

7/7 (performed at Edinburgh as **The Circle Line**)

Michael Gibson only learns to love his wife when he has lost her. But his inner self, Michaela, seeks to release from the person he falsely believes he is. We never find out whether she succeeds. Meant to be presented as a double bill together with Plastic England.

By Thomas Jackson

Cast:

Michael Gibson
Michaela Gibson

Prologue

At the back of the stage are two free-standing door frames. Between them and nearer, but not too near, the front a sofa.

Enter Michael and Michaela. They stand next to each other at the front of the stage.

Michael: Hello. I'm Michael. I'm thirty four years old and an investment banker. Not to put too modest a point on it a highly successful up-and-coming investment banker. Last year I took home £317,000 in salaries and bonuses. I will be a millionaire by the time that I am thirty eight. Don't you feel guilty about that? people say to me. No I do not. I am not a sentimentalist. I am a trained scientist and a Darwinian. There are winners and losers. I'm sorry but that is the way the world is. Two things explain the world and Darwin discovered both of them. One is that things evolve through random selection and the other is the competitive aggression that enables those who had the lucky break to capitalize on it. Winners and losers. I'm a winner. Sorry mate, it was me that got the lucky break and me who had the balls to grab the opportunity with both hands. The fact that it wasn't you who got the lucky chance is not my problem. Go and cry

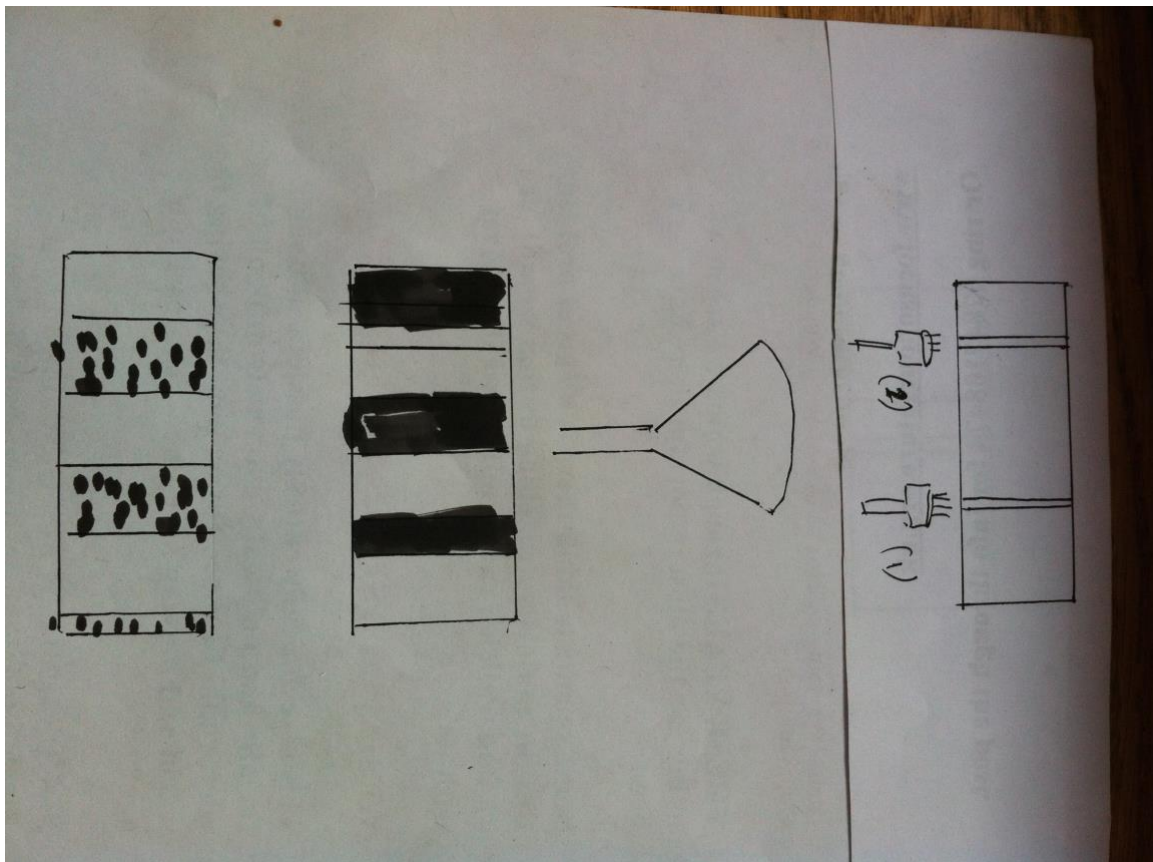
somewhere else. There's no pattern in it. It's just accidental and meaningless. Call me hard if you like. OK I'm hard.

C.V.: Public School. 4 A's at Science A Level. Captain of the First XV. Head of School. Did well. My only regret is that I never got the science prize. Then Oxford. Read Natural Sciences and, I'm sure you won't be surprised to hear, landed a first. I went on to a master's degree and specialized in the DNA of mitochondrial protein assembly. I then left academia for the City where, I have to say, my scientific training has proved very useful. Fortune favours the prepared mind is as true in finance as it is in science. I'm married. Have been for five years but as yet no children. In that department, I have to admit, things aren't going too well. In fact divorce is on the horizon. But there's no use being sentimental and crying about it. If you find you have dug a hole for yourself stop digging, climb out and move on. Move on, move on, life evolves, move on, that's my motto. Well that's me. Stay with me if you can. I'm worth knowing.

Michaela: Hello I'm Michaela. Look, Michael, can you leave me alone for a few minutes, I want to talk to the audience on my own. Michael, will you please give me just a few minutes on my own? (Michael departs with obvious reluctance). He's so frightened I'm going to get out of control and escape from him. It's a bit of a façade really, all this hard stuff. Like most people, he's really a pussy cat inside. Now, about me. If you think I'm the usual kind of stage character, well not exactly. I call myself Michaela because, you might say, I'm the feminine side of Michael, though that doesn't really quite catch it. His inner self might be nearer the mark. No not that, precisely. A previous age might have called me his immortal soul, but that's not very helpful language to us today. His Doppelganger? His Guardian Angel perhaps? Yes, but in an important sense no, as the philosophers say. Perhaps even his Fairy Godmother? Yes that too, but only up to a point. None of these, not really. I think I can best explain who I am by borrowing a few ideas from quantum physics. *Quantum physics?* There's going to be a mass walk-out. Give us our money back. We didn't come here for a lecture on physics I

hear you cry. Hang on a minute, hang on. Just two simple ideas O.K.? Don't worry if you can't understand it. The good news is that the scientists can't understand it either. Theirs' are the most important ideas in this play and I hope by the end you'll see why. Are you up for it? No mass walkout? Nobody leaving? I haven't frightened you off? Brilliant. Here goes then.

(She has a power point projector and as she talks she clicks the appropriate slides onto the screen. See below for a rough idea of what Michaela's four slides should look like: (i)) outer right the first screen with the two slits in it (2) inner right shining light through the one slit (3) inner left what happens when you shine same light through two slits (4) outer left what happens when you project a stream of electrons rather than strawberries through the slits rather than light. Even better with two more slides showing the random splosh marks the strawberries make when they go through first one and then two slits in the screen.



Right. Here are the two wacky ideas from physics. The first I'm calling 'Both Waving and Bouncing'. Right here goes. Imagine I've two screens one a few a metre or so behind the other. The first screen has two slits in it. Suppose I shine a light through one of the slits in the nearer screen. What happens? After the light has passed through the slit it fans out of course, just like the beam from your torch does. (slide of a light fanning out). Now let's do it with two slits and shine the light through both of them. What's going to happen? You'll get two fans of course. But you don't. What you get is black and white vertical stripes. (slide with the vertical black and white stripes). Why on earth? This experiment was first done by Thomas Young in the nineteenth century and he realised that you get the black and white stripes because light is a wave. Imagine two waves of the sea going through two gaps in a breakwater and then mingling with each other. Because they are waves they can go through two gaps at once. So with light. When two peaks or troughs co-incide they re-inforce each other so you get bright light. When they don't they cancel each other out so you get no light at all. He'd proved light is a wave. But hang on, hang on. In 1905 Einstein discovered something called the photo-electric effect. This didn't work if light was a wave. Light had to be in little bullets streaming out of the sun, just as Newton had thought, little particles of light that had come to be called photons. But how could light be both waves and particles? Well both experiments worked. It is. Light is both waving and bouncing. OK? Right, just let's put our brains together for a moment before moving onto idea number two. (a pause for reflection)

Here's my second idea. I'm going to call it Random Splosh. Imagine I've got a punnet of ripe strawberries here and I start throwing them through one of the slits (random splosh marks on screen). Oops they're not all getting through. But some are and, of course, we're getting a pattern of random splosh marks on the second screen. Now let's start throwing them through both slits, some through one and some through the other. As you'd expect, we get two lots of random splosh marks. (two sets of random sploshes on

screen). So far so good. But now let's think about very small things. Suppose you did this experiment with electrons. With one slit you get random splosh just as with the strawberries. But with two slits, amazingly you don't. The splosh marks gradually build up into stripes just as the light did. But electrons aren't light, they are bits of stuff, although very tiny. How can they be waves as well? But they are. This is the idea above all that I want you to get hold of. Looked at in one way electrons are visible particles in a particular place at a particular time. Looked at in another way they're invisible waves that are both everywhere and nowhere. Strawberries random splashes at all times. Electrons both particles and waves. Here and now but also everywhere and nowhere. OK? Don't worry the physicists can't understand it either.

Well I suppose that was a rather long-winded way of making this point that I want you to grasp. There are two dimensions to everything. One is actual and the other is virtual, and the virtual one is extremely unexpected and weird. Phew! Hang on to that thought because I'm going to return to it at the end of the play. Good. We can almost get on with the dramatic action. Just one more thought.

Michael is the particle aspect of Michael Gibson. I'm the wave dimension. My job is to try to guide Michael through this visible particulated world into the invisible holistic universe where we all truly belong. It is in that sense that I am his Guardian Angel or his Fairy Godmother. But it's not easy. The problem is that I can't tell him what to do because he is a free agent. I can only make suggestions, most of which he brushes off with contempt. You will already have seen for yourself what a self-assured and pig-headed bastard he is. Still he's my self-assured and pig-headed bastard, so I'm going to have to make the best of him. At the end of the day he's mine, my own dear, dear person. Michael's my representative on earth, you might say. And you never know what might happen. In a world whose deepest level is that of quantum uncertainty you never know what strange deeply inscribed pattern might emerge from random accidents. So let's see what I can do with him. Let the action begin! (exit)

Scene 1

(enter Michael and Michaela. She is two feet behind him which is always her default position unless she is directed otherwise).

Michael: Ah! Rosemary's not home yet. Thank heavens for that. At least I can have five minutes peace having a drink in my own bloody home. (Mimes going over to cabinet and pours drink)

Michaela (from over his shoulder): You're drinking too much

Michael: Shut up woman.

Michaela: I just think you ought to know

Michael: I don't want to know. Just keep quiet will you . Nag nag nag

(they sit side by side on the sofa)

Michael: A good day. The Zurich deal went through with less problem than I'd expected.

Michaela: Don't forget you've got to see the Head of the Bank tomorrow about that Z twenty five futures fiddle that you pulled

Michael: Do you remember at school when we used to sing songs in the showers after rugby matches?

Michaela: I try not to

Michael: Those were the days, eh? Land of Hope and Glory, Jerusalem, Onward Christian Sodomites

Michaela: About Z twenty-five futures –

Michael (sings): Land of Hope and Glory, Country of the free -

Michaela: Stop evading the issue. The Z twenty-five futures fiddle.

Michael: Will you just shut up. I've only just got home and I'm having a drink. I don't want to hear about the Z twenty five futures deal

Michaela: Fiddle

Michael: Deal

Michaela: No. Fiddle

Michael: Deal. Deal. Stop twisting things. It was perfectly within normal codes of practice. The way you put it you make it sound worse than it is.

Michaela: Just suppose there were a Head of the Bank, which of course there isn't, and you'd been hired by him, which of course you haven't, and a shady deal, which of course it isn't, that you'd pulled off, which of course you didn't, had been exposed, which of course it hasn't, and the bank was worried about its reputation, which of course it isn't, then of course the reason the Head of the Bank wants to see you is just to have a cup of coffee, or maybe it isn't.

Michael (getting up and stamping round in a rage followed by Michaela who mockingly mimics his movements): Will you just shut up. Give me some peace. I don't want to hear any more about Z twenty five futures.

Michaela: Just reminding you it would be sensible to think what you're going to say.

Michael: The bank won't be worried about Z twenty five. Who do you think runs it? The Dalai Lama? It's a bank. All they're interested in is bottom line. They won't want to let me go on any account. I reckon they made half a million out of me last year.

(Noise of outer door slamming)

Oh no, it's Rosemary. The one chance I had for a bit of p and q on my own and you've spoilt it worrying me about Z twenty five.

(one of the doors opens as if an invisible person is opening it)

Michael: You're back then. I hope you've cooled down. Apology please.

(pause)

Michael: I shall raise the matter as soon as you come home if I want to. (Michaela grimaces at the irony of it) You need to face up to your responsibilities.

(pause)

Michael: You're just incredible. My fault? It was my fault? Who ordered the damn thing in the first place? (Michaela signals to the audience that in fact it was him)

(pause)

Michael (mimicking in a feminine voice): 'Well you take it back then'. I don't see why I should take it back. You ordered it.

(pause)

Michael: Oh no I didn't

(pause)

Michael: I did not. For the last time. I DID NOT. You ordered it. It's your responsibility. You either fucking pay for it or you take it back (Michaela does a Heil Hitler)

(pause)

Michael: Great balls of fire. We can't go and see your mother on Saturday.

(pause)

Michael: Not again. For crying out loud you miserable suspicious cow. I am not going to slop off to see Sylvia. Though I don't know why not. At least she's got good legs and lets you have a drink. I always watch Chelsea when they're at home on Saturdays. And this Saturday it's Man United. At Stamford Bridge. Man United. Having sex with Sylvia in full view right out there on the pitch. The whole bloody team. Do you think I'm going to miss the game of the season so we can go to see your awful mother. (Michaela in despair)

(pause)

Michael: Oh yes she is awful

(pause)

Michael: Bloody awful. She had to be somebody's mother and you poor mare she picked you. She leaks so much pity, when all the babies were lined up she spotted the really ugly one and took it home (Michaela horrified and tries to tap him on the shoulder but he is not having any).

(pause)

Michael: Bloody bloody awful. Your mother! (mimicking Rosemary's mother) 'Oh Michael, you're an investment banker, would you please sell some raffle tickets for the church. Oh Michael, isn't this earthquake, this hurricane, this flood in Bangladesh, this murder in Ormskirk awful'. Yes it is but don't tell me about it you annoying old bag. She's the holy edition of the News of the Bloody World. (shouting) Read the latest. Read all about it. Cat dies in Huddersfield. Council fails to collect bins last week. Millions die in Ethiopia. Viscount caught shop lifting. Who does she think I am? The Pope? The pastor of mankind? Does she want me to worry about every bloody awful thing that happens in the whole bloody awful world? I'm sorry about Bangladesh. I'm

sorry about the poor cow in Ormskirk. Sorry sorry sorry. But I didn't do it and there's nothing I can do about it. So stop worrying me about it. (Keeping the world out gestures from Michaela).

(pause)

Michael: For the last time I am not having an affair with Sylvia. I don't keep on accusing you of having affairs. Though you're so bloody ugly these days I don't imagine anybody would want to. STOP ACCUSING ME OF HAVING AN AFFAIR .

(Michaela signalling to audience and mouthing 'He is having an affair'. Michael rushes towards Rosemary and starts knocking her head violently against a wall. Michaela is beside herself with dismay. Rosemary escapes and we see and hear the door bang to as if an invisible person has fled through it)

Michael (crossing to the door, opening it and shouting after her): Don't worry I'll sleep on the sofa all right. At least Sylvia is not frigid. Only a polar bear would enjoy being in bed with you. Cow. Bitch. Roll on global warming, it's supposed be melting the icecaps. All the permafrosted cocks in Islington, mine included, will rise up rejoicing and weep tears of gratitude. (Bangs the door shut and goes over to sofa. Michaela sits beside him. He starts to weep. Long pause)

Scene 2

Michaela: That was awful

Michael: Yes I know. Awful. I feel terrible. I didn't mean those things. Why do I say them? Why do I say them?

Michaela: Go and apologize to her

Michael: I can't. Not yet. Not now. It's as if I have a beast inside me I can't control.

Michaela: Go and do it now

Michael: I can't, I can't.

(pause)

Michaela: Do you remember when you first met?

Michael: How could I forget? Venice

Michaela: Venice, Ah Venice

Michael: The mist on the lagoon. Dissolving. Lovely beautiful mournful city

Michaela: Everything soft, melting, dissolving

Michael: How strange it was. Everything floating

Michaela: How removed, how dreamlike. A city of clouds

Michael: And all soft and vanishing things. Rosemary. In Venice. She was so beautiful. Then.

Michaela: So mysterious, then

Michael: I adored her. She had that wonderful glow of modesty about her that young women sometimes have.

Michaela: So gentle. So thoughtful. So loving

Michael: Yes, I did so love her. Then. Her sad Mona Lisa smile. It was never going to end

Michaela: Yes you so, so loved her

Michael: The pianist playing Cole Porter in the hotel lobby. The pigeons round the duomo. Just like it's supposed to be

Michaela. The wonderful Venetian light reflected from the canals on the palazzos. Just like it's supposed to be

Michael: Dolce color d'oriental zaffiro

Michaela: Sweet sapphire of the morning in the east

Michael: lo bel pianete...facere tutto rider l'oriente

Michaela: The beautiful planet making the dawn sky laugh with light

Michael: Venus

Michaela: Yes, Venus, goddess of love

Michael: Venice, Venice, city of Venus

Michaela: Venice, lovely lovely pensive city

Michael: She was so beautiful. Rosemary. In Venice

Michaela: So beautiful. Then

Michael: I opened like a flower in her light. I thought it would always be so.

Michaela: Making the dawn sky laugh with light

Michael: We were so happy, so happy

Michaela: So happy, then

Michael: But it could never have lasted.

Michaela: You loved her. Then

Michael: Yes, I did so love her. Then

Michaela: And still do

Michael: No, not now. I wish I could still live in the illusion. But I cannot. And will not. I was beguiled by Venice.

Michaela: ‘...Men che dramma/ di sangue m’e rimaso che non tremi: conosco I segni de l’antica fiamma.’ Not a drop of my blood that was not trembling now, as I felt the onset of the ancient flame.

Michael: No, no. It was an illusion. What we call love is only sex for animals with big brains. It dies. We live in a post-Darwinian world. Facts, facts, facts. Love dies. Like all animals we have to move on. What I will not do is beguile myself with sentiment. This is the real fact, the dismal truth about sex. After the initial rush of love the choice is between jogging comfortably and lovelessly along, blood sluggish and the organ of love limp, or having endlessly discomforting but at least arousing affairs. Nature substitutes repulsion for attraction in order to make us move on. Nature wants to spread genes. That’s all there is to it. But - ah! ah! that first rush of love. Rosemary in Venice. This is the terrible thing. For human beings, it is the illusion of the dream that makes the reality of the facts so cruel. Darwinian animals, we cannot forget our Platonic illusions. To have once dreamt! Venice, how I curse you! Deluding, bewitching, beguiling Venice. Hazy city of dreams, of dissolution and disillusion, of illusion and delusion. Mocking city. Deceiving us. Leading us astray. City of mists and hallucinations, phantasms and mirages. How happy I might have been if I had never known Venice.

Michaela: Not a drop of my blood that was not trembling now, as I felt the onset of the ancient flame.

Michael: No. No. I will not give way to sentiment. I will not be led astray by Venice. The real world is not Venetian, alas, but Darwinian. Facts facts facts. Move on. Move on. The past is past, the illusion over.

Michaela: Apologize

Michael: I can't, I won't. Face it. The story of human life, alas, is one of Darwinian disenchantment. The disrobing of Plato. Sex for humans is ecstasy, followed by disappointment, followed by rage, followed by disillusion, ending thankfully at last in impotence. At the moment I'm on the cusp between disappointment and rage. Bad luck on Rosemary, I admit.

Michaela: Come to bed, or rather to sofa.

Michaela: This bloody hard sofa. Well at least it's like life. I will not be sentimental. I will not apologize.

(He takes off his coat and shoes and socks and lies down on the sofa. Michaela tenderly tucks his coat around him and stands watching as the lights dim to darkness. Under cover of darkness his socks are removed. An alarm rings. Lights up. Michaela is still behind the sofa watching over him)

Scene 3

(lights up)

Michael: I'm late. I'm late. Where are my socks. Where are my bloody socks?.
(Going over to door and opening it). Can you get me a pair of socks.....Rosemary, I need socks. (A pair of socks are thrown out). I'll see you tonight. (sits on sofa and starts putting on socks. The door opens as if a person is coming through it). Look I'm – forget it. Have a nice day. See you tonight. Look I thought - (outer door bangs) oh hell.

Michaela: Come on, come on you're going to be late.

Michael: Stop nagging me. OK OK I'm coming. They rush off stage and we hear the outer door bang)

(Voice 'Mind the gap, mind the gap, mind the gap'. They both leap onto a tube train, Michaela still two feet behind. They are holding onto the straps swaying to the movement of the crowded train.)

Michael (as if to fellow passenger, it is clear that he is not speaking to himself but somebody else). Terribly sorry, are you OK? A bit crowded this train isn't it? (He smiles apologetically. Michaela, from behind, holds up a derisory finger at his interlocutor.)

Michaela: Bloody foreigner, taking up room on our trains.

Michael: Where are you from? Poland you say?. How lovely. A most beautiful country. I went to Cracow once. Charming.

Michaela: Bloody kraut, breathing our oxygen.

(There is a longish pause while they sway in silence to the movement of the train)

Michael (to himself as he still sways to the train): And it's Kevin Pietersen. He looks round the field and settles over his bat. He's in such a tremendous vein of form at the moment, isn't he Aggers. We could be looking at a big score today Blowers.

Michaela: Oh no! Not the scoring a century for England fantasy again. Not KP again.

Michael (taking guard as if he has a bat in his hands): OK I'm KP. You're Shane Warne. Come on, bowl me a googly.

Michaela (resentfully): What 's a googly?

Michael: Ah, a leg spinner normally spins the ball out of the back of the hand, but to bowl a googly he turns it over even –

Michaela: OK OK. (she pretends to bowl a googly as an unwilling woman would)

Michael: What a glorious stroke. That one bisected cover point and mid off like a rocket. Pieteren settles over – no, no he's asking for the sight screen to be moved

Michaela (Aussie accent): Get on with it and let's get this over with you wingeing pom (she bowls again)

Michael: And it's another glorious stroke from Michael Gibson, a most delicate late cut this time that takes him to within four runs of his hundred on his debut for England.

Michaela: I thought you were Kevin Pietersen.

Michael: For goodness sake, woman. Haven't you got any imagination? (going back from centre stage to position in train) And it's Beckham. What a glorious cross to the roving predatory Michael Gibson - My ticket! Shit! I lost my ticket! I say, I'm terrible sorry, I think I dropped my ticket just where you're standing

Michaela (tapping him on the shoulder): G'day mate. It's Shane Warne reporting back from down under.)

Michael: That's very nice of you. (kneeling to pick up ticket). How stupid of me! Ha ha ha!

Michaela: Bloody Magyar trying to nick my ticket

(Silence as they sway to the train. Suddenly Michael moves into centre stage)

Michael (running after him): Oh no, here we go again..

Michael (saluting): You wanted to see me sir?

(pause):

Michael: A special mission, sir?

(pause)

Michael: Isn't Dieppe in France, sir?

Michaela : Ooh la la. Accordion players. Strings of onions. Voulez-vous couchez avec moi, mademoiselle?

Michael : Well we'll do our best, sir. Give Jerry something to think about anyway, sir

Michaela: You great fat lazy bastard behind your desk. Having a good war are you?

Michael: If by any chance I don't make it back, sir, could you make sure Rosemary gets this, sir (he fumbles in his pocket)

Michaela: That's your Tesco loyalty card.

Michael (hissing at her over his shoulder): Will you just shut up. (proffering the card and then putting it back into his pocket). Thank you, sir. I'd appreciate that, sir. Wish me luck, sir.

(They are in a motor boat roaring into Dieppe harbour. Michael making roaring motor boat noises)

Michaela (hanging onto her tin hat): This is bloody dangerous. Can't we go home?

Michael: Ratatatatatata. Ratatatatata. Die Englishe schweinhund! Schell! Schnell! Der Engländer kommando! Achtung! Ratatatatata. Ratatatatata.

Michaela (shouting above the racket): This is our stop. Old Street.

Michael: So it is. (to Pole) Goodbye then. How nice to meet you. I hope you have a good time in England. We're all Europeans now, ha, ha, ha.

Michaela: All bloody foreigners now, the whole lot of us. Stands the clock at ten to three and is there honey still for tea.

(they get off the train and run on the spot to indicate running up stairs, and then stand with one foot raised as on an escalator. And so out into the street).

Michael: I'll just go and have a cup of coffee before I have to go in to see the big wig.

(they enter a cafe)

Michael: I'll have a cappuccino please. One shot. (to Michaela) Wow! Pffff! She must look nice without any clothes on. Yes one shot please.

Michaela (singing to tune of Nessun Dorma): I had a dream-a
Of a nice ice cream-a
With a signorina
In Napoli

Michael (he is whiling away the time tapping impatiently on the counter as one awaiting his coffee) : What's the assignment this time, C? You're telling me that Smersh has got the naked signorina imprisoned in the dungeons of the castle and they're going to torture her to get the secrets of the European nuclear programme out of her? Whoooo! That's a bit of a corker. (he gives a long whistle). Well you know me. Never say no to a beautiful woman. I'll get moving . (Michaela is making the hissing and grinding noises of the coffee machine) Got the secret codebook and the death ray laser gun, Moneypenny?

Michaela: Oh James, you will come back won't you

Michael: Just for you Moneypenny. So we meet again, Blofeld. Still got that white cat, I see

Michaela: The piranna fish are waiting, Meester Bond.

Michael: We'll see about that, Blofeld. (Michaela still grinding and hissing). My word Blowers, Michael Gibson is in good form to-day. My dear old thing, I couldn't agree more. I'll have my cocktail shaken and not stirred. Two pound seventy five? Get some clothes on and we'll soon have you out of here. No nothing to eat thanks. Then we'll make long and slow love on the plane home. Could you just stamp my card please. (Michaela)Wow, I'd like to see you with your kit off. (Michael) Thanks.

(He hastily drinks the coffee and they are immediately waiting to go in and see the Head of the Bank)

Scene 4

Michaela: Now just go in and say you're sorry for what happened and nothing like this will ever happen again

Michael: Don't be stupid. That would be admitting that I've done something wrong

Michaela: Please Michael

Michael: Just shut up. I know what I'm doing.

(They go in to see the big wig)

Michael: You wanted to see me, sir

(pause).

Michael: The Z twenty five futures. Oh that. I wondered why you wanted to see me. Yes, we cut a few corners I admit but I think you'll agree at the end of the day we got a good result. The bank came out of it pretty well, don't you think?

(Pause. Michaela hisses in his ear 'Apologize' Michael hissing back to her over his shoulder 'I'm not going to apologize. Why the hell should I?')

Michael: Yes, I appreciate the point about the bank's reputation. Rather enhanced it as a go-getting sharp-as-a-knife city predator in my opinion.

(pause)

Michael: The bank doesn't take that view?

(pause)

Michael: I'm sorry, I can't agree. I'm afraid I'm going to have to stick to my point

Michaela: Alright, might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb then. Go go go. Take him. Take him. Annihilate him. Imagine him in his underpants.

Michael: I'm afraid that I can't operate under those conditions. If that's the case I shall have to take my talents elsewhere

(pause)

Michael: What? You're going to have to let me go! (he is gobsmacked. Michaela behind him makes rueful I told you so gestures)

(pause)

Michael: Please, please reconsider this. OK OK I'll be more careful in future

(pause)

Michael: And as a freelance I get no severance package? You can't do this.

(pause)

Michael: So that's it then? After my years of service to the bank and all the money I made for you this is all I get? Well thanks a bunch. Thanks for the offer of a recommendation. I'll use it as toilet paper. Good morning. (He is weeping. He sits on the sofa with Michaela, distraught, presumably in a kind of lobby outside the head of the bank's room. He buries his head in his hands. Michaela takes his hand and holds it tenderly)

Michael: Silly old fart

Michaela: Yeah. Silly old fart.

(A voice comes over the loudspeaker system. At first Michael does not realize what it is saying and only gradually begins to pay attention)

Radio announcement: Reports are coming in concerning what is thought to be a concerted terrorist attack on the London underground system. It is not known how many attacks have taken place. It could be as many as six but it is certainly three. At first it was thought that the explosions had been caused by a power surge in the underground electrical system but the Home Office has confirmed that they are the work of terrorists. All three known explosions took place at approximately 8.50 a.m. One bomb went off on a westbound Circle line train, number 216, bound from King's Cross to Paddington

Michael (beginning to take interest): It's a terrorist attack

Michaela: On London? A terrorist attack?

Radio: A second bomb exploded on the Piccadilly line, train number 311 travelling between King's Cross and Russell Square. Rescue services are being handicapped in their attempts to reach the scene of devastation by the depth of the tunnel in that stretch of line.

Michaela: Poor souls. Poor souls. Imagine the bewilderment and terror they must be feeling in the darkness. Oh poor souls.

Michael: Phew! It certainly puts Z twenty five futures into perspective

Radio: A news flash is just coming in. Another attack has occurred on a bus in Tavistock Square. The bus was a number 30 travelling from Hackney Wick to Marble

Arch. It is not known how many casualties there have been but they certainly include a number of fatalities. By chance, the attack took place near the headquarters of the British Medical Association in Upper Woburn Place and a number of doctors were on hand who are tending as best they can to the injured.

Michael: What about the third known underground attack? What about the third one? . Is Rosemary safe?

Radio: The Prime Minister is flying back to London from the G8 conference at Gleneagles. Now back to the tube bombings. A third explosion took place on a train travelling from Liverpool Street to Aldgate.

Michael: Rosemary! Rosemary! That's her train. She gets out at Aldgate to arrive at the office by 9 o'clock. I must get down there. Rosemary! Rosemary!

(He grabs his coat and he and Michaela go flying from the stage. We hear the outer door banging off stage and they come rushing in again. Michael is shouting Taxi! Taxi!. They leap in. The sofa is imagined to be the back of the taxi)

Scene 5

Michael: Aldgate tube station please, as fast as you can make it.

Pause

Yes, I think I know somebody who might have been on the train.

(They sit. Michael is alert and tense. Michaela tenderly takes his hand and begins to sing softly:

Night and day you are the one
 Only you beneath the moon or under the sun
 Whether near to me or far, it's no matter darling where you are
 I think of you
 Day and night night and day
 Why is it that this longing for you follows me wherever I go
 In the roaring traffic's boom, in the silence of my lonely room
 I think of you
 Night and day day and night
 Under the hide of me, there's an oh such yearning and burning
 Inside of me
 And this torment won't be through
 If you let me spend my life making love to you
 Day and night night and day.

Scene 6

Michael pays the taxi –‘Keep the change’ and they rush off stage and then rush on again, awaiting the bodies being brought out of the tube with the greatest trepidation. Their agony and grave concern must be shown here entirely by facial expression. An audio collage is played composed of shrieking voices, tearing metal, drumbeats, gibbons screaming and howler monkeys howling, elephants trumpeting, any noises that suggest disintegration and affliction of mind, interspersed with remembered lines from earlier in the play in Michaela’s voice, further interspersed with live radio commentary as the bodies are brought out. It is the commentary that directs the audience to understand what Michael is doing as he mimes kneeling down to inspect each dead face. The first five he looks up at Michaela and shakes his head. The sixth is Rosemary. The audio collage stops dead. He gives a great shrieking howl. .’Aaaaaaaaaaaaa! Dead! Dead! Rosemary! Rosemary!’ Blackout.

Scene 7

(Michaela is crouched in a corner with her head in her hands)

Michael: When it first happened I thought I would die. I felt as if my insides were being scraped with razor blades. Then there was the merciful anaesthetic of aftershock. For many days I could feel almost nothing as if my senses had been turned down with a dimmer switch, a sort of fuzziness, as if I was seeing through muslin, as if I was picking up sounds half heard in another room. But then the waves of uncontrollable rage and the biting despair. It’s the accidental quality of it all I can’t come to terms with. If I hadn’t had to see the Head of the Bank that day I too would have been on the train. Accidental. Meaningless. This one lives, that one dies. That’s it. But most dreadful of all, the remorse. Oh God, God, why don’t you exist you bastard and then at least I could blame you? It’s the having nowhere for rage and despair to go, nobody to blame and dump them on so you can get rid of them and cast them off like ill-fitting clothes. No wonder people invented God. ‘I will pray for you Michael.’ Oh thank you, thank you, you stupid sentimental sanctimonious salt in the wound hypocrite. ‘I’ll get Father O’Reilly to say Mass for you. Won’t do you any harm, might do you some good.’ Oh thank you thank you. Just give me a week or two, I’ll soon bounce back. Right, here I am. Can’t keep a good man down what what? Felt off colour for a week or two but already to go again!. ‘Good boy, good boy. I always say, time is a great healer, life has to go on. Deep deep

breathing! One two, One two! To the left! To the right! Breathe in, breathe out!’ But how can I tell them about the despair having nowhere to go, about the pumped up tire feeling and no way to let the air out? It’s the nothing there that is so terrible, only the mocking echo from all those unfeeling atoms and molecules. No, not even mocking, but just no feeling, no feeling out there, no pity or blame, just matter. No wonder people heard the echo of their own cries of anguish coming back to them and imagined it was the voice of God. Now I see it, the terrible thing about matter is that in the end it doesn’t matter. Nothing matters but through some freak of evolution we are cursed to imagine that it does. Rosemary, Rosemary, why didn’t I love you while I was still able? While there was still time? Too late, too late. Those terrible words. The massive crash of the iron gates of the past slamming shut never, never to be opened. The ever going forward arrow of time that can never be turned back. I never thought about remorse. I didn’t know what it was. I never dreamt that I would feel it, that it would turn every morsel of food to ashes, sour every drop of drink. Why can’t I be sensible and say well that’s over, move on, move on, life has to go on. ‘Well, we are sorry for your loss but life has to go on’, people say, with another vicious twist of the knife. Yes, I say, smiling bravely, life has to go on. Thank you for telling me that. How kind you are. I wouldn’t have thought of it. ‘Good on yer, good man, that’s the spirit’. How can I tell them that I have these hard stones sticking in my throat that I cannot swallow, retch as I might? Who will dissolve and melt them? Quarks, atoms, chromosomes, molecules, forgive me, forgive me. But they do not answer, they do not speak. If only – Oh! Oh! Oh! If only I could have it over again. No answer, no answer. Rosemary, please die, please die. Release me, let me move on, life has to move on. Eventually, I know, she will die, she will dwindle away, and I will be released, I will look back unable to feel her any more. But then, and this I also now know, worse than regret will be the death of regret. This is the terrible thing, in the end my failure to love her doesn’t matter, because there is nothing else but matter, and this is what with relief I will come to feel, but I will know that I have finally lost what is most precious because I will be no longer able to feel that loss. ‘Well you know, Michael, time is a great healer.’ Thank you, thank you for that thought, how kind you are. ‘Of course, of course, Michael, I want to help you. Just let me tear off with yet another platitude that bit of plaster you at last managed to get onto the wound.

Ready? Here we go. Rrrriiiiiipp! There, that didn't hurt too much did it? Don't forget, if I haven't said it before, time is a great healer. Well done. Brave boy. Kitchener would have been proud of you.' Oh what an irony, to be trapped in a bubble of meaning in a meaningless world. I never expected this. Why have I been cursed to love and feel and regret? Venice! Venice! 'Not a drop of my blood that was not trembling now/ As I felt the onset of the ancient flame.' Why are we confused by these romantic illusions, why do we not just go to it like rabbits and goats? Oh God, God how I would hate you if only you existed. Where was God at 9/11? At 7/7? In Rwanda? At New Orleans? Where was God at Auschwitz? Not there. Not even glowering with angry and vengeful rage, just not there. Do stones feel? Do stars love? Do mountains care? (shouts) Hello out there! Hello out there? Listen! Listen! Anything? Anything? Rosemary died. Are you reading me? This is Z twenty five calling the universe. Rosemary dead. Over. Delta Echo Apple Delta. Dead. Do you hear me? No? No. No-one answers, just billions of stars that do not feel or laugh or weep but meaninglessly burn on. Why cannot I let her go? Rosemary, I banish you, I banish you. But there she is still, mute, accusing, appealing, recriminating, loving me. Why are we thus cursed to love? Sex, we know from science, is nothing but the whiff of pheromones, the itch of instinct whereby nature ensures the mechanical transmission of genes. Why cannot we just accept this? Why has the unfeeling earth given birth to this freak, this performing clown, this inadvertent sport, this monstrous accident, the feeling human? Animals lust, display, perform the act and move on. 'You must move on Michael. Time is a great healer.' If for the animals, why not us? What does it matter that the mate dies as long as the genes are transmitted? But for me the skies have fallen in, the stars have been snuffed out. What does it matter? What does it matter? To me it matters. 'Never mind Michael, life goes on.' And some day, I know, even to me it will not matter. Because in the end there is nothing but matter. But something precious in me will have died. What matters in me will have died. But then I too will die, and it too will no longer matter. Where was God at Auschwitz?

Long pause.

Scene 8

Michaela: Michael, my dearest dearest Michael,.I'm not going to comfort you with platitudes. Let me take you somewhere else. Not here, not here. Somewhere quite other. Let me take you to a different place. Where can this be? Look hard, look, look.

Michael: I can't see anything.

Michaela: Look, look! What is this place that you see in your mind's eye? Where is it? Somewhere strangely familiar?

Michael: Good heavens it is Auschwitz. I've seen the pictures..

Michaela: Does your heart dip when you see the railway lines running into that squat towered entrance? See, see the trains bearing in their human cargoes, whistling as they slow down, the wheels squealing and the boilers blowing steam as they reach the ramp. Raus! Raus! All out! All out! See the waiting lines of dazed and terrified people numb with bewilderment and fear. How can you take your eyes off the SS doctors methodically selecting in their immaculate uniforms with their spotless white gloves? A glove flicks to the left and death, to the right and life.

Michael: Why are you showing me all this?

Michaela: Flick, flick. Flick, flick. See the columns of naked people shuffling into the gas chambers, beautiful women shaking with fear, crying bewildered children, skinny old men weeping shamelessly. Listen to the Auschwitz orchestra playing The Blue Danube. See them passing between the guards stationed at precise intervals with their guns and whips, hear the shouts urging them on, see the snarling dogs straining at their leashes. Can you feel the hidden current of connection between the perpetrators and the victims,

fellow journeyers into this extraordinary realm beyond any other that humans have previously known?

Michael: Stop, stop. Why are you doing this to me? If this is meant to help me more than platitudes give me platitudes.

Michaela: Look look. Don't avert your gaze. In your mind's eye. Imagine the faces turned up to the showerheads hopeful in the darkness, but instead the hiss of the capsules of Zyklon B being dropped in from above. The soft hissing. The sudden dreadful thuds of realization, the scalding upsurge of desperation and despair, the very earth sickening, all trust dissolving and hope dying. The choking darkness. The howls and wails, the last precious air foul with the stench of vomit. Feel the terrifying upsurge of triumphant cackling demons from the depths of the soul, the hideous palpable enfleshment of the primitive terrors that lie at the bottom of every heart. Listen to the shrieks, the yells, the gulps, the agonized choking. Does your imagination fail at this point? See the doors being opened again, the corpses packed so tight they are still standing upright, and pink as tulips. Surely these are the very ovens of hell. As humanity ceased to believe in an imaginary hell, so, unable to bear the loss, it created a real one. Where was God at Auschwitz? What do you think? What do you think?

Michael: What I think is that this really happened, and because it really happened all the beauty in the world is undone. Where was God at Auschwitz? Where was God when Rosemary died? How can people prattle on about a merciful God? Think of the horror of the animal world. Beautiful antelopes caught and mauled by lions. Chickens mindlessly slaughtered by foxes. Fish eaten alive by bears, the larva of the ichneumon fly eating its living caterpillar host from the inside, spiders paralyzing flies so that they can consume their still living prey later, snakes slowly swallowing living frogs, cats gratuitously playing with mice before they kill them. What Auschwitz shows us is that man is simply a product of nature in a mindless universe, and for that reason is, when he has to be, as violent and pitiless and cruel as any other animal. That is what I think.

(pause)

Michaela: Do you remember the physics classes that we used to go to at school?

Michael: The physics classes? Yes of course I do. Mr Lewis. Godless Lou. Boys, it is not love that makes the world go round, that is merely an importunate and frequently inconvenient itch between the sexes, it is gravity. Boys, beware my namesake Clive Sinclair Lewis, known to his familiars as Jack. He knows no physics.

Michaela: Do you remember what he taught you? That a subatomic particle is both a visible fragment of matter in a particular time and place, and also an invisible wave that is nowhere, in no particular time and place?

Michael: How could I forget? Boys, it is not as if the physicist goes down to the sea and scoops up a capful of water from a wave. In scooping up his capful the water disappears altogether and he is left with a capful of nothing, but a nothing that is a wave, a wave only, with no water for it to pass through. Old Lou was up with all the latest ideas. Weird I grant you. Weird, weird, weird. Why are you asking me all this? What's this got to do with it? Where are you taking me?

Michaela: Through all our long association together I have never preached to you. But now I'm going to. (She stands up on a bench and addresses him as from a pulpit).

Michael Gibson, I love and care for you. Do you remember the two slit experiment first with photons and then with electrons that Lousy Lou told you about? That electrons are both waves and particles? How can they be? But they are. Weird eh? Well here's something even weirder. Richard Feynman showed that not only do the particles go through both slits at once, although they can't because they are particles, they go everywhere else in the universe as well. Watch me. I'm playing billiards. I hit the ball with the cue and it rolls towards the pocket. But the ball is made of atoms and the atoms of electrons, protons and neutrons. So the electrons must be rolling towards the pocket too because they are inside the ball. They are. But on the way they visit everywhere else in the universe as well. Stephen Hawking's wheelchair, your wristwatch, Andromeda, Alpha Centauri, the Pope's zuchetta. But all these different pathways cancel each other out. Except one, the one going straight to the pocket. It's a weird weird universe. Here and now is also everywhere and always. Consider this. Our bodies are made of cells. The cells are made of molecules. The molecules of atoms. And the atoms of protons, neutrons and electrons. But the electrons, our electrons, are not only in our bodies they are also everywhere in the universe. Deep within our bodies we are already living this everywhere life. Darwin discovered a lot. But he didn't know about this everywhere life. How do you know that Rosemary didn't just awake from this dream we call reality to find she was in the everywhere life, where she had always been in any case? Far fetched? Not so far fetched as physics. Perhaps we do just rot when we die. Or perhaps we find ourselves not in the particulated form we were used to but in the universal form that was always our true home. Do you, Michael Gibson, know the ultimate secrets of reality? No you don't and nor did Darwin. Who knows? Perhaps in another dimension we will be able to make sense even of Auschwitz. Or perhaps we won't. We just don't know. Hope, Michael. hope. We just don't know so we can only believe. Hope, Michael, hope.

Don't despair. Don't despair. Michael I so love and care for you. Can you believe? Can you believe?

Michael: I can't(less certainly) I can't.....(even less certainly) I can't.

Michaela. If you cannot believe, at least let us dance.

(They dance in solemn and stately fashion to the music of the movement *molto adagio* (A Thanksgiving to God for Recovery from My Sickness) from Beethoven's Quartet in A Minor Opus 132.