

Filthy Frogs is an adaptation of Aristophanes' comedy *Frogs*, which featured a contest in the underworld between the tragic playwrights Aeschylus and Euripides. Aristophanes' comedy conveyed the sense of the waning of an era, with Dionysos, the god of drama, looking backwards for inspiration as he journeys to the afterlife intending to bring one of the dead playwrights back to life.

Filthy Frogs was written by me around 2000, and some of the few topical jokes relate to that time. The action is transferred to the contemporary, and the new theme is the waning of the 'modern' period in theatre, and the great names associated with it.

***Filthy Frogs*: synopsis**

In this play DIO and XANTHIA, his assistant, decide to try to resurrect Bertolt Brecht and, with him, a political theatre. DIO's first thought is to take advice from Irvine WELSH, but the suggested methods of entering the underworld are too drastic. DIO and XANTHIA have recourse to spliffs, and some of DIO's suspicious white snuff, and begin to have emotive and nostalgic visions of performers and other celebrities.

After a shock encounter with a bogey-man (Goebbels), they finally see the dim figure of GRO(T)owski, who is poling his canoe like Charon. They purchase the canoe and the self-penetration pole, and pass the floating islands, challenged by the AR-TOADIANS, who are violently opposed to political theatre. They meet a second chorus of initiates, the CRITICS, who celebrate themselves and reluctantly direct them to the gate to the theatrical underworld, which is guarded by the great TORTSOV (Stanislavski). After enduring trials set by TORTSOV, they beat him off and progress, leaving the CRITICS to stumble around in the dark looking for an audience.

(Interval)

XANTHIA attempts to obtain permission from the CLERK of the underworld literary archives to resurrect Brecht. As she is beating the CLERK, DIO appears to announce that the AR-TOADIANS are insisting on a contest between ARTAUD and BRECHT, who is running away from danger. ARTAUD is brought on in a strait-jacket, and when released he subjects BRECHT's short plays *He Who Says Yes* and *He Who Says No* to parody and ridicule, using the AR-TOADIANS as a Brechtian chorus. ARTAUD collapses into manic incoherence, and DIO accepts that he may be that weak item 'he who says maybe'. As BRECHT and ARTAUD finally fade from sight, DIO goes looking for Beckett, who is hanging around outside hoping for resurrection, and XANTHIA in despair is confronted by what she takes to be the phantom of Sarah Kane.

Cast size: the play requires seven performers, two for the leads (1M, 1F) and an ensemble/chorus of five (1F, 4M).

FILTHY FROGS

An Aristophanic Comedy

CAST in order of appearance

DIO

XANTHIA

WELSH

SHADES of the underworld

GROT

Chorus of **AR-TOADIANS**

Chorus of **CRITICS**

Leading **CRITIC**

TORTSOV

JOBSWORTH, a **CLERK**

BRECHT

ARTAUD

Scene: various

Music

What follows here is a small selection of scenes from the complete play. In the first extract from Act 1, Dio and his assistant Xanthia are tripping down to the underworld, and beginning to 'see' things:

DIO. You're quite right. What I need now is a spliff. *(He pulls out a very large, silver-plated cigarette case.)* Care for one?

XAN. I'll look after it. Obviously a case of "here's one I prepared earlier". *(They smoke.)* What have you got in these?

DIO. Only the finest ingredients. My own recipe. Like it?

XAN. I love it. Who's that over there?

(The stage begins to darken. Figures gradually appear. Smoke and mist begin and thicken.)

DIO. You must be seeing things.

(A saxophone, softly.)

DIO. And hearing them. Or I am.

(The melody continues. It is Charlie Parker.)

DIO. Bird. It is Bird. Sheer ornithology. Give me those salted peanuts.

(A trumpet begins.)

DIO. And Dizzy. Sweet and sour. Let me hear you. Yo! Ah, my friends, my friends.

(They disappear as he approaches them.) Grasping at shadows.

(Billie Holiday, with "Stormy Weather".)

DIO. Ah, Lady Day, Lady Day, Billie, my little beauty.

(DIO is beginning to wander over the stage, grasping at shadows. XANTHIA wanders over to join him. Billie is replaced by Marilyn Monroe, with "I Want To Be Loved By You".)

XAN. A little predictable, after a good start. Imagination three, fantasy one.

(Martin Luther King, with "I have a dream...".)

XAN. Now here's something different. Thoroughly PC. A man with a dope-free dream.

(Elvis Presley, with "Love Me Tender".)

XAN. From one king to another.

(Jim Reeves, with "From a Jack To a King".)

XAN. And down market, too. Vinyl visitations, but as for the afterlife of actors, scripting hacks, and other detritus of the world we know and love so well, not much progress.

DIO. Time for a little snuff, then. That should do the trick.

XAN. Ah, the blond variety. I won't ask what's in it. I'll just try some.

(The mist has thickened. The Spice Girls, with "I'll Tell You What I Want...".)

DIO. They aren't dead!

XAN. Yeh, but I wish they were. There's no end to hoping. *(Figures start to appear.)* You know how it goes - "Why this is hell, nor am I ever out of it." Right now, I am rather.

(Thatcher, with handbag, wanders past.)

DIO. I think you must have forgotten diplomatic immunity, my dear Xanthia. What did that Tory politician say about Pinochet? "One must never ignore the agreement reached between a sovereign people and its tyrant." Quite so. How could one ever forget it? *(Another figure appears.)* Why, a man with a bicycle.

XAN. I want to see him ride it. It may seem trivial, but I want to see the bastard get on and ride it.

(The man stops, and speaks silently to DIO.)

DIO. He says his front tyre's flat.

(Another figure - Noel Edmonds, hand in hand with Mr Blobby.)

DIO. Now that is cruel. Sadistic, even. What did Mr Blobby ever do to you?

XAN. I'd rather not say. *(She picks up the laptop.)* So, do you think we're nearly there?

DIO. I don't know? Are there any more?

XAN. So many, so many. "I had not thought death had undone so many."

(Another figure, leading a chimp.)

DIO. *(horrified)* Not David Attenborough! You couldn't. Not even you...

XAN. No, not even me. There are those I fear to lose, fear so much that I sometimes think they are gone already.

DIO. But what about Larry? Why did I forget Larry? How could I? Or John Gielgud? Or Alec? Father would never forgive me.

(All the figures disappear, revealing one standing by a strange-looking object.)

DIO. Is that one dead or alive?

DIO. Is that one dead or alive?

XAN. Hard to tell. He may not know himself.

DIO. This is spooky.

XAN. It's not spooky. It's Jerzy. Look at that beard, and those glasses. It has to be. It's Jerzy Grotowski.

DIO. The late, great, revered Polish maestro of the Poor Theatre and holidays in California, with...

XAN. (*in an awed whisper*) With Lech Walesa on his left hand, and the Pope on his right, in a triptych of postmodern Polish saints.

DIO. With Walesa and the Pope?

XAN. Well, the Pope's so far to the right you can't quite see him. But what is Jerzy doing?

DIO. Poling, of course. Any fool can see that.

GROT. Nulski morja teatr! Nulski morja teatr! Niek, nip, nulski morja teatr! Nimstrodsjkja niddlemeander Cheeselake. Ah, miskja modri Cheeslake! (*He wails.*)

XAN. But what is he doing here? And who or what is Cheeselake?

DIO. I think I have it. Leave this to me.

XAN. Gladly. Or gladski.

DIO. He's still lamenting the passing of his great actor Cheeselake, and his theatre of the two-and-a-half rows in Coleslaw. And that, unless I'm mistaken, is the Cardboard Canoe, built for him by his friend and disciple, the Ingenious Barber. And that fearsome object there must be the notorious self-penetration pole. We must distract him. Grot, my dear Grotty, don't you remember California, and all that wonderful west-coast sunshine?

Dio and Xanthia hire the canoe, and begin to cross the lake and marshes of the underworld:

DIO. On the Floating Islands we must watch out for the loathsome Ar-Toadians, and try to avoid their vicious cruelty.

XAN. Who they?

DIO. A predatory breed of Filthy Frogs, who haunt the murky marshes of memory with a paranoid nostalgia for the vanished avant-garde, for the theatre that never was, never is, and never shall be.

XAN. I think I must have trained with them.

DIO. Don't be ridiculous, Xanthia. People will get annoyed. Whoever heard of a dramatic character with an education?

XAN. Hamlet. And who mentioned education?

DIO. Training or education. It's no good. *(He points to the audience.)* They won't like it.

XAN. Who they?

DIO. Do you always say that?

XAN. I like it.

(A mist descends.)

DIO. But I don't like this.

XAN. Where are we?

DIO. We must be getting near the Floating Islands.

(A blood-curdling cry is heard. Silence. Then screams of agony, and sobbing.)

DIO. *(in fright)* Now when the Ar-Toadians come for us, and they will, use the self-penetration pole on them. They won't like that. Lay about you. I'll keep us moving forwards.

XAN. What with?

DIO. Will-power.

XAN. What have they got against us?

DIO. Their avant-garde senses will have told them that we are on our way to visit the hateful materialist Bertolt Brecht, and they won't want to let us through.

XAN. Are we exuding some sort of post-Marxist pheromone?

DIO. Something like that. Their skin is extremely sensitive to any whiff of political commitment.

(The cries and screams intensify.)

XAN. I don't like the sound of this. You're the one with the political commitment. Backwater quickly, or turn this damn thing around.

DIO. Too late! They're all around us!

AR-TOAD. *(separately)* El-lo. El-lo. El-lo. Matelots. Matelots. El-lo. El-lo. El-lo matelots.

XAN. They sound rather friendly. Rather like that Budweiser advert. *(To DIO)* Have you got a ferret?

DIO. They've seen the Canoe.

AR-TOAD. El-lo, el-lo, el-lo matelots.

XAN. Bonjour mes amis, how goes it with cruel-tee?

AR-TOAD. C'est organique, c'est physique, c'est magnifique, c'est dynamique. En haut Artaud, à bas la politique. *(They chant.)* Poétique magnifique, poétique organique! En haut Artaud, et à bas la politique! En haut Artaud, bravo ces matelots!

XAN. En haut Artaud, a little shove and off we go!

DIO. En haut Artaud, vin rouge and escargots!

XAN. Cruel-tee for les grenouilles!

DIO. That doesn't rhyme in French. Watch out, they're getting theoretical.

(The AR-TOADIANS circle the Cardboard Canoe, pointing at DIO, XANTHIA and the Canoe in turn.)

AR-TOAD. Masculin, féminin, neutre. Masculin, féminin, neutre. Féminin, masculin, neutre. Neutre, féminin, masculin.

XAN. Why aren't I féminine? I've never understood that.

DIO. Because you're a principle, not a person.

XAN. You mean, like gender is a social construct and the personal is political?

AR-TOAD. *(becoming excited and hostile)* Politique, politique, la politique! A bas la politique! En haut Artaud!

DIO. Now see what you've done.

XAN. Don't worry. I'll pacify them. Alors, j'ai envie, mes amis, de vos chemises Bretonnes.

AR-TOAD. (*more agitated still*) Breton? Breton? La politique et puis Breton!

XAN. What did I say? I was admiring their shirts!

DIO. André Breton, you fool. The surrealist spokesman. Artaud detested him. You might as well have mentioned Bertolt Brecht.

AR-TOAD. (*ecstatically furious*) B-brecht, B-brecht! B-breton et B-brecht! A bas la politique, en haut Artaud! Cruauté, cruauté!

XAN. Never mind crudité, you half-baked amphibians. Garlic butter to the lot of you! (*She lays about her with the pole.*) A little bit of Grotty will send you dotty. Masculine, feminine, or neuter, I'll penetrate your pessimism for you, you transubstantiated tadpoles!

DIO. Quick, quick, move us forward too!

XAN. (*contemptuously*) Frog-spawn. Translucent jelly. (*She shouts.*) The personal is political!

DIO. Never mind that now. This must be it. Stash the pole in the Canoe, and don't forget my laptop.

Once Dio and Xanthia have landed, they meet a chorus of Critics:

CRIT. We worship success
 In any kind of dress
 Providing it is tasteful
 And not a dreadful mess

 Oh, no
 Not a dreadful mess
 We *despise* a dreadful mess

 We have language on our side
 And our tastes are very wide -
 Liberal opinions, tested and tried -
 But to this very day
 We think we should say
 That what we most admire
 Is a well-made play

 A jolly good play
 A damn fine play
 That what we most admire
 Is a well-made play

XAN. Not much about design, choreography, stage-direction or political ideology in this lot, is there? But they're hardly a "getting your hands dirty" crowd, are they?

DIO. I wouldn't be so sure about that.

XAN. You may well be right. There's plenty of room in those plus-fours for a hands-on experience. Have you noticed how they all carry handkerchiefs in their jacket-pockets?

DIO. I always wondered what they were for. Sunday must have been a steamy day in the laundry.

CRIT. The actors we could name
 Would put you to shame.
 Of course we've seen them all
 Again and again.
 There are some we adore
 And some we deplore
 And some whose reputations
 Prove hard to sustain
 It's all in the game
 But what makes it easier
 Oh, so, so, so much easier
 Is when despite appearances
 It all remains the same.

 Oh, we like it the same
 That's the name of the game
 When despite appearances
 It all remains the same.

 Oh, we like it the same
 We like it the same
 Again and again
 We like it the same.

The doorkeeper of Hades is the Great Tortsov, or Stanislavski, who puts Dio and Xanthia through various tasks that they fail, although they eventually manage to move past him.

In Act 2, Dio reports on finding Bertolt Brecht, the object of his journey to the underworld:

DIO. We do. First the good news. I found Brecht myself, chewing on the end of an old cigar, and spoke to him, and he's willing to come with us! Can you imagine that, Xanthia? The impact that would have? The rebirth of all that's best in political theatre, in proletarian theatre, the wonder and awe of the dialectic unchained, the revolution in theatre and in life renewed...

XAN. Did you say unchained, or unchanged?

DIO. Unchained, of course.

XAN. What was that noise?

DIO. What noise?

XAN. That's odd. Very odd indeed. I could have sworn I heard the sound of a wall falling down. Somewhere in central Europe. A large wall. In Berlin, perhaps. But I must be imagining things. The dialectic unchanged. So what's the problem?

DIO. The Ar-toadians.

XAN. What, that ridiculous collection of fart-arsed amphibians? I thought we had left them behind, skulking in their marshes.

DIO. No, they're tenacious, as sticky as mud, and they pop their heads up everywhere. Some of them must have been snooping in on my chat with Brecht. They've kicked up a fuss among the luvvies down here, and are insisting on a fight. They won't take no for an answer, and it's got poor old Brecht very shaken up indeed.

XAN. Some people never learn. Where did we stash that pole? (*Looking in her knapsack*) I think I've still got the Grotty beard and glasses. They may come in handy.

DIO. My dear Xanthia, wherever did you acquire your unpleasant taste for literalism? No, I don't mean bare-knuckle fighting. They're insisting on a contest of skill and relevance, of theatrical power and potential before they'll let Brecht come with us. They're championing Artaud, the super-Frog, the master of holy theatre, the high priest of cruelty, the sage and mage of all that's avant-garde in the theatre against BB.

XAN. It should be a very short contest. Dead dialectic versus live art.

DIO. Not if the Ar-Toadians have their way. They've dragged mad Artaud out from his underworld asylum, and are tugging him about on the end of a rope in a frenzy looking for poor old Brecht.

XAN. So what has happened to the cigar-smoking kraut? Legging it to a neutral country once again? Old habits die hard.

DIO. That's just what I don't understand. I told Brecht to come straight here. But there was one more embarrassment waiting for me. I bumped into Sam, hanging around just outside.

XAN. And what could possibly be embarrassing about bumping into Samuel Beckett?

DIO. It became rather obvious that he wanted to come back to life too.

XAN. What? Mister metaphysical, mister melancholy, mister "I've no bone to pick with the graveyard"? The old humbug. Had enough of his season in hell, has he? What did he say?

DIO. "Nothing to do, nowhere to go, it's awful".

XAN. Serves him right. He should be so Lucky. Happy Days. Do you pity him?

DIO. Not I.

XAN. Well, that's the end of that little routine. And here comes BB himself, the poor old chap, scurrying along in his Marxist dungarees, cigar-butt in mouth. Always running hotfoot away from the irrational, as fast as his little legs will carry him.

The chorus of Ar-Toadians then appears with Artaud, whom Xanthia helps to climb out of his straitjacket:

DIO. Look, he's stirring. Didn't our boy do well? But he's having some difficulty with the straitjacket.

XAN. Stuck fast in a metaphor again. Let me give you a hand, Toady old pal.

(XANTHIA helps ARTAUD to get out of the straitjacket.)

ART. Merci, merci. *(Springing up)* Ello, my English chums, my jolly rosbif fellows! But what ees zees leetle bit of Augsburg excrement doing here? Zees is a théâtre, n'est-ce pas? And zees ees a politician *(pushing BRECHT)* - how do you say it? - no more than a pees-pot!

AR-TOAD. *(advancing, threatening)* Pees-pot, poppycock, Jacques Lecoq!

DIO. *(intervening)* Now hold on. This is hardly fair. You outnumber him. You can't have a chorus in the contest as well.

ART. But zees ees a Brechtian chorus, is it not, mes amis? Zey will be as you choose, yes, a Brechtian chorus. You like the Brechtian chorus? We shall make a demonstration, yes?

XAN. In Franglais, or in dubious Deutsch?

ART. In English. Your own Queen's English. We both speak English perfectly. In translation, of course.

BRE. Of course. But I am not completely translated.

ART. Nor am I. And I am translated badly.

BRE. Oddly, not badly. But that's hardly surprising.

ART. Unevenly, I would say. But you wrote too much, of course.

BRE. At least I had something to say.

ART. Yes, indeed. The same thing all the time.

AR-TOAD. *(in Brechtian mode)* Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.

(BRECHT, DIO and XANTHIA look at them.)

ART. They are alienating the audience, as you wished, Monsieur Brecht. In this, you were very successful, I believe. It was your major technique of theatre, was it not?

BRE. While you were cruel to the audience, if there happened to be one. As I recall, there wasn't most of the time. And that was before your compulsory trip to the madhouse, wasn't it?

XAN. Why not combine both ideas - cruelty from you, and alienation from you - and kill off the theatre altogether?

DIO. Remember, Xanthia, that old wise proverb. You have to be cruel to be kind (*smiling at ARTAUD*), and (*turning to BRECHT*) you have to be alienating to be... to be...

XAN. Brechtian? By the way, Arty, tell me this: what exactly is the `double'? Your famous work, *The Theatre and Its Double*? A wonderful read, no tiresome rationality there, not even any sense really, just psycho-babble, spew, sodomy and body fluids spurting everywhere...

ART. Ah, the *Spurt of Blood*, one of my finest pieces.

BRE. Correction. One of your only pieces.

XAN. But if that is the theatre, what then is its double?

BRE. War is its double. We have war, we have Artaud. That is his cruelty, isn't it, my friend? The theatre of war, the theatre of cruelty. The celebration of bloodshed and unreason. There, you have it all.

ART. Merde. Piss shit. I speak of the cruelty of the mind, a sucking whirlpool of life that devours the darkness, a scream of agony that animates the absolute, shrieks of splitting stones like insects in the green dusk, the labyrinth of the mind's murkiness, the star dancer's gesture of flagrant despair, a world collapsing into chaotic magic...

XAN. An empty theatre, full of large promises and bags of hot air.

ART. I speak of visions, not realities. I despise reality. It is excrement, ordure.

XAN. Quite so. Tell that to the theatre's chief executive.

BRE. What is this chief executive?

DIO. They used to call them artistic directors, but they felt that sounded a little...

XAN. Arty?

DIO. Yes, far too artistic. The theatre means business. That will please both of you immensely, I'm sure. Do you mean business, Bertolt?

BRE. I always mean business. Stage business, dialectical business, Marxist business.

DIO. And you, Antonin?

ART. Chaotic business, vortex business, cruel business, spurt of blood business. Yes, even double business.

DIO. Double business? Beat that, Bertolt.

BRE. I have written many times on business. I have even Lehrstück on double business. I have my learning plays *He Who Says Yes* and *He Who Says No*. That is all you need for a dialectic on business.

DIO. A Brechtian management training course in miniature. Splendid. Do you buy, or do you sell? Do you hold, or do you let go? Just the thing for the Blairite stockbrokers, like *Serious Money* for the Thatcherites before them. Our business is good business. Well done, BB.

AR-TOAD. (*impassive*) Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.

ART. This *He Who Says Yes* and *He Who Says No*, it is all the same thing. Come now, I will show you. We all remember these plays?

BRE. Natürlich.

DIO. Unforgettable... in outline.

XAN. Absolutely unforgettable... in outline.

ART. Good. Then we have our cast here. You, my fine Stalinist apparatchik always on the run from trouble, you will play the teacher. (*To DIO*) And you, my fine Marxist idolater, will play the part of the little boy. These plays were written for little boys, is it not so?

BRE. That is true. They were the children of the revolution.

ART. And not so very much later, the children of the Third Reich. So very effective was this didactic theatre of Monsieur Brecht. We have all we need here. A stool, a little pot for the boy, my chorus of Ar-Toadians, and a headscarf for the mother. There is always a mother in Brecht.

XAN. Most touching from someone who treated all other women like shit. What about that string of women script-collaborators, who somehow ended up under the name of Bertolt Brecht in the programme?

BRE. I worked as an ensemble. Collective creation.

XAN. Yes, you collected them and they did the creating... in more ways than one.

ART. Now we must have area one and area two on our pitifully bare stage, because this is dialectical theatre, which means our Mr Brecht occasionally discovered dialogue in his preaching to the public.

XAN. Something you never quite managed, did you, Arty? Plenty of ecstatic outpourings, mucho-mucho incomprehension, but not a great deal of dialogue.

ART. I myself was in dialogue with creation itself. You yourself might try it. You sit here and keep quiet for the time being. (*He hands her the headscarf.*) You wear this. You look ill and ugly. It is artistic.

XAN. Thank you.

ART. (to DIO) You stand by her. You wear shorts and a tie.

DIO. But I have no shorts.

ART. Do you not have boxer shorts?

DIO. Well, now that you mention it I...

ART. Good, they will do. Come, quickly now.

(DIO *removes his trousers, and hands them to XANTHIA.*)

ART. There we are. And my chorus is ready?

AR-TOAD. Oui, oui, bien sur.

ART. They will do very well as Brechtians. So we all know the story. We shall have the opening speech from the teacher. Are you ready, Bertie my friend?

B. "Ich bin...". nein, nein, scheiss. Diese englische Sprache...

ART. Never mind. You practise a little. Practice makes perfect. We have our chorus instead. Are you ready, my copains?

AR-TOAD. (*in Brechtian monotone*) A bas la politique, en haut Artaud.

ART. No, no, my friends. You say: "What we must learn is consent."

AR-TOAD. What we must learn is consent. (*Pause.*) A bas la politique.

ART. And then you must say: "Many say yes, many consent, many are not asked, and most have no idea what is going on at all."

BRE. I object most strongly. That is not in my script.

ART. Come now, mes copains.

AR-TOAD. "What we must learn is consent. Many say yes to consent, many consent to saying yes, and many are not arsed."

BRE. Gott in Himmel! "I am the teacher, this is my pupil, I am going on a journey to the mountains, there is disease in the city, may I come in?"

ART. My English friend?

DIO. Oh... "Yes."

BRE. "I see your mother is ill."

DIO. (*desperate*) "Yes, thank you, very ill. (*Remembering*) Oh, and I want to come with you to find a cure."

(ALL *break into spontaneous applause, apart from BRECHT.*)

BRE. "You may not come. You may not leave your mother."

DIO. "But I want to come."

AR-TOAD. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.

ART. (to AR-TOADIANS) No, no. Say after me: "They saw that he wanted to go."

AR-TOAD. "They saw that he wanted to go."

ART. Bravo. And now...

XAN. Don't I say something? And who are they? And why are they in my kitchen?

BRE. Yes, in my script you do.

ART. They are a Brechtian chorus.

XAN. No, I mean, who are the 'they' that saw he wanted to go?

BRE. This 'they' means the teacher and the mother, of course.

XAN. (*exasperated, and pointing to AR-TOADIANS*) But then who are *they*?

ART. They are a Brechtian chorus?

XAN. I don't understand.

ART. Do not worry. Your part is finished. You may leave. We are on the mountain, and the chorus are pilgrims. We must mime climbing a mountain.

DIO. How do we do that?

ART. It is easy. It is a Brechtian mountain. It does not exist. My chorus says: "The boy is tired."

AR-TOAD. "The boy is tired. This is a bad thing. We shall speak to the teacher."

ART. Formidable!

AR-TOAD. "What is wrong with the boy?"

BRE. "He is tired."

AR-TOAD. "We do not think so, you obstinate Marxist-Leninist stooge. The boy is ill. He looks very strange."

XAN. I'll grant them that. He does look very strange.

DIO. Thank you so much.

ART. Quiet, please. You are preventing alienation.

AR-TOAD. "We cannot carry the boy across the ridge. We must instead throw him off the mountain, and break all the bones in his fat little body. Boy, do you consent?"

DIO. Now hold on...

ART. They are very good. Boy? Boy? What do you say, boy?

DIO. (*resentfully*) I seem to have drifted momentarily from my vivid recollection of the script...

XAN. Into a kind of subtextual gestus, when society and the individual become as one in a crisis of revolutionary fluxus? That kind of thing?

DIO. Yes.

ART. Bravo! He has said yes. He has consented. They throw him off the mountain, and fling clods of earth and flat stones after him. So, curtain, or rather half-curtain, since this is a Brechtian play.

BRE. This is not my play. It is a travesty.

XAN. Yes, a travesty of an extremely moving Japanese noh drama, I believe.

ART. Exactly. That was how our Mr Brecht invented his title. He who says `yes' was written slightly later.

DIO. And the jar?

ART. Oh, they take the jar with them. It is a Brechtian property. Things are always more important than people in the Brechtian materialist drama.

XAN. Samuel Beckett stuck people inside jars, and made a play of it. And inside dustbins, and made a play of that.

ALL. (*threateningly*) So?

XAN. Nothing. Nothing at all. I just thought it might be worth mentioning. Incidentally, where is old Sam right now?

DIO. Oh, he's hanging around outside.

XAN. Not waiting, by any chance? (DIO *glares at her.*) No, I thought not. Just a silly idea that came to me.

ART. So that is `yes', and what a fine Brechtian play it is. But now we have `no'.

XAN. Do we have to have `no'?

BRE. No!

ART. Yes, we do have to have `no'. But that is easy, because `yes' is exactly the same as `no', because they are both derived from the noh.

BRE. Gott in Himmel...!

DIO. Now hold on, Toni, that's not really fair.

AR-TOAD. (*menacingly*) What we must learn is consent. Many say yes to saying no.

ART. Thank you, mes copains. Now actors, take up your positions on each side of this flat, boring, tedious Brechtian stage. So, now we have saying no. Chorus.

AR-TOAD. "What we must learn is consent. Many say no to consent, many consent to saying no, and many are not arsed."

XAN. That should be `asked', shouldn't it?

AR-TOAD. (*threateningly*) "What we must learn is consent. Many are not arsed."

XAN. Suit yourselves. I'll just sit here anyway.

BRE. "I am the teacher, this is my pupil, I am going on a journey to the mountains, may I come in?"

DIO. "Yes."

BRE. "I see your mother is ill."

DIO. "I want to come with you."

ART. And so we can see that it is just the same, and so we can move on.

AR-TOAD. "They saw he wanted to go."

ART. So they did, my copains, and we are now on the mountain, which is also the same, for the simple reason that it is not there at all in our glorious Brechtian theatre. And the boy is ill, and they wish understandably to throw him off the mountain, and he says no.

DIO. "No."

ART. Thank you. And that is it. Very good, effective didactic theatre. You say yes, then you say no, and you all grow up to become little fascists and die on the Russian front, while the Marxist ideologue runs away to Denmark to drink buttermilk.

AR-TOAD. "The boy is ill. We cannot carry him across the ridge. We must throw him off the mountain, and break all the bones in his fat..."

DIO. That's enough!

XAN. Bravo! The worm turns. Ach, Donald, where's yer trewsers? A more unlikely boxer I never saw. Come on, Dio, get your cacks on, for the sake of postmodern art and Calvin Klein.

(DIO *does so.*)

BRE. (*quietly*) This, of course, is not my play. The boy says no because he is not heroic, and because the world must change.

ART. For the worse, my friend. I give you Stalinism, I give you Hitler. Who then said no? What use is your theatre?

BRE. And where is yours?

AR-TOAD. What is the meaning of the Ar-toadian concept of the theatre and the plague?

ART. (*patiently, to AR-TOADIANS*) My friends, we have finished now. The demonstration is over.

AR-TOAD. What we must learn is consent. Many consent to saying no to saying yes. Many are not arsed. En haut, Artaud.

XAN. Wait a minute. I have an idea. Stay in your roles. What about he who says maybe?

Artaud finally dissolves into manic visions, but Dio finds he has lost his sense of certainty about restoring Brecht to the living world. As Dio wanders off to look for Samuel Beckett instead, in the increasing obscurity Xanthia believes she can see the dim figure of the playwright Sarah Kane.

The End