of them myself.

HENRY I thought it was four.

WINSLOW Was it? Oh yes, you're quite right. The second one was more of a bad date than anything. Well anyway, let's get back to this Boethius project of yours. You're sure you deleted it? (*HENRY nods*) No back-up files? (*HENRY shakes his head*) No hard copy? (*HENRY shakes his head again*) Well, that's that then. If you can't show the department that you're working on something ... not much to be done, really. Well, at least Higham can't say I didn't try. So ... (*checks his watch*) I suppose I should be going ... Nice chatting with you, Henry. Best of luck and ... tomorrow's a new day and ... well, you know, all that.

HENRY crawls back under his desk and assumes the fetal position.

HENRY Thank you, Winslow.

WINSLOW Any time.

WINSLOW takes a few steps away. He knows he could walk out right now, his conscience clean, and every narcissistic fiber of his being is screaming at him to do just that. But to his own surprise, he comes back and takes a seat at HENRY's desk.

WINSLOW Henry, how about if I make you a little proposition?

HENRY Proposition? No, I —

WINSLOW Henry, please! At least have the decency to hear me out. It's nothing very extreme, I assure you. People do it all the time.

HENRY Do what all the time?

WINSLOW Well, I was thinking, how about if you and I escort a couple of beautiful women around town this evening?

HENRY What? Winslow, I can't —

WINSLOW Come on, Henry! Where's the harm in that?
Let's shake the medieval dust from those bones of
yours!

HENRY Exactly what kind of women are you talking
about?

WINSLOW Oh, the best kind, Henry. Only the best.
They're wise to the ways of the world. They know the
deep, dark secrets that every man carries with him like
a hunchbacked child in the cellar of his soul. They are
icy, almost unapproachable, but if you can touch their
hearts, they burn with a passion so rich and deep that
it will scorch you to the very pit of your being.

HENRY Are you talking about prostitutes?

WINSLOW Heavens, no! They're from the Psychology
Department. There's a lot of talent over there, Henry,
and I'm not talking about Freudian theory.

HENRY I don't think so.

WINSLOW Why in God's name not?

HENRY I ... I don't want that.

WINSLOW Then what do you want?

HENRY I don't know ... I had what I wanted. I want
that back.

WINSLOW Henry, that's not generally how the space-
time continuum works. Time rolls on, even for you.

*WINSLOW takes a book off HENRY's desk and
stands up. He moves to one of the bookcases.*

HENRY Not in my books, it doesn't. Time stands still
in my books. Every page is exactly the way it was five,
six, seven hundred years ago. No changes, no editing,
no —

WINSLOW Divorces?

HENRY Just leave me alone with my books.

WINSLOW I see. They're not just stories to you, are
they? They're little time machines. (*pulls two or three
books from the shelves*) And any time the present gets
too close or threatening, why, you just jump into one of

your books and escape into the past.

One by one, WINSLOW launches the books in graceful arcs towards the trash can.

HENRY Stop! What are you doing?

HENRY scrambles from beneath the desk and retrieves his books as WINSLOW slamdunks one more dusty tome into the trash.

WINSLOW What needs to be done! You've lived in full retreat from reality long enough.

HENRY My books are my reality!

WINSLOW Correction, Henry. They were your reality. But that reality is gone! Up until last year you were perfectly happy with your teaching, your research, and your wife, right?

HENRY re-shelves his precious volumes, but keeps one in his hand.

HENRY Yes! Yes, I was!

WINSLOW But you're not happy anymore, are you? Where is your research now? Where is your wife? I don't mean to be cruel, but that life is over.

As he continues speaking, WINSLOW puts HENRY's phone on a bookshelf, places the trash can near the bookshelves, pulls the two upstage chairs to the desk and drapes the sheet over the desk as a tablecloth.

WINSLOW The world awaits, Henry! There are wonderful things to be seen, tasted and felt, and felt again if things are going well. It's time to rediscover life, to try new things. And all modesty aside, I can't think of a better guide than myself! Besides, it's either this or I go home and write a paper on metapsychological approaches to the impression of reality in the early films of Vittorio De Sica. And I really, really don't want to do that.

HENRY So you want me to go out? With you and these women?

WINSLOW reaches beneath the desk, pulls out HENRY's jacket, and helps HENRY put it on.

WINSLOW All I'm proposing is that we take the lovely Pamela and Marie out to dinner and perhaps a nightclub or two. We'll get some pasta into them, some Chianti, and we'll see what happens.

HENRY I'm not much on dancing.

WINSLOW Henry, you're not much on anything. You never have been. That's what this is about. To introduce you to what most people call life.

HENRY Maybe ... just dinner.

WINSLOW Fine. Just dinner it is. You have my word on it.

Lights shift and soft Italian music comes up as HENRY and WINSLOW take their seats at the table. HENRY still has his book with him. HENRY checks his watch and gazes downstage.

WINSLOW Henry, what are you looking for?

HENRY Shouldn't Pamela and Marie be back by now? It's been nearly ten minutes.

WINSLOW And where, exactly, do you think they might be?

HENRY They said they were going to the restroom.

WINSLOW *(points in one direction)* Henry, the restrooms are this way.

HENRY *(points in the other direction)* But they went that way.

WINSLOW I noticed. Is there anything in particular in that direction that catches your eye?

HENRY No. Just ... the front door? They left?

WINSLOW Well, they did say they were going to use the restroom. However, they never actually specified that it would be in this restaurant.

HENRY Was it me?

WINSLOW Of course it was you! You don't think it was me, do you?

HENRY But I was trying so hard to be interesting.

WINSLOW Yes, no doubt. The trouble is, that “interesting” is a relative term, Henry.

HENRY What do you mean?

WINSLOW Well, I recall starting off the evening with a charming anecdote regarding esteemed Italian director Federico Fellini at the Cannes Film Festival. You then jumped in with your story, the gist of which was that it was common when assaulting a medieval fortress for the attackers to climb up into the castle through the latrines.

HENRY But that’s perfectly true!

WINSLOW I’m not saying it isn’t. Following that, I conducted an impromptu quiz regarding the first film appearances of a variety of notable and beloved actors. You, for reasons best known to yourself, followed this up by explaining the technique by which medieval soldiers pulled their victims’ lungs out through their backs, a practice which was apparently called “giving the man some wings.” Do you begin to see a pattern here?

HENRY I’m sorry. I was just talking about what I know.

WINSLOW Well, there’s nothing wrong with that. You just need to pull your horns in a little. Don’t you have any nicer stories, perhaps an anecdote or two regarding your medieval studies?

HENRY I suppose I do.

Their waitress, RACHEL VIALLI, enters and approaches their table. Long ago, RACHEL turned her back on most of the things the rest of the world seems to value, but she still takes a glance behind her once in a while, just in case.

RACHEL Is everything all right?

WINSLOW Yes! Fine! Wonderful!

RACHEL Can I get you anything else? Dessert? Coffee?

WINSLOW No, no, thank you. But I’ll tell you what, could you possibly join us for a moment?

RACHEL Why?

WINSLOW (*gets up and pulls out a chair for RACHEL*)

My friend here is just about to launch into an absolutely fascinating story. The place is practically empty, why don't you grace us with your presence and give us your critical input?

RACHEL (*glances around and concedes WINSLOW's point*) Well ... okay. (*sits down*)

WINSLOW (*returning to his own chair*) Splendid! So, off you go, Henry! Transport us with a thrilling tale of personal adventure!

Taken aback, HENRY glances back and forth between WINSLOW and RACHEL as they look at him expectantly.

HENRY All right ... all right, I will. There was this one medieval convention ... when was it? 1998, I think it was. Or maybe 1996 ... I know it was in July. Or June. Anyway, there was this convention in York ... no, now that I think about it, it must have been 1997. Yes, that's right. Now then, I was having dinner one evening with some other medievalists ... Sheffington was there I remember, and Donner-Scott and Smythe. No, it couldn't have been Smythe, he was dead by then. Bancroft? No. It's funny, I can see him clear as day ... tall fellow ... it wasn't Phinney, I'm sure of that. It might have been Dixon —

WINSLOW Why don't we just assume it was Dixon, whoever the hell he is.

HENRY Yes, I suppose it doesn't make a great deal of difference. Anyway, we were discussing this reference to a castle that Sheffington had found in one of Gower's works. We had the next afternoon free, and we decided to go have a look for ourselves. So we took this bus the next day, one of those double-deckers, and went up to this little village near the coast. I think it must have taken nearly two hours to get there. Well, maybe a little less than two hours. They've got some lovely countryside in that part of England, so we really didn't mind the long

drive. Except for Sheffington, of course. He's always been rather prone to motion sickness. I felt badly for the woman sitting in front of him. Still, you can hardly blame Sheffington, can you? It's not his fault you can never get the windows on those buses open ... where was I?

WINSLOW I hope to God you're at the castle by now!

HENRY That's right, the castle! Well, we got off the bus, and no castle was immediately apparent, which seemed a little odd. Because usually, if there's a castle ... you can see it. So, we began asking around, and apparently the castle had been destroyed by a siege or something three hundred years ago! (*laughs long and hard, wiping a tear away*) Oh dear. But that's Sheffington for you.

WINSLOW And?

HENRY And what?

WINSLOW That's the story?

HENRY Yes! Amazing, I know! Unbelievable! But it really happened! So, how's that for a tale of adventure?

RACHEL Wonderful!

WINSLOW Wonderful? You must be joking! No offense, Henry, but that story would put a hyperactive child into a coma.

RACHEL (*standing up*) Well, I happen to love stories about castles. As a matter of fact, a couple of years ago, I went on vacation to Scotland and saw fifteen castles in six days.

HENRY Really? So did you see Edinburgh and Stirling?

RACHEL Yes, of course! And Lochleven and Glamis, and Rothesay Castle on the Isle of Bute. It was a lot of fun. I tried to get my sister to go, but she thought I was nuts. So she went to Branson, Missouri, and I went castle hunting on my own. I even found this one that wasn't listed in any of the guidebooks. Crookston Castle, it was called. That was my favorite. It was

basically a pile of rubble, so I could see why nobody else cared about it. I'm not sure why I liked it so much. But you don't find that kind of rubble just anywhere.

HENRY Right! That's absolutely true!

RACHEL So I thought your story was really interesting.

RACHEL smiles at HENRY, who dazedly smiles back.

WINSLOW No, it wasn't.

RACHEL Yes, it was. *(puts their bill on the table)* I can take that whenever you're ready. *(To HENRY)* Thanks for the story.

RACHEL exits and HENRY stands up to watch her go.

HENRY She liked my story.

WINSLOW Don't be ridiculous.

HENRY But she said —

WINSLOW She's just angling for a bigger tip, that's all.

WINSLOW stands up, pulls out a money clip thick with bills and flips a few on the table.

HENRY But she seemed to —

As he speaks, WINSLOW puts the extra chairs back against the bookshelves.

WINSLOW Henry, I've just had a wonderful idea! Why don't we retire to the Video Café for a nightcap? It is absolutely the place to be these days. Do you know they've got a television in every booth?

HENRY A television?

WINSLOW Yes!

HENRY And that's a good thing?

WINSLOW Of course it is! It's quite remarkable, a social phenomenon! Think about our society, Henry. Think about how fragmented we are — young, old, black, white, rich, poor, gay, straight. The single thing, the only thing that unites our culture is our experience of

watching television!

HENRY But what if you don't watch television?

WINSLOW Why then you're an outcast. A social leper. A freak.

HENRY But I —

WINSLOW takes HENRY's elbow and starts to hustle him offstage. HENRY leaves his book behind on the table.

WINSLOW You'll just have to see it, Henry. I'll explain it all when we get there, eh? We'll just have a drink or two. Where's the harm in that?

WINSLOW and HENRY exit. RACHEL enters to get the bill and the cash. She spots HENRY's book and picks it up as HENRY re-enters and sees her.

HENRY Oh! Hi.

RACHEL Hi. *(holds up the book)* This yours?

HENRY Yes, thank you. *(takes the book and turns to go, then hesitates and turns back to RACHEL)* It was nice of you to say you liked my story ... even if you didn't.

RACHEL But I did like it! I don't know what your friend's problem is.

HENRY He's not really like that. Well, actually, he's a lot like that. But he's not a bad person. He just gets a little wound up now and then.

RACHEL Did he leave? Can I get you some biscotti and coffee?

HENRY No, I ... I really can't. My friend, he's waiting for me outside.

RACHEL Well, maybe some other time.

HENRY Okay!

RACHEL I'm Rachel. Rachel Vialli.

RACHEL puts out her hand and they shake.

HENRY Henry ... Henry Boyle.

RACHEL What was it you were saying earlier? I was bringing your salads, and you were talking about ...

I think I've got this right, people climbing up castle latrines?

HENRY Right! That's what medieval soldiers used to do — perhaps most notably during the siege of the Château Gaillard in 1204. And what's funny is ... well, maybe not funny ... certainly not to them it wouldn't be ... but sometimes the invaders would get stuck halfway up the latrines and then ...

Mortified by his choice of subject matter, HENRY turns and heads off.

RACHEL Don't stop! It's fascinating!

HENRY It is?

RACHEL Yes! Don't you think it's fascinating?

HENRY Well, I do ... yes. I'm just not used to anybody else thinking that. What is it that you like about castles? The history, the romance, the —

RACHEL The walls. I like the walls. The twelve-foot thick walls. That's what I want. I want to be able to go home, raise the drawbridge, drop the portcullis, and curl up behind twelve feet of solid stone with some biscotti and coffee.

HENRY So, do you have a favorite castle?

RACHEL Still looking. Most of the best ones seem to be taken.

HENRY Well, I really should go. My friend's waiting to go to some nightclub.

RACHEL Of course. But if you don't mind my asking, exactly what is it you do?

HENRY I teach ... Medieval English ... at the University.

RACHEL Oh, okay. I take classes there once in a while.

HENRY You do? What's your field of study?

RACHEL Oh, nothing. Everything.

HENRY You don't have a major?

RACHEL No. I just take the stuff I'm interested in ... history, Latin, bowling, whatever.

HENRY You take classes because you're interested
 in the subject?

RACHEL Yeah. That's just between us, though. I don't
 want people thinking I'm more of a freak than they
 already do.

HENRY Right. Of course.

RACHEL Besides, it's such a pretty campus. I jog
 through there every day, you know, by the river. Maybe
 I'll see you sometime.

HENRY Maybe! I don't ... it's not that I run ... but
 sometimes I walk ... if I have to go somewhere ... I
 ...walking is what I do ... if it's not too far.

RACHEL I'll tell you what. If I'm running, and you're
 walking, let's keep an eye out for each other, okay?
 Maybe we could grab a coffee or something.

HENRY Sure! Yeah, okay! I sure will! That's a good
 idea! Keep an eye out! Coffee! ... Well, good-bye.

*HENRY waves and trundles off as RACHEL watches
him with a small smile. She whisks the makeshift
tablecloth off the table, drapes it over the back of
HENRY's chair, and exits. Lights shift to the wee
hours of the morning as we hear WINSLOW's
booming laughter offstage before he launches into
the theme song from Gilligan's Island.*

WINSLOW (o.s.) ... the ship's aground on the shore of
 this uncharted desert isle ...

*WINSLOW staggers onstage doing a soft-shoe
shuffle, followed by HENRY, both stewed to the gills.
WINSLOW has donuts stuck on his fingers.*

WINSLOW ... with Gilligan, the Skipper too. The
 millionaire, and his wife. The movie star, the Professor
 and Mary Ann, here on Gilligan's Isle!

*WINSLOW finishes with a big leg kick which HENRY
tries to emulate, and they both fall to the floor
laughing.*

WINSLOW Ha! What do you think of that? I told you I

knew it!

HENRY That's ... that's something, all right.

WINSLOW notices the donuts on his fingers.

WINSLOW Henry, did we stop for donuts?

HENRY No.

They both howl with laughter.

WINSLOW That's damned odd. (*holds the donuts up to his eyes and peers through them at HENRY*) Now listen to me, Henry. You can't spend the rest of your life holed up in here reading the same books over and over! You need to write something! Anything! It doesn't have to be an academic paper! Write a story, a novel, or a play! Write something that people will care about! Am I making myself clear? (*HENRY manages a nod as they both struggle to their feet*) Good! Now, what are you going to write?

HENRY I don't know. Maybe some poetry?

WINSLOW Poetry? What the hell are you talking about? You write one word of poetry, I mean even one haiku, and you can consider our friendship over!

HENRY Why? What's wrong with poetry?

WINSLOW What is poetry, Henry? It used to mean something, but now, you take someone with a bad haircut, a tattoo, a pierced something, and there's your poet. That's what poetry is today, Henry. It's writing for people who can't write.

HENRY I've never seen you like this, Winslow. Why do you hate poets so much?

WINSLOW I used to be one myself. Luckily, I grew out of it. But you never really escape it. I'll always be a recovering poet, Henry.

HENRY I'm sorry, Winslow. I never knew.

WINSLOW Ah, I was young ... you do things.

HENRY Well, maybe I'll try a novel.

WINSLOW There you go! That's more like it!

HENRY Ah, who am I kidding, Winslow? I can't write a novel. I'm not creative! I'm only saying that because

I'm drunk.

WINSLOW Then keep drinking!

HENRY sits down in his chair.

HENRY Keep drinking?

WINSLOW Isn't it obvious? If you're hungry you keep eating, if you're dirty you keep cleaning, and if you're wrapped too tight in your own skin, hell, you just keep riding the old tomato! Jesus, Henry! Do I have to spell out everything for you?

HENRY But what would I write? For almost my whole life I've cut myself off from everything.

WINSLOW You know what you need? Television! You know the saying, "Tune in and plug out," or whatever the hell it is.

HENRY But what am I supposed to watch?

WINSLOW That's the best part, Henry! It doesn't matter! You just suck it up like a thirsty plant and it gives you all the essential nutrients our culture has to offer! And soon, why, you're a mighty oak, your verdant canopy of leaves stretching over the darkling forest like — *(realizes he's lapsing into poetry)* Well, you get my point.

HENRY Television. You know, I think I see what you're getting at ... oh no!

WINSLOW What is it?

HENRY I don't have a TV!

WINSLOW What?

HENRY I don't have a TV!

WINSLOW Okay, wait. Hold on. Don't panic now. I think I see a way out of this. I just need to run to my office. You wait here. I'll be right back.

WINSLOW exits and HENRY shouts after him.

HENRY The wheel is turning!

HENRY turns his whole body in his chair, stopping at each Latin phrase until his legs are over the back of the chair and he is flat on his back on the desk, arms waving wildly.

HENRY *Regnabo*, I shall reign. *Regno*, I reign.
Regnavi, I once reigned. *Sum sine regno ... sum sine regno!*

WINSLOW reappears, holding a small TV and a curiously shaped bottle filled with an emerald green liquid. HENRY resumes a normal sitting position.

WINSLOW Here we are, Henry! Your writer's first aid kit — booze and TV — each to be consumed in liberal amounts!

WINSLOW puts the bottle and TV on the desk. He plugs in the TV as HENRY picks up the bottle.

HENRY Absinthe?

WINSLOW Absinthe! You're worried about being creative? Well, that is the drink of genius! The "Green Muse" as it is sometimes called! The favorite beverage of Van Gogh, Oscar Wilde and Ernest Hemingway! The perfect libation for a man about to embark on an artistic journey!

HENRY Isn't absinthe illegal?

WINSLOW pulls a laptop computer from a desk drawer and opens it up on HENRY's desk. He pulls out a thick sheaf of paper and places it on the desk as well.

WINSLOW Well, in this country, yes, I suppose it is, if you want to be absolutely nitpicky about it.

HENRY *(gestures to the TV)* And this?

WINSLOW Just plug it in, turn it on, and tune out. It's the whole damned world in a box, Henry! The whole damned world in a box!

HENRY You think so?

WINSLOW Absolutely! And Henry, you've got the perfect novel-writing setup here! A) you're a literate man, and B) you're depressed out of your mind! Hell, it's not like you have anything else to do, right?

HENRY I guess not. It's just ... I was so happy before.

WINSLOW Yes, Henry. You were happy. Like a barnacle on a rock is happy. But that rock's gone and now you've got to be like a shark! You either keep moving, or you die! Now, what's it going to be?

HENRY I'll ... write a novel!

WINSLOW Good man! Now get to it! Your Muse is calling. *(heads off singing and dancing)* Just sit right back and you'll hear a tale, a tale of a fateful trip ...

WINSLOW exits. HENRY opens the absinthe. He sniffs it cautiously, then takes a small sip. Three seconds later, it hits him like a blow to the solar plexus.

HENRY Oh Jesus! Oh God!

HENRY stares at the bottle in disbelief, then takes another healthy swig as he turns the TV on. Lights shift as HENRY is bathed in the glow from the TV. As he watches, we hear clips from classic TV shows and commercials. HENRY begins to type as time and space start to bend. He pulls bottle after bottle of absinthe from the desk drawers, draining them as he continues to watch TV and type. The TV sounds become distorted, the atmosphere becomes greener, and possibly a light fog drifts behind HENRY as he floats in his absinthe-induced haze until ... BANG! BANG! BANG! Three thunderous knocks jolt HENRY back to reality. Three more normal knocks and HENRY hides under his desk. Three more knocks and lights shift as RACHEL enters, carrying a white cardboard box. WINSLOW enters opposite RACHEL and they cross at center stage.

WINSLOW Excuse me, don't I know you from somewhere?

RACHEL Pardon me?

WINSLOW I seem to recall something about you. Perhaps it's just the fluorescent light in your hair. It reminds me of the froth in the waves off the coast of Ciociaria.

RACHEL Is that so? Does Ciociaria actually have a coast?

WINSLOW smiles engagingly, then takes her hand and kisses it. Behind them, HENRY emerges from beneath his desk and resumes typing.

WINSLOW Winslow Saxonhouse at your service. Author, lecturer, and professor of film studies. My specialities are Italian neo-realism and penetrating insights in general. Is there something I can help you with?

RACHEL *(holds up the cardboard box)* I just wanted to drop this off for Professor Henry Boyle, but he doesn't seem to be in.

WINSLOW Henry Boyle?

RACHEL Yes. Why do you seem so surprised?

WINSLOW Well, you're a woman.

RACHEL That's right. That must be one of those penetrating insights you mentioned.

WINSLOW Ah, touché! What I meant to say was that, to my knowledge, Henry doesn't know any women, except for his ex-wife. But I'd be happy to give him your package when I see him.

RACHEL I was hoping to give it to him in person, but ... do you have a pen I could borrow? I'll just write a note on the box.

WINSLOW Of course.

WINSLOW produces his fountain pen and hands it to RACHEL. As she writes something on the box, WINSLOW gives her a thorough looking over. RACHEL hands WINSLOW back his pen and the box.

RACHEL Thank you.

WINSLOW Not at all. You're sure we haven't met?

RACHEL Not in any meaningful way. So long.

WINSLOW *Ciao.*

RACHEL walks off and exits. WINSLOW bursts in on HENRY.

WINSLOW Henry, you won't believe this, but something incredible just happened to me in the hallway!

HENRY Go away! I'm working!

WINSLOW This woman, this attractive, fit, intelligent woman gave me this package to give to you. Can you imagine?

HENRY What? For me?

WINSLOW Yes! She even wrote a note — Good Lord! I forgot to read the note!

HENRY But it's for me!

WINSLOW Just wait a minute ...

WINSLOW tries to read the note as HENRY gets up and grabs for the box. WINSLOW plays him the way a matador plays an onrushing bull.

WINSLOW Ah, here it is! And very sprightly, I must say!

HENRY Winslow!

WINSLOW "Dear Henry, you beautiful man. I find myself utterly bewitched by your style, grace, and intellect. If you feel the same way and enjoy the occasional firm spanking, please give me a call."

HENRY stops struggling for the box, completely stunned.

HENRY What? Really?

WINSLOW I may have embellished slightly. Here you are.

WINSLOW hands HENRY the box and HENRY looks at the note.

HENRY Winslow, it doesn't say anything like that!

WINSLOW True, true. I'm a bad man, Henry.

HENRY *(looks more closely at the box)* Winslow, this note is written in Latin! "*Ut pignus amicitiae,*" it says.

WINSLOW Which means?

HENRY "As a token of friendship."

WINSLOW Fine, fine. Let's see what's in the box. *(opens the box and pulls out a cannoli)* Why they're cannolis! *(takes a healthy bite of cannoli and chews lustily)* Henry,

unless I am very much mistaken, you are being courted with Italian pastries.

HENRY Courtied?

WINSLOW *(looks at the top of the box again)* And who is this “Rachel” anyway?

HENRY Rachel ... it’s our waitress! From the Italian restaurant! It has to be! *(sits back down at his desk, staring at the cannoli box like it’s a holy relic)*

WINSLOW So it is! I knew I recognized her! Well, well, well. Who would have thought it? It appears you’ve made a conquest! Another notch in the Boyle belt! And a waitress, no less. Come on, she might still be in the hall! *(HENRY just stares at the box)* Henry, she’s on fire for you! Be merciful! Douse her flame!

HENRY She’s gone by now.

WINSLOW Ah, you’re probably right. But she’ll come back. They always do. But never mind about that. I — *(finally takes in all the empty absinthe bottles on HENRY’s desk)* — where in God’s name did you get all these absinthe bottles?

HENRY I’ve got a friend at Cambridge. He sent me a case. *(grabs a bottle and to WINSLOW’s shock, takes a long swig)*

WINSLOW You’re drinking it straight?

HENRY What do you mean?

WINSLOW Well, typically absinthe is diluted with water and sugar. A slotted spoon is often used to ... *(HENRY takes another swig)* ... but, I suppose, whatever works for you. You’re not having any kind of side effects, are you?

HENRY Side effects? Like what?

WINSLOW Oh, delirium, epileptic fits, hallucinations, things like that.

HENRY No, I don’t think so. My dreams have been getting a little strange ... at least, I think they’re dreams.

WINSLOW Well, just remember, drinking should be an art, not a profession. Everything in moderation, all

right?

HENRY Right.

WINSLOW Now, on to more important things. How's the writing going?

HENRY It's coming along.

WINSLOW Coming along? Excellent! The vague, non-specific answer of the true artist! (*picks up the sheaf of papers on the desk*) Is this it, then? It looks good ... lots of pages ... seems to be nicely typed.

HENRY Give me those! (*grabs the papers from WINSLOW*) It's not finished yet!

WINSLOW Just out of curiosity, how close are you?

HENRY I don't know. Maybe two ... three weeks.

WINSLOW Ah, well, you'll be needing this then. (*reaches behind HENRY's ear and, like a magician, pulls out a business card*) Voilà! (*hands HENRY the card*)

HENRY What's this?

WINSLOW When you finish the book, send it to this man, Turk Logan.

HENRY A literary agent?

WINSLOW Not just a literary agent. He's the best! You'll like him. He's a good man ... well, all right, maybe he's not a good man. But he's a damned good agent, and that's all that matters.

HENRY But why do I need an agent?

WINSLOW There's an old Italian expression, Henry: "*Belle parole non pascon i gatti.*" "Fine words alone do not feed the cats." Right now, all you have clutched in your hand are some fine words. That's wonderful. But all those pages you've written won't mean anything unless they're published and promoted in the right way. That's where Turk comes in. What's the book about, anyway?

HENRY Um ... things.

WINSLOW Things! That's genius, that is! Genius! And your new lady friend, will you be giving her a call? I did see she wrote her phone number on the box of cannolis.

HENRY Call her? No! I mean ... no. I can't, not right now. I can't have any distractions. I have to finish what I started. This book ... this writing, it's the only thing keeping me together.

WINSLOW (*grabs two more cannolis and begins to walk off*) Well then, I'll let you sweep to a graceful conclusion. Don't forget. Turk Logan. He's your man. I'll tell him to be expecting it, all right?

HENRY All right.

WINSLOW *Eccellente!*

WINSLOW takes an enormous bite of cannoli and exits. HENRY takes a sip of absinthe and turns the TV on. Lights shift to a greenish hue. As HENRY changes channels, we hear more TV clips, and these all have a theme to them — rodents. We hear Alvin and the Chipmunks, Mighty Mouse, and Leave it to Beaver [or other shows that reference rodents in some fashion]. Finally, we hear a voice-over from a nature special.

NARRATOR (v.o.) ... the capybara, from South America, is the world's largest rodent. Subsisting largely on a diet of water-plants and bark, they usually associate in herds, often gathering near brackish water ...

The booming voice of TURK LOGAN is heard.

TURK (o.s.) Professor Boyle! Are you in there? It's Turk Logan! I'm here to talk to you about your book!

HENRY turns the TV off as lights shift back to normal. HENRY looks from the TV to offstage, not entirely sure where that voice came from. TURK LOGAN enters briskly. His demeanor and crisp movements betray his Marine background. He's got a briefcase in one hand and a poster rolled up under his arm. HENRY rises shakily as TURK puts his briefcase and poster on a chair and spreads his arms wide.

TURK Henry Boyle! How glad I am that I lived to see this day!

HENRY Who did you say you were?

TURK Oh Jesus, didn't I say? Turk Logan. Literary agent. (*shakes HENRY's hand vigorously*) Are you feeling all right? You look a little under the weather. Here, take a seat. (*guides HENRY back into his chair, then opens up his briefcase and pulls out a manuscript*) I just finished reading your manuscript last night. Here it is. And here I am.

[NOTE: We never see the title of HENRY's book, nor do we ever learn what it is about. It is a tabula rasa, upon which people will write their own meaning.]

HENRY So what did you think?

TURK Ah, I like that! Straight to the point! You want to know what I think? I'll tell you what I think. Dr. Boyle, we've got a winner here.

HENRY We do?

TURK Absolutely. Very, very, very good. You've got an interesting way of writing, Henry. May I call you Henry? Great! What I like about this is that it's quaint, kind of old-fashioned, but it really moves. I've never read anything like it.

HENRY It moves?

TURK Oh yeah! I see this going over big. It's kind of an avant-garde nostalgia piece. I know big when I see it, Henry, and I'm holding it right here!

HENRY So you think you can find a publisher?

TURK Hell yes! This little darling here ... (*puts the manuscript to his nose and takes a healthy sniff*) Oh yeah! This even smells good! This has best-seller written all over it. Speaking of which ...

TURK picks up the poster he brought and unrolls it. It is an advertisement for The Benedictine Monk Diet and Workout Book. An elderly monk in a simple brown robe is pictured holding a potato and a banana in his outstretched palms.

TURK ... I brought you a little something. A decoration for the office.

HENRY What is that?

TURK You are looking at this year's number one best-seller, guaranteed.

HENRY *The Benedictine Monk Diet and Workout Book?*

TURK You got it! I'm saying a million units in the first two months easy. You don't mind if I put it up do you? *(doesn't wait for an answer, but pulls a stapler from his briefcase and staples the poster to HENRY's bookshelf)* It comes out next week, and I'm telling you, this little man here, Brother Emilio, he's gonna be bigger than Stephen King.

HENRY I see ... and what does Stephen King do?

TURK *(laughs as he twirls the stapler on his finger like a gunslinger and puts it back in his briefcase)* That's why I love this job! You writers have the damndest sense of humor. Anyway, what we're gonna do here Henry, is we're gonna sell this baby, then we'll take it from there.

HENRY I'm not sure I know what you mean. After you sell the book, what else is there to do?

TURK Selling the book is only half the battle, Henry. Once we've done that, we've got to sell you.

HENRY Sell me? Sell me to whom?

TURK Anybody who'll take you. And believe me, they will. It's a catchy little book, and all in all, you've got a good look, the kind of look people will expect. I like the wardrobe, the hair ... maybe we'll get you going on a beard 'cause it's a beardy kind of book, but I think we'll lose the glasses so we don't go overboard on the stereotype. *(plucks HENRY's glasses from his face and stuffs them into HENRY's shirt pocket)*

HENRY My glasses? But I need my —

TURK Hey, hey, hey! Come on now, Henry! You've done your job, now let me do mine, all right? *(paces back and forth behind HENRY, like General Patton in his prime)* This isn't some half-assed, shoot from the hip operation here! We're gonna run this the way it should

be run, like a military campaign! And anybody that gets in the way is gonna wonder what the hell ran over them. But that's my business. You don't worry about any of that. You'll be floating above it all, peaceful and calm. Oh, you might hear the occasional joint popping, blood running, or bones cracking, but hell, you can stuff your ears with all the money we're gonna be swimming in! Now then, any questions?

HENRY Were you ever in the military?

TURK Damn straight! Marine Corps. Special little unit we called the Black Rats.

TURK squeaks like a rat and scratches at his hands in rodent-like fashion. HENRY recoils in alarm.

TURK You know, the bringers of plague, pestilence, disease, those kinds of things. There isn't a creature on this planet I couldn't kill if I had half a mind to. That's a nice little edge to have in this business. Anything else?

HENRY No, I guess not.

TURK Then I'll be in touch. (*tosses the manuscript back in his briefcase and closes it up*) Great things are on the horizon, Henry. Your life is about to change in ways you never dreamed.

HENRY (*struggles to his feet*) But I'm not sure I want that ... I was just writing a book. All I really want is my old life back.

TURK It's too late for that now. You need to get yourself ready to meet America, Henry.

HENRY Why?

TURK Because once they get a taste of you, America is going to want to jump right up your ass and live there ... I mean that in a good way. Take care, Henry. Get yourself ready for the big adventure.

TURK's entire being suddenly becomes rodent-like and he closes in on HENRY making squeaking noises. HENRY retreats in horror until his back is against the poster TURK just put up. TURK makes a jump at HENRY and as HENRY screams, TURK resumes his

*normal demeanor, picks up his briefcase and exits.
The full impact of what his future holds hits HENRY
as he sags against the bookshelf.*

HENRY What have I done?

HENRY slides to the floor. Lights fade to black.

END OF ACT ONE