

Spring 2021

This New Colossus

Sean M. Ardor

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd>



Part of the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ardor, S. M.(2021). *This New Colossus*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/6375>

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu.

THIS NEW COLOSSUS

by

Sean M. Ardor

Bachelor of Arts
Colorado College, 2008

Master of Public Administration
Seattle University, 2017

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in

Theatre

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2021

Accepted by:

Steve Pearson, Director of Thesis

Robyn Hunt, Reader

Tracey L. Weldon, Interim Vice Provost and Interim Dean of the Graduate School

© Copyright by Sean M. Ardor, 2021
All Rights Reserved.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of the MFA Acting faculty and my program colleagues: Robyn Hunt, Steve Pearson, Stan Brown, Can Yasar, Timothy Giles, Iuliia Khamidullina, Gabe Reitemeier, & Jennifer Estrada. Essential research funding provided the University of South Carolina SPARC graduate research grant program, led by program manager Dr. Lauren Clark. Additional scholarship funding provided by Luetta and Weldon Friesen. Critical administrative support provided by Gabrielle Peterson of the Department of Theater and Dance. In Japan, John Oglevee and Richard Emmert of Theatre Nohgaku provided Noh training and intercultural support. Noh training was principally led by Teruhisa Oshima and Kinue Oshima of the Kita School of Noh.

ABSTRACT

This New Colossus was an original work of theater which I conceived, wrote, designed, directed, and performed four times over three consecutive evenings in mid-November 2019 at the Center for Performance Experiment in Columbia, South Carolina (A video recording of this performance is included in my thesis submission). *This New Colossus* tells the a story of an unnamed Grandfather and his Grandson struggling against a fictional communist government of the United States during its rise in the 1930's and its fall in the 1970's. The work was inspired by the lives of 20th century leftist revolutionaries, the poetry of Walt Whitman, and the traditional Japanese theater form of Noh. The research process for *This New Colossus* was partially funded by the University of South Carolina's SPARC grant, which allowed me to travel to Japan to study Noh. My experience in Japan directly influenced the subsequent creative process of *This New Colossus*, most evidently in the choreography of the closing dance, which borrowed many Noh movements and principals. While the show was sincere in its intent, it was artistically incomplete and narratively implausible. The prospects for the future of the work are uncertain. At the very least, the work cannot be performed again as it was, and will require significant reconstruction and revising before it is ready for an audience once more.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	iv
Chapter 1: How It Was	3
Chapter 2: How It Might Be	3
References	8
Appendix A: This New Colossus performance script	9

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CPE.....Center for Performance Experiment

TNTheatre Nohgaku

TNCThis New Colossus

CHAPTER 1

HOW IT WAS

This New Colossus (TNC), a 20-minute theater performance which I wrote, directed, designed, and performed, premiered on November 15th, 2019 at the Center for Performance Experiment (CPE) in Columbia, SC. This performance was the primary element of my Master of Fine Arts thesis, of which this document is a secondary supplement. A video recording of this performance is included in my ETD submission as a separate file and the complete performance script is included in this document's appendix. TNC was one of six solo performances on the show ticket; each graduate actor created and performed his or her own individual and discrete work.

TNC began in the spring of 2019 with a question: What would I have done had I been alive when communism was still a viable social-political model? Though I don't recall exactly what prompted my question (I've for years read about and studied the history of communism and eastern Europe) I do remember my instant reply: I would have enthusiastically signed on to the movement, only in time to become disaffected and forced to flee, perhaps under conditions of great danger to myself and my family. Imagining that flight is the seed from which *TNC* sprouted.

Throughout that spring and into early summer an image came to me again and again: a man in a hat with a briefcase, hopscotching through vertical columns of

streetlight poured in sequence down a darkened street. That image was never used in the final performance of *TNC*, but it established some of the aesthetics that stayed with me: Noirish light, 40's period clothing, a lone man going somewhere or perhaps from something. Was he an agent of the secret police, sent on business that would end in someone's death?

In early May 2019 I came across an article about the 200-year anniversary of Walt Whitman's birth. The article reminded me of the extent to which Whitman has become (and sought to become in his own lifetime) the bard of democracy, the national voice for the transcendent, utopian yearnings of a mythically grand, universal American soul.

At that moment, my image of the agent on midnight business met Whitman's notion of the universal American and I saw an alternative America where Whitman's lusty texts of love and democracy were banned by a repressive communist regime.

I wondered: what if this agent that I saw in my imagination was going home for the last time? What if he knew he was about to be arrested, tortured, killed? What would he do? And how would he do it? My interest in these "last actions" is continuous with a thread in my acting education that emphasizes communication with the whole body and the persuasiveness of an actor entirely focused on his or her given actions in the present moment.

I began to write the first draft of the *TNC* script in late July 2019 while training with Theatre Nohgaku (TN) in Tokyo, Japan. I traveled to Japan that summer to study Noh, a traditional form of Japanese theater that originated in the late 1400s. I was interested in learning how Noh actors develop their powerful stage presence. Tadashi

Suzuki, who was instructor to my instructors at USC, borrowed some Noh techniques and principles to develop his actor training program. I had therefore a familial as well as professional interest in learning more about the Noh tradition. The costs of my trip were partially supported by funds from the University of South Carolina SPARC grant program and the Catherine Friesen Memorial Scholarship Fund.

The last week of the Noh training program was dedicated to experimenting with Noh techniques to create new work (most Noh plays performed today were written 300-600 years ago). I used that week to start staging *TNC*. I had settled on the idea of a Grandfather and a Grandson as the principal characters. Very quickly I had a picture of the story: a Grandfather who helped advance a socialist revolution in the United States, only to be arrested and executed by resulting regime; and his Grandson, 40 years later, an experienced terrorist, a violent man unable to forgive his grandfather for so meekly accepting his fate. How would they speak to each other across time? Having never known my grandfathers I wanted to play with what it might be like to directly inherit the consequences of a family member's past actions. If my grandfather had been a political criminal, how would that have affected how I grew up? How would that change my sense of duty and my sense of self?

I began to think about the perversity of confessions. False and coerced confessions were standard practice in many of the Soviet states. How additionally cruel would it be to force people to leave their own confessions, without the presence of a human interrogator? What if the act of confessing, alone and uncompelled, was a means of punishment? What if the Grandson was forced to confess for his Grandfather's crimes?

What would it do to him if he was from birth considered a criminal, a non-person? Would he embrace that identity? Or reject it? I became intrigued by the idea of the Grandson choosing violence while the Grandfather disavowed it, creating dueling ideas about what a revolution requires.

The duality of the Grandfather/Grandson also fit in well with traditional Noh structural elements, where a lead actor reveals his or her character's true identity through conversation with a secondary actor. While the Grandfather/Grandson could not be on stage simultaneously as two spatial separated characters (this being a solo show, I was the only actor who would be on stage), I had an idea that the Grandfather might be writing a letter in his last moments, a letter to his descendants that contained the poetic DNA of his identity (The act of writing also doubled nicely with the Grandson's confession).

My initial experiments in Japan were successful. I found that by applying extraordinary attention to ordinary actions—opening a door, removing a coat, picking up the phone—I could begin to give the appearance of a man doing everything for the last time. Similarly, I found that applying Noh techniques such as conscious body structure, strong foot-to-floor connection, and precarious, forward-directed balance, helped to give greater power and focus to my actions. These techniques are similar to what we practice in my acting classes, and my ability to form at least a provisional understanding of their application was only possible because of my prior acting education.

When I returned to campus I had a solid rough structure to build upon. I immediately started to re-read Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1892). I had read it before two years prior and I knew that I would want to quote extensively from the text;

more, I wanted to soak myself in it so that it would fully saturate my artistic process and language. I also began to learn more about the history of leftist, socialist, and communist movements in the United States. William Z. Foster's *Toward Soviet America* (1932), Clara Bingham's *Witness to the Revolution* (2016), and Brian Burroughs' *Days of Rage* (2015) were my principal sources.

One humid August evening I settled in to enjoy Jean-Luc Godard's sci-fi neo-Noir film *Alphaville* (1965), in which the pulp detective Lemmy Caution faces off against the authoritarian computer intelligence Alpha-60. In the film, Caution is twice interrogated by Alpha-60. In these interrogation sequences, the camera is fixed closely on Caution's face, while an array of microphones and lights swirl about him like planets around a sun or hornets around a carcass.

Originally I wanted a similar setup for my own show: an angry cluster of needle-like, invasive listening machines hemming in the Grandson. I abandoned that idea for obvious practical reasons, but I nevertheless wanted my interrogation sequence to contain some of the technological claustrophobia captured in *Alphaville*. Ultimately Caution defeats Alpha-60 by describing an equation it cannot solve: love. Unable to quantify the unquantifiable, the computer self-destructs, bringing *Alphaville* down with it. Caution and his slinky *fatale* escape into the inky night.

That same month, the acting director of the United States Citizenship and Immigration services, Ken Cuccinelli, "revised" the famous words inscribed within the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired and your poor who can stand on their own two feet and who will not become a public charge," he said in an interview with National Public

Radio, snidely discarding the “huddled masses yearning to breathe free” of the original sonnet. That sonnet, I was reminded in hearing this news, is titled “The New Colossus.” I named my show after this poem, changing “the” to “this,” so as to both honor the author, Emma Lazarus, while implying that a second colossus, an America reborn, would come to replace the first colossus that had been felled in the authoritarian revolution of the play.

Many of the passages in the performance script owe their provenance to class writing exercises conducted by my professor, Robyn Hunt, and subsequent discussions with my colleagues, particularly the “57 seconds” bomb passage and the first half of the Grandfather’s letter to his wife. However, as we closed in on opening night, I discarded more text than I wrote, gradually narrowing the scope and content of the script. I spent many hours choreographing and drilling the closing dance sequence, which incorporated many Noh movements and principals, but was structured around a Whitman-like poem of instructions for building a new “colossus of democracy” from the raw materials—both soil and people—of America. I first wrote the poem, then created actions in response to the words and instructions. Though the audience never heard the poem that underscored the actions of the dance, knowing that each movement corresponded to a distinct action bolstered my confidence. Within the reality of the play, the silent poem transformed into motion became the way in which the Grandfather passed his message of unbent faith through time and beyond death.

It is difficult to judge whether the performance was “successful.” Our desire for a stable meaning of the term is defied by the mystery of the audience’s experience and the non-rational, non-linear power of art. That I would make this show, that it would be at the

very least workmanlike and well-considered, and that I would minimally fulfill the requirements of my program, none of that was ever in question. The question is whether it would be more than sufficient—whether it would be alive. My answer is that it stirred but it did not run. It never escaped the confines of my intent to run with a life beyond the scope of my limited self. It was *made*, through and through, and while that is a prerequisite to uncanny power is it not the same and is no substitute for art that outranges its creator's reach.

My work was sober, direct, and complicated. Structurally it offered little variation in its course and the differences between the characters of the Grandson and Grandfather were not sufficiently distinct. I think the work would have benefited from more spatial and kinetic differentiation between the Grandson and Grandfather segments. I believe this may have made it easier for the audience to see them as two people and understand that the two scenes were happening separated by a large measure of time and space. While it is impossible to say so definitely, I felt that the audience's attention began to drift in the second half of my performance. If the Grandfather's section had been more different than perhaps the audience's attention would have been refreshed by variation. However, that would have diminished my intention to show the Grandson and Grandfather in almost identical circumstances but making different decisions about how to cope with those circumstances. In a revised version of the play, I would keep both of them at the desk, confined by the moment and kept in a kind of camera-less closeup, but separate the two scenes in stage-time so that they wouldn't be played back-to-back.

For whom did I make this show, and what did I hope to achieve? While I wanted to test myself as an artist and lay the groundwork for the creation of a subsequent full-length piece, I wanted also to honor Whitman and call his presence into the room. We need him now, our bard of democracy, to remind us how awesome and unlikely our fragile compact remains. Did I expect to change minds, sway hearts? No, because such a linear formula—art in, change out—is impossible. It is, however, possible that an audience member might find themselves beside themselves and glimpse the world from an altered perspective. For audience members to become beside themselves *together* is our goal as performing artists, and while I do not feel that I accomplished that with my show in alone, I believe we six performers accomplished that collectively. Our shows were so divergent in theme, tone, pacing, and composition that the overall effect was tangibly transportive.

CHAPTER 2

HOW IT MIGHT BE

This New Colossus is unfinished. It was made to be unfinished. Midway through the process I realized that my performance would have to become an excerpt from some larger future work. What I wanted to do, what I felt, what animated me, could not all fit into a 20-minute sequence. *TNC* became “an excerpt” of its own perpetually lengthening shadow. One year after performing *TNC*, I am less clear than ever about how that shadow might take ultimate shape and definitive flesh. The virus is one complication, but because it is material and external, it is more surmountable than artistic uncertainty. I know that I was and continue to be unsatisfied with the piece as performed it; yet I also know it was sincere and true to my instinct. Could a fractional gesture have offered any more than a fractioned satisfaction? All I am certain of is that I would not perform the show I performed in 2019. If it is to return it will return much changed, and, I hope, more full. I have a few ideas about what those changes might look and feel like.

Looking back, I’m bothered by relative improbability of the alternative America that I proposed. I do not think that a socialist government could ever take firm root in the United States. Without the possibility of this conceit, can the show exist? Yet, these two facts are true: 1) The closest America has come to a socialist republic was in the 1930’s; and 2) in the last ten years socialism and socialist policies have again entered into the

American political imagination and are, for the first time since those 1930's, being considered seriously. It is the right time to ask whether the United States is ready for more communitarian politics. There's a hunger for it and I know future circumstances demand it. However, it is equally the right time to observe again that the United States is far more tempted by, and has a more established history with, far-right reactionary and theocratic politics. You have only look at the present (2020) US administration to know that this is so. That way will be the way we fall if we fall, not into secular communism.

Does the unlikeliness of *TNC*'s imagined context detract from the people, feelings, and ideas contained within it? How much does it distract an audience unfamiliar with US history and the history of US leftist movements? Popular culture has well prepared Americans to accept both subtle and outrageous alternate histories. However, I'm sobered to consider that my outlandish conceit of a United Socialist States of America might only be credible to deranged internet trolls who believe in a grand leftist conspiracy to end America as they know it (just ask your local South Carolina senator). Is this the way that I want to approach the perils and failures of last century's communitarian politics? It doesn't feel right—but I don't yet know the best alternative.

When I think about *TNC*'s next iteration I often don't see it as a solo stage performance, but as either a film or a theater piece with a cast of 3-5. Images come to me now and then, offering glimpses of possibilities: I see the Grandfather in his suit standing the slate-grey surf, a statue of resolve; I see a woman in a dark red dress between the Grandfather and the Grandson while radio static spills from a third man's mouth. A man at a table counting and arranging bullets. Walt Whitman picking up scattered papers (the

“leaves” of grass) from the floor and speaking to the audience. People trapped in columns of light, speaking into the dark, seeking each other through their voices.

I believe that expanding the cast to 3 or 5 actors would allow me to better capture the large historical scope that I desire and allow for more direct interactions between differing characters at different points in dramatic and historical time. I also want women in the play so that not only male figures are represented. Say, three male actors and two female. I would expanded the play (*This New New Colossus?*) to add a third time period, somewhere between 2030 and 2040, in addition to the alternative 1930’s and 1970’s. In this future a third character speaks his confession, but he appears unrelated to the Grandfather and Grandson. As he arranges bullets on his desk, he speaks this line from *Leaves of Grass*: “At 11am they began the burning of the bodies.” This third man is less direct and less clear in pursuit of his goals than either the Grandfather or Grandson. He’s seen something finish, end. And the answer he needs, where is it, from who does it come? I don’t know. But he says that line. And there *are* bodies to burn.

The casting might be like this: One actor to play the Grandfather, one to play the Grandson (though they could still be doubled; there is an advantage to each approach), one to play the radio man/third man/Walt Whitman; one woman plays the Grandfather’s wife, another plays a revolutionary who may or may not be contemporary with the Grandson, but is not bound by his familial history (these roles could also be doubled in one actor). She may be an antagonist to the Grandson. Even, perhaps, an interrogator? The extremist, charismatic presence of Bernadette Dohrn (one of, if not *the*, principal leaders of the leftist terrorist group the Weather Underground) features largely in the

history of the 70's counter-culture. She, like Whitman, is part of this story and I see her as the primary inspiration for the second female character in the expanded play.

I do not see myself acting in this expanded version of the show. I imagine that I would direct it instead. I want Walt Whitman to appear because he should be there and I want him to be there. I also believe that making the play more overtly fantastical will help the audience lift the disbelief of the conceit. If it is more obviously fabulous, they may more generously allow it to be true.

Why do I see one possible version as a film? I don't know; maybe only because I've been in that kind of film before—minimally rational, maximally splendid, totally outdoor. Could *TNC* work as that kind of film? If so, its first language would not be the words of the script but the juxtaposition of images sourced from the natural world. Its story would not be narrative and the majority of the spoken language would be in the form of a voice-over. Mostly it would be quoting from Whitman, layering his words over images and movements. I see it still as a performance of one actor. Maybe me, maybe not.

Unusually for me, *TNC* has very few links to specific places and landscapes, which is why I'm surprised that I'm seeing it as a partially outdoor film. However, one thing I know *TNC* is missing is Whitman's celebration of the American landscape and his vision of democratic fecundity in the very loam and roots of the continent. If you miss that you miss Whitman, and I think that's why my imagination directs me toward an outdoor film, or at least a film where we might welcome and greet the natural world as Whitman would have us greet it. If the Grandfather were mostly outdoors and the

Grandson mostly in the theater, it would create a contrast between the Grandson's confinement of violence and the Grandfather's liberation of love and hope.

REFERENCES

- Bingham, Clara. *Witness to the Revolution: Radicals, Resisters, Vets, Hippies, and the Year America Lost its Mind and Found its Soul*. Random House, 2016.
- Burrough, Bryan. *Days of Rage: America's Radical Underground, the FBI, and the Forgotten Age of Revolutionary Violence*. Penguin, 2015.
- Foster, William Z. *Toward Soviet America*. 1932. Balboa Island, 1961.
- Godard, Jean-Luc, Director. *Alphaville*. Andre Michelin Productions, 1965.
- Ingber, Sasha, and Rachel Martin. "Immigration Chief: 'Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor Who Can Stand On Their Own 2 Feet.'" National Public Radio, 13 Aug. 2019, www.npr.org/2019/08/13/750726795/immigration-chief-give-me-your-tired-your-poor-who-can-stand-on-their-own-2-feet
- Schor, Esther. "What the Trump Administration Gets Wrong About the Statue of Liberty." The New York Times, 14 Aug. 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/08/14/opinion/ken-cuccinelli-emma-lazarus.html?searchResultPosition=3.
- Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*. 1891. Library of America Paperback Classics, 2011.

APPENDIX A

THIS NEW COLOSSUS PERFORMANCE SCRIPT

An interrogation room with a table and chair. The GRANDSON sits at the table. He holds a single roofing nail in his right hand. There is a recording device on the table. The GRANDSON starts the device.

GRANDSON: Yes, I killed them. All the early bombs were mine: The soldiers at the dance; The nice people in the Pentagon bathroom; Judge Dohrn and her family. Of that I will confess.

Look, I was never an idealist. But because my grandfather is an official traitor I was born a suspect. I thought I'd be safe if I focused on something non-political, so I studied chemistry. But in the USSA any suspect is already convicted. So you wait in the trial of your ordinary days for the sentence that will surely come, one tomorrow or the next.

January 9th, 1970 I was late awake in an unwilling vigil. Mary had thrown off the sheets like usual and was lying naked on her right side, the last of the waning moonlight pooling in the curve of her waist. Melville called in raspy panic; tomorrow they would come at 3 am. I asked myself, what will you do? Let them take her like your grandfather let them take him, waiting alone in his apartment reading Leaves of Grass? I pressed my face to her back and heard in her heart the sound of my own heart turn: No--I would be no witness to her torture and death.

So when on the 10th three quick knocks and the iron ram battered open the door of 18 W. 11th St. we were already gone, and the ten agents of the People's Federal Police instead found 15 bricks of my homemade dynamite attached to an alarm clock set for 3:01 am. Or, it found them.

The Founders who recruited me knew I had less to lose than the listless children of the Party's bloated middle. "You're already an enemy of the state, so why not be a

useful one?" I never cared much for their notion of a greater America that once was, with free markets and free worship, though I used to yearn vaguely for the imagined liberties my grandparents knew. But what I really knew was practical. Like how to build bombs. The guys before me didn't know much; five of them blew themselves up in a townhouse in 68. Their bombs had no safety switch, no way to test whether what they'd made would work. Eventually I came up with a thing where I inserted a lightbulb, and when the bulb lit, the circuit was complete, and we were able to test things that way. If the light came on, I knew it worked.

Thursday February 12th, 1970 I placed bombs beneath two parked patrol cars outside New Lenin City's Brooklyn precinct headquarters, killing 12. Another eight detectives lost their legs. On Monday, March 3rd, I concealed a bomb in a hollowed-out law book and hid it above a ceiling tile in the second-floor hallway at the Centre Street building, about 125 feet from Commissioner Harkin's office. He survived, but 17 others working in city accounting on the floor below did not. On Friday, March 7th, five separate pipe bombs exploded simultaneously beneath the floor of the event hall at Fort Dix, killing 125 soldiers and their wives celebrating the successful end of the campaign against South Vietnam. For the first time, I packed the pipes with roofing nails. It would become my signature.

Late on June 9th, 1973 I was assembling bombs at a Founders saferoom at 217th St Park Terrace West when Frank burst in and said the PFP were on their way. It was a large cache of explosive that I had spent months preparing and rather than let them have it I rigged it all to blow. But as I was rushing out the door something...I was held up. I can't explain it, but in the 57 seconds before the explosion things began to change. Maybe it was knowing the room would soon be dust, soon nothing but dust and motion and splinters but...I could see the birds in the wallpaper begin to move and sing.

57 seconds and I couldn't turn away from the white wings of the paper birds just about to whisper off the blue. 57 seconds endless as an inhale never at the limit of its lungs, filling and filling for the breath that would blow this whole house down, blow it down the street, blow it through people's windows, blow it in their hair, their faces, coating them wholly in the hot fluttering dust of a thousand ashen birds spewed out in the rooky din of 73 pounds of ammonium nitrate I kept in the fridge

behind the milk. 57 seconds till Julia and Cathy above would swim in the darkness of the floor's absence, arms up high in flying made of falling, and plunge into the gasp.

But 57 seconds left and I knew none of this that would come, the 57 seconds after, the 57 minutes, the 57 hours of the first days of a decade underground. One hundred twenty-three seconds in and all I knew was that the birds were alive and I could hear their beating wings. 33 seconds and I remembered the five flights of stairs to go and I was gone. I made it four before the bomb questioned all the architecture of a solid and brought me to the ground in a liquid spill of a concrete stream. Outside the debris rapped dissonance on the parked cars' roofs. I staggered through the silence, a long silence, before came the hunt of the siren's distant wail. The light of the fire cast long living shadows on the road before me. In the light of the charnel dawn I saw scraps and pieces of people: an arm with no hand, a shredded torso, a leg without a foot, bristled all with roofing nails. Behind me, I could hear the pit speak. "Smoke," it said, and "marrow."

The GRANDSON stops the recorder. At some point in the following speech he places it in the desk drawer and closes it.

GRANDSON: [*As if remembering with difficulty*] All the prisoners in the prisons, the murdered and the murderers, all the righteous and the wicked, the interrogator, the judge, the executioner, I see myself in the ways of them, they are not vile anymore than I am vile; we hardly know ourselves we are into one another so grown. Grandfather, how did you face this?

The GRANDSON stands, faces upstage, and puts on GRANDFATHER's coat and hat as the lights shift. The GRANDFATHER returns. The GRANDFATHER looks to the desk, and moves the chair beside it. He looks to the door. He goes to the desk and places his hat on it. He opens the drawer, removing Leaves of Grass. There is a letter tucked inside of it. He sits, opens the book, places the letter on the desk, and reads from the book.

GRANDFATHER: [*Reading*] 'Then with the knowledge of death as walking one side of me, And the thought of death close walking the other side of me, And I in

the middle as with companions, and as holding the hands of companions, I fled forth to the hiding receiving night that talks not, Down to the shores of the water, the path by the swamp in the dimness, To the solemn shadowy cedars and the ghostly pines so still.

From the deep secluded recesses, From the fragrant cedars and the ghostly pines so still, Came the carol of the bird.’

He places the book on the desk. His fingers linger on the cover.

GRANDFATHER: My fears come to me days and nights and go from me again, but they are not the me myself.

The Grandfather sits, breaths, readies himself. He takes the letter in his hand.

GRANDFATHER: My love, if you’re reading this, then it is certain I am dead. How I wish I could have said goodbye in my own voice and held you the last time with my own hands. But if I die here they will not follow you there.

He places the letter back on the desk.

Steinman and Tarver will get you to the old loyalists in Boston. There will be a car waiting for you there, along with the documents you need for the ferry from Bar Harbour. Bergmunsen will accompany you on the drive, playing the role of your sister. McHenry will meet you in Yarmouth. You can trust him.

Again you will know exile, our kingdom of perpetual exit we kept so long together. I wish I could return there with you--where we knew if not our greatest happiness than at least our deepest peace.

That peace, our peace, ended the day the wireless fell silent. Odd how I felt time backwards; not that I noticed the wireless was suddenly silent, but that I suddenly noticed how long it had been silent--and I felt then the future in the absence. When the sound did come back there was no voice, not at first, only a strange, regular clicking, a turning, almost like a clock ticking but more like a hollow thrumming,

thrumming, thrumming us toward some place we did not know but to which we had no choice but to go. I don't remember what Foster finally said that morning. I don't remember what you said, though we argued, whether I should go back. You never really told me what you thought. Maybe you wanted me to think of it only as an opportunity, never a risk. Here it was: the revolution we had fought for together now calling us back to the country we thought had closed to us forever. What would Debs have done, you said, with such a chance as this?

But at what cost? Over Roosevelt's body? That night in the four hours before the ferry I dreamed of the Statue of Liberty. In my dream she turned away from looking out over the Atlantic and instead faced in to an America that had changed behind her back. Long this colossus superb with lambent eyes accosted me, until finally she said in the words of Whitman: Chant me the poem that comes from the soul of America, chant me the carol of victory, and sing me before you go the song of the throes of Democracy. But I could not speak and I woke then to the ship's horn piercing the dim recesses of my throttled dreaming.

I know now it was not America that the old colossus saw, nor was it America that I returned to hoping to lead in one last revolution. How arrogant we were to think we had come to the end of our history. It was all lies; America is never a finished place. I'm sorry I couldn't do what I promised you, to build a country that could accept all the love you are made to give. Only a land free of slavery, free of racism, free from hunger deserves you. Only America as it is destined to be deserves you. Failing to bring that about, in the rare now of our love, is my only regret. Judith, this is not America we have seen, for the real America we cannot yet see, living as it always does ahead in the what may come, the Republic of one day shall it be. As an ideal, it can never be realized. As an ideal, it can always be realized, one tomorrow or the next. And to my son, remember Whitman and turn, turn your undying face to where the future, greater than all the past, is swiftly, surely preparing for you. I see flashing that this America is you and me, its power, people, testimony, are you and me, its crimes, lies, thefts, defections, are you and me, past, present, future, is you and all. Do not turn your back on those whose would destroy you. Embrace them, foolishly. They are you, for all the multitudes of violence are contained in this nation's soul as they are contained in your soul,

they are comrades of one body with all with the multitudes of love, rejecting none, permitting all.

The GRANDFATHER finishes the letter. As he speaks the following invocation he places it back inside the book and seals the message to the future inside.

In the hour of my death I hear now the poem the colossus of dream commanded.
In my bones, the very marrow chants it. I will remember toward you our future
gleaming, democracy always returning, this new colossus ever approaching.

The GRANDFATHER dances the dance for this new colossus. At the end of the dance, a door opens upstage. The GRANDFATHER crosses upstage to face it. He glances at the book on the table. He adjusts his suit. Just as he is about to move, the lights rush out and leave us in darkness.