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EXCURSION INTO PHILOSOPHY

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(A room furnished only with a bed against the upstage wall. A picture hangs over the bed. There is a window on the stage left wall, the shutters open. Bright morning light streams into the room. A woman, PUELLA, is lying on the bed asleep, facing the upstage wall. She is wearing a short pink nightie, her buttocks exposed. A fully dressed man, ROG, sits on the bed facing downstage. He is slightly slumped over in deep concentration. Next to him on the bed is an open book. He picks up the book and reads for a brief moment, then puts the book back down on the bed.

ROG gets up and walks to the window and looks out purposefully. He paces back and forth, pauses, looks at PUELLA, then looks out the window again. He goes to the bed and gently shakes PUELLA).

ROG

(In a loud whisper) Puella... Puella... wake up, honey...

(PUELLA stirs, begins to stretch and yawn.)

PUELLA

Is Waldo here yet? (She looks around the room.)

ROG

No. He should have been here by now. Maybe something happened to him.

PUELLA

Waldo? Nah, he's fine. Baby, let's make love before he gets here. You know how horny I get in the morning. And in the afternoon.... evening...

ROG

Honey, I need to talk to you. About something serious. I've been up all night thinking...

PUELLA

(She gets up behind him and starts to run her hands over his shoulders and chest and down his front.) We can talk later, baby. Now be a real stud and make love to your little Puella.

ROG

(Pulling away) It's important!

PUELLA

(Throwing herself back onto the bed in resignation) That's okay. Waldo will be here soon, and he'll make love to me.

ROG

Puella, please listen. We really need to discuss a matter of some importance.

PUELLA

He's so manly and strong. *(She begins to writhe and run her hands over her body.)*

ROG

(Goes to her and grabs her by the arms and shakes her.) Stop it!

PUELLA

Ohhhhh, somebody else is manly and strong too.

ROG

Forgive me for being so violent *(he embraces her)*.

PUELLA

Take me, Rog! Take me to paradise, baby. *(Her eyes close; her body goes limp)*.

ROG

This is important. Please, honey. We've got to change things! I mean it. I haven't been able to sleep a wink. I've thought this all through. Don't you see? Waldo keeps getting more and more dangerous. He takes risks without thought of the consequences, for him or for us.

PUELLA

You're paranoid, baby.

ROG

Have you noticed he's reading Nietzsche again?

PUELLA

Both of you boys love to read. All the time read, read, read! What difference does it make what he's reading?

ROG

It's his behavior, his eyes! Have you seen it in his eyes? He's taking it too seriously. The Superman stuff, he's really beginning to believe it.

PUELLA

Superman? You men like the cape, blue tights, red panties? Hey, in the right situation that could be sexy.

ROG

No, honey, no... Nietzsche... never mind. Trust me. Something's going to happen. But I have a plan. I've been reading Plato since dawn.

PUELLA

Not him again.

ROG

The Symposium.

PUELLA

What's a Symposium?

ROG

Technically, it's a drinking party. These people, the creme-de-la-creme of Greek civilization, lie around on couches and get drunk on wine and make speeches about the nature of love.

PUELLA

Talking about love. Bullshit! Let's *do* it, baby.

ROG

See, the last speaker at the symposium is Socrates. He tells about how he met this woman named Diotima, who explains to him that the more love grows, it becomes less about flesh and sensuality and more spiritual and pure and eternal.

PUELLA

This Diotima must have been a real dog. She probably never had it, so she resented it. I don't believe it unless I feel it, unless it gets inside me.

ROG

You're an empiricist! (*PUELLA looks perplexed*) You believe experience is the only source of knowledge.

PUELLA

Yeah! Diotima didn't have no experience so she didn't have no knowledge.

ROG

Quod erat demonstrandum. (*PUELLA perplexed*) Q.E.D. "Which was to be demonstrated". It's put at the end of a proof.

And to be absolutely correct, it's didn't have *any* experience.

In any event, the idea that Socrates, through Plato, is trying to get at is that the things we sense - see, hear, smell - everyday things are really illusions. Reality exists on a level beyond the ordinary. Material objects are inferior copies of perfect ideas that exist outside of space and time, and can be apprehended only with our thoughts.

PUELLA

Baby, you're trying to bend my mind like a pretzel.

ROG

Take dogs, for example. There are millions of dogs in the world, each one different. But they have something in common which makes them dogs. What is this *dogginess*? Plato tells us that they are all copies of the perfect dog, which doesn't exist in space or time, but only in eternity. We are only capable of connecting with the eternal through our thoughts. *We* can think about the perfect dog, but all the dogs we see or touch are just copies of *the* perfect, eternal dog.

PUELLA

So Diotima's a dog. What's that got to do with love?

ROG

As we grow closer to a love of truth and eternal beauty, the *object* of our love becomes the perfect, eternal love, rather than the earthly, sensual love.

PUELLA

Baby, you want to *talk* about eternal love; you want to *think* about eternal love; and I got an eternal *itch* that you don't want to scratch.

(There is a noise from above. Both ROG and PUELLA freeze and look upward waiting.)

PUELLA

Are you sure you tied the old couple up tight?

ROG

(Getting his gun and holster from under the bed) Yes. There's no way they could get loose. Maybe it's Waldo?

PUELLA

I didn't hear nobody come through the front door.

ROG

Something made that noise.

(They both are silent for a moment and look up; they don't hear the noise again.)

PUELLA

I know! Maybe they have a dog. It's a farm; they gotta have a dog. I want a dog. Just my dog, who loves only me. He'd always be glad to see me, and lick me in the face. Mama never let me have a dog.

ROG

Your mother can't hurt you anymore.

PUELLA

Mama, the boring Latin teacher who named me “Puella”.

ROG

Latin for “girl”. Accurate, to be sure, though not very imaginative.

PUELLA

On her death bed said she should have named me “Meretrix”. What’s that mean again, baby?

ROG

“Meretrix”, sad to say, is Latin for “whore”.

PUELLA

Oh yeah. That makes sense... “trix”... Good old Mom.

ROG

She was wrong to say that. The disease had taken her mind away.

PUELLA

Good riddance to her!

ROG

(He goes to her and tenderly strokes her hair.) Listen, honey, as part of my plan, we’ll get you a dog. But we have to start right away.

PUELLA

I can have a dog, baby? Can I have this dog? *(She points upstairs.)* Wait a minute. What’s the rest of the plan?

ROG

Listen carefully. We take the money and leave before Waldo gets here.

PUELLA

That’s dangerous...

ROG

First, we should go up and untie the old couple and apologize to them, perhaps give them some of the money to compensate them for their inconvenience, and as a disincentive to call the police.

PUELLA

Yeah, as if!

ROG

Then take off to another state and change our lives. Stop stealing. I could get a real job. I could support you and love you in a pure way. And you could love me, and only me... you know, stop sleeping around. I would put you on a pedestal and make you my goddess. You deserve a better life than this. You have such a good soul. I know it. We could change and lead a virtuous life.

PUELLA

(As she slowly recovers from being dumbfounded) Whoa, baby.... The part about the dog – I like that. I love the dog. The rest of your plan... I don't know. I might not like it. Besides, Waldo would kill us. He'd find us and he would kill us.

ROG

If we stick with Waldo we're going to get killed anyway. Or put in prison. I know how his mind works. I could get us someplace he would never find us.

PUELLA

What kind of job could you get? Let's see... what can you do? Well, you know how to put money in the bag I'm holding while Waldo terrorizes the victims. That, and reading a lot of nonsense all the time. It's a short resume, but impressive. You could wear your ski mask to the interview.

ROG

It's okay. I expected you to be skeptical. You need to adjust to the idea and see it in the same light I do. Like Plato's cave.

PUELLA

Plato's cave? Is that anything like Plato's Retreat?

ROG

It's a *simile*. Let me explain. As Samuel Goldwyn once said, listen slowly. You see, we're all imprisoned in a cave facing the wall, with a fire behind us making shadows on the wall. We see only shadows, but think we see reality. Finally someone, the philosopher, escapes and gets outside to see the light of day, reality. That's me, the philosopher. And the philosopher goes back into the cave to tell the others and help them to find their way out of their ignorance. *But* because his eyes have adjusted to the bright light outside, when he goes back into the dark cave he can't see the shadows as clearly as before, so everyone thinks he's stupid.

You get it? I'm the philosopher and you think I'm stupid.

PUELLA

Du-uh!

ROG

Come on, Puella. Let me guide you out of this cave and show you the light of day. We can grow old together and grow virtuous and partake of eternity.

PUELLA

(Snatching up the copy of The Symposium)

Let me see that!

(She starts to read as Rog stands by in anticipation. After a few lines, she starts to laugh, as she reads further she laughs more derisively. ROG looks at her with questioning eyes.)

It's about boys! They're talking about men being in love with boys. Are you queer? Is that why you don't want to make love to me. This is your plan? I get a dog and you get a boy?

ROG

No! No, honey! That was ancient Greece. They liked boys. But the ideal of love Diotima describes is universal. It applies to us.

(Two gunshots are fired upstairs. ROG and PUELLA are stunned.)

Two shots...

PUELLA

Waldo! *(She looks at ROG.)* He shot them. He shot the geezers.

(Another shot is fired.)

The dog!

(Footsteps are heard coming down the stairs. WALDO enters the room. He is handsome, dashing, confident, and appears totally unbothered by the fact that he just executed two human beings.)

WALDO

Some men toil from sun to sun, but Waldo's work is never done. Poo! *(WALDO grabs PUELLA by the waist and kisses her on the lips.)* Big Brother! *(He takes ROG's head in his hand and kisses him on the lips.)*

PUELLA

Did you shoot the dog?

WALDO

Dog? What about a dog?

PUELLA

The third shot.

WALDO

(Puts his arm around her shoulder) Come here. 'Dja miss me? Thought I'd never get here. Went through hell – literally. Well, literally symbolically, since hell doesn't actually exist. Anyway. Drivin' down the highway, gettin' kind of lonely, nothin' on the radio, and I see this guy hitchhikin' with a suitcase. About my age, height, weight, practically a twin. *Mein doppelganger*. Stopped, asked him where he was goin', he was goin' my way, picked him up, we rode for a while. Might have been my physical double, but a mental homunculus. Little brain bankin' around like a pinball inside his skull. Throw a compound sentence his way, his eyes light up: "TILT!" Total gull, believed everything I said. Wonderful!

(WALDO sees the book, picks it up and turns it to see the cover, whereupon he drops it as if it were a diseased rat.) Plato! Fuck! What's he doin' here? *(He throws a glance at ROG.)*

About an hour of stuffin' this geek's ears full of horseshit... a wail in the distance, look in the rearview, it's the cops. State troopers or somethin'. Looked at the speedometer, know I'm not speedin', figure they know who I am. Or they think they know who I am. Cretins! Now I'm speedin'! Dumbo next to me quiverin' and stammerin, about to pee in his pants. I'm gettin' distracted by the sound of the pinball bouncin' around his head. Pulled out my gun. Told him to get down, there might be shootin'.

Cops start gettin' closer, they see just me in the car, shit-for-brains down on the floor smellin' up the car. Pea-brain in the cruiser gets off a shot, comes through the back window, out the front, whizzin' by my right ear. My travellin' companion has ceased to be a material object... pure fear. Decide to pull a maneuver seen only in the movies, spin the car around a one-eighty, cross the median, go the other way... SURPRISE! Big tanker full of flammable liquid. Kaboom! The conflagration! Welcome to Beelzebub's rumpus room!

Grabbed the hitchhiker's suitcase, slipped out the door, walked through the blazes out the other side. My body-double flame-broilin' in the car. If I know cops, and I do, they've already assumed that he was me, I died in the accident, they're off my trail.

Hey Rog, a perfect exercise in Cartesian doubt. Waldo ceased to exist. Have to start over, rejectin' all assumptions held in the past. All's I know: *cogito ergo sum*.

ROG

(Explaining to PUELLA) I think, therefore I am – Descartes.

PUELLA

My hero!

ROG

It's foolhardy. You could have gotten yourself killed.

WALDO

Thanks for carin', big brother. But as you see I am here. Question is: who am I?

PUELLA

You're Waldo, baby.

WALDO

Officially Waldo is dead. Doesn't exist.

ROG

(Sternly) You got someone else killed. Someone innocent.

(WALDO looks at ROG for a moment and has a realization. He picks up the book and flips through it and walks over to ROG.)

WALDO

You're readin' Plato again. Shit! Fillin' your brain with idealistic lies about the virtuous life. Hey, Poo, The Philosopher King here bore you with the story about the cave?

PUELLA

(Waving her hands over her eyes. Mockingly) I can't see nothing but shadows.

WALDO

(Covering his eyes) Help us Rog. Lead us to the light.

ROG

You killed an innocent man. Two innocent men and an innocent woman.

WALDO

Nobody's innocent. St. Augustine's original sin. You're readin' Plato, next thing you know, you'll be readin' Augustine.

ROG

They didn't deserve to die.

WALDO

All any of us deserve. Might have dispatched them to a better place. *The Apology*, the trial of Socrates, when he's given the death penalty. *(With mock histrionics)* "The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways – I to die, and you to live. Which is better God only knows."

ROG

But you don't believe that. You argue what you don't believe. You're a... Sophist! A Protagoras!

WALDO

Whoa there. Thought you were goin' to call me a lawyer. That'd be an insult. Kinda like old Protagoras. "Man is the measure of all things". Well I'm the measure of all men.

PUELLA

You are in my experience, baby.

WALDO

Thanks, babe. You worry too much, Rog. Inferior beings died in the service of a superior one. Happens. Besides, if I hadn't survived, wouldn't be able to tell you about our next project. Got a plan.

PUELLA

Rog has a plan, too.

WALDO

Rog? A man with a plan? *(To PUELLA)* Probably plannin' we should all drink hemlock. *(Back to ROG)* Listen, bro, maybe I can fan you out of your doldrums.

(Arm around ROG'S shoulder) You're gonna love this. A train passin' about two hundred miles from here on Thursday, on its way from the engravin' plant to the Federal Reserve Bank... almost a hundred million dollars in currency. Gonna get all we can fit in the old couple's truck.

ROG

We can't do it.

WALDO

Course we can. We're the *Übermenschen*. Can do anything if we will it.

ROG

What I'm trying to explain is that Puella and I can't go with you. We have other plans.

WALDO

(He cozies up to Rog) Get back to your senses, Rog. Remember? I was just a little boy you used to read Nietzsche to me. Thought it was so cute how I mispronounced Zarathustra. "Daddy Rooster", remember? Say it with me *(he takes ROG's mouth in his hand and manipulates his lips)*.

WALDO AND ROG

Daddy Rooster.... Daddy Rooster....

PUELLA

Daddy Rooster *(she begins to laugh and continues giggling)*.

WALDO

Had this image of a struttin' barnyard fowl makin' pronouncements.

(When WALDO says 'struttin'' PUELLA starts to strut like a rooster. When he says 'pronouncements', she crows like a rooster.

ROG let's out a long agonized shout-scream. WALDO and PUELLA cease their respective talking and giggling and stare at him, awestruck.)

ROG

(After the shouting is over) This is how it's going to be. Puella is going with me. We're going to take the money; you can have the truck. It's only police bait anyway. We will disappear, and you won't come after us. Go rob your train. You're the superior being and you don't need us anyway. We're through with this life. I love you Waldo. You're my little brother and I wish I could save you, but I'm afraid you're beyond salvation.

WALDO

Rog! What about Nietzsche?

ROG

Nietzsche's dead! I buried him next to God.

WALDO

Your sense of ethics. You can't start a virtuous life with stolen money. And the two corpses upstairs? Legally you share responsibility, don't you think ethically as well?

ROG

You killed the old couple; I was going to untie them and apologize.

WALDO

That would be smart.

ROG

What's right is not always what's self-serving.

WALDO

Bentham: The greatest good for the greatest number? Three of us, two of them.

ROG

Now there are two of us, and one of you.

(He pulls out his gun, picks up the money bag from under the bed and moves to stand next to PUELLA.) Now stand aside, Waldo, and let us go.

WALDO

(Taking out his gun) You go. Poo and the money stay.

(Waldo takes the money from ROG'S hand).

PUELLA

Wait a minute. What about what I want? Do I get a say in this?

WALDO

What *do* you want?

PUELLA

First, I want my part of the money. Then we all three go our separate ways. You Rog, to find the virtuous life; Waldo, to seek power and adventure. I'll go find someone to love me. You guys love old dead philosophers and silly ideas.

ROG

Puella, I worship you!

PUELLA

I don't want to be worshipped. I ain't no goddess. I'm a woman made of flesh and I need to feel warm human flesh, not a cold Greek statue.

WALDO

Never complained about my flesh not bein' hot enough.

PUELLA

I'm just another conquest for you. An inferior being at the service of a superior one.

ROG

Waldo, I think she's been reading Mary Wollstonecraft behind our back.

PUELLA

I ain't been reading nothing. I been living and breathing. I been trying to get your nose out of a book and into my crotch! I want someone to make love to me, not just fuck me, and goddamnit, I want a DOG! (*To ROG*) You promised me a dog and (*to WALDO*) you killed it!

WALDO

Dog? You see a dog, Poo?

PUELLA

I sensed it.

ROG

We'll get you a dog, Puella. It doesn't have to be that particular dog. As I was trying to explain earlier, there are many dogs, all of whom are mere copies of the Platonic idea of the perfect dog, which exists outside of space and time.

WALDO

Think she's referin' to "the" dog as opposed to "a" dog, which partakes of the general dogginess of Plato's theoretical form.

ROG

But "the" dog is an ideal. Outside space and time. We can't have "the" dog, we can only think about it.

WALDO

Aristotle rejected Plato's separate, timeless form. Said it was contained within each dog... a potential... *essence*.

PUELLA

That's right, I felt the *essence* of the dog. And I heard its paws.

WALDO

“Pause” as in interval?

PUELLA

No, “paws” as in feet.

WALDO

(Tapping his fingernails against the wall) Clitter, clatter of little toenails? *(PUELLA nods. WALDO stops tapping.)* Hear ‘em now?

(They listen.)

PUELLA

Not anymore.

WALDO

The paws pause. *(Pause)* Think the dog exists?

PUELLA

He don’t exist if you killed him.

WALDO

I couldn’t kill him if he didn’t exist!

ROG

Even if he only exists in Puella’s mind, then he exists in some measure, since all things are really mental.

WALDO

Deluded idealist! Confusin’ sense-data with the object itself.

ROG

I thought you didn’t like Russell.

WALDO

Old Bertie! A pacifist wimp, yeah, but a superb logician.

ROG

Even Russell admitted we have no proof of things outside our minds, we have to rely on assumptions.

WALDO

Take your idealist crap, which I don't, but for the sake of argument... Berkeley: "Esse est percipi", to be is to be perceived. Poo no longer perceives the dog... it ceases to exist.

ROG

Not exactly. He said if the dog *is no longer perceived* it ceases to exist. She doesn't have to perceive it. There need be only one percipient, therefore the dog continues to exist because it is perceived always by the mind of God.

WALDO

Ah! The question: Is there a God?

PUELLA

The question is NOT is there a God, it's is there a DOG!

ROG

The perfect dog exists somewhere, because to be perfect is to be supreme in every possible aspect, and to exist is better than not to exist, therefore the dog must exist.

WALDO

The ontological argument for the existence of the dog? Circular logic. Thomas Aquinas rejected that... thirteenth century.

ROG

If you prefer, allow me to quote the great pragmatist, William James: "If the hypothesis of the dog works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is true." It is satisfactory to *me*, ergo it is true.

WALDO

Not satisfactory to *me*, ergo not true!

ROG

I believe you may be in the minority, little brother. Puella, is it satisfactory to you?

PUELLA

If it's satisfactory, it's true? Satisfactory?

WALDO

Yeah, Rog. Obliterates objective truth. James was screwy. Somethin's true 'cause it's satisfactory? Wacko!

PUELLA

You want to know what's satisfactory to me? If I had millions of dollars and got serviced on a regular basis by the Brazilian soccer team. That's satisfactory, but you know what? IT AIN'T TRUE! Here's what's true: I'm broke and hanging out with a couple of useless yo-yos.. You guys don't know nothing. You say whatever suits you.

(Pause)

ROG

You have a point. That is a common criticism of philosophy, that philosophers through the ages have said whatever their circumstances and prejudices required. Merely rationalizing one's own self-interests.

WALDO

The skeptics said it's impossible to know anything. Can't know for sure anything exists. Maybe all just a dream. Poo, you can't even be sure I exist. I wasn't in the original paintin'.

ROG

That's true. Maybe none of us exist. Maybe we're just part of the playwright's dream.

WALDO

Even the audience. Real? Or just the playwright's fantasy? And if they do exist, should we question their taste?

PUELLA

Soooooooo... IS THERE A DOG?

WALDO

Only the playwright knows if it's a dog... or dogma.

(All three look at each other for a moment, then shake their heads and speak together.)

WALDO, ROG, PUELLA

No... no... he's totally confused now.

ROG

I must admit. I am, too.

WALDO

Second that.

(ROG and WALDO are paralyzed. PUELLA looks at them in frustration, waiting... then.)

PUELLA

What do we do now?

ROG

Do?

WALDO

What we have here is a dilemma. *(He sits, puts the money down and holsters his pistol.)*

ROG

We certainly do. I don't know how to get out of it. *(He holsters his pistol.)*

WALDO

Me either Rog. Nonplussed.

PUELLA

What's the problem, baby?

ROG

How can we possibly know what to *do*, if we don't know what to *think*?

PUELLA

Come on! Don't think so much. Just DO!

ROG

(To WALDO) Just *do*?

WALDO

Hmmmm. *(To PUELLA)* Like Kierkegaard's "leap of faith"?

PUELLA

(Irritated) I don't know what that is.

WALDO

Throwin' your lot in with eternity. *(To ROG)* Old Kierk described dread before the leap. I feel dread. You feel dread, Rog?

ROG

I feel dread.

PUELLA

Dreadful!

ROG

This is exciting!

WALDO

(To PUELLA) Okay. How do we make the leap?

(WALDO and ROG ready themselves as if to make a physical leap.)

PUELLA

Come on, guys! Stop listening to philosophers. Think for yourselves!

(WALDO and ROG look at each other in total amazement. A revelation!)

WALDO AND ROG

WOW!!!

ROG

Existentialism! Puella, you're amazing.

PUELLA

Stupid men!

ROG AND WALDO

(To each other, with great delight) Post-modern feminist deconstructionism!

PUELLA

Arrrrggghhh!

ROG

Be patient with us. Please. You're just so much more advanced than we are.

WALDO

I got it! She can teach us.

ROG

(To PUELLA) Yeah! Teach us!

WALDO

And teach others. Charge admission!

ROG

Advertise!

WALDO

Publish!

ROG

(Envisioning the title) “The Puella Lectures”!

PUELLA

Okay. I see. You want me to teach you. Fine. Sit down.

ROG

Wait. I need to find something to write with.

WALDO

Yeah, take notes.

PUELLA

Hold it right there. You don't need no notes. It's simple. Just sit.

(They sit upright, awaiting the lesson.)

(To ROG) Give me the money, baby.

ROG

(He hands her the cloth sack as he whispers to WALDO with the pride of a bright student.)
Adam Smith.

PUELLA

(To WALDO) Give me the keys to the old folks' truck, baby.

(He takes the keys from his pocket and hands them to her. They look at each other, the two guys in eager anticipation, Puella bemused and astonished.)

PUELLA

Okay. Pay careful attention. This... is how you just *do... babies*.

(She turns and walks offstage. We hear the sound of a door opening and closing.)

ROG

Splendid!

(ROG and WALDO are still attentive, absorbing the lesson. There is the sound of the truck starting and driving away.

They sit for a few moments, silent, smiling to each other until it slowly dawns on them that PUELLA has left with the money and isn't coming back.)

WALDO

Feel abandoned.

ROG

Heidegger.

WALDO

Indeed.

ROG

I feel isolated.

WALDO

Sartre.

ROG

That leaves us back with our dilemma.

WALDO

(Remembering) “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judgin’ whether life is or is not worth livin’ amounts to answerin’ the fundamental question of philosophy.”

ROG

Camus. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Are you suggesting....?

WALDO

We still have our pistols.

ROG

Has it come to this?

WALDO

All our philosophies are like Sisyphus's rock. We roll them to the top of the hill, they roll back down again.

ROG

Life is meaningless and we're alone.

WALDO

Only way out... death.

ROG

How shall we go about it?

WALDO

As I said, we have our pistols.

ROG

Is that our only option?

WALDO

Don't think we want to beat each other to death.

ROG

I've always fancied the Japanese ritual Seppuku. So beautiful and orderly.

WALDO

Disembowelment. Beheadin'. We lack the swords.

ROG

So true.

WALDO

Mixin' existentialism and romanticism?

ROG

That won't do.

WALDO

Pistols it is. Farewell, Roger.

ROG

(Embracing WALDO) Bon Voyage, mon frere.

(They raise their pistols, each putting his pistol to his head. They take a deep breath. They pause. They look at each other, pistols still to their heads.)

This is not right. So banal and unceremonious.

WALDO

You're right. Should go out with more than just a bang.

ROG

Two bangs.

WALDO

Two bangs. Must be somethin' more.

ROG

Something festive.

WALDO

Don't think "festive" is quite the word. Poetic.

ROG

Marvelous!

WALDO

Poetic and noble.... A duel!

ROG

But that would leave one of us alive.

WALDO

Only the form of a duel. Count, shoot precisely on the count. Discharge our weapons simultaneously.

ROG

Oh, I wish Puella were here.

WALDO

Me too. I'd like to shoot *her*. (*Taking ROG by the arm*) Come with me. (*They move to the center of the room.*) Stand back to back. Walk three paces, turn, fire.

ROG

Okay. Got it. (*He turns and shakes Waldo's hand, then they stand back to back and start to count and pace.*)

WALDO AND ROG

One... two... three...

ROG

WAIT! Wait, wait wait.... The turning and shooting are too imprecise. Why don't we try it this way: We walk three paces on counts one, two and three, turn on four and shoot on five.

WALDO

Okay. Good idea. Wanna do this right.

(*They stand back to back again and repeat the paces.*)

WALDO AND ROG

One... two... three... (*turning*) four... (*shooting on the count*) five..

(*When they squeeze their respective triggers, both wince, close their eyes and brace for the arrival of the bullet. This position is held for a couple of beats until WALDO realizes that nothing has happened.*)

WALDO

(*Noticing ROG's wince*) Hardly an expression of nobility.

ROG

(*Opening his eyes*) Waldo? Is that you?

WALDO

No, it's Socrates. I've come to welcome you to the afterlife.

ROG

Socrates! You look just like my brother.

WALDO

Rog! It's me! Nothin' happened.

ROG

I just shot you.

WALDO

Your weapon discharge?

ROG

(*Checking the chamber to find an empty shell*) Yes, it did.

WALDO

(*Checking his weapon to find the same*) Likewise. Very odd.

ROG

Odd in the sense that experience has not conformed to our expectations.

WALDO

In a nutshell. But why?

ROG

Puts me in the mind of David Hume and his ideas about causation. The connection between the guns being fired and the bullets entering our bodies is merely a result of habitual thinking. Just because we have *observed* that conjunction of events before does not prove a causal connection.

WALDO

Denies the principle of induction. Has to be another explanation.

ROG

Perhaps we're already dead and partake of eternity, where Augustine said time does not exist.

WALDO

Rog, let's turn away from metaphysics, direct our inquiries towards physics.

ROG

How bold!

WALDO

(Thinks, then snaps his fingers.) The bullets collided between us...

ROG

(Looking around on the floor) Then we should expect to find shards of lead on the floor.

WALDO

Don't be so Newtonian! Think quantum mechanics.

ROG

The Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle! A bullet cannot have a definite velocity and a definite location at any one time.

WALDO

No. The wave-particle nature of the bullets. They collided, the deBroglie waves intertwined precisely out of phase... cancelled out. The bullets vanished!

ROG

Or, through some freak of nature, the bullets exceeded light speed and traveled backwards in time.

WALDO

Time... time... time... (*Revelation*) Archimedes in his bathtub, *Eureka!* This is it. Fired our guns, the universe stopped expandin', began to contract, the arrow of time reversed!

ROG

Like Sisyphus's rock!

WALDO

Exactly! (*They shake hands vigorously.*)

ROG

Slightly off subject... but just as I squeezed the trigger, I seemed to remember that Camus rejected suicide. He posed the question, but answered in the negative, suggesting, rather, a noble defiance in the face of absurdity.

WALDO

May be right. You are right. (*Laughs*) Answered the fundamental question of philosophy incorrectly.

ROG

(*Joins in the laughter*) But our suicide didn't work! That was close!

WALDO

Saved from a grave philosophical error by a Sisyphian event: the universe is rollin' downhill!

(They laugh and hug.)

ROG

(Pulling away) But... Not to be negative, but is it not true that Hawking rejected the idea of the arrow of time going in reverse when the universe contracts? And he asserted that intelligent life could not exist under such circumstances, since disorder would decrease, and the human process creates more *disorder* than it does order?

WALDO

Yeah, yeah, yeah. The psychological arrow follows the thermodynamic arrow. I'm familiar. Faulty premises. Right on physics, wrong on biology. Assumes life is static; we know it's evolutionary. Maybe... the universe contracts.. life evolves... actually *creates* order.

ROG

Hard to imagine. Human beings are so messy.

WALDO

Intelligent life! Doesn't have to be human. Some progeny of reptiles, sharks maybe, even more compact - *unicellular* intelligence.

ROG

Astonish me!

WALDO

Human evolution's a dead end anyway. Inefficient at producing intelligence. All these cells, organs to produce *thoughts*. Thoughts... no mass, no volume... outside space and time.

ROG

Which brings us back to Plato.

WALDO

So it does. Thoughts are eternal. The beings that think them will be different.

ROG

But, if, as you surmise, that time has arrived, then how do you explain the fact that we still exist?

WALDO

(Thinks hard) You assume we exist.

ROG

There is one other explanation of our circumstance that we failed to consider.

WALDO

What's that, Rog?

ROG

The psychological subjectivity of time. Sometimes in heightened situations time seems to speed up or slow down within the mind. Perhaps our minds are racing ahead of the bullets, which are still on their way towards us.

WALDO

Hmmm. There is that.

(WALDO and ROG resume the wincing positions they held at the time the triggers were pulled. We hear two simultaneous shots and they fall to the floor.)

FADE OUT