

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



# Art the Master

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by Adriano Cugola

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EXTRACT

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This script is distributed by The Australian Script Centre  
77 Salamanca Place Hobart 7004 Tasmania Australia  
email [admin@ozscript.org](mailto:admin@ozscript.org)  
[www.ozscript.org](http://www.ozscript.org)  
ph +61 3 6223 4675  
fax +61 3 6223 4678

## The Players:

<b>Barclay Belacqua:</b>	A funeral artist
<b>Greenly:</b>	A devil
<b>Cavendish McCavity:</b>	Funeral artist manqué, accountant célèbre
<b>Emily Vanderpander:</b>	Barclay's first wife
<b>Jane:</b>	Barclay's second wife
<b>Leandra:</b>	Barclay's nurse
<b>Licencia:</b>	A demoness
<b>The Hag:</b>	An angel
<b>Richard Osblatfish:</b>	Grave-digger and pie shop owner
<b>Ivan:</b>	Art's council executive
<b>Arturo Clubfoot:</b>	A funeral impresario
<b>Dr Sarah Sturmleiter:</b>	An academic
<b>Jason:</b>	A provocative student
<b>Overlander:</b>	An agreeable student
<b>Deliria:</b>	Rock vocalist, former girlfriend of McCavity
<b>Mr Stiffy:</b>	A strange customer
<b>Doctor:</b>	A brain surgeon
<b>Mourner:</b>	The guy's brother
<b>Customers:</b>	Disappointed and disappointing customers
<b>Rock Band:</b>	Three of them
<b>Demons:</b>	Three of them



<b>Actor 1</b>	Barclay Belacqua
<b>Actor 2</b>	Greenly, Mr Stiffy, Customer, Overlander
<b>Actor 3</b>	McCavity, Mourner, Customer, Clubfoot
<b>Actor 4</b>	Emily, Leandra, The Hag
<b>Actor 5</b>	Deliria, Jane
<b>Actor 6</b>	Licencia, Customer, Doctor, Sarah
<b>Actor 7</b>	Richard Osblatfish, Ivan, Jason



## Act 1

### Scene 1

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*A large four-poster bed in spirit land. Mists waft and drift around it, and a green light illuminates the white sheets. Greenly jumps over the bed like a hideous child. Under the sheets squirms his friend Licencia. Next to the bed stands a strange rack on which things resembling human bodies hang.*

**Greenly:** Ahhhaha. Where's the sow? The sow who lines my bed?

**Licencia:** Get off. You're disgusting me.

**Greenly:** Just let me rub on you baby.

**Licencia:** No.

**Greenly:** Please.

**Licencia:** I don't want that body.

**Greenly:** What's wrong with it?

**Licencia:** It's old.

**Greenly:** *(points to the rack)* You've been through all of them! A hundred times.

**Licencia:** Get a new one, and I might show some interest.

**Greenly:** And who's offering to sell? Eh? And how can they offer, if no one says the incantation. And how can they say the incantation, if no one speaks Latin. I'm sick of arguing with you. *(pause)* You have the same one all the time...

**Licencia:** You seem to like it.

**Greenly:** Yes, I have simple taste! What of it.

*Barclay's voice is heard from offstage. Distorted and hollow like an echo: "Cav! Come back here! You bogan! You frightened little bogan. Yeah! A bogan in terror! It's outrageous!"*

**Greenly:** Did you hear that?

**Licencia:** What?

**Greenly:** The incantation! Potens in terra erit semen ejus. His seed shall be mighty upon earth.

**Licencia:** You're dreaming.

**Greenly:** I wouldn't have heard if they weren't the words. *(puts on some socks)*.

**Licencia:** What're you doing?

**Greenly:** Going down. To have a look.

**Licencia:** *(getting excited)* You really think you heard it?

**Greenly:** Enough!

**Licencia:** Should be better formed than the last.

**Greenly:** That was six hundred years ago. They were smaller then.

**Licencia:** Go to. Any change's for the better.

**Greenly:** Go to... You're drooling like a puppy. Hahaah. I'll not return til I snare him. No. Not til the contract's bleeding in my hands! Hahah. Til the small print's pinned him for our pleasure. And universal law delivers us a poor Christian's body.

*He pushes the bed off stage at a pace through the swirling mists.*

**Scene ends.**

## Act 1

### Scene 2

*A modern funeral parlour. There is a reception desk, a front and rear entrance and showroom with some display coffins. Barclay stands at the desk tapping an opened newspaper. McCavity stands by looking guilty.*

**Barclay:** Disgusting!

**McCavity:** ... What?

**Barclay:** Really disgusting. Nickerson. Buried at MacCoffins's. Off with a fast funeral...

**McCavity:** Yeah... I saw it.

**Barclay:** Oh I don't blame him. He's just a poor poet. *(pause)* It's the nature of our times Cav. Astounding technical powers, boundless wealth and everywhere: shit for brains.

**McCavity:** MacCoffin's what they want. It's what you give them. If you want to stay in business.

**Barclay:** I'm sick of business!

**McCavity:** Barky... there's...

**Barclay:** They'd sooner be buried like dogs. I'm sick of compromises. Sick of stinking rock and roll services...

**McCavity:** It's all that's kept us afloat... Which leads me to what.. I've been meaning to tell you...

**Barclay:** Bank manager. So what.

**McCavity:** That's not what I meant, but since you mention it.

*Enter Osblatfish.*

**Osblatfish:** Hey! Got any Charlie Thorpeses?

**McCavity:** There's one in the hearse. Muriel Stiffy.

**Barclay:** No there isn't. I've just looked.

**Osblatfish:** Better be. That's Stiffy's sheila. I told im we'd do a good job on er.

*McCavity and Barclay exchange looks of alarm.*

**Barclay:** Course we have. Listen Ossie. Go check the hole's ready.

**Osblatfish:** I jist bloody dug it.

**Barclay:** Give it a few more inches then.

**Osblatfish:** (*disgusted*) Ahhh I'm not gunna argue with ya.

*He exits.*

**McCavity:** What do you mean... she's not there? I loaded her last night.

**Barclay:** The doors are open. Wide open!

**McCavity:** (*guilty*) Actually... I drove it from the party this morning.

**Barclay:** You took our hearse to a party?

**McCavity:** Yeah. Can you afford a taxi?

**Barclay:** Jesus! It could be anywhere! And Stiffy's here any minute.

**McCavity:** Well tell him you're dressing her.

**Barclay:** We're burying her at one. Wait... She was blond wasn't she? About your height?

**McCavity:** No way Barclay. I'm out of here.

**Barclay:** It's your balls up Cav. Come back! Have you seen this Stiffy? He's an animal! (*heavy pummelling at the door*) Oh! That's him.

**McCavity:** I'm out! (*heads to the back door*)

**Barclay:** If you run, I will give him your name and address. I will! (*McCavity freezes in fear and rage*) Now, get in. (*Barclay rips the end off a mop and places it on McCavity's head*) Put this on...

*Barclay pushes an unwilling and terrified McCavity into a coffin that is lying on a trolley. Mr Stiffy bursts in at last.*

**Mr Stiffy:** Oi! Oi! Anyone ere?

**Barclay:** Mr Stiffy?

**Mr Stiffy:** Yeah. Muriel ready yet? Is that er?

**Barclay:** Looking more beautiful than ever.

**Mr Stiffy:** The box's different.

**Barclay:** She's in a finer one. No cost to you though.

**Mr Stiffy:** She deserved better, but I couldna afford it. (*pause*) Umm. I just gotta spend a few minutes wiv er. On me own like.

**Barclay:** Of course. (*Stands behind the reception desk, and picks up some notebooks*) I'll just stand over here. Out of the way.

*He watches fretfully as Stiffy lies down beside coffin and sobs hysterically.*

**Mr Stiffy:** G'day Muriel. It's ya old man ere... Ya dumb tart. (*pause*) Ya broke me heart... I loved ya. I fuckin loved ya. (*beats the corpse*) You don't know how much... (*choking*) I know I knocked ya round. I'm not proud of it.

But... you used ta make me so... mad... I'm not saying it was all bad. Cause it wasn't. I mean, ya liked a good root now and then. *(getting horny)* Yeah. You used ta like when I... *(pause, then to Barclay)* Hey mate, I just wanna stay wiv her for a bit. Like in a room on me own.

**Barclay:** *(gulping)* Ahh hehe. What for?

**Mr Stiffy:** For privacy.

**Barclay:** Ahhm I suppose. You're not doing anything weird?

**Barclay:** She's me friggin wife.

**Mr Stiffy:** We're just not that kind of parlour... That's all.

**Mr Stiffy:** *(starts pushing the trolley)* Right. We're goin ta MacCoffin's...

**Barclay:** No! Look. We're willing to help. It's just that it mightn't be good for the corpse.

**Mr Stiffy:** What's not good?

**Barclay:** Whatever it is you're going to do. *(pause as they estimate each other)* There's an empty room along the corridor. Room 212...

**Mr Stiffy:** *(starts pushing the trolley)* Right!

**Barclay:** Wait! We have a rule. You can't wear glasses out back.

**Mr Stiffy:** Then I can't see what I'm doin.

**Barclay:** We've got to have some standards!

**Mr Stiffy:** Here ya'are. *(slams glasses on the reception desk)* Wankers...

*Stiffy wheels out the coffin and slams the door. At the same time, a woman enters and browses desultorily around the display room.*

**Barclay:** Can I help you madam?

**Customer:** I'd like to bury my husband. Affordably, that is.

**Barclay:** *(sighs)* Economy range?

**Customer:** If you want to be blunt about it.

**Barclay:** Well... Standard rock services of course: includes a minister - your choice of religion - four piece band: bass, lead vocal, keyboards, drums. Your choice of four rock classics: *Stairway to Heaven*, *Highway to Hell*, *Another Brick in the Wall*, and *Can't Get no Satisfaction*.

**Customer:** Hmmm.

**Barclay:** It's what people want. But look. It's not every day your husband dies. It's a day for reflection. For reverie. *(Opens book)* This is our real catalogue... We specialise in modern classics. Werner. Xenides. Hillmeyer... And even ... a few of my own.

**Customer:** Hmmm... well.

**Barclay:** Look at this one: the Viking pire! We float him on a miniture long ship and then set fire to it. Fantastic concept... pioneered by Michailkov in

Paris... No? Here. Death in Battle. We dress him in a uniform. Your choice. Place him in a concrete bunker. Pack it with explosives, flares, rockets... Kapow!...

**Customer:** Bit much for Greg I'd say. He was only an economist.

**Barclay:** Burial at Sea! We dig a pit, fill it with brine and stock it with fish. We build a kind of ship's bridge, a genuine sea captain reads the service... It's very formalised, very...

**Customer:** Elaborate I think. Haven't you anything simpler?

**Barclay:** Something gentle... hedonistic?

*Enter Emily, who browses around the showroom and listens intently.*

**Customer:** Less bombastic.

**Barclay:** Mediterranean Wake! Finest gourmet food, served by the grave. Hors d'oeuvres pass ritually round as the coffin's lowered. Priest reads a Latin mass. And instead of clods of earth the mourners throw in olive pits. Growth... peace beyond sorrow.

**Customer:** *(sighing)* Look it's very tempting but...

**Barclay:** See yourself in a black shawl! Wailing... Praying...

**Customer:** No. Look... I'll take the rock and roll.

**Barclay:** *(matter of fact)* Wednesday OK?

**Customer:** Not earlier?

**Barclay:** The band's here today or Wednesday I'm afraid.

**Customer:** Has to be tomorrow. Ohhh. Look. I'll see if MacCoffin's can fit him in. Sorry to trouble you.*(she exits)*

**Barclay:** No trouble at all... *(mouths "obscenities" but cuts short when he sees Emily)* Yes madam, can I help you?

**Emily:** My dear husband Godfrey's ill, and... close to passing... He's asked for something dignified and discreet... I wonder if you know the Oak Epiphany by Werner. He did it some years ago.

**Barclay:** At the burial of his wife. It's a masterpiece! I'd be honoured to perform it! How... How is it that you know about Werner?

**Emily:** Godfrey's a lifelong admirer. We met him once at a dinner in New York. We often did business there.

**Barclay:** You met... Werner? You know Werner?

**Emily:** Quite a shy man really.

**Barclay:** *(more to himself)* God, I wish I could meet Werner.

*Snorting and hacking offstage signals the return of Mr Stiffy.*

**Mr Stiffy:** Oi! Where's mi glasses? *(crashes into Mrs Vanderpander, who staggers fitfully into Barclay's arms)*

**Barclay:** *(to Stiffy)* Hey! Careful! *(to Emily)* So sorry madam. So very sorry.

**Mr Stiffy:** *(puts on his glasses)* Right. Ya better fix her up again. I messed up the box a bit. I'll see ya later.

**Barclay:** You haven't ticked the song you want.

**Mr Stiffy:** Aooohr yeah, umm, yeah. Can't get no Satisfaction. That band betta be good.

*He exits slowly.*

**Barclay:** *(Rolls his eyes)* So sorry madam. Clients from across the river.

*Enter Osblatfish as Mr Stiffy is exiting.*

**Osblatfish:** I jist finished ya hole mate.

**Mr Stiffy:** Hope it's deep. She liked it deep. Eh! Hyeah hye hye...

**Osblatfish:** Herh herhh herh *(inexplicable raucous hilarity ensures for some moments, breaking as Barclay tries to speak with Emily).*

**Barclay:** Keep it down!

**Mr Stiffy:** Ahrr fuck off, ya little poofter...

*Deeply hurt, Mr Stiffy storms out.*

**Osblatfish:** Have a bit a respect mate. He's wife's jist bloody barked it.

*Osblatfish follows Stiffy in solidarity.*

**Emily:** Look. This is probably a bad time for you. I might...

**Barclay:** Madam. Please. I could do something wonderful!

**Emily:** *(anxious)* Yes... tomorrow perhaps. When you're not so busy. Bye bye.

*Exit Emily.*

**Barclay:** *(sobbing)* This is not happening. I'm somewhere else. It's all a dream. A horrible dream. I'll open my eyes... and...

*Enter the band in a huff. Deleria and a couple of weirdly pathetic black leather clad rock musicians. Osblatfish re-enters from the other side.*

**Osblatfish:** *(contemptuously)* Ere's trouble.

**Barclay:** You're late again. The service starts in an hour!

**Deleria:** Button up poncing britches.

**Barclay:** What?

**Deleria:** The band's had a meeting.

**Barclay:** Oh masses rising are they?

**Keyboard:** Three months back pay mate!

**Drummer:** *(points to Osblatfish)* We'd be robbing the corpses, if he didn't clean em out first.

**Osblatfish:** Eh?