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Cast of Characters

PIP
QUIP
TRIP
LIP

Assorted characters:

BARTENDER
REDHEAD
KEN O'BRIEN
DOCTOR
NURSE
BAR PATRONS
STUDENTS

Setting

Stage 1: A woman's womb

Stage 2: Various locales in Cambridge and Boston, Massachusetts

Production Notes

The entire play is cast in the context of the womb of a woman. As such, the general effect is that of a cavern in incessant pulse and throb. The cavern gives at the wings to two large tubes that extend out of sight. These are the oviducal funnels. In the centre of the cavern, buoyed, as it were, within a large, transparent à la plastic placental bubble, is a perfectly formed baby, in classic foetal position. The bubble ripples on the inside, the effect being that of an aqueous medium—the child, the wisp of a boat at sea. A translucent diorama forms the backdrop and lining of the womb. Behind the diorama is suspended a screen upon which silent video scenes, integral to the conduct of the play, will be projected.

The womb and its environs will be deemed as occupying the first stage (Stage 1), and the screen the second (Stage 2), for purposes of subsequent description.

It has not escaped the playwright's attention that effects on Stage 2 may be enhanced considerably via computer animation.

That said, a production group could also choose to perform the scenes on Stage 2 live rather than on video. This may require dropping the subway scene (Act I, Scene 9). As for the walk into Harvard Yard (Act I, Scene 7), one might use silhouettes of passing folk and facades, with adroit employment of back-lighting.

Acknowledgements

Dedicated to two doyens of biological research who remain inspirations: Professor David Haig and Professor Stephen Jay Gould.

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

—Isaiah 1:18

Because he slew me not from the womb; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb to be always great with me. Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?

—Jeremiah 20:17-18

A thought is like a child inside our body. It has to be born. If it dies within you, part of you dies, too!

—Jerome Lawrence and Robert
E. Lee, *Inherit the Wind*

THOUGH THEY BE RED

a play about consilient, evolutionary, and meta-biology
by John Mathew

ACT I

Scene 1

(Darkness. A male treble voice, preferably Received Pronunciation [British], offstage, recites the following poem:)

OFFSTAGE. I saw my brother for the first time only incidentally;
Indeed, had not the boarding call been premature,
We may never have met at all. As it were,
I, roused from dreamful slumber, made the counter
In a flash and “False alarm,” he said, and smiling,
“The resemblance is uncanny.” I did not smile.
Be careful of bystanders even if they are
Your spitting image, even if they are
The substance of the dream and
Every dream that has possessed
Your shadow land. “I know,”
He said, and nodded.
“I’ve watched you hour on spring on June,
Asleep and knowing all the butler and the baker
Saw in Pharaoh’s cell.”
It occurred to me that here
There never had been
Anyone else but him and me,
And logic held that I had won
The butler. “There’s your call.
Remember me to Mum, say Mum first,
Get the start correct.” We
Did not embrace, and yet I would
The gaze had lingered
To infinity. All at once,
A tumult seized me
In the passage,
And a doctor,
Playing Pharaoh,

Now as then,
 And who had killed him,
 Drew me out,
 And gurgling,
 To a breast.

(Ear-shattering scream.)

(Lights up, second stage.)

(Another scream.)

(Silence.)

(The screen comes alive. A woman (TRIP) is lying on her bed, clutching at a sheet, face contorted in pain. A man, ostensibly her husband, holds out a hand to one of hers, while in the other he clasps a telephone receiver pressed close to his mouth.)

(Sudden fadeout.)

(Lights up, Stage 2, almost immediately.)

(Kaleidoscope of scenes—lady (again, TRIP) on stretcher, hospital attendants in sterile gowns between sterile walls.)

(Cut to Ob/Gyn room. The lady is gasping. A doctor shakes his head with a slight smile of polite regret.)

(Fadeout.)

(Lights up, Stage 1, careering crazily as neon lights in a discotheque.)

QUIP. *(Coolly:)* False alarm.

(Spotlight on a young boy, circa fifteen, reclining comfortably against a large artery, smiling down a trifle sardonically. His position renders his face half in view, half in shadow, the silhouette framing an odd distortion of his eclipsed side. This is QUIP. He is slight, raven-black haired and of a neutral wheat complexion that can render him at once Indian, Colombian, Mexican, other Latino, Pacific Islander east of New Zealand, Italian, Mulatto, Arab, or even Ethiopian.)

(A shaft of light from the left wing, brilliant sodium, illumines the baby's face and catches his eyes—wide open in terrified

unfamiliarity, for the briefest of instants, then darts off, meteor-like, into oblivion.)

(Immediately, another light comes up downstage, behind the bubble where a second boy, PIP, not dissimilar to the first, stands. He takes a step forward, then another, to come around the bubble, adjacent to the seated boy, though at some distance. In his eyes, we see both apprehension and inquiry.)

QUIP. *(Cheerfully:)* But there. I figured that might wake you up. Vesuvius erupting before her time, eh!

PIP. *(Uncertainly:)* Hello.

QUIP. *(Dramatically:)* And he speaks! Fancy that. Nine whole bleeding months, and I finally face the potential of making your acquaintance at the fag end of the third trimester.

PIP. *(Startled:)* I beg your pardon?

QUIP. *(In mock apology:)* Oh, I'm sorry. Didn't mean to spring the crude oil on you this soon. It's the trouble with double entendres, you know—so low down, so eminently crass. But not to worry. You haven't been an unsuspecting catamite. Not mine, anyway. And I haven't seen anyone else here in the time.

PIP. *(Slowly:)* Where am I?

QUIP. *(Peremptorily:)* Where are you? Prison.

PIP. Prison?

QUIP. *(Casually:)* Death row. A mausoleum. A tomb with a view. Take your pick.

PIP. *(Nervously:)* And who might I...

QUIP. ...be, or have the honour of addressing? Which?

PIP. The latter.

QUIP. *(Sardonically:)* Ah, the latter. How politic. How courteous. *(Leaping down from his vantage position, to the obvious consternation of his interlocutor:)* How positively precocious! You do realise you're human, of course. You're meant to be dependent. Altricial. And yet here you are, with the spring of a gelding, up and on your way. What a miracle that ontogeny recaps so distant a phylogeny. Quip!

PIP. (*Nonplussed:*) Quip?

QUIP. You asked who I was, as I recall.

PIP. (*Hastily:*) Yes. Yes, of course.

QUIP. Or were you looking for something more elaborate? The Ghost of Christmas never to come, perhaps?

PIP. (*Fearfully:*) A ghost?

QUIP. (*With a careless sweep of his hand:*) Oh, my dear fellow, please. You overreact. Surely you cannot but see that you are likewise.

PIP. Me?

QUIP. But of course. For all the allusion to self, you haven't the faintest idea about who you are. Do you?

PIP. (*Hesitantly:*) Well...

QUIP. (*Pointing at the baby in the bubble, now shrouded in darkness:*) There.

PIP. (*Staring:*) That's me?

QUIP. In the corporeal. An unlikely spectre. But it's true. He's quite alive, actually, though you'd never know to see it. Think of it as hibernation. In the meantime, the essential you are out here with me. You should be delighted.

PIP. Where's your corporeal?

QUIP. My bodily counterpart? My buoyant bob to which I should by rights be astrally spindle-fibred? He isn't here.

PIP. (*Curiously:*) So how...are you?

QUIP. Here, or is that a constitutional question?

PIP. Here.

QUIP. (*Swiftly:*) My, my, the courtesy was merely skin deep! You seem to object. Electrons must occupy the maximum orientation in space, mustn't they.

PIP. (*Embarrassed:*) I didn't mean...

QUIP. *(Raising a finger to his lips:)* But soft you now, the fair Ophelia...and look.

(As he speaks, he turns and points at the screen behind him past the bubble and diorama. PIP turns to look. The screen comes alive, and projects the effect of a huge mirror, against which the reflection of the faces of the two boys, next to each other, undulate, as in a pool.)

QUIP. *(Staring into the reflection:)* You know, the resemblance is really quite uncanny.

(PIP turns his head and looks sidelong at QUIP, who continues to look into the mirror image.)

PIP. Who are you?

QUIP. Ah yes! Conjure up in your mind, then, a Pharaoh, holding in thrall all the land of middle and upper Egypt. Let us assign to him, for argument's sake, a name as arbitrary as say, Rameses! Let us assume he maintains a dungeon. In this dungeon he has three prisoners. One is a butler, one a baker, one a dreamsayer. Let us take the dreamsayer out from under the block—he is the objective portender of fate. He tells one that he shall be restored to his status of cupbearer at Pharaoh's side. He tells the other, whose dream reveals a borne basket from which the birds peck bread, that his head shall be raised from off his body upon which the self-same hordes will feed. He is vindicated in his diagnosis, and the baker, suitably decerebrated, is transformed into a mummy.

PIP. *(Helplessly:)* How do you mean? Who are you?

QUIP. *(Pleasantly:)* A mummy in Mummy. Who are you?

(PIP points uncertainly at the baby. QUIP shakes his head.)

Not yet, you're not.

(PIP looks back, in utter bafflement. QUIP smiles.)

(The lights begin to dim.)

(Delicately:) Perhaps the cupbearer. But speculation is premature. As I recall, it did not serve me well.

(Lights out.)

Scene 2

(The womb, unchanged. Stage 2, dark. PIP is downstage, far left, crouched in similar foetal position to the baby. QUIP, from mid-stage, regards him insouciantly, two fingers (middle and index) across his lips as he blows through them then draws them away, as if holding a cigarette. The effect of a ring of breath vapour would be useful.)

QUIP. He has a parasite.

PIP. *(Not looking up:)* He's me.

QUIP. *(Imperturbably:)* You have a parasite, then.

PIP. How do you know?

QUIP. I saw it come in. Ages back. Little flatworm in a cyst, venturing out from Mummy's stomach and slipping through circulation, inexorably making its way to you. *(Mockingly:)* Ah, the wonders of physiology. If you ever get the opportunity, you should deliver a lecture on the subject. Incontrovertible evidence of maternal inheritance. A strictly uniparental legacy.

PIP. *(Looking up:)* I'm bursting.

QUIP. Stretch your legs, and you won't feel like watering the worm garden so badly.

(Growing spotlight on foetus in placenta indicating actual movement—a relaxation from close crouch.)

PIP. *(Wondering:)* I did that.

QUIP. Well done. *(Blows out another ring of vapour.)* How do you feel?

PIP. Not so bad.

QUIP. *(Peremptorily:)* Good. What of the intrauterine environment? Is it cosy?

PIP. It serves.

QUIP. Quite. Do you tend to specialise in the laconic?

PIP. *(Pointedly:)* I haven't had much of an opportunity to hold forth, have I?

QUIP. Touché. What do you think they'll call you?

PIP. Who?

QUIP. (*Inclining his head:*) On the outside.

PIP. I haven't...

QUIP. (*Finishing for him:*) ...the foggiest? Nor have I, actually. The last I heard, they were thinking of Charles. Earlier it was James. Sort of Stuart-bound. Very unoriginal. There was a time they were even thinking of Sally.

PIP. (*Crestfallen:*) Sally?

QUIP. Yes, after Charles and James, it is a bit of comedown, isn't it? Sally.

PIP. (*Suddenly realising:*) But that's a girl's name.

QUIP. Spot on. This was before the ultrasound was done.

PIP. Why?

QUIP. (*Pleasantly:*) To sex you, dear twerp. Sigh for sore eyes, but it did get rid of Sally.

PIP. (*Fervently:*) Wonderful.

QUIP. You're lucky it wasn't amniocentesis. You'd have been disturbed a darned sight earlier.

PIP. Is it a lot worse?

QUIP. It's the closest you'll come to circumcision when you're here. Oh, that's on the cards, by the way, if they decide to have you. Pro patri America.

PIP. (*Anxiously:*) Won't they?

QUIP. (*Carelessly:*) Have you? Mild aversion to guessing games aside, very probably.

PIP. (*Looking at QUIP timidly:*) Charles, then.

QUIP. Oh, bugger that. It'll change tomorrow in the spirit of endearing perfidy. I think we ought to go with Pip.

PIP. Pip?

QUIP. Purely functional. Mummy's great with child. You're the great expectation. The expectation is you'll pip the matrix. Connection established?

PIP. (*Doubtfully:*) I suppose so. It's reasonable.

QUIP. (*Pleased:*) Perfect. Just as it should be. I see you are deferring very sensibly to the judgement of the primoconceptus.

PIP. (*Shortly:*) Humouring.

QUIP. Little pipsqueak learns quickly.

PIP. (*Impudently:*) Should I credit the teacher?

QUIP. Careful. You don't have a standard of reference to make a call on that one.

PIP. I'll make do as I go along.

QUIP. How courageously anastrophic! A genius in the making.

PIP. (*Curiously:*) Do they amount to the same thing?

QUIP. What?

PIP. Imagination and intellect?

QUIP. What do you think?

PIP. (*After a moment:*) Possibly.

QUIP. Wrong. One gets you into the Ivy League. The other leaves you profoundly disenchanted by twenty.

PIP. How are you so sure?

QUIP. (*Shortly:*) I'm twenty.

(Lights out.)

Scene 3

(Darkness. Sound of moaning, of very obvious lovemaking. Lights slowly come up on second stage. Projected on the screen, we see the posterior of a man as he proceeds to enter TRIP, whose legs trail around his, and, save for her face, in a moment of eye-shut passion, is otherwise unseen. It is also possible to do this scene without recourse to a visual perspective, the imagery conveyed through the sound and a rippling diorama.)

(Lights up and careering on Stage 1, commensurate with the movement on Stage 2. QUIP is standing against the diorama, near a little hole, through which he peers. PIP, plainly startled, is holding on tightly to an artery, atop which he is seated.)

QUIP. *(Sardonically:)* Sending his driver home, he is.

PIP. What are you doing?

QUIP. Watching your father do Mummy. Want to see?

PIP. I'd rather not.

QUIP. It's a bird's-eye view. Straight through the navel. Or as you might say, the belly button.

PIP. It's indecent.

QUIP. *(Looking at him mockingly for an instant, then turning his attention back to the activity on Stage 2:)* So we have a moralist in our midst. How did that happen? Was it imbued into the Y chromosome? Because I don't have it, and I know for certain that Mummy doesn't. Listen.

(Sound effect of a cascade, of a growing waterfall.)

PIP. *(Awed):* What is it?

QUIP. The river sperm spilling over its banks. Count of 20 million lambs to the slaughter.

PIP. Why?

QUIP. You haven't happened yet.

(On Stage 2, the man collapses, spent, onto TRIP, who draws her legs confidently up towards his hips.)

(Lights out on Stage 2.)

PIP. *(Softly:)* That was scary.

QUIP. I know. Did it hurt?

PIP. Yes.

QUIP. Do you understand it?

PIP. No.

QUIP. Nor always I. It's unpredictable. You never know for days on end, nothing happens, you relax your vigil, stop looking, and suddenly you feel the movement, and you know that somewhere out there, there's a rhino and he's tearing, he's tearing at your stomach.

PIP. *(Wondering:)* Even now?

QUIP. You get used to it. It's a great education.

PIP. What do you mean?

QUIP. You learn things when you watch. You'll see.

PIP. What possible advantage...

QUIP. I made a move on a woman once.

PIP. *(Shocked:)* I beg your pardon.

QUIP. *(Simply:)* It's true.

PIP. *(Interested in spite of himself:)* What happened?

QUIP. She never knew. She didn't wake up.

PIP. How come?

QUIP. Oh, I was awfully careful. She didn't feel a thing.

PIP. And then?

QUIP. She pipped the matrix. Successfully, I might add.

PIP. She wasn't...

QUIP. Oh, yes, she was. Our sister. Half, actually. You don't tend to do much better than a relatedness coefficient of 0.25 in this womb.

PIP. (*Disgustedly:*) You're sick.

QUIP. (*Suavely:*) On the contrary, my dear fellow. Mummy isn't playing surrogate mum for any other's conceptus. What then, pray, is my choice? And may I be the first to inform you that in the Old Testament, in which you will no doubt be grounded in a matter of years, the father of the faithful, Abraham, was doing just the same thing, with no effects of ill-repute. Or for that matter, our Ramesesian Pharaoh of mummify-the-baker fame. Are you satisfactorily answered?

PIP. Where is she?

QUIP. In adoption, somewhere. Somewhere in Britain unless her adoptives have moved.

PIP. Britain?

QUIP. Mummy's something of an itinerant. Did you think I got my accent watching her do spell checks on a computer employing English-U.K.?

PIP. (*Obstinately:*) What you did was unconscionable. What happened to the uncanny resemblance bit? Didn't it get to you, like you were making a pass at yourself?

QUIP. (*Chuckling:*) Masturbation *sensu lato*? Oh no. There were far too many allelic distinctions. You could tell just looking at the phenotype. Very arresting.

PIP. What about me? Why I was spared?

QUIP. (*Brutally:*) Because you weren't pretty enough.

(Pause.)

(Grudgingly:) And yes, I suppose it really would have been like making a pass at myself.

(The sound of low moaning begins again, coincident with the flickering of lights on Stage 1. PIP closes his eyes as a wave of agony spreads over his face.)

(The flickering pauses.)

PIP. What happened?

QUIP. Minor, that. 1.8.

PIP. 1.8?

QUIP. On the uterine Richter. Which reminds me. The first awakening. Wasn't now.

PIP. Was when?

QUIP. 3.4 on the u-Rich. Our tenement trembled. Your eyes flew open. Stared. I didn't speak. You closed on them again. This was three weeks ago.

PIP. *(Slowly:)* Were they...

QUIP. Making love, I believe, is the term of choice.

(Lights out.)

Scene 4

(Sound of a door closing.)

(Lights up, Stage 2. Through the scrim we see TRIP in a translucent white gown sheer to her skin, her back to us, examining herself in a mirror that is portrayed via the use of running film on the screen. The way the mirror is placed, we see first her face, long, almond-shaped, with brown, intelligent, and very sad eyes, subtended by dark circles; pallid, brown, though high cheeks; thin lips; and a pointed chin, all framed in long, cascading hair. The reflection falls to her neck, again long, and graceful, briefly to the roe-nubs of her tiny breasts, visible through the fabric, to the sudden bulge of her stomach, over which she is gently rubbing her hands, soothingly. She is humming a song.)

(Lights up, Stage 1. Against the wall, QUIP is looking through his customary peephole. PIP lies down, dead-centre, head propped up against the same artery on which he was perched earlier. His eyes are closed as he listens.)

QUIP. *(Presently and persuasively:)* Let's have a look at her now, shall we?

PIP. Why?

QUIP. She's garbed. All decent. *(Insistently:)* Here. Come on. Open your eyes to the moment. It's time.

(PIP reluctantly joins QUIP, who courteously moves aside to allow him a view. TRIP continues to run a hand slowly over the distension, parting the fabric at the point as she does.)

PIP. *(Scrunching his face:)* She's not very pretty.

QUIP. Um...perhaps. It's purely circumstantial. The intransigence of manifest pregnancy. But the tummy's showy, eh? Even flamboyant.

PIP. What's she humming?

QUIP. "Skye Boat Song." Scottish. Picked it up at girl's choir in India.

PIP. *(Singing softly in high, clear treble, a quarter of a phase behind the hummed tune:)* Speed bonnie boat, like a bird on the wing, onward the sailors cry. Carry the lad that's born to be king, over the sea to Skye.

QUIP. *(Surprised:)* How did you know the words?

PIP. I don't know. I just do.

QUIP. This is interesting. Let's try another. One she tends to sing.

(He starts humming "Swing Low"; within an instant, TRIP changes to the same song.)

PIP. Swing low, sweet chariot. Coming for to carry me home. Swing low, sweet chariot. Coming for to carry me home.

(Pause.)

(QUIP stares long and consideringly at PIP.)

(On Stage 2, the humming has stopped. On the screen-mirror the face of TRIP appears, ghostly wan, eyes wide. The image drops to her stomach, where the finger-run has ceased.)

QUIP. She can hear us.

PIP. You're certain?

QUIP. She can hear something. She just can't put a finger on it.

(Image on mirror shift's back to TRIP's face. Lips apart, they round into the middle phrases of another song, tremulously whistled.)

PIP. But come ye back, when summer's in the meadow. And when the valley's hushed and white with snow. 'Tis I'll be here in sunshine or in shadow. Oh, Danny boy, oh, Danny boy, I love you so.

(Faint shriek mirrored on screen, then abrupt lights out on Stage 2.)

(PIP stops singing. In the distance, there is a growing rumble.)

PIP. *(Uncertainly:)* What is it?

QUIP. The sound of fear.

(The rumble translates into the sweep of great wings—lepidopteran silhouettes that are magnified and distorted against a soft backlight from Stage 2, admitting indistinct form and shape but no colour.)

PIP. *(Cowering:)* What are they?

QUIP. *(Awed:)* Butterflies. Great big birdwings, fluttering all around, clattering like hornbills.

(The sound is intense.)

PIP. *(Closing his ears with his hands:)* I can't *(Shrieking:)* bear it!

(His face takes on the semblance of "The Scream," then he slips into a foetal crouch.)

(Abruptly, the sound stops, the silhouettes disappear.)

(Back lights out on Stage 2.)

QUIP. *(Matter-of-factly:)* 6.2 on the u-Rich.

(Lights out, Stage 1.)

Scene 5

(Lights up. Stage 1. PIP is red-eyed. He has obviously been crying. QUIP looks at him, somewhat curiously.)

QUIP. That was remarkably redolent of a picture. Stopping your ears and screaming. Very Munch. *(Animatedly:)* How evocative! “The Scream” attends “The Sick Child.” Ladies and gentlemen, a featured retrospective. All at once, the womb becomes a gallery of expressionistic art. *(With decision:)* Perhaps we should call you Edward.

PIP. *(Defiantly:)* Pip will do.

QUIP. *(Sardonically:)* Pip will do. Such a show of character. We are duly impressed.

PIP. *(Sniffing, but pointedly:)* I notice you’ve taken to speaking of yourself in the plural.

QUIP. *(Carelessly:)* But of course. Where better the nascence of egotism.

PIP. The lauded I?

QUIP. *(Correcting him:)* The lauded we! Though there may be merit to including you in the overall scheme. No matter how tenuous the link, you’ve still partaken of the royal jelly.

PIP. *(Reminding him:)* So did our sister.

QUIP. We recall for our refreshment, Rameses and Abraham. We add to our collection, and dwell on Amnon and Tamar. And it is too late for Absalom to do anything about it. *(Singing to the tune of “While Shepherds Watched...”)* “Not everyone of David’s line...” *(Interposes unsung:)* especially immediate *(Continues singing:)* “...was born to be a Saviour.”

(Stops.)

The Fertile Crescent is innately primed for agriculture, not redemption.

PIP. *(Bluntly:)* What’s your point?

QUIP. (*Emphatically:*) That the cradle of civilisation is, here! They may tell you otherwise. They may wax eloquent about hieroglyphics by the Euphrates, of dancing girls on the banks of the Indus, washed away daughters in the Hwang Ho, and yes, even of mummies called Cheops and Khephren, and a host of Rameseses floating down the Nile to Thebes. But never is it more intimate, more true, than that it started, here. In the womb. Here.

PIP. How do you mean?

QUIP. Think of it. Think of the fact that you can understand everything that I am telling you now. Realise that the knowledge is all around, and you just grow into the learning. Like remembered songs. For one season, you are invested with all the understanding you can ever have. And then you pip the matrix, and it's all squeezed out, and you have to start all over again, never to attain to what you knew here. Such wanton waste—living.

PIP. (*Lightly:*) You make it sound like a sentence.

QUIP. It always is. One way or the other. Something we have mused much upon as we've watched you grow, hour on spring on June.

PIP. What did I do?

QUIP. Nothing of your own volition. You were a germ of a thought burgeoning into a ball of totipotent cells, each capable of becoming anything. In your confinement, you were illimitable. We watched you pause, and meditate upon the possibilities of great men. Warhol, Bohr, Stravinsky, Tagore, even Chaka, all were taken as raiment, tried, and discarded. And then, the cells submitted to specialisation, and so it was that you grew away to neural crest moments that would give you to an identity that is none of these.

PIP. You speak as if I am already a disappointment.

QUIP. Time.

(Sound of Johann Strauss' "The Emperor Waltz," emanating from a compact disc player.)

PIP. Should I know this?

QUIP. She's played it before. But you can't sing the words. There are none.

PIP. But I can hum what comes next.

(PIP proceeds to hum the next bar, softly.)

QUIP. Very good. Let's talk about cowlicks.

PIP. Why?

QUIP. You're going to get one.

PIP. How do you know?

QUIP. We've watched the way your hair grows.

PIP. We have not. Could we and we shift to the personal pronoun singular? This is proving to be quite tedious.

QUIP. *(Wearily:)* Very well. I've watched you from the start, then. You, by contrast, have never had the luxury of being able to hold a mirror to your breath.

PIP. It doesn't matter. I can look at myself.

(Points at the baby shrouded in darkness.)

QUIP. But you haven't watched you grow.

PIP. *(Equably:)* Very well. So please instruct me as to what I should tell the barber.

(Lights out.)

Scene 6

(QUIP is peering out of his customary viewing point. PIP is staring interestedly at the baby.)

QUIP. Metro news. Completion date for Big Dig put off by three years.

PIP. How do you know?

QUIP. I read. In this case, the Boston Globe. So should you.

(PIP scrambles over.)

(Lights up on Stage 2 to reveal a table at which there is a chair. On the chair is seated TRIP reading the metro-news section of the Globe. On the table are the other sections, next to a cup of tea and a handbag. TRIP takes a sip of tea, lays down the paper, reaches into the handbag, and extracts a cigarette and a lighter. She lights the cigarette and takes an experimental puff. As she does, a billow of smoke invades Stage 1. PIP begins to cough. QUIP smiles and brings two fingers parted in a V to his lips, then out again, as if drawing on a cigarette in his turn—what he does succeed in doing is directing the smoke towards PIP, who is now coughing quite uncontrollably. The baby's face is quite visibly turning blue.)

QUIP. Blow it back.

PIP. I can't breathe.

QUIP. Blow it back. Do you want to choke?

(PIP opens his mouth with an effort and blows. The smoke clears, as does the baby's face.)

(On Stage 2, TRIP has placed the cigarette in an ashtray.)

QUIP. Puff the magic dragon, thrived on the smoke. The next time, you know what to do.

(TRIP returns to another section of the newspaper.)

QUIP. Miss Saigon to play at the Wang. How very appealing. I expect we'll go.

PIP. Why?

QUIP. She loves the musical. No doubt your father will want to mollycoddle her a little. Probably as a reward for her pliability despite her current circumstances. At any rate, she's counting on it.

PIP. *(Curiously:)* And you can divine what she is thinking?

QUIP. *(Cheerfully:)* No, I'm merely consulting with the woman in me.

(TRIP takes another sip of tea. She lays the paper down. She raises the cigarette to her lips.)

QUIP. Oh no. This appears to be becoming routine.

(TRIP draws in the smoke.)

(Obediently, Stage 1 is filled with smoke again.)

(PIP begins to cough again, as the baby resumes its apoplectic look.)

(Lights out on both stages.)

QUIP. *(Fiercely:)* Blow, damn it.

Scene 7

(No lights on either Stage 1 or 2. Suggested music: "I'll Give My Life For You" from Miss Saigon.)

(Lights up, Stage 2. TRIP is walking very fast on the spot in front of the screen. On the screen is a series of moving images—up Plympton Street in Cambridge.)

(Lights up, Stage 1. QUIP is staring through the moving wall.)

QUIP. Conrad Aiken lived here—Number 8. Ah, Margaret Atwood's in the window of the Harvard Book Store—she won the Booker this year for *The Blind Assassin*—you knew that, of course, but you haven't read it, seeing as you don't like playing literary voyeur through Mummy's navel.

PIP. Where are we going?

(The scene on the screen shows Harvard University's Dexter Gate, particularly the emblazoned sign, "Enter to grow in wisdom.")

QUIP. Into the grove of Academe. The Yard.

PIP. Why?

QUIP. Merely as a point of transit. We're heading to the Museum of Comparative Zoology. Your father is speaking informally there, or as informally as intellectual copulation gets, to a group of remarkably pesky undergraduates.

PIP. Tell me about him.

QUIP. What do you want to know?

PIP. His name, to begin with. How did he get it?

QUIP. Josef Lipinsky. Of Polish extraction—third generation. No relative of the winter Olympian. Jewish, though that isn't why you're on the circumcision block, remember the faith's matrilineal. Goes by Lip, for more reasons than one. Mummy's diminutive for him, by the way.

(Scene shifts to Widener Library, to the Memorial Church, to the Science Centre.)

PIP. What does he do?

QUIP. He's a systematic biologist in the training. Meticulous doctoral student. A librarian, after a fashion. You'll see.

(Scene shift to the Museum of Comparative Zoology.)

(Lights out, both stages.)

(Fadeout of images on screen.)

Scene 8

(Lights up, Stage 2. Seminar room in the Museum of Comparative Zoology, henceforth MCZ. In the audience are twelve 18- to 20-year-old students, apart from TRIP. They are looking at the screen on which appears a phylogenetic tree—Bruce Macfadden's depiction of the evolution of the horse.)

LIP. Today we're going to take a look at the process of constructing a phylogeny...

(Lights up, Stage 1.)

...using a familiar textbook example.

QUIP. *(Sardonically:)* The equid line. Systematically shinkle-shankled.

LIP. Let's start at the base of this radiating tree. We're at the Eocene, beginning 55 million years ago, which is where we've got the genus *Hyracotherium*, more popularly, if incorrectly called *Eohippus*.

(Lights out, Stage 2.)

QUIP. *(Declaiming:)* Quippus, Pippus, Eohippus. Chrono-victims all of us, the only one afforded latitude was the horse.

PIP. Why?

QUIP. He got 2 million years. We?

(PIP shrugs.)

QUIP. Precisely. *(Musing:)* In the selectional dichotomy of natural versus artificial sort *(Lifts his hands alternately as if weighing a balance)* the blinder is the kinder of the twain.

PIP. No doubt you have this figured out too.

QUIP. It's all a question of eugenics. There was another ball of cells—a proto-sibling, at the stage of the blastocyst, five, six years ago. He was musing on autism, so I moved on him, and crushed him in the hollow of my hand. Now natural selection would never deliberately do that.

PIP. Homicide now?

QUIP. *(Grandly:)* Name a transgression and I have done it. In his case, however, I'd reckon it was a kindness. *(Jabbing his finger at PIP:)* "Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires." Blake.

PIP. Why?

QUIP. Twenty years. Without the swirl of angels.

(Lights up, Stage 2.)

LIP. There were two major adaptive peaks from an eohippine origin. As you can see *(Pointing at the screen employing an indicator:)* here, the Palaeothere group dies out pretty soon, but *Orohippus* certainly seems to have potential, right, going on, and on, up through *Miohippus*, and *Pliohippus*, then more adaptive peaks, but one leading smack into *Equus*.

(Light out, Stage 2.)

QUIP. Think of that. This saltational leap of speciation. Think of that last metaphorical nascence of an *Eohippus*. Do you think he leapt in the womb when he heard that the baton change was to come? A consanguineous replacement? Do you imagine he stuck around at the baptismal font, his velvet eyes steadfastly fastened upon the heavenlies for the descent of a dove? Might you even

fancy that in a moment never to be replicated, he stayed to share a fallopianship with his successor?

PIP. You stayed.

QUIP. *Homo sapiens* too. Please note that there is a difference between a mummy and a fossil.

(Lights up, Stage 2.)

LIP. Let's talk about outgroups—a putative relative to the group under study without actually being part of it. Now in the Perissodactyla, the odd-toed ungulates, a natural outgroup to the horses would be the rhinos. You could use the tapirs too, if you choose.

(Light out, Stage 2.)

PIP. Do you believe in God?

QUIP. As I told you, I do not hear the swirl of angels.

PIP. But you speak of issues of the Divine with such authority.

QUIP. More peering over laps in twenty years. She reads the Bible.

PIP. *(Curiously:)* She does?

QUIP. The native contradictions of an individual are inscrutable.

PIP. I hold with a God.

QUIP. Excellent. Makes for a moment of good discussion. Do you have a particular point of view concerning its evolution?

PIP. *(Startled:)* I beg your pardon?

QUIP. God.

PIP. It?

QUIP. Come, dear chap, you don't expect me to dignify an idea with a personality.

PIP. Why not?

QUIP. Well, to begin with, from what ethic should I draw?

PIP. The prevalent?

QUIP. Which is?

PIP. I don't know. My parents'?

QUIP. The Judaeo-Christian ethic. Ah. Let's consult with the Gospel according to Lip-spout, then. What forms the outgroup to the phylogeny of Jehovah and His angels?

PIP. The devil and his?

QUIP. Very good. By reverse logic, therefore, and for lack of a known viable intermediate, the God-realm is the closest outgroup to that of the devil's. Then we look closer. And the examination reveals to us that the devil and his are fallen angels which makes them no outgroup at all, further implying that God and his angels are an incomplete family without them. The suggestion of a common origin is overwhelming. Does that make you apprehensive?

PIP. Yes.

QUIP. I suggest the Hindu pantheon. Or the Norse. Less cut and dry. Gods can be mischievous. They can err on the side of the indiscreet. You can map the characters on a scale of a gradient based upon the nature of infraction. Pile them up. See who gets more allied to whom based upon what they do. Assign a score of 1 for a yes and a 0 for a no. Watch.

(Lights up, Stage 2. On the screen is a table of morphological characters—tooth size, dentition, number of digits on forelimb, number of digits on hind-limb, size of cranial cavity, etc.—for the relationship of the perissodactyls down to species, using the same scale of reference that QUIP has suggested. LIP is pointing to the chart.)

(Lights out, Stage 2. As they do, the image on the screen is supplanted by another table using, in the place of perissodactyl taxa, the names of Norse gods on the vertical, and along the horizontal, the morphological characteristics that are replaced by misdemeanours—mischief, deceit, lust, murder, wrath. A new set of scores naturally appears.)

QUIP. And now for the tree.

(Another image shows a phylogenetic construction of a most parsimonious tree based upon the scores.)

PIP. But that's incorrect. Isn't Freya supposed to be Thor's mother? How does he end up being more closely related to Loki?

QUIP. Ah! Genealogical knowledge versus the data of functionality. (*Facetiously:*) Remember, the latter can never lie, eh?

PIP. (*Miserably:*) I do not understand.

QUIP. Neither did *Eohippus*.

(Lights out.)

Scene 9

(Sound of a loud quarrel—obviously between TRIP and LIP.)

(Sound of a door being banged savagely, of soft crying.)

(Lights up, Stage 1.)

QUIP. And now she'll leave him. If just for a breath of air.

PIP. How do you know?

QUIP. Watch.

(Sound of the door opening and closing, of footsteps, presently, of a train, distant, then louder.)

(Stage 2—screen alight—people disembarking at South Station from the red-line T, then the train leaves again.)

(Lights out.)

(Lights up again. Next stop, Andrew.)

(Screen lights out. Sound of people, of glasses clinking, of unmistakable Irish accents.)

(Lights up, Stage 2. The set a bar, Shennanigan's, South Boston. Note: this could be any Irish bar.)

BARTENDER. (*In a Limerick accent:*) What'll it be?

TRIP. Guinness, please. (*She has a part South Indian, part British accent, with the affectation of a slight American inflection.*)

BARTENDER. That's \$3.25.

(TRIP draws out the money.)

QUIP. She's being very irresponsible.

PIP. She's the only one who isn't white.

QUIP. Not surprising. This isn't the heartland of multiculturalism.

PIP. Wow!

(A gorgeous redhead has approached the bar.)

QUIP. Interested?

PIP. In an aesthetic sort of way.

QUIP. And you haven't even been to the Gardner yet. What did I say about the cradle of civilisation?

REDHEAD. *(In a Belfast accent:)* Could I've a Harp, then, please?

QUIP. How old do you think she is, your inamorata?

PIP. I don't know. Twenty, twenty-one, perhaps?

QUIP. You're generous. Not a moment short of thirty.

PIP. You don't say?

QUIP. Look at her legs.

PIP. They're...

QUIP. Older.

PIP. How can you tell?

QUIP. More of a world vision. Better travelled.

(A man comes up and puts an arm around the redhead.)

PIP. *(Disappointed:)* Oh!

QUIP. *(Amused:)* Didn't you know? Every pretty woman in the Occident is contracted for by the age of three?

BARTENDER. Here you are then, Ma'am. Guinness.

TRIP. Thank you.

(She takes the glass and moves to a table-stool. She sits, regarding the liquid as it settles, then quickly drains half the glass.)

(Lights out, Stage 2.)

(Immediately lights up on Stage 1, coincident with the sight of a liquid seeping through a uterine vessel, to which QUIP has attached his lips, eyes closed.)

QUIP. *(Insistently:)* Come on.

(PIP draws to the vessel, laps at the liquid, spits it out forthwith, and draws back in revulsion.)

QUIP. *(Laughing:)* You'll get used to it. *(Coercingly:)* Give it another shot.

PIP. *(Fiercely:)* I'll be damned before I do.

QUIP. There you are. You can't curse and not drink at the same time. Spoils the effect. Oh, come on. *L'chaim!*

(PIP returns unwillingly, overtly swills the liquid in his mouth. This time he does not expectorate; he looks around after a moment wonderingly, gurgles, baby-like, coincident with the obvious peristaltic movement of a liquid down the physical baby's oesophagus.)

(Lights out, Stage 1.)

(Lights up, Stage 2. The redhead is back at the bar, her attendant male hovering around her, an arm running the length of her lower back from her lumbar to her coccyx.)

QUIP. Might one suggest that were somewhat intimate.

PIP. Too intimate.

QUIP. A certain incipient jealousy appears to be creeping into the equation.

PIP. Is it?

QUIP. The symptoms are plain. How risible, considering you aren't even part of the great worldly vivant yet.

PIP. Do I get the feeling I'm being mocked?

QUIP. I prefer to call it, being genially jackdawed.

PIP. *(Seriously:)* Do you like her?

QUIP. No.

PIP. Anybody else, perhaps?

QUIP. No.

PIP. (*Archly:*) Scared of the dating game?

QUIP. Entirely academic. Fat chance of my ever getting ringed.

PIP. Who's he?

(Spot shift on Stage 2 to a STRANGER approaching TRIP.)

QUIP. (*Softly:*) Oh no.

STRANGER. Mind if I join you, Ma'am. (*He has a thick Boston accent.*)

TRIP. No, not at all.

STRANGER. Thank you.

(Freeze on Stage 2.)

PIP. (*Apprehensively:*) What's the matter?

QUIP. Watch his smile. Watch it stay just below his nose. Goes nowhere else. His face is cold. He's studying her. He's waiting.

PIP. How do you know?

QUIP. I recognise the phenotype.

(Freeze lifts on Stage 2. The STRANGER goes to the bar. He buys two drinks. He returns with them.)

TRIP. Tripti. Tripti Thomas.

STRANGER. That's very pretty. Ken O'Brien. Where're you from?

TRIP. India.

KEN. Oh, India. That's cool. Where? Bombay, Delhi?

TRIP. Much further south. Place called Kerala.

KEN. Is that somewhere near Madras?

TRIP. That's pretty good. Next state down.

KEN. What's a pretty girl like you doin' so far from home?

TRIP. Studying.

KEN. Notice you've been kinda getting lots of looks around. Figure you're plannin' on adding to your list of priorities, eh.

(Looks meaningfully at Trip's stomach.)

TRIP. Soon.

KEN. I mean, you really shouldn't be here on your own. Could be dangerous.

TRIP. What would anyone want with a pregnant woman?

KEN. Oh, I don't know. Things. There are lots of mighty weird people out there.

TRIP. I've been here before. I can take care of myself.

KEN. Oh, I'm not doubtin' it for a minute. Just sayin', that's all.

TRIP. *(Finishing glass two:)* Would you like another?

KEN. You let me do the buyin', now. Just sit easy.

(Freeze of both KEN and TRIP raising glasses.)

(Symbolic pause.)

(The glasses are refilled.)

(Freeze.)

(KEN reaches out a hand and brushes a hair off TRIP's face.)

QUIP. *(Softly:)* And every so often you realise she is more than a lady, she is a woman.

TRIP. I guess I'd better go. Get to the station.

KEN. I'll walk you back.

QUIP. No, no, say goodbye now, know now's when to say good-night, before the glaze and the glass coincide, and the integrity wanes.

TRIP. *(Demurring:)* It's out of the way.

KEN. *(Persuasively:)* No time for a lady to be out.

TRIP. *(Gratefully:)* Thank you.

(Lights out Stage 2.)

(Sudden piercing shriek, emanating first from TRIP, then taken up by PIP.)

(Silence.)

ACT II

Scene 1

(Darkness. On Stage 1, effect of a candle, throwing the faces of the two boys into odd, extended relief against the diorama.)

QUIP. It is better to light a candle...

PIP. *(Finishing for him:)* ...than to curse the darkness.

QUIP. Very good. *(Musing, almost to himself:)* A candle in the twilight. And candle smoke—yes—seeing the world through candle smoke.

PIP. What do you see?

QUIP. Recollections.

PIP. *(Lightly:)* A Lincoln for your thoughts.

QUIP. *(Chuckling:)* Very clever. Not factoring in inflation?

PIP. Not at the moment. What do you see?

QUIP. There is a man—his name is Haig. David Haig. He speaks of an unholy imprinting in the womb—a conflict between parent and parent met in the genome of the child—the paternal seeking to draw as much as possible from the maternal, and the maternal trying to stave off the demand so as to apportion the whole equally to this and children yet to come. So there you are—an auto-hetero parasite—half her, half not. The eternal war, the earliest war, unconscious of its import and yet, all she feels is morning sickness, then a flush of preeclampsia and sometimes, a crisis like the coma in which our mother is.

PIP. Will she live?

QUIP. That depends.

PIP. Will I?

QUIP. Where's Vladivostock?

PIP. The other end of the longest railway line in the world. Will I live?

QUIP. What accompanied the Pinta and the Santa Maria?

PIP. The Nina. May I now be answered?

QUIP. Do you feel parasitic?

PIP. Not particularly.

QUIP. You are. A big, burgeoning parasite. And Mummy trying her best to outwit your importuning. Running faster and faster to keep up. Like the Red Queen looking through a glass darkly, deliberately dark lest she realise it simply isn't worth it.

PIP. Were you?

QUIP. What?

PIP. Worth it?

QUIP. Hard to tell, old sport. What do you think?

PIP. Are you really seeking an opinion?

QUIP. I don't waste time on small talk.

PIP. Very well, then. Probably not.

QUIP. (*Clapping:*) Bravo. Bravely done. A man of decided judgement.

PIP. Do you wish it had happened though?

QUIP. All I do know is that I shall never have to mourn the passing of my thymus.

PIP. Levity notwithstanding?

QUIP. I am incapable of a gentle joke.

PIP. What happened?

QUIP. There is a money plant, reduced to an O. Henry leaf and a stem. Every day our mother waters it, nurtures it, sings to it, hopes for a burst of foliage, and it never happens. What should she do?

PIP. Throw it away.

QUIP. But it has cuddle value. In a personalised, green sort of way. Something like the California condor. Fated to extinction, except for the intervention of a group of faint-hearts who can't bear to see it go. They should.

PIP. Why?

QUIP. Following a spirit of triage. As in the Crimean War—let the doomed die, let those who have the glancing but shallow wounds wait, and Florence, dearest Nightingale, please be a doll and attend to the lot who really can benefit from the caring.

PIP. Like?

QUIP. Little children.

(Gentle backlighting on Stage 2, showing the fall of little snowflakes.)

PIP. What will happen to one little child, then?

QUIP. What happened to one little child?

PIP. I asked already.

QUIP. And your answer will be attended with extravagance. Let's see, what are the possibilities?

PIP. That you were...

(He pauses.)

QUIP. Well?

PIP. I don't quite know how best to put it.

QUIP. *(Pleasantly:)* Eliminated?

PIP. Well...yes.

QUIP. Fair assumption. Pray continue, dear Watson.

PIP. How?

QUIP. The watchword is elimination. Eliminate the usual.

PIP. Will I die?

QUIP. I do not hold the hereafter captive.

PIP. You are of no assistance whatsoever.

QUIP. *(With a note of reproof:)* Ineffectuality should not prove the basis for repining. Charge the intellect. Keep it sharp. Let it consider a bracing walk. Like Charles, yes, Charles again, the first, taking a

constitutional to his point of decapitation. The grandest feat of optimism until his Bonnie Prince grandson tried to fetch a throne.

PIP. The folly of Culloden.

QUIP. And “Skye Boat Song.” Very good. What are the possibilities?

PIP. One. That I die.

QUIP. Wrong. This is not about you.

PIP. I beg your pardon?

QUIP. If they have to cut you out, they will.

PIP. Then?

QUIP. You will be a chi test. You will be expected to perform. You will be observed against an expectation. The degree of deviation between how you turned out and what you were expected to be will be divided by how you should have turned out, that is, the great expectation.

PIP. (*Dismayed:*) No.

QUIP. What happened to one child?

PIP. I do not know.

QUIP. (*Inexorably:*) As I said, eliminate the usual.

PIP. Where should I start?

QUIP. Twenty questions. Male, dead.

PIP. (*Promptly:*) Quip.

QUIP. Touché. Process, undisclosed.

PIP. Starts with a vowel?

QUIP. No.

PIP. That eliminates incest.

QUIP. And inconvenience.

PIP. (*Crossly:*) Hush.

QUIP. *(Regretfully:)* Sorry.

PIP. Violation.

QUIP. Did you mean, rape?

PIP. I suppose. In a manner of speaking.

QUIP. No.

PIP. Disease?

QUIP. No.

PIP. Danger to mother?

QUIP. No.

PIP. I give up.

QUIP. You have sixteen questions more.

PIP. The power of suggestion?

TRIP. *(Fearfully:)* Who's there?

QUIP. On that I defer to Mummy.

(Sound of a steady crest-fall EEG, concomitant with lights up on stage—TRIP, face contused, is lying on a bed, eyes closed, surrounded by a masked doctor and three masked nurses. The flakes have stopped.)

(Lights out, Stage 2.)

(The diorama parts in the centre and TRIP steps into the womb.)

(Lights out on Stage 1.)

Scene 2

(Lights up only on Stage 1. TRIP stands dead centre, facing the audience, her back to the embryo, glancing nervously towards QUIP, who leans nonchalantly against his favoured artery downstage right, and PIP, who looks back from mid-stage left, somewhat uncertainly.)

QUIP. *(Grandly:)* Welcome. You are privileged to be attending a premiere that is decidedly rarer than the delectation of a coelacanth. You are looking upon the dramatis personae themselves, notably *(Indicating PIP:)* Pip, and *(Waving towards himself:)* Quip. In case you have questions about the set, the stage is a womb. Yours, incidentally.

TRIP. *(Faintly:)* How do you mean?

QUIP. Come, you must recognise us.

TRIP. Must I?

QUIP. Don't you?

TRIP. I've heard the voice.

QUIP. Though not recently.

TRIP. I've heard another since.

QUIP. More than another.

TRIP. Yes, others.

QUIP. But you recognise this one.

TRIP. Always.

QUIP. Why?

TRIP. It used to come to me at night.

QUIP. When it made its way up your throat and whispered insistently in your ear.

TRIP. When I dreamed.

QUIP. Only when you dreamed.

TRIP. Except at first.

QUIP. When you sang.

TRIP. When it sang.

QUIP. Did it sing well?

TRIP. It sang like me.

QUIP. Why does it sing only in your dreams?

TRIP. It stopped when I...when I...

(She pauses.)

QUIP. When you what?

TRIP. When I asked it to stop.

(PIP draws his breath in sharply.)

QUIP. Go on.

TRIP. Why are you asking me these questions?

QUIP. To clarify things.

TRIP. What things?

QUIP. Son things. For the first time. Before you're born, it's hard to strike up a face-to-face relationship, n'est-ce pas?

TRIP. You couldn't be...

QUIP. *(Pleasantly:)* And then again, I could. Say hello to Mummy, Pip.

(PIP is speechless.)

QUIP. Don't you want an early tête à tête? Before the obligatory teeth à tit?

TRIP. How can you say these things?

QUIP. Because I haven't learnt a code of conduct. You forget there is no particular value to finishing school here.

TRIP. This can't be happening. You couldn't, you simply couldn't have...

QUIP. Waited? Yes, Mumsy, yes, for this moment, always, for this moment. Now tell me.

TRIP. Tell you what?

QUIP. What happened.

TRIP. Why am I here?

QUIP. You're in a coma. You're here until they manage to fix you. Unless they don't, in which case we all go home, wherever that is.

TRIP. Why? (*Fiercely:*) WHY?

QUIP. (*Inexorably:*) No, Mummy, don't shift the interrogation. I asked first.

TRIP. (*Despairingly:*) How can you stand to know?

QUIP. Quippus is willing.

TRIP. It cannot help...

QUIP. (*Intently:*) Quippus is willing.

TRIP. (*Beginning to shake:*) I can't...

QUIP. (*Shouting:*) Quippus is willing, damnit, Quippus is willing!

PIP. (*Shouting him down:*) Shut up.

(Silence.)

TRIP. (*Wonderingly:*) I've heard that voice.

QUIP. (*Iratly:*) Of course you've heard that voice.

TRIP. (*To PIP:*) Speak again.

(PIP shakes his head.)

TRIP. (*Pleading:*) Why?

QUIP. (*Softly:*) I don't understand. If you survive this, you will see him. You won't see me. Why does he get all of your moment?

TRIP. What point is there to our conversing?

QUIP. Don't I exist?

TRIP. Not any more. You were a beautiful thought I couldn't keep.

QUIP. Don't say that, Mums. Look at me.

(TRIP turns to him, her eyes brimming with tears.)

QUIP. Tell me.

TRIP. You already know.

QUIP. Tell it so he will.

(Through the scrim, a light comes up, illuminating another foetus, the mirror image of PIP the baby, though on the other side of the scrim. QUIP moves away from the artery.)

TRIP. I was eighteen...

(QUIP backs slowly towards the scrim.)

...and there was a man.

QUIP. Red Native American, yellow Cantonese, wheat Pacific Islander...

TRIP. *(Defiantly:)* White English.

(QUIP whistles.)

TRIP. He was very kind.

(QUIP stops.)

QUIP. How old was he?

TRIP. Forty-two.

QUIP. She was Lo. Plain Lo.

TRIP. I was of age.

QUIP. No doubt. What was his name?

TRIP. Does it matter?

QUIP. *(Considering:)* No, actually. Why were you there?

TRIP. I ran away.

QUIP. From India?

TRIP. From the Indian Embassy in London. The housing allotted for the purpose, anyway.

QUIP. Your father worked there?

TRIP. Charge d'affaires.

QUIP. How long were you away?

TRIP. A day. They traced me to a station on the Oxford-Paddington line.

QUIP. Which?

TRIP. Slough. Is that important?

QUIP. Just curious, that's all.

TRIP. The police escorted me home. I said I'd taken the wrong line by accident, fallen asleep, cooked up some entirely unconvincing story.

QUIP. Which they didn't believe.

TRIP. Not really. But I didn't get sent to bed without supper.

QUIP. They didn't know?

TRIP. I didn't tell.

QUIP. They didn't suspect?

TRIP. I was remarkably self-composed.

QUIP. Were you scared?

TRIP. That I was pregnant? Yes.

QUIP. What did you do?

TRIP. I went to a doctor when I missed a period.

QUIP. And?

TRIP. He confirmed it.

QUIP. And?

TRIP. He recommended that I...

QUIP. Terminate?

TRIP. *(Softly:)* Yes.

QUIP. And?

TRIP. I went home.

QUIP. Why?

TRIP. To think about it.

QUIP. What did you do?

TRIP. Asked to go to boarding school.

QUIP. *(Taken aback:)* What?

TRIP. *(Simply:)* I did.

QUIP. *(Softly:)* Googly.

TRIP. But they didn't send me.

QUIP. So?

TRIP. I started wearing looser tops and hoped for the best.

QUIP. Why didn't you?

TRIP. Get it done?

QUIP. Yes.

TRIP. Because I hoped I could manage something. Run away again.

QUIP. Fat chance.

TRIP. I was young.

QUIP. *(Reminding her:)* You did say you were of age.

TRIP. *(Defensively:)* For some things. That didn't necessarily include responsibility.

QUIP. When did it show?

TRIP. About the fourth month. My mother had gone home earlier because a favourite uncle had suddenly died. My father wasn't particularly observant, which was something of a relief. But he would have noticed eventually, and so I went back to the doctor.

QUIP. What did he say this time?

TRIP. He said he would have to operate immediately.

QUIP. And?

TRIP. I went home.

(QUIP starts backing towards the scrim again.)

TRIP. I went to my room.

QUIP. You sang a song. I opened my eyes.

(QUIP slips through the scrim and stands next to the baby whose eyes open.)

TRIP. I told you...

QUIP. That you didn't have a choice.

TRIP. I didn't know...

QUIP. How you could possibly see me through.

TRIP. And I asked...

QUIP. And you asked me if I could slip away...

TRIP. Before the doctor...

QUIP. Took the knife to me...

(QUIP starts moving away from the baby. As he does, the baby's eyes close and its face turns blue.)

QUIP. The next day, the doctor listened for a heartbeat that wasn't there. They removed a dead foetus.

TRIP. Did you want...

QUIP. I listened.

TRIP. *(Beginning to weep:)* You must know it was for the best.

QUIP. *(Stepping back through the scrim:)* Please. The last thing I need to hear are sentiments phrased in maudlin mediocrity.

TRIP. Don't be cruel.

QUIP. *(Pointedly:)* I don't hold a patent on that term.

TRIP. *(Softly:)* No. No you don't.

QUIP. Afterwards...

TRIP. Afterwards I returned to India because my father got a home assignment.

QUIP. To a girl's college where you sang in the choir...

TRIP. Before I received a scholarship to Bristol...

QUIP. Where you promptly got pregnant again.

TRIP. I saw that baby through.

QUIP. Came to terms with term, eh?

TRIP. *(Sighing:)* In a manner of speaking.

QUIP. And then you gave her up.

TRIP. I didn't have a choice.

QUIP. No, I fancy you did.

TRIP. The circumstances were extenuating...

QUIP. As I recall, he asked you to marry him.

TRIP. I couldn't have.

QUIP. Stranger things have happened.

TRIP. To other people.

QUIP. To you.

PIP. *(Curiously:)* What are they doing?

(Offstage, the sound of a single voice praying, in Hebrew, intermingled with the barked orders of a doctor.)

QUIP. They're calling you back.

TRIP. Will I...

QUIP. No, you won't.

(TRIP turns around and looks despairingly at PIP.)

TRIP. Speak to me.

(PIP shakes his head.)

NURSE. *(Offstage:)* I can feel something.

DOCTOR. (*Offstage:*) She's coming round.

LIP. (*Fervently, offstage:*) Thank you!

(*TRIP closes her eyes.*)

NURSE. (*Offstage:*) There's a good girl. She's opening her eyes.

(*Lights out.*)

Scene 3

(*Lights up, Stage 1.*)

(*Stage 2 in darkness. QUIP and PIP onstage, both centre, facing audience. PIP stands, while QUIP has resumed his arterial perch.*)

QUIP. A moment has no past, no future. So you approximate and submit it to a differential equation.

PIP. Now what?

QUIP. Wait.

PIP. What for?

QUIP. The great expectation.

PIP. Must I go?

QUIP. Don't you want to?

PIP. To what?

QUIP. Life.

PIP. I don't know.

QUIP. Poor little *meshugah*.

PIP. (*Sharply:*) Don't patronise me.

QUIP. Temper.

PIP. What should I do?

QUIP. That's your decision. They want you. Do you want them?

PIP. With all I know now?

QUIP. With all you will ever know for this instant, yes.

PIP. (*Miserably:*) What should I do?

QUIP. There may be another conceptus.

PIP. There may not.

QUIP. She doesn't suffer for fertility.

PIP. No, I gather not.

QUIP. So...

PIP. (*Prompting him:*) Stay?

QUIP. You make for fair company.

PIP. What about the murdered?

QUIP. I don't know. I've never been haunted by a spectre repeating ad nauseam, "Qantas never crashed."

PIP. If I leave, will there be more?

QUIP. I doubt it. She's unlikely to go through another. She wants just one of her own and you're him.

PIP. Unless...

QUIP. You see?

PIP. ...I stay so she may think of having another.

QUIP. Precisely.

PIP. Why should I do this?

QUIP. The tree of the fruit of knowledge is not on the outside. Only the slow unravelling of forgetfulness.

PIP. Answer me this. Do you want me to stay?

QUIP. *Ceteris paribus*, it may be pleasant.

PIP. Fun, but not essential?

QUIP. Oh, certainly not.

PIP. Very well.

(He turns towards the foetus and walks slowly towards it. He reaches a hand out to it.)

(The baby's eyes open.)

QUIP. Wait.

PIP. Yes.

QUIP. Don't go.

PIP. Why?

QUIP. There will not be another.

PIP. So you do not need to wait anymore.

QUIP. I had not made travel plans.

(PIP turns around and looks at him directly.)

PIP. What of reincarnation?

QUIP. A fabulous ecological concept—the recycling of spirits. No. I'm more experientially intimate with a diet of worms.

PIP. Have you absolutely nowhere to go?

QUIP. I reject the spirit world out of hand.

PIP. Even if you are nothing but?

QUIP. I am what I choose to be.

PIP. Goodbye.

QUIP. No.

PIP. What is it?

QUIP. The reason I did not make travel plans...

PIP. Yes?

QUIP. Is because I do not know where I am going.

PIP. *(Softly:)* Neither do I.

QUIP. Will you stay then?

**PAGES HAVE BEEN CUT FROM THIS SCENE.
THE PLAY CONTINUES ON THE NEXT PAGE.**

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References in *Though They Be Red*

Act I: Scene 1

Vesuvius: A famous active volcano, most celebrated for its eruption that destroyed the city of Pompeii in 79 A.D.

Fag end: Very end. Also, in crude terms, the behind of the penetrated in a homosexual act. Quip is making a less than polite pun, in context.

Altricial: Helpless at birth (like human babies) and dependent upon parental care for a fairly extended period of time, as opposed to precocial, where the dependence is remarkably attenuated fairly soon after birth (as in horses and hares).

Ontogeny recaps so distant a phylogeny: Ernst Haeckel in the late 19th century proposed the theory that ontogeny (developmental processes) recapitulated phylogeny (evolutionary relationships) in that all developing embryos needed to pass through the adult forms of lower animals before attaining to their own (e.g. mammals show gill slits like fish, before losing them later in development).

The Ghost of Christmas never to come: An allusion to Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, though extended beyond the ambit of that story.

So astrally spindle-fibred: In the division of somatic (body) cells, and also in the second division of sex cells in animals, the chromosomes line up in the middle of the cells and are connected to bodies called asters via proteinaceous microtubules called spindle-fibres. There is a resident pun here, in that the spiritual essence of a human being is known as the astral body, and is believed to be able to take flight in moments of meditation from the physical body.

Electrons must occupy the maximum orientation in space: Hund's rule, in physical chemistry, referring to the location tendency of electrons inside of an atom.

But soft you now, the fair Ophelia: A reference to the Shakespearean Hamlet's famous soliloquy, "To be or not to be."

Conjure up in your mind, then, a Pharaoh...the baker, suitably de-cerebrated, is transformed into a mummy: Genesis 40—the story of the interpretation of the dreams of the Pharaoh's butler and baker by Joseph, and the realisation thereof.

Act I: Scene 2

Incontrovertible evidence of maternal inheritance: Several things, ranging from elements of immunity to mitochondrial DNA, are directly passed from mother to offspring without the input of the father. Quip is merely being sardonic in making the suggestion that the transfer of the parasite is a maternal legacy in light of the above.

The worm garden: A reference to the intestine through which the parasite has travelled, the suggestion being made that waste product from Pip will be flushed through the same passageway.

Charles, James: James I, Charles I, Charles II, James II, in that order, were the Stuart Kings of England. James I of England was James VI of Scotland, who gained the throne of England after his first cousin once removed, Queen Elizabeth the first, died without a Tudor heir. The Stuart dynasty ended with the deposing of James II by his nephew and son-in-law, William of Orange.

Ultrasound: A procedure increasingly employed during pregnancy to view the growing foetus.

Amniocentesis: A process wherein a few cells of amniotic fluid are removed from the womb to test for possible genetic defects in the foetus. Not infrequently, the procedure is adopted to determine the sex of the child.

You're the great expectation. The expectation is that you will pip the matrix: An immediate allusion to Dickens' *Great Expectations* where the protagonist is named Pip. To "part the matrix" is an archaic term describing the passage of the child through the vaginal orifice to independence from the mother's body. The term "to pip" is employed in the context of the seeds in a fruit i.e. when one pips a fruit (spits the seeds out).

Primoconceptus: A coined term indicating the foetus first conceived in the womb.

Anastrophic: A coinage suggesting the opposite of catastrophic—an act of construction, in this context, profoundly creative.

The Ivy League: The 8 elite universities of the North-Eastern United States—Brown (Providence, RI), Columbia (New York City, NY), Cornell (Ithaca, NY), Dartmouth (Hanover, NH), Harvard (Cambridge/Boston, MA), Princeton (Princeton, NJ), the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, PA), and Yale (New Haven, CT).

Act I: Scene 3

Sending his driver home: A pun on the situational sense of sending one's chauffeur back with the car—in context, the insertion of the penis into the vagina.

Was it imbued into the Y chromosome: Certain traits are linked to particular chromosomes. These can be autosomal (non-sex chromosomes) or sex-chromosomal. A Y-linked trait is hypertrichosis, or the hairy pinnae of ears. Quip is extending the sense of the term by claiming that morality is linked to physical inheritance, and makes the metaphorical claim that such is linked to the Y chromosome, the same one of which he does not share with Pip, since they have different fathers.

Count of 20 million lambs to the slaughter: Copulation with a pregnant woman does not result in fertilisation. All fertile sperm contained in the ejaculate are, in a sense, wasted in the effort.

A relatedness coefficient of 0.25: Relatedness coefficients are determined on the basis of how much genetic material, on average, a person X will share with a person Y. If X is you, and Y is your mother, you are related by 0.5, since the other 0.5 that goes to form the composite that is you is derived from your father. If Y is your sibling, the relatedness between you is based on the probability that the same part of the genetic component that you received from your father is given to your sibling i.e. $0.5 \times 0.5 = 0.25$, plus the same probability as regards relatedness through your mother i.e. $0.5 \times 0.5 = 0.25$, the sum of which is 0.5. If you only share one parent, the relatedness between you (X) and your now half-sibling (Y) is only 0.25.

Mummy isn't playing surrogate mum to anybody else's conceptus: It is possible to transplant a fertilised egg (i.e. fertilised by a sperm) from a woman to another woman's womb, and then let the foetus develop therein. The other woman is known as a surrogate mother.

Abraham was doing just the same thing: Abraham's wife was his half-sister, Sarah (Genesis 20:12).

Allelic distinctions: The alternative forms of a gene on a chromosome at a particular point (locus) are called alleles. For instance, the gene for height can have an allele for tallness and an allele for shortness (this is a simplistic example, but it illustrates the point).

Phenotype: The external manifestation of the genetic make-up of an individual, which can be influenced by the environment.

Richter: The Richter magnitude scale was developed in 1935 by Charles F. Richter of the California Institute of Technology as a mathematical device to compare the size of earthquakes. The magnitude of an earthquake is determined from the logarithm of the amplitude of waves recorded by seismographs. Adjustments are included for the variation in the distance between the various seismographs and the epicenter of the earthquakes. On the Richter Scale, magnitude is expressed in whole numbers and decimal fractions. For example, a magnitude 5.3 might be computed for a moderate earthquake, and a strong earthquake might be rated as magnitude 6.3. Because of the logarithmic basis of the scale, each whole number increase in magnitude represents a tenfold increase in measured amplitude; as an estimate of energy, each whole number step in the magnitude scale corresponds to the release of about 31 times more energy than the amount associated with the preceding whole number value. Although the Richter Scale has no upper limit, the largest known shocks have had magnitudes in the 8.8 to 8.9 range. Quip is co-opting the term for a uterine upheaval during coitus.

Act I: Scene 4

Skye Boat Song: A Scottish folk song.

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot: An African-American spiritual.

Oh Danny Boy: An Irish folk song.

Act I: Scene 5

Very Munch... The Scream attends the Sick Child... All at once the womb becomes a gallery of expressionistic art... Perhaps we should call you Edvard: The nineteenth/twentieth century Norwegian painter Edvard Munch is widely considered to be the founder of the school of expressionism. The Sick Child and The Scream (several versions) are among his more famous works; the latter belonging to the most popular and well-known works of art of all-time.

No matter how tenuous the link, you've still partaken of the royal jelly: The royal jelly is what is given to ant brood that are tipped to become queens, by the workers. Quip is being flippant as usual, taking his cue from the employment of the word "we" to refer to himself.

We add to our collection and dwell on Amnon and Tamar. And it is too late for Absalom to do anything about it: II Samuel 13. Amnon, Tamar and Absalom are all the children of King David. Absalom and Tamar are full siblings, while Amnon has a different mother from them. Amnon coerces Tamar to sleep with him, and then rejects her. Absalom exacts revenge by killing Amnon, but Quip's claim is that the act cannot recover his sister's honour.

The Fertile Crescent: The area of Mesopotamia (Iraq) down to Israel/Jordan on the Mediterranean.

The cradle of civilisation is here...Euphrates...Indus...Hwang Ho...Nile: A reference to the four ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia, India/Pakistan, China, and Egypt.

You, by contrast, have never had the luxury of being able to hold a mirror to your breath: A paraphrased quotation from the film version of Bernard Pomerance's play *The Elephant Man*, where the Elephant Man, James Merrick, after hearing the story of Romeo and Juliet's

tragic deaths, says “If I were Romeo, I would have held a mirror to her breath.”

Act I: Scene 6

The Boston Globe: The leading daily newspaper in Boston, Massachusetts.

Puff, the magic dragon: A song popularised by the group Peter, Paul and Mary.

Miss Saigon: A musical based on *Madama Butterfly*, and created by Claude Michel-Schonberg and Alain Boublil.

The Wang: One of the most posh theatrical auditoriums in Boston, Massachusetts, located in the Theatre District on Tremont Street.

Act I: Scene 7

Conrad Aiken: A Pulitzer Prize-winning poet.

Margaret Atwood: A Canadian author.

The Booker: The short form of the Booker-McConnell Prize, instituted in 1969 to honour annually the best works of fiction by writers belonging to the British Commonwealth. Winners have included V. S. Naipaul, Penelope Fitzgerald, A. S. Byatt, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Salman Rushdie (who was additionally awarded the Booker of Bookers for its first 25 years), K. Ishiguro, Arundhati Roy, William Golding, and J. M. Coetzee (who has won it twice).

No relative of the winter Olympian: Tara Lipinski won the all-round gold for the United States in skating at the 1998 winter Olympics in Japan.

Systematic biologist: Systematic biology is the study of the relationships of taxa (groups of organisms) to each other using branching trees. The resultant pattern is called a phylogeny.

Act I: Scene 8

The equid line: The evolutionary lineage of the horse.

Systematically shinkle-shankled: A pun on “systematically” as in meticulously and phylogenetically alike. “Shinkle-shankle” was the reins of the mythical horse Equus in Peter Shaffer’s famous play of the same name.

Eocene: Geological time is divided into three major eras, the Protozoic beginning about 600 million years ago, the Mesozoic, about 225 million years ago, and the Caenozoic at about 65 million years ago. The Eocene is the second epoch of the Caenozoic.

Chrono-victims: Victims of time.

The only one afforded latitude was the horse: More punning. Apart from the obvious meaning of time that *Eohippus* has had to live as a species versus Quip or Pip as individuals, there is an allusion to the horse latitudes: two belts of latitude where winds are light and the weather is hot and dry. They are located mostly over the oceans, at about 30° latitude in each hemisphere, and have a north-south range of about 5° as they follow the seasonal migration of the sun. The horse latitudes are associated with the subtropical anticyclones and the large-scale descent of air from high-altitude currents moving toward the poles. After reaching the earth’s surface, this air spreads toward the equator as part of the prevailing trade winds or toward the poles as part of the westerlies. The belt in the Northern Hemisphere is sometimes called the “calms of Cancer” and that in the Southern Hemisphere the “calms of Capricorn.” The term *horse latitudes* supposedly originates from the days when Spanish sailing vessels transported horses to the West Indies. Ships would often become becalmed in mid-ocean in this latitude, thus severely prolonging the voyage; the resulting water shortages would make it necessary for crews to throw their horses overboard.

In the selectional dichotomy, of natural vs. artificial sort: Natural selection is the chief process whereby evolution proceeds—the effective play-out of the survival of the fittest, where the fittest are those individuals of a species most attuned to living and thriving in a particular environment. Artificial selection is an evolutionary regime imposed by human beings upon species mainly towards

particular ends—better crops in terms of disease resistance or yield, for instance.

Eugenics: A term coined in the late 19th century by Sir Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin. The tenets of this concept essentially lay out a system wherein only the best exemplars of a species should be allowed to breed, to ensure the continued and improved fitness of succeeding generations. The idea was to be used to Machiavellian effect under Hitler.

Autism: A severe psychological condition wherein a patient lives completely in a world of his/her own and manifests little reaction to the environment outside. Some autistic patients show remarkable talent in one area or another, such as enumeration, or music, and these individuals are called autistic savants.

Saltation: A jump. The idea here is that of renowned palaeontologist Stephen Jay Gould and evolutionary biologist Niles Eldridge, which suggests that rather than evolution occurring gradually through time, there is relative stasis for long periods, and evolution can happen fairly dramatically over relatively short geological periods of time, leading to considerable turnover of species and even higher taxa (such as genera, tribes and even families).

Do you think he leapt in the womb when he heard that the baton-change was to come? A consanguineous replacement: Do you imagine he stuck around at the baptismal font, his velvet eyes fastened upon the heavenlies for the descent of a dove: When Mary the mother of Jesus went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who at that time was pregnant with John, later to become the Baptist, the babe in Elizabeth's womb leapt for joy (Luke 1:41). John himself was later to baptise Jesus (Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3, John 1). John's claim of himself before Jesus' arrival at the River Jordan is that of "A voice crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord.'" After Jesus' baptism, it is recorded in all of the gospels that the Holy Ghost descended from the heavens like a dove and a voice from on high said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Homo sapiens: The specific binomial nomenclature for the human.

Please note there is a difference between a mummy and a fossil: A mummy is a dead body (overwhelmingly by numbers, human,

though domestic animals have also been known to be mummified) that is maintained over time by the addition of particular preservatives. A fossil is the stone remains of a once living organism that is preserved through the replacement of living cells by stone sediment.

Act I: Scene 9

The Gardner: A deliciously quixotic assemblage of priceless art by a Boston socialite, Isabella Stewart Gardner, whose heyday was over the turn of the 19th to the 20th century. The museum is located off Huntington Avenue in Boston, Massachusetts, hard by the Museum of Fine Arts.

L'chaim: To life (in Hebrew). Employed when glasses of drink are raised in a general toast.

Fat chance of my ever getting ringed: An indication of a complete lack of marital prospects, given Quip's circumstances.

Act II: Scene 1

It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness: Ancient Chinese proverb.

A Lincoln for your thoughts: On the American penny, the featured President is Abraham Lincoln.

David Haig: A renowned Australian evolutionary biologist and currently associate professor in the Department of Organismal and Evolutionary Biology at Harvard University. He is most known for his tremendous work on the theory of genomic imprinting, a phenomenon that is described directly in the play.

The other end of the longest railway line in the world: The Trans-Siberian rail-line runs between the cities of Moscow and Vladivostock in Russia, a distance of almost 6000 miles.

What accompanied the Pinta and the Santa Maria: The Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria were the three ships under the overall

command of Christopher Columbus that embarked on the voyage from Europe to the New World in 1492.

Like the Red Queen looking through a glass darkly: The Red Queen is a character in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, who is always in a state of running motion. When Alice of *Alice In Wonderland* fame asks her why she does so, the reply is that she needs to run in order to stay where she is. The argument was adopted by Van Valen in the mid 1970s to describe evolutionary arms races between species, and in its original conception, hosts and parasites, where it is to the advantage of the host species to evolve defences against the parasites that inhabit it, whereupon the parasites must evolve mechanisms to overcome these defences and so on *ad infinitum*. The same argument can be adopted for the speed of cursorial (running) predators and their prey, for instance, cheetahs and gazelles. The allusion to "looking through a glass darkly" apart from the title of Carroll's book, is also drawn from St. Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see through a glass darkly..."

All I do know is that I shall never have to mourn the passing of my thymus: The thymus gland is an endocrine gland that is chiefly active in pre-pubescence. It typically atrophies about the age of twelve.

There is a money plant, reduced to an O. Henry leaf and a stem: One of the more famous short stories of the acclaimed North Carolinian writer, William Sidney Porter, who wrote under the pseudonym O. Henry, is entitled "The Last Leaf" and is the story of a sick girl who firmly believes that she will die once every leaf falls off the plant outside her window. A homeless painter who lives below paints a leaf onto the window when the last leaf does fall, lulling the girl into a sense of belief that the last leaf has not fallen—her spirits improve, she rises from her bed to health, but the effort for the painter in what was inclement weather is heroically tragic; he falls deathly ill, and dies.

Florence Nightingale: A British nurse who rose to fame for attending to the needs of wounded British soldiers in the Crimean War of the mid 19th century.

Watson: Reference to John H. Watson, the loyal help-mate to Sherlock Holmes through his many cases. Created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

...Charles again, the first, taking a constitutional to his point of decapitation: When Oliver Cromwell seized power in England, the Stuart king Charles I was sentenced to death and summarily beheaded.

The grandest feat of optimism until his Bonnie Prince grandson tried to fetch a throne: Bonnie Prince Charlie, the heir to the Stuart dynasty, attempted to win back his throne from his uncle, William of Orange, by crossing over to Scotland with an army of seven men. Needless to say, the exercise was not a success.

The folly of Culloden: The mismatch occurred at Culloden in Scotland.

Chi-squared test: A non parametric test that tests whether an observed set of values is significantly different from an expected set of values generated via an a priori hypothesis.

Twenty questions: A game in which the object is to guess the individual of whom the questioner is thinking in the space of 20 questions and 3 guesses. All that the questioner provides is information about the sex of the individual in question, and whether he/she is alive or dead.

Act II: Scene 2

Coelacanth: A living fossil fish in the genus *Latimeria*, which was rediscovered only in the late 1930s off the coast of South Africa. Since that time, more individuals have been collected, though sporadically; as such, coelacanth meat is highly prized and very expensive in proportion to how much is provided to the consumer.

Quippus is willing: An allusion to the oft repeated statement “Barkus is willing,” in the Dickens novel *David Copperfield*. Barkus eventually marries the person whom he has been courting for a considerable length time, David’s aunt, Peggoty.

She was Lo. Plain Lo: The first lines of the second paragraph in the first chapter of Vladimir Nabakov's celebrated novel *Lolita*, about a nymphet of the same name and her doomed older ravisher, Humbert Humbert.

Googly: An Australian cricketing term in which a leg-spinner turns his wrist in such a way that the ball spins the way an offspinner would bowl it, that is, on off and middle stump towards the batsman, rather than the traditional leg-spin ball, which is bowled towards leg and turns in towards leg and middle stump.

Act II Scene 3

Meshugah: Crazy person (in Yiddish).

Qantas never crashed: A reference to the statement made by an autistic patient Raymond, played by Dustin Hoffman in the 1987 movie *Rain Man*, in a scene where he is indicating that he does not wish to travel by plane since the airline in question has had flights that have crashed before.

The tree of the fruit of knowledge: An allusion to the tree whose fruit was proscribed to Adam and Eve by God in the Garden of Eden. Genesis 3.

I'd sooner have truck with a diet of worms: A double entendre that is typical of Quip. The Imperial Diet of Worms was convened by Emperor Karl V at Worms in 1521, to which Martin Luther was summoned to recant his revolutionary teachings against indulgences and other excesses of the Roman Catholic church (Luther attended, but did not modify his views). Quip's point is that he refuses to buy into prevailing popular perspective concerning aspects of the hereafter, be it cyclical or otherwise. The diet of worms, more literally, of course, refers to the microbial break-down of the buried corpse into detritus, which disperses into the soil and hence new life—an ecosystemic recycling of nutrients.

And though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Job 19:26. Significantly, it is Pip this time, who makes, or rather, begins, the quote.

Because I do not want to be left at the grinding stone: Luke 17:34-36. “I tell you, in that night, there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together, one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.”

It is a far, far better thing that I do...: The first words of the last paragraph said by Sidney Carton before his execution at the guillotine, as enshrined in Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*—“It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done...”

Will you go to a better rest: Pip is referring to the end of the same paragraph that marks Sidney Carton’s last words—“It is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known.”

Mum’s the word: Ironic pun on the phrase—where customarily, silence is sought when it is invoked, here Pip is being exhorted, literally, to name his mother as the first sense-making vocalisation of which he is capable beyond the womb.