

# The Waste

## Note

The Waste uses some of the form of greek theatre in that the chorus speaks in poetic form while the other characters normally speak in prose. Originally live music was performed by a percussion ensemble.

## Extracts

### **End or Beginning ...**

Jester - (*awaking*) Ah yes ..... yes .... Now where? No .... it wasn't .... or was it? Perhaps? ... No ..... Was it over there, or over here? (*Remembers the pieces of paper sticking out of his costume and selects one.*) That's it ..... 5 pages to the right, then to the left - straight ahead - got it! (*Picks up a half eaten hamburger in a wrapper. Eats the hamburger.*) Mmm. Only two weeks old. But that's not the point - this is! (*Holds up wrapper.*) See these things on it? They're called - letters. Do you know? MacDon ... Don't. Don't what? Eat it? Seems alright. Let's try this (*takes a mouthful of wrapper*). Seems alright. Not quite as good as the other bit, but ver-ry similar. On this (*holds up another wrapper*) there are - words. See, you can eat them. Wait a sec (*rushes to another part of the Tip*).

This is it? Do you know what this is? Do you, sir? Have you seen one, madam? It's called a ne-ws papper. And do you know what's in it? More words. Yes, I learnt about them. (*In a whisper*) No one else around here knows that these mean something. The Queen doesn't like it - sssh! But I know, oh yes. And I know if you join them together they make sentences. And you know what? These sentences and the words in them mean something. Here, I'll show you.

See this newspaper? It's called the S-o-o-o-n. The Sun. Yes, look, look at this bit. (*Reads*) Twon-twenty twenty, Prim - Prime-minister losses the will to speck. See, he didn't have anything to say any more. And look at this one! Jan Two Oh Oh One. Mill... millun... ium dom... dome collapses. It must have been a toy, like our Toymaker makes and a child stepped on it. And - and it just broke, you know! Like, like one of the Toymaker's toys! (*Laughs then serious again*). See these words mean things. Just like those other words.

*(Rushes to another part of the Tip)* Here's another thing I found. Look, almost undamaged. How long has it lasted? That's what I want to know. It says *(with difficulty)* Off 'ed, off head. No, it doesn't seem right? *(Gives it to member of audience)* What does it say? Of-sted Report!<sup>1</sup> I see *(reads)*. All skols failed. See. I see, see. But I don't. I know it means something, but what? Nothing at all because I don't understand and there's no one else. *(Tries eating it but spits it out)*. You can't even eat it, so what use is it? Schools failed. Whatever schools were they didn't work. See what the Ancients have left us. They say its them, ages upon ages ago who created the Tip - but they're gone - past.

But the people are still here - because of the Queen. I've always tried to look after her but she's always ill. Can I make her laugh? I could once, but not now. Specially not since the Big Tippers are visiting less and less. That's how we live, see. They dump it over the fence.

Once they came every day  
But for weeks now nothing  
The passers-on warned us  
"Do not cross the Fence.  
Stay behind and be safe."  
So no one does or ever has.

But I have seen  
Through dark cage wires  
The black wall line  
On a distant horizon  
Its shadow broken by  
Glimmering light flecks  
Reducing over time.

But days have fled  
Since even one appeared.  
And tippers no longer come  
Bringing food for all the Tip.

A dying land, a dying Queen  
And what can I do  
To make her laugh?  
What use a Jester  
Who can't cure tears?

*Breaks down crying.*

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<sup>1</sup> Relates to UK Schools inspection regime. Can be adapted to other National Institutions.

## **Fantasy and Reality ...**

*The Queen arrives with her Court and seems determined to remain in control, although as the scene develops her anxiety over her future intensifies and, while pretending to be happy with the Toymaker's distractions, finds it difficult to retain control over her actions.*

General - Your Majesty is better? (Queen nods) Then perhaps it is time to take control of the dark forces that have invaded our midst.

Queen - Not now, General. Now I need distracting. Toymaker?

Toymaker - Yes, your Majesty?

Queen - Have you had any new ideas that could please me?

Toymaker - (nervously) Indeed, Majesty. Images of such brilliance they illuminate the mind with ... with light.

Queen - Yes, well, let's hope so. Now the Jester is otherwise engaged.

Physician - Your Majesty, perhaps you've misjudged him. You saw what happened.

Queen - Will you desert me too?

Physician - No, but it seems as if there is a cure ...

Queen - Good. The Toymaker will provide the cure.

General - And then to business with the enemy?

Queen - Yes, yes. Now, Toymaker, the first thing I require is shelter. The sky is darkening. The rest I leave to you.

Toymaker - Thank you, yes, your Majesty. First a house.

*Claps her hands and a group of Pickers make a human sculpture of a house around the Queen.*

*And now, Majesty, perhaps you would like to look in my magic mirror so you can see yourself clearly.*

*Claps her hands again and a second group of Pickers lines up across the set. The Queen is escorted to the first in the line, strikes a regal pose that is mirrored down the line of Pickers.*

Queen - Impressive, Toymaker. I'm not so ill then.

*This idea is contradicted by the image of the Queen stumbling and being supported by the Physician and General*

Toymaker - Of course not, your Majesty. Perhaps some new clothes, a cloak in the latest fashion would help?

*Claps hands and the first group of Pickers move into position and make a human sculpture of a cloak. The Queens links arms with the sculpture and it moves with her.*

Queen - Excellent. Fit for a queen.

Toymaker - And some rings and other jewels, Majesty.

*Claps hands and another group of Pickers parade in front of the Queen, pretending to put rings on her fingers, necklaces round her neck, precious objects at her feet as she moves around.*

Physician - If I might, your Majesty, as one of your advisors ....

Queen - Later. What next, Toymaker?

Toymaker - *(caught up in her own fantasy)* A feast, your Majesty, with rich foods, spices from the ... Orient. Fruits from faraway places ....

*Toymaker again claps hands and one group of Pickers forms a table and chairs while the other serves food.*

Physician - Can I just ...

Toymaker - And now a dance to entertain you, your Majesty, while you eat ...

*Claps hands and Pickers pair off and waltz around the Queen.*

Queen - Excellent. Physician and General, you dance too.

Physician - I think, Majesty, that I'd rather not. If you ...

Queen - Nonsense. Begin!

General - C'mon then darlin'. Let's give it a fling.

*The General roughly grabs the Physician and does a rough parody of a tango. He squeezes the Physician too tight, stamps on her toes. They move down stage.*

Physician - *(to audience)* There are times, and this is one, when I really do regret the Jester's absence! Ahh!

*The General swings the Physician around roughly and pulls her downstage, drops her on the floor and bows. During this the Stranger and Jester quietly arrive and observe from the side of the set.*

General - So what's it like dancing with a real man for once?

Physician - *(still on floor)* If you'll just give me a few days to recover I'll think of a suitable response. At present a rowing expression comes to mind; something you put oars in.

Queen - *(still seated)* Well done, General.

Physician - *(now annoyed)* Queen, if I can speak at last, there does seem to be one slight problem with all this finery, a small oversight, no doubt, but one which I think I ought to draw your attention to ...

Queen - Yes?

Physician - It doesn't exist. None of this is real.

Toymaker - *(confused)* I ... er ... oh well if ...

Queen - Do you think I'm mad?

Jester - *(arrives on set)* Queen. It's a pleasure to see you better *(back in old role)*. Can I help? Knock, knock?

Queen - *(coldly)* The door's closed, barred, nailed shut. In short, your presence is not required. *(Haughtily)* You may go.

*The Jester is not prepared for such a reaction but dejectedly goes back to the Stranger's side. The Queen's mime continues with the Pickers combing the Queen's hair, doing her nails and makeup, adjusting her clothes, etc ...*

Jester - *(to Stranger)* I thought, for a moment, but ... she isn't better.

Stranger - Time to make a change?

Jester - We must do something for her. Look at her. Completely infatuated by these illusions. It's not the Toymaker's fault. Is now the time?

Stranger - Yes it is time. Watch carefully where these illusions end.

*The Stranger raises her arm and gestures to the Queen, and the Jester leans forward to look. Both remain still in these positions. The light darkens and in slow movement the Queen's chair and helpers melt away from her while a group of Pickers form the initial mirror sculpture.*

Queen - Toymaker, what is going on, did you order this?

Toymaker - *(trying to intervene)* No, Majesty, and they won't respond to my control. I can't stop them.

Queen - The mirror, what's happening?

*The Queen is scared now as she slowly approaches the mirror. At first the reflection of herself is neutral but then it reflects a variety of negative emotions: anger, fear, despair, hate; and then shows the Queen as ill, bowed down, holding her side, with cramps that bend her over and writhing on the floor. All of which, as the mirror creates the image, the Queen reflects in her actions. The parts of the mirror behind the first image act as echoes as they go diagonally up stage.*

Queen - Help me.

Toymaker - I can't. I ... there are no illusions left.

Stranger - *(moving to Queen lying on the floor)* That's right, Toymaker, none left. None for you and none for the Queen. It's time to find reality.

## **The Final Struggle ...**

General - Stop all this. Are you are blind? While you've been indulging yourselves, the enemy from without has grown stronger. Now is the time to fight. The Queen has lost her mind, been driven mad by the Stranger here.

Jester - That's not true. Why don't you open your eyes?

General - Oh my eyes are open. Look around you. What do you see?

*Everyone, apart from the Stranger, turns and are scared to see they are surrounded by dark figures slowing advancing - the Anti-chorus. The General is triumphant.*

So now you'll have to fight - to survive. Then we'll deal with the Stranger.

*The Anti-chorus advances through the audience on to the set as the Pickers take up defensive positions. Pair fights break out. The Pickers are being beaten and the Jester is separated from the Stranger trying to stop the fighting. He notices a group of the Anti-chorus have surrounded the Stranger and are pulling her down. He jumps to intervene and fights off all the Anti-chorus pulling her free into his arms. The Veil suddenly arrives too. He stops again and this time helps, throwing off the Anti-chorus with ease. The scene is chaotic when suddenly the Barrower arrives.*

Barrower - (shouts) Stop!

*The action freezes and the General jumps in surprise.*

General - Ahh! What? It's you!

Barrower - Yes. (To Jester) No need to surprise you anymore. Hello, Stranger, nearly there?

Stranger - Nearly there.

Barrower - (to General) Now young man, it seems to me you have taken rather a lot on yourself (takes him by the arm to centre set). So, shadows. You wish to make the people afraid of shadows.

General - (trying to break free) These are not shadows and I am not afraid of them.

Barrower - And yet I smell your fear, your paranoia. You would try to destroy all the Stranger and Jester have done to change things for the better.

General - The Stranger is on the side of these dark forces and has tricked the Jester who is, after all, a fool.

Barrower - Takes one to know one, eh? And yet I've brought you a gift, too. In my barrow, Physician, would you be so kind.

Physician - Of course, anything to help the General. Will it be, uncomfortable? I hope he won't let me - us - down again?

Barrower - Ah, Physician, I see you've learned much too. Unfortunately for some people the truth is always uncomfortable.

*The Physician rummages in the barrow and finds a large lamp. S/he holds it up in surprise, then smiles, as do the Stranger and Jester. The Physician willingly brings the lamp to the Barrower, who holds it up before the General.*

Now then leader of men  
It must be clear  
What this torch does!

It shines its light  
And eats the shadows  
Its rays remove  
Those fears of things  
That seem to be  
But are not.

General, for such as you I'll dispense with long, scientific explanations that might involve inference of the complex configuration of concave and convex lens; the refraction possible by focussing light on prismic mirrors to amplify the beam and keep it within tight parameters.

*The Jester is just about to intervene.*

Or else the Jester might rightly say this torch has got a powerful beam that brightens a big area. So I won't. What I will say is, General, turn this torch on the shadows, like this.

*The Barrower thrusts the torch into the General's hands and helps him point it at the shadow Anti-chorus. As he does so they melt into the set. He turns the lamp with greater and greater enthusiasm until all the shadows have disappeared. More white light added to set as this happens.*

General - They're not there. The Stranger was right.

*The Queen enters, still polishing her mirror.*

Queen - Nearly there, nearly there. The reflection is beginning to show (*glances at General*). Ah yes, you've been hunting shadows too long. It's time you started considering the security and welfare of real people.

Toymaker - Yes, just another illusion (*laughs nervously*) if rather a scary one.

Physician - (*severely*) And so unnecessary, too.

*The Queen has stopped polishing for a second, sees the Court and Pickers are exhausted and motions for them to sit. All do, except the Veil, who remains facing the audience and the General, who can't believe what has happened.*

Queen - That's better. I think, General, you had better relax too, you need a rest.

General - I'm, I'm sorry about that. I guess ... Yes ... I'll do better now.

Stranger - Well, Queen, although a little tired your Court is looking a lot better ...

Jester - Wait a moment. The Veil ... he's stopped (*rushes over*). Are you alright?  
(*Veil slowing unwraps himself*)

Veil - Knock, knock?

Jester - (*excited*) Who's there?

Veil - Boo.

Jester - Boo who?

Veil - There's no need to cry about it, I'm home.

Jester - And you're speaking?

Veil - Yes, there's nothing to avoid any more. Here I am. I've been travelling too long without seeing or meeting ... anyone.

Stranger - Welcome home, Veil, no need to hide yourself from the world.

Veil - It's funny. The Tip seems cleaner now.

Stranger - No more shadows but it could get even cleaner.

Queen - Yes. Veil, and all of you Pickers, go for a while.

*The Queen dismisses the Court, Veil and Pickers. They exit.*