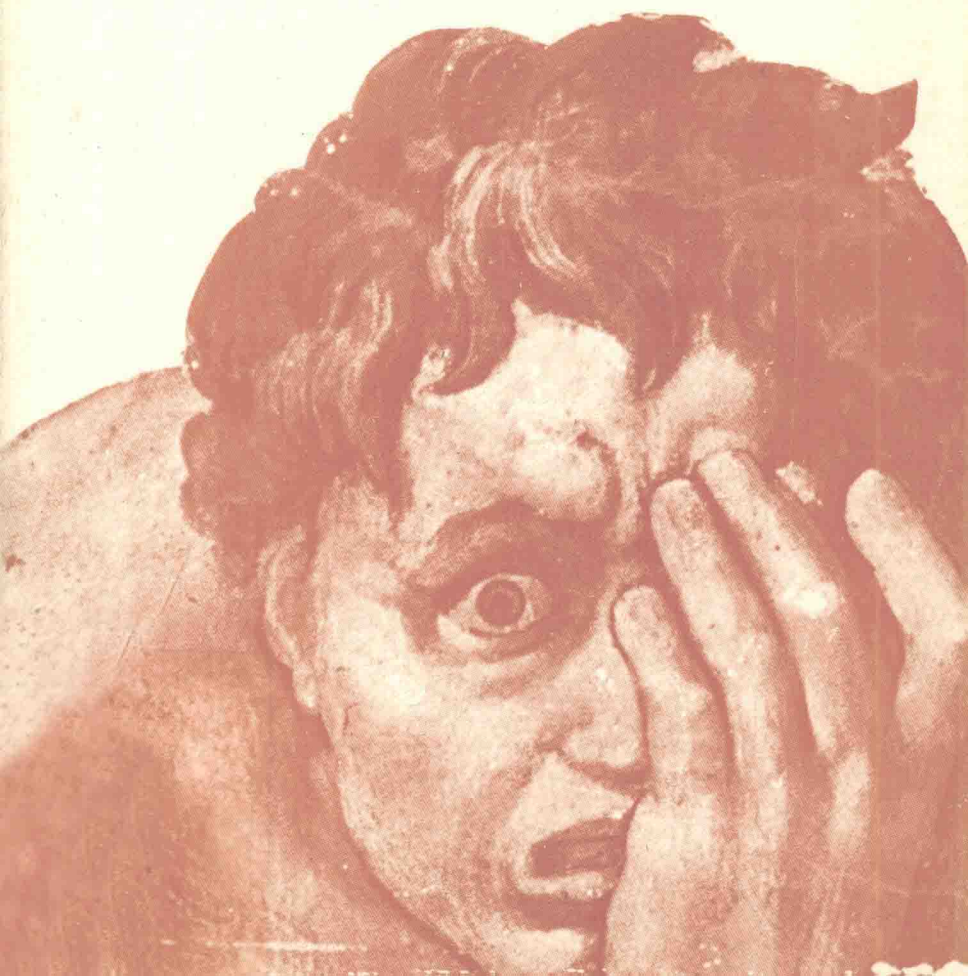


SAMUEL FRENCH INC.

ROBERT PATRICK'S CHEEP THEATRICKS

PLAYS, MONOLOGUES & SKETCHES



Robert Patrick's
cheep theatricks



EDITED BY MICHAEL FEINGOLD
INTRODUCTION: LANFORD WILSON
SAMUEL FRENCH INC.

NEW YORK

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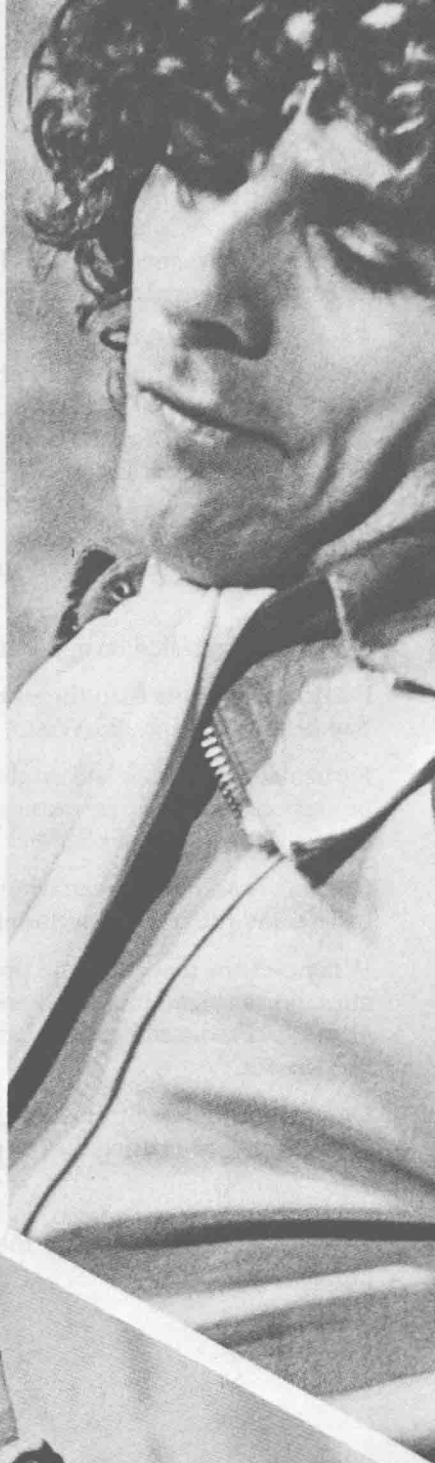
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Introduction
Lanford Wilson
page 1

I Came to New York to Write	5
1955: My Parents Were American	7
1957: One of Us Has to Work	16
1959: Phil and Laura	22
1961: The P.R. and the V.I.P.	28
1964: Pop People	38
1965: Verna and Artie	52
1967: Fred and Harold	57
1969: I Came to New York to Write	66
Help, I Am: A Monologue	81
Cornered	89

Opposite: David Gallagher as Jay
in *The Haunted Host*; John Albano as
The Star in *The Richest Girl*; and below,
Irving Metzman as Arnold Bliss

Lights/Camera/Action	111
I: Lights	113
II: Camera Obscura	119
III: Action	125
Still-Love	131
One Person: A Monologue	157
Joyce Dynel: An American Zarzuela	173
Preggin and Liss	231
The Richest Girl in the World Finds Happiness	247
The Arnold Bliss Show	261
I: The Actor and the Invader	263
II: La Répétition	269
III: Arnold's Big Break	281
IV: Presenting Arnold Bliss	291
The Haunted Host	297

INTRODUCTION

Bob told me this introduction should begin, “Bob Patrick’s plays are stars shooting across the cobalt night sky—snowflakes that for a second enhance the eyelashes of the blushing Muse!” or some such. But I really can’t capture the preposterous pop jargon that Bob nearly invented. If I did begin this introduction that way, I couldn’t finish it—not the way he would.

Not his way because he has a gift for starting at a place that immediately makes us comfortable. It’s familiar. He has a knack for capturing the beat of those *Date with Judy* puppet plays, those safe and charming televised reflectors of what it was never like. We sit in a drafty, squalid Off-Off-Broadway theater, and he starts by making us wish we’d brought dear old Aunt Hattie along to this dump to see this sweet little show. It’s very Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. When it starts. Very *Meet Corliss Archer*. Then before you know it Mickey has gone down on Corliss and you don’t quite know where you are because the language has gone wild, and the jokes have gone serious, and the Pop Art cut-out characters have turned three-dimensional and nobody ever told it to you this way before. And the show is only in it first fifteen minutes.

Bob can do these somersaults on your head because he still worries about some of those things writers started ignoring a few years back. Like form. Like content. Like beginning, middle and end. Like laughs: Bob writes funnier than anyone else, but people in the Village have known that for so long that in print it looks like yesterday’s news. Bob writes funny because his heart is back there with the old worries about form, but his imagination is right up front with next week’s Marvel Comix. The combination is a wonderful one, and very individual.

Bob first appeared on the Off-Off-Broadway scene when the scene itself first appeared. He horsed around the Caffè Cino for a few years before he had anything produced there; a lot of people didn’t know he wrote. But he wrote, starting with *The Haunted Host*. He also acted. He also directed. He also ran lights. Maybe half a dozen of his

plays were done at the Cino. (He's one of perhaps fifteen writers who found the place hospitable; without the Cino's hospitality I doubt if there would be any serious theater in New York today. Maybe somewhere else.) He also waited on tables, kept the door, co-managed the place, staged about fifteen "comic books" when scheduled shows were cancelled (thereby inventing Story Theatre a few years before Paul Sills), and organized, for La MaMa this time, the first Off-Off-Broadway omnibus. (It was called *BbAaNnGg!*, lasted four hours, and made Ellen Stewart enough money to pay off the electric bill and the cops and the fire department and run another month or so. Things were not always easy Off-Off-Broadway; Bob made them look easier.)

For a while—three or four years—he was directed by other people at other places. Then he found himself at an East Village bar—the Old Reliable. If you've ever heard of the place it's because Bob was there nearly every night for over two years. If you haven't heard of the place you begin to see the problem of working Off-Off-Broadway. It's way too far Off-Off. But I don't think it could have survived intact anywhere else. I'm sure Bob couldn't have; the Old Reliable was finally a place where he could "write and sing and dance and act and paint." He had needed a place where he could improvise on stage, with an audience twice a night, changing his show. The audience changing his show. He had needed the freedom to take completely untalented actors and mold them into his idea of glamour (he was lucky enough to discover some very talented ones in the process). And he had needed a place where he could entertain his friends. He had written a multitude of occasional plays: Halloween at the Cino, Easter at the Old Reliable, Christmas at La MaMa (twice). He had been entertaining the Village entertainers for years. The Old Reliable was his home and every night was open house.

I feel like a barker: "Step right in, ladies and gentlemen. On the inside you'll find a virtually global range of subject matter, you'll visit an amazing array of locales. You'll see the last man on earth trapped atop the Empire State Building; you'll see an art gallery in the grip of a light show; you'll see The Richest Girl in the World find Happiness." Well, you will. "You'll also travel from a motel to a suburban kitchen to a twelve-hundred-room mansion and back to your own TV screen. You'll also discover the very first amazing rock opera on the

life of Christ, the first good play to run backwards in time, the ultimate original homosexual love triangle (hypotenuse offstage). You'll see the stage become a street, an apartment, a temple, the Garden of Eden, Calvary, Gethsemane, and the Electric Circus, without a stick of scenery or a moment of hesitation. You'll see the Village Writer's Writer Write!"

It isn't all sideshow and spectacle. In *I Came to New York to Write* the walls remain and movers change the decor from play to play: that connecting image, telling us of the transience of urbanities, ties together a whole social history of the city, fifteen years of ups and downs. In the *Arnold Bliss* series the scenes lead up to Arnold's TV commercial; like most commercials it is hateful, full of bitterness, vilification, intimidation and exploitation of its audience. The Bliss plays are one very keen-sighted artist's surrealist vision of the dehumanization process corrupting an actor's desire to communicate. It is also very funny, but that's almost not important, just there to keep us in our seats for the real stuff.

Aside from the funny lines, aside from the rapid pacing, aside from the beautifully balanced construction, the perception, the social criticism, Bob Patrick is one of the few writers unafraid of feeling, even when it dips over into sentiment. So many funny writers hide behind the barrage they unloose that it needs to be stressed: this one doesn't. He's written some extraordinarily affecting two-person scenes. They come up suddenly out of the foregoing banter with a force and surprise, an urgency, so strong it's a wonder the Off-Off audience didn't run in panic. But they didn't. He can show you, in a heart-breaking late-night quarrel and separation, how two lovers should never separate; in *One person*, my own favorite play in this collection, he has only one of those lovers on stage. The other is in the audience, and the author-actor uses the opportunity of an audience to hold him till everything has been said: It is a terribly delicate play, a delicate situation. It's one of those one-act plays that will be anthologized along with *Riders to the Sea* and *Hello out There* and *The Long Christmas Dinner* and other plays whose appeal is impossible to pin down or shake off. It'll be a while, but it'll be there.

Of course, this is a writer who doesn't always write delicately or sentimentally. Nobody could be quite so popular and do that, especially when he's popular among other writers. Bob's resourceful and

forward; he'll use anything, a cheap laugh or a rarefied and fine one, any line in the book, providing it lets him get his argument across. And providing it's his book.

This is his book.

It's been a long time coming. Nice to know that it'll be a long time here. I like to imagine a couple of kids picking up a copy somewhere and reading a play aloud. Bob is always offering to read to you—or with you. You can't resist his rhythms. You'll be reading with him if you read these plays aloud. Even if you read them to yourself—but don't read them to yourself; they're meant to be read out loud. Even better, I like the idea of the same two kids—I use the word “kids” because it sounds like Bob: “Hey, kids, let's put on a show!”) Two kids, then, finding a copy and deciding to put on a show.

It'll be one hell of a good show.

Bob was the doorman at the Caffè Cino for at least two years. He used to stand on the sidewalk and try to coerce strollers off the street and into our shows, trying to introduce us to the wary customers.

Are you a customer? Are you wary? There's someone I'd very much like you to meet . . .

Lanford Wilson
New York

I CAME TO NEW YORK TO WRITE

For James Colson

I Came to New York to Write was first performed at Norman Hartman's Old Reliable Theatre Tavern on March 24, 1969. It was directed by the author, with lighting by David Adams, and with the following cast:

1955: *My Parents Were American*

Marion *Julia Curry*

David *James Marmon*

1964: *Pop People*

He *Alan Causey*

She *Barbara Montgomery*

1957: *One of Us Has to Work*

Tillie *Barbara Montgomery*

Hank *Irving Metzman*

Luther *Alan Causey*

1965: *Verna and Artie*

Verna *Julia Curry*

Artie *Irving Metzman*

1959: *Phil and Laura*

Phil *Alan Causey*

Laura *Julia Curry*

1967: *Fred and Harold*

Fred *James Marmon*

Harold *Alan Causey*

1961: *The P.R. and the V.I.P.*

P.R. *James Marmon*

V.I.P. *Irving Metzman*

Harrigan *Alan Causey*

1969: *I Came to New York
To Write*

Ruby *Barbara Montgomery*

Maggie *Julia Curry*

Victor *James Marmon*

Over: William Haislip and June Perz in the
1972 La MaMa production of *Pop People*



The entire play takes place in the same New York City apartment over a time span of fifteen years. The scene changes are made by stagehands costumed as Bekins movers. There is a door to the kitchen, and another to the hall. The bell to open the downstairs door is placed rather high beside the hall door. There is one window, with a good view of the Empire State Building. It is important to several of the scenes that the downstairs bell and the one from the hall sound different.

In actual production, the scenery may be simplified and stylized, so that a bookcase comes down and becomes a bed, etc. Changing pictures, curtains, and so on, can suggest the different tenants quite adequately. In the Old Reliable production, we changed very little except wall pictures, the position of sofa and chairs, and (most helpfully) the style and location of telephones.

1955: My Parents Were American

The apartment is filled with European literary souvenirs of an earlier era. Pictures of Proust and Nijinsky, etchings by Kokoschka, autographed photos of Dietrich, some Russian hangings, Japanese prints.

At rise, the stage is empty. A door chime sounds. We hear MARION's voice off, crying, "All right, all right, wait!" Chime repeats. MARION, 32, in outré slacks, vest, man's blue work shirt, beads, stomps across stage in high heels, pushes buzzer, flings door open, shouts down the stairs:

DAVID'S VOICE (*From hallway*) Oh, hello, there. I'm—

MARION (*Interrupting*) I said wait!

SHE slams door and stalks back out of room. Doorbell. SHE returns with tray holding a bottle of cordial and two silver glasses, sets

it on coffee table, surveys everything, ignoring the now constantly-ringing doorbell, shakes her hair, puts on glasses (worn on a chain around her neck) and glides to door.

MARION (*Opening door graciously*) Oh, hello, there. You must be Belle's friend. Won't you come in?

DAVID (*Young, attractive; overcoat and scarf*) Uh—yes, sure. How do you—uh—Miss Benson?

MARION (*Ushering him in*) Please—Marion.

DAVID I'm glad to—David Clark.

MARION (*Grabs his unoffered hand and shakes it*) So glad to meet you, David. May I take your coat? (*SHE whisks the scarf off him*)

DAVID (*Offering coat*) Oh, sure. Let me—

SHE takes it, starts away.

MARION (*Sharply*) Sit down!

DAVID But there's a package—

MARION (*Back to him, icily*) Did you want something from your coat?

DAVID Yes, there's a—

MARION (*Thrusts coat at him*) Don't tell me. Just take it.

HE removes a wrapped book from the coat.

MARION Now hide it! (*As SHE heads off*) Won't you pour yourself a cordial?

DAVID (*Sees spread, heads for it*) Ah, that would be—

MARION (*Off*) A cordial is a sweet drink. Preprandial. It's in the bottle there.

DAVID I know what a cordial is.

MARION (*Re-entering with a long, decorated wooden box*) How nice. I almost forgot cigarettes. There's one package here of almost every brand. Do you smoke?

DAVID Yes, I do.

MARION (*Opens box*) Please help yourself.

DAVID I have my own.

MARION Please! It's an Old World gesture. I am determined to do this right!

DAVID *takes cigarettes.* THEY *sit.*

It's getting harder and harder. Nowadays it's not enough to count brands. You have to count filter and nonfilter of each brand; regular, king or super-king; mentholated and non-mentholated; pack or box; and of course all the variations and combinations of those: Regular non-filter non-mentholated; king-size non-filter non-mentholated; regular non-filter non-mentholated pack; king-size non-filter mentholated box; regular non-filter non-mentholated—(*A little laugh*)—It's getting impossible. (*Gaily*) I'm going to have to start just putting out cigarette papers and a pack of Bull Durham. (*Crestfallen*) That was a joke. I'm not doing this at all well.

DAVID (*Who has been staring at her fascinated*) Doing what?

MARION Being a literary hostess. Forgive me. I just decided to start it, and I haven't got the touch yet. (*Accusingly*) You haven't poured the cordial.

DAVID (*Quickly doing so*) Oh, of course. (*Pours two*)

MARION (*Cold*) Pour me one as well, won't you?

DAVID (*Proffering one*) I did.

MARION You're supposed to wait until I ask.

DAVID (*Making to pour drink back in bottle*) I'm sorry, I'll pour it back.

MARION (*Takes drink quickly*) It's all right. Cheers.

THEY *clink glasses*. BOTH *find the cordial mildly unpleasant*.

Well, dinner will be ready soon. (*Brightly*) We're having goose! It'll be ready in—well, I don't know how long, exactly. I've never cooked a goose—literally. Ha! Why *is* goose so literary?

DAVID Is it?

MARION (*Brief panic*) Isn't it? I'm fixing it in its own juice—with couscous—an Arabian grain? And then, for dessert, a mousse! It rhymes.

DAVID (*Nods, fascinated and utterly at sea*) Rhymes.

MARION (*Trying to be bright*) I *did* have another menu planned, but I simply didn't know how to fix it. It was going to be a young chicken cooked and served under truffles. The perfect dish for an aspiring young writer!

DAVID (*Entranced*) Really? Why?

MARION Don't you see? Young chicken under truffles? Pullet Surprise! (*No reaction from DAVID*) Well, what could a young author want more than a Pulitzer Prize! (*SHE slumps*) You're not helping.