

## *DRAMATIS PERSONAE (the personated persons)*

- “Remember how bad it was yesterday? Here we go again.” (Goldsmith)

*Steelman: our hero. He is dressed in wounds: shattered lips and perjured eyes that open his tissues to business as usual.*

*Theas: Steelman’s wife—or—what her name said. Her gender is like a badly-pasted poster, sloppily, incompletely imposed from the outside by anonymous hands. Beneath which: animate absence. A loose weave of nerve and brick.*

*Foreman: commodity, utility, fertility, beauty. He cultivates his appetites. He walks the factory in gray, permissive sweats. He stands his ground.*

*Wife: his dearly beloved. She is a fugue state: nothing pronounced as ‘noting.’*

*Abominations: generic organic solids, dressed in tax.*

*Poet: a blank and wholesome face, masquerading as the law.*

*Verb: (his) weaponized language.*

*Toby: a principle of thrift, white and workmanlike. From his interminable prison in the lilacs, he texts the actors: u up ;-)*

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*C.E.O.: death’s second self. He bathes in streams of pink and silver resin to bind his carcass to itself. He sits over the vast factory floor, dove-like, brooding.*

*Chorus: board members at Arcadia Steel. They are respected, objective members of the community. They pass out luxurious wet and dry suckets, candied meats, and kissing confits to pacify the audience.*

*Reverend: he who reveres the end.*

*Shibboleth Places / Amorous Indigestion: good cop / bad cop.*

*Oedipus / Sphinx: the voice of reason / its victim.*

*Daddy: he vacuums all the pollution from my belly and leaves it here for the pleasure and edification of the consumer.*

*Dog: Tiresias in drag.*

*Congregants, factory workers, Arcadians (to taste).*

# ACT ONE

*scene: Arcadia, Indiana, a company town. The act opens at Steelman's house. It is a perforated skin, endowed with winter filth. Later, we travel to the Bamboo Lounge, a tiki bar in the heart of Arcadia. Throughout the first three acts, the stage should be packed with pastoral trash<sup>1</sup> so thick that the actors must wade through it to enter and exit. Once onstage, they stand as still as possible, as though imprisoned by it. They do not make breathless mergers or peel away from each other. They call out as if issuing bureaucratic commands—especially in scenes of violence and sexual intimacy. At no point may one character touch another. Their hands hang at their sides like fat, yellow fish. They caress each other in the abstract parts of their blubber using an antiseptic idiom.*

• *Argument:*

*Enter our generic hero with a generic wound: in the foot like Oedipus or the ear like Hamlet. The precise texture and weight of his pain will not concern us here. This is a tragedy of liability and legality—a corporate pleasure for a corporate age. Let it suffice that he is breakage: the unknowable surplus of the workplace that Foreman (animated by generic appetites) must eliminate.*

*Out of work, pressed by need, Steelman foresees, foresuffers all: how Theas, his wife (generic medium between) will give tender slivers of herself to save their house and keep him on the job. How she will swallow Foreman's humoral mud, which catches in her stomach and seals it against grief. And yet, he turns his head from the merciful thing she meant.*

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<sup>1</sup> *car batteries caked in sugar; effervescent denture-cleaning tabs; crushed bags of Tostitos Scoops; Pampers and tampons; shattered sacks of chemical salt; royal oaks and cedars, murdered by invasive beetles; flavored condoms with the flavor sucked off; delicate, crumpled receipts; tax returns with the names redacted; the foam from a no-fat decaf latte; etc.*

## ENVOY (about the author)

scene: live, from the bowels of Arcadia...

- ...the Poet sends an augury of his booty:

Toby:

I sing my self for sale: broke, butter-light,  
and highly militarized. Once I drank  
my song and ate it too. But Rumsfeld was right:  
you go to war with the army you have.  
Now, fragrant in not-things and fluent too,  
pale Achilles walks his mother's roses.  
Brittle as a grammar, man and his wound  
sing together and pick each other's noses:

"Whoso sinks his sex in funeral meats,  
some baked, some sweet, I know where is an hind,  
left by holy buddies to stain the beach.  
Do not touch him. He is Caesar's in mind,  
Circe's in body: go to him and write,  
'My love,'" (he coughs a rope of snot) "'is like:

- about the author:

Toby: Ok, excuse me while I ode myself—or what's left of me. Once I merged my delicate fingers with the internet, but its engine erupts aromatic paste, worn as prophylactic against the plague. Very soon I will be the silence of vespers. When the time comes, I'll draw my credit card like a flaccid sword and advance against the air. Hello, I am awed by all that is known: pale Iphigenia as she walks among her mother's roses. "Break forth unscented flesh in chives and bullion," (sez she, thru me). "Seedbed of the thing, sweetheart of the thing, break forth in salt and wisteria: the spring is here and dappled with its speculum."

*He thinks he has an inalienable right to soda and sandwich—that this is what it means to be a man. Yet, under current political conditions such a desire is unspeakable as such. Therefore the skies blanch when he walks beneath them. The resources of his being are exhausted. There is no special augury in the fall of a sparrow. There follow three minutes of mortuary heat.*

*[exit Toby, permanently]*

## AUBADE (o, bawd!)

scene: Theas in the bath. Steelman sings her praises through the door. From a lofty pine beside the house, Foreman watches her in the suds, delighted.

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*Steelman:*

I have always loved roses not always  
since lady who verbs me all roses  
will eat to a blank and lovely shape,  
map of my urge, which against me closes.  
One honey hour walked her waterways  
and drink still the dark perfume of her thought.  
One hour my mountainous spirit says,  
“I investigate logistics of loss:  
how my hand dissolves in embalming lotion  
and frames the self among jubilant trees,  
how you were caught, Achilles’d and ocean’d,  
and now of earth and pleasure take your leave.”  
The question was whether your savage breast  
would be savaged by art. Yes, I say, yes.

• “I too was born in Arcadia.”

*She steps from the bath, hair on her forehead oil-black, massed in tumorous braid: she does not answer. The dog paws the earth and samples the air: somewhere measure is broken. From his place in the pine, Foreman rejoices and sings the rupture:*

Divine Theas, queen of the bath—she of the steak-thigh—she net of lace. Peel her pale skin: touch the tight-packed river-silt within. Lift the silt, like a sheet of wax: find a flock of angels, engaged in musical debate. Night and day, they feast upon the eye and spit the iris back. Hence the marbled plumpness of her breast, overstuffed with it. And yet, her fullness sets an absence in me. Her silence sets a music, which un-limbs, sends the fat to wander in itself: unmeasured, at last, undressed. So I will be: of essence cured and sex unstitched.

## *PROBLEMS OF BEAUTY (sparse rhyme)*

*scene: enter Foreman, fluid as time, to offer Theas his help. To praise the particular plumpness of her lips and no other. Her voice, light as beer foam. To say the substance, sublime, streaked by child:*

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*Foreman:*

So pluck it out if pleasure makes the eye  
opaque: which I melts or eats itself or  
sings the hours in the bush by your door,  
O lady which is lunched in dark tree and sky.  
In proof whereof, witness our Wyatt: knee  
elastic as syntax, sings crooked body  
(his and hers) in park and hotel lobby:  
thus you are savage question and some me.  
And witness the magnificent sparrow  
as she gorges herself on lunch cancer.  
Eat shit, sparrow—go on—eat the marrow  
of eye and barf it back—there's your answer.  
But witness you, which excretes bird and tree.  
Prosecution rests: all this you far exceed.

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In the wine-dark waters of her cell phone, the fishies say  
OOWHHooP OOWHHooP. And their words are pregnant  
with consent. “Listen,” says Foreman, “to the ache—heavy with  
form—that populates your husband’s wound. It says, *FUUNTZ  
BA BE O. FUUNTZ BE BA BITZE-O.*” Theas sighs, and shifts  
her weight. “Listen,” says foreman, “Each of us must act his  
part in unknown languages. But your husband stretches past  
grammar, a voyager, sallied forth from the burnt coasts of the  
corpse. He is useless dough, unbound stone.” The pipes shudder  
in protest: *SHRANRRRTZzzz SHRANRRRTZzzziee.* “I will  
not let him work again—unless you thrust your hand into my  
bowels and map me. For I am twenty-one, and full of luscious  
wind. For I watch you sweep the pages of Cosmo, and I see you  
linger on the sex tips.” The dog shivers beneath the table, and  
growls: *MMM-MMM MAMMON.*

## LANDSCAPE WITH WIND (*devoutly to be wished*)

scene: *she consents.*

- “*small talk: work and the weather.*”

*Theas:*

I find I am a great many people  
each one networking with the wind.  
I find I am dressed in the scent of things:  
severe and stormy—somewhat cheerful.  
I find I am fragile as the weather:  
weather that weather composes.  
I find I am populated by roses,  
bush of thought and dusky leather,  
built by loss and thrilled by startled songbirds,  
which rising choir I call “brutes,”  
I call “exemplary bodies,” call “use,”  
since all at work with time, you launch your words  
from this table of wind and breast,  
which I call “certainty,” call “rest.”

- *Landscape with Abominations (devoutly to be washed).*

*T:* there was a car crash in my chest and all the Abominations died there was a grease fire in my chest and all the Abominations ate it and they smack their abominable lips and they do 1 hundred push ups with each of their 1 hundred tentacles  
*F:* i feed my tentacle with pancreas and snake just as the doctor said the weather is very fine yesterday the clouds came down in burial linen and blew their organs through my nose they blew pork chop and liver blew pancake and Froot Loops then they stopped blowing  
*T:* there was a car crash in my chest and my husband climbed out and massaged his wound there was a grease fire in my chest and the god of the Abominations eats it and blesses us and recites a litany of his convictions *that love occurs most in the deep bowels of a horse that it is conditional that wheat and mud shiver it that sex bark it* there is horse flesh in him fecund and the Abominations lick their heavy lips and the Abominations laugh and ask did you ever hear such a wind-fucker as this