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Dramatic Publishing

THE SEDUCTION OF CHAOS

by
KENT R. BROWN



Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(THE SEDUC TION OF CHAOS)

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The Seduction of Chaos was the winner of the 2004 Plays for a New Millennium Festival competition sponsored by the Sciotoville Theater Project in Sciotoville, Ohio. Under the production of Lorri Tipton, the play premiered on May 13, 2004, in Portsmouth, Ohio, as part of the Sciotoville Theater Project's Plays for a New Millennium Festival. The play was directed by James Taylor Hayes and featured Staci Slaughter as Jackie, Loren Keller as Arthur, and Amy Skelton as Kristina. Set Design by John Huston. Lighting Design by Vivian Robson.

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Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois

THE SEDUCTION OF CHAOS

A One-act Play
For 1 Man and 2 Women

CHARACTERS

ARTHUR FRANKLIN: A well-dressed man in his middle 60s who used to believe that money, a beautiful wife and a good position would protect him against the world.

JACKIE WHITE: An uneducated woman in her mid- to late 30s. Possesses a naive, infectious sense of humor.

THE WOMAN: A striking woman of indeterminate age. Intelligent, stunning, highly unstable.

ADDITIONAL CAST/AS AVAILABLE: Two to three people may be used as “patrons” to aid in animating the short transition scenes.

TIME: The present.

SETTING: A gallery in a small art museum. There are two entrances, a viewing bench, and a simple chair used by the gallery guard.

The gallery is dominated by *The Seduction of Chaos*, a huge canvas hanging on the “fourth wall.” Comprised of clusters and streaks of psychedelic colors, the effect is

that of hundreds of flashing knife blades raining down upon the viewer. Emerging from the visual chaos can be seen the face of a little girl with tears in her eyes...her mouth frozen in a terrifying scream.

The “Artist’sBiography” is next to the “painting.” Serving as a protective barrier is a gold-colored rope threaded through four metal stands.

THE SEDUCTION OF CHAOS

SCENE 1

(Tuesday, 3:30. ARTHUR FRANKLIN enters carrying a briefcase. He is tightly wound, emotionally off-center, but works to keep himself on point. He glances about the room for a moment, then sees the “painting.” He watches intently, approaches cautiously, then exits. JACKIE WHITE enters, surveys the room, sees a small piece of paper in the corner, picks it up, reads it, shrugs and puts it in her pocket. Then she settles herself in the guard chair. A few moments later, ARTHUR reappears, nods to JACKIE.)

ARTHUR. Good afternoon.

JACKIE. Good afternoon to you, sir. And how are you today?

ARTHUR *(approaches the “painting”)*. Fine, thank you.
(ARTHUR leans over the rope barrier to get a closer look. It appears as if he might touch the “painting.”)

JACKIE. Watch it, sir. Sir?

ARTHUR. What’s that?

JACKIE. You have to stay on this side of the rope. No touching.

ARTHUR. No touching. Of course. I’m sorry.

JACKIE. It’s for protection.

ARTHUR. Protection?

JACKIE. Yes, sir.

ARTHUR. Whose protection?

JACKIE (*glad to have someone to talk to*). Hey, that's good. Whose protection! The painting, man. Right in front of you. Like last month? This mother comes in with her six-year-old boy and another kid in a stroller. She's standing right about where you are. The baby starts in cryin'. Just a little whine here 'n there but it's gettin' louder. Diaper most likely. My little nephew, Petey, he gets like that. But the mother's just watchin' that picture...like she's seein' Judgment Day. Then the baby cranks it up another octave. And the boy—he's Anthony—he's tellin' the kid to shut its face and takes off one of his Reeboks and starts hittin' on the baby. Now the baby starts screamin' like all hell. So I say "Ma'am, your kid is smashin' your little baby!"

ARTHUR. What does she do?

JACKIE. She never took her eyes off the picture, that's what she did. So I gotta make my move on Anthony. He sees me comin' and throws the Reebok right at the picture. Now it's just me 'n the Reebok so I start movin' and gaugin' and stretchin'...and my arm's out and...I catch the laces just as it's about to hit the picture.

ARTHUR. Nice catch.

JACKIE. Thanks. Used to play flag football with my brothers.

ARTHUR. What does the mother do?

JACKIE. The mother? Didn't even know we were here. Nothin' on this earth 'cept for that painting. "Hey, lady," I said, "maybe your little boy needs to go to the bathroom." She just turns around, takes the Reebok outta my

hand, and walks out with her kids. Sometimes ya just wonder about people.

ARTHUR. You saved it. The painting.

JACKIE. Well, I...it's my job.

ARTHUR (*looking intently at the "painting"*). What's it called?

JACKIE. *The Seduction of Chaos.*

ARTHUR. *The Seduction of Chaos.*

JACKIE. Officially, yeah. 'Course, us guards, we just call it *Chaos*. We make up names for the artworks. Got to keep yourself occupied. Now don't you go tellin' the man age ment. Can't lose me this job.

ARTHUR. It's striking.

JACKIE. Well, it's big anyway, I'll give it that. Fifteen feet high and twenty-seven feet wide. Brand new, just got it a week ago. Havin' the grand opening thing in a few days. The biggest in the gallery. Museum paid \$900,000 for it. Can you imagine that?

ARTHUR (*moving closer to the "painting"*). The blues and the greens are...amazing...almost treacherous. (*Pointing to the colored areas.*) And those...the darker portions...there, and over there, what would you call those?

JACKIE. I'd call 'em dark blue-green splotches, but I bet there's a special name for 'em. Maybe somethin' like "blobs of truth."

ARTHUR (*pointing to various places on the "painting"*). These streaks here...do you see?...and over there? Everywhere. Yellow, green...cobalt blue. It's...staggering.

JACKIE. And them red gashes up there...see? And don't forget that orange stuff over there.

ARTHUR. Like exploding planets...or a meteor shower.

JACKIE. Looks more like the “artiste” took herself a handful ’a Magic Markers and went at it on some old butcher paper.

ARTHUR (*concentrating on the “painting”*). Do you feel it?

JACKIE. Feel what?

ARTHUR. The heat.

JACKIE. That might be the air conditioning. It’s been goin’ down all week long.

ARTHUR. It makes you want to touch it. (*Moving toward the “painting.”*)

JACKIE. Like I told ya, sir, that’s not allowed. Oil in the fingertips. Damages the canvas. ’Course in this case... who could ever tell?

ARTHUR. If I touch it, bells will go off and security will come and haul me away.

JACKIE. Well, yeah, that’d be interesting, but we don’t have no bells here. Just me and a coupla signs. We trust the public to do the right thing.

ARTHUR (*taking a step back*). May I stand here? (*Taking another step back.*) Or perhaps here. Is this better? Safer?

JACKIE (*smiling*). Now, you’re having a little fun with me, and I appreciate that. Tell you what...if you want to get down ’n dirty we got some of that “interactive art-environmental-make-a-social-statement” stuff down the hall. There’s this big bunch of grass ’n dirt ’n weeds ’n rocks all built up, with cigarette butts ’n paper cups ’n rubbers ’n busted-up baby dolls ’n torn-up hundred-dollar bills all glued into the ground. I know, ’cause I tried to pull one up once. And there’s a sign that invites people to walk all over it. Like we don’t really see the

beauty we have 'cause we're so busy discarding our way through life, littering the natural world with our "stuff." Kids really love it.

ARTHUR. What's that called?

JACKIE. "Hope and Expectations." But us guards just call it "Keep Off the Grass." Museum shelled out \$300,000! For that kinda money they can come tear out my bedroom and set it up right here for everybody to sleep in, hang their underwear on my lampshade.

ARTHUR. You're not an art lover, are you?

JACKIE. Well, you sit around lookin' at all this, room after room, like I do and you begin to get a little buggy. (*Referring to the "painting."*) Like this Lambrisi chick, here. Nothin' but "pain" 'n "vision" 'n "angst." Nobody's paintin' pictures of oranges 'n bananas anymore.

ARTHUR (*beginning to read the "Artist's Biography"*). "Kristina Lambrisi, born in San Francisco, California, in 1968, is internationally known for her compelling visions of pain and fear through her challenging integration of line and color."

JACKIE. Hell, live in the Projects if ya want some pain 'n fear.

(THE WOMAN enters. She is simply but smartly dressed. JACKIE and ARTHUR are unaware of her presence.)

ARTHUR (*continues reading*). "Her monumental works, often fifteen by thirty feet in dimension, seduce and assault the senses simultaneously. Caressed at first by the undulating blue-green echoes of life's embryonic potential—

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

While directing the premier production of **The Seduction of Chaos**, James Taylor Hayes kept a series of notes chronicling his interpretation and approach to the play. The following observations have been excerpted from those notes.

—*The Seduction of Chaos* is a very erotic and cathartic play. It is set in an art gallery, and has only three characters: Jackie, a security guard; Arthur, a middle-aged man who has lost his job and his wife on the same day; and Kristina, an emotionally unstable artist who drags Arthur into her strange and perverse world. The fourth presence in the play, although not a character in the literal sense, is a massive abstract canvas hanging on the fourth wall valued at \$900,000.

—When the artist, initially identified only as “The Woman,” first appears, she is anonymous; just another visitor to the gallery, who happens to know something about art history and this particular artist’s past. We eventually find that the painting reflects her very tragic past; her parents were killed while vacationing in Italy—and while protecting her physically from their attacker. Her emotional response to these events is reflected in the painting. Not representationally, though; it is up to Arthur and the guard to find these phantoms embedded within the colors and shapes on the canvas. Arthur is fascinated, repelled, and at the same time drawn completely to this frightening painting. He sees his own history in it, too. He cannot figure out why “*The Seduction of Chaos* is worth \$900,000 and he’s worth nothing.”

—I found the play moves in triangles, shifting focal points from one character to the next, and sometimes to the painting itself. I saw the actors as a chamber ensemble: the guard as the piano, playing the louder more basic notes; the man as the cello, slow, steady and deep, but capable of great fire; and the woman as the violin, controlling the melody of the piece. The security guard, both in style and attitude, acts as counterpoint to the characters of Kristina and Arthur, who is slowly slipping into a state of near dementia. The tension between Kristina and Arthur; between them and the security guard; and between Arthur, the guard, and the painting, is palpable. When things finally break loose, it is shocking and frightening and strangely liberating.

—Sigmund Freud proposed the idea that people invest their emotional energy into objects that carry the weight of their memories. He called this concept “cathexis,” the libido’s charge of energy that invests emotional meaning in proxy objects. Kristina creates the painting, investing it with the emotional pain of the death of her parents. Arthur senses and responds by investing his own energy back into the painting. Had Kristina not entered the gallery, the energy transfer would remain between the painting and Arthur. Kristina’s arrival, however, creates a triangular flow of energy—Kristina-energy-painting-energy-Arthur-energy-painting-energy-Kristina. The rising tempo of the play also mirrors the mounting erotic attraction, shared between Kristina and Arthur, orchestrated/manipulated by Kristina.

—Arthur’s investment of energy makes the painting more meaningful and thus more valuable—also, more insidious in its ability to control his mental state. Ultimately, at

Kristina's encouragement, he destroys it. The negative energy emanating from the painting is too much for Arthur, too reflective of his own personal tragedy, and feeds his bitterness too well. Kristina, as with her previous works of art, attempts to achieve catharsis through the destruction of her painting but is unable to exorcise the experience of witnessing her parents' death.

—In *A Director Prepares*, Anne Bogart discusses several elements of theatre, including eroticism. Her description of the steps in an erotic relationship mirrors the process by which Arthur discovers the painting. Bogart enumerates seven steps:

- ??Something or someone (the painting) stops you in your tracks
- ??You feel drawn to it
- ??You sense its energy and its power
- ??You make first contact
- ??It responds (and the painting does respond, by growing in importance and power)
- ??You experience extended intercourse (Arthur's communion with the painting, and later his physical destruction of it—the “little death”)
- ??You are changed irrevocably

—By the time we reach the end of the play, Arthur has been transformed from a simple, intelligent, middle-aged man grappling with some exterior changes in his life—the loss of his job and his wife—into a shark. He is now a man who is unashamed of his own violent—although not neces-

sarily physical—power, and his ability to control and manipulate others—much like Kristina. This change is effected when Kristina manipulates him into destroying the painting. This cathartic act moves him through his own grief and confusion into a more decisive and deliberate, yet considerably less wholesome, man.

James Taylor Hayes is an actor, director, producer and author. His work as an actor includes numerous roles for stage, film, television and radio. He has produced over 250 shows and outdoor spectacles across the United States. Jim worked for many years as a director and producer for the John B. Rogers Company, where he produced the Tacoma Sesquicentennial Historical Spectacular, the 50th Anniversary Speedway Indiana America on Wheels and the Re-enactment of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in Alexander City, Alabama. As founder and artistic director of Unicorn Players, Inc., Jim has thirty years' experience touring children's theater, for which he wrote 14 stage adaptations of classic children's literature.