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*Dramatic Publishing*

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A One Act Play

# who am i this time?

An episode from  
Kurt Vonnegut Jr.'s  
"Welcome to the Monkey House"

By  
Christopher Sergel



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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WHO AM I THIS TIME?  
*A One Act Play*  
For 3 Men and Seven Women

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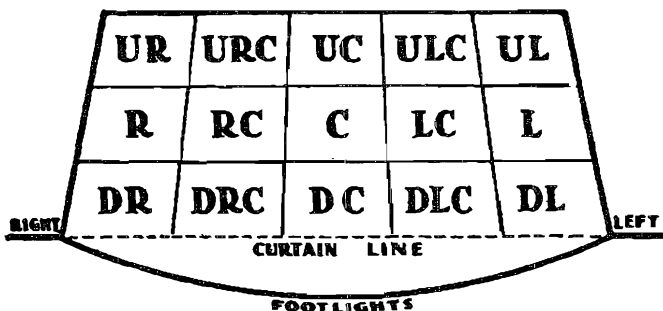
CHARACTERS

HARRY NASH. . . . . *shy leading actor of theater group*  
MISS SAWYER. . . . . *owner of theatre*  
MARY . . . . . *her assistant*  
NEWT. . . . . *director of play*  
HELENE. . . . . *shy, beautiful girl; Harry's co-star*  
GEORGE  
DIANA  
SUSANNE. . . . . *members of acting group*  
CATHERINE  
NANCY

PLACE: *North Crawford Mask and Wig Club.*

TIME: *Present.*

## CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



## STAGE POSITIONS

*Upstage* means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: UR for *up right*, RC for *right center*, DLC for *down left center*, etc. A territory designated on the stage refers to a general area, rather than to a given point.

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**NOTE:** Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

## WHO AM I THIS TIME?

The curtain rises on what suggests a backstage area.

There are a few folding chairs, an old coffee table in the central area, and here and there some left over props and bits of scenery.

Against the upstage wall there are several leaf rakes. At LC there's a table or desk with a chair behind.

Several attractive girls in casual clothes are strolling on, talking as they come.

DIANA is carrying a thermos and some paper cups.

CATHERINE has a notebook, NANCY is bringing some scripts and SUSANNE is carrying a diet cola.

NANCY: My choice would be a play by Edward Bond—dynamite. Or maybe David Campton—also dynamite. Or Christopher Fry!

CATHERINE: Why always English playwrights?

(DIANA is pouring coffee from her thermos. GEORGE, a bright young man wearing good looking casual clothes is entering)

NANCY: If I could have anything I wanted for Christmas—

CATHERINE: You'd like an English playwright.

NANCY: I'd like a good role for a change.

DIANA: (Offering coffee) George?

GEORGE: I meant to bring my own. (Taking cup) This'll be fine. Thank you.

DIANA: I forgot the sugar.

SUSANNE: Does anybody still eat sugar?

GEORGE: (Grimaces at bitter taste) That's—coffee.

DIANA: Did Miss Sawyer say what play we do next?

NANCY: I think we should vote on it.

CATHERINE: Miss Sawyer owns the theatre.

NANCY: She doesn't own the North Crawford Mask and Wig Club.

CATHERINE: You provide a theatre, then you get to pick out the plays.

DIANA: I think we should do something relevant.

GEORGE: Relevant to what? Relevant is not a noun.

DIANA: Everyone knows what's relevant.

SUSANNE: I thought we'd decided on the play about the problem high school kid.

GEORGE: Every high school kid is a problem high school kid.

SUSANNE: It's called THE KID NOBODY COULD HANDLE. That one.

DIANA: And that one is relevant.

NANCY: The part's a little young for Harry Nash.  
(They all react to this)

SUSANNE: Well, maybe someone else—

DIANA: Not star Harry?

NANCY: (To SUSANNE) Are you serious?

SUSANNE: (Dismissing) Forget it.

NANCY: I'll tell you an American play I wouldn't mind doing. "Streetcar"—with Harry playing a cruel Stanley Kawalski—(Acting)—and I'm Blanche Dubois.

(MISS SAWYER who is a little older than the others and the acknowledged leader is entering DL followed by her assistant MARY, and by NEWT, a slightly older young man and decidedly uneasy at the moment)

MISS SAWYER: I was hoping for a better turnout.



CATHERINE: I guess those here get the parts.

MISS SAWYER: That's not really up to me.

CATHERINE: But if you're directing...

MISS SAWYER: I have an announcement.

DIANA: The play we're doing?

MARY: Let her announce.

MISS SAWYER: It isn't up to me anymore. That's my announcement. I'm not going to direct the next play. (There's a murmur of concern and protest) For one thing, my mother's sick. For another, it's time the North Crawford Mask and Wig Club found some new directors.

MARY: Why?

SUSANNE: Who needs—

GEORGE: (As he comes upstage, interrupting) If you don't direct, what about Harry Nash? (This is a new concern to everyone)

MARY: Harry's so shy.

CATHERINE: And with a new director—

SUSANNE: I could help with your mother.

MISS SAWYER: It's settled. (Poking man next to her)  
Stand up, please. (As he's rising) Our next group  
of plays will be directed by Newt. (This is received  
with reservations)

CATHERINE: (After a beat) Newt?

NEWT: (Smiling uneasily) When Doris Sawyer called this  
morning, I was as surprised as you are.

GEORGE: (Cautiously) I didn't know you were a director.

NEWT: (Trying to make a joke) Mostly I direct the installa-  
tion of combination aluminum storm windows and  
screens. Guess most of you know—I'm a salesman.  
Storm windows, doors—(No one is amused and he's  
running down)—here and there a bathtub enclosure.

GEORGE: (Gently) We know. (Trying to say something  
pleasant) At least you always show up for the club  
meetings.

NEWT: (Wryly) But the highest rank I ever held on stage was  
either butler or policeman—whichever's higher.

GEORGE: We do some complex productions.

MISS SAWYER: I've promised to give as much help as I can.  
(Decisively) But it's my theatre, and for now, anyway,  
Newt is in charge. (They all look toward the uncomfor-  
table man as they digest this information)

DIANA: (Taking a breath and challenging) What play?  
(NEWT looks to MISS SAWYER for guidance, but she's  
refusing it)

MISS SAWYER: (Giving question back to him) What about it, Newt?

NEWT: It's—well—

NANCY: (Helpfully) Anyone for a play by David Storey?

NEWT: Not this time.

SUSANNE: Someone suggested we vote.

NEWT: (Getting himself together) No—I've made a choice.

DIANA: A choice that's relevant? (Reacting to look from GEORGE) Relevant to—like, real life?

NEWT: (With a slight edge) That's up to the audience. Before we go on, I want to know about Harry Nash.

GEORGE: (To the sky) Now he's making conditions.

NEWT: If Harry doesn't take the part, I'm not directing. Where is he, anyway?

NANCY: The hardware store. Where else?

CATHERINE: You know he never comes to meetings.

NEWT: (Trying to recall) I've never seen him at a meeting, but I didn't realize—

CATHERINE: Couldn't drag him.

NEWT: He's our best actor. He couldn't be that shy—or exclusive.

GEORGE: It isn't that Harry's exclusive. And he doesn't stay away because he has something else to do. He isn't married—doesn't even go with any girl. No men friends, either. He's just too shy for social situations.

NEWT: (Hard to believe) I saw him play the Jimmy Porter role in LOOK BACK IN ANGER—pure, blazing fury. Then the idiotic part in THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST. After that, HENRY THE EIGHTH. Anyone who could play those roles...

NANCY: On stage he's never Harry Nash.

MISS SAWYER: (Nodding) The moment the curtain goes up, he's body and soul what the script tells him to be.

NANCY: (Not meant unkindly) But in real life—he isn't anybody.

SUSANNE: Talk about an identity problem?

MISS SAWYER: Please...don't start psychoanalyzing.

NANCY: One performance—he was like a charged-up Richard Burton. Then I stopped in at Miller's Hardware where he works the following Monday. (Makes a face) His personality was about as blah as the leaf rakes.

MARY: (Surprised) You stopped in?

NANCY: (Shrugging) Don't ask why.

NEWT: We're doing a short piece by Strindberg, and there's a very difficult role.

CATHERINE: Strindberg's DANCE OF DEATH? THE FATHER?

NEWT: MISS JULIE. (The cast is expressing interest to each other at this news)

CATHERINE: (As she writes in her notebook) Never thought I'd be starting a project on Strindberg.

MISS SAWYER: MISS JULIE—then there are two difficult roles.

NEWT: (Dismissing; generally) I better get down to Miller's Hardware and start looking among the leaf rakes. We'll have our first readings tomorrow night. (They are all rising and starting for various exits)

DIANA: (Ready to debate) About MISS JULIE...

NEWT: (Generally) Eight o'clock tomorrow night. (Back to DIANA) Consider it relevant to the problem of a rigid social structure, or if you prefer—women's lib.

MISS SAWYER: (Pausing; with amused concern) Pretty ambitious for a beginner.

NEWT: Not if we can get Harry.

MISS SAWYER: (As she goes) And the girl to play Julie.  
(NEWT is being left alone on the stage and turns front)

NEWT: (Speaking directly—and casually—to the audience)  
Doris Sawyer was absolutely right. We had two difficult roles. And when we cast them we found the most exciting part of our show was taking place off stage, backstage in the wings, and during rehearsal. I wouldn't want you to miss that. Strindberg's bitter battle between the sexes became the background for something else entirely. We discovered we had a drama developing within our production.

(HELENE SHAW, a very beautiful, quietly dressed girl, comes on L and sits behind a small table at LC)

NEWT: (As he begins to cross L) On my way to Miller's Hardware, I decided to stop off at the telephone company to complain about a bill for a call to Honolulu. I'd never phone Honolulu in my life. (He glances at HELENE, then looks back to the audience) And there was this beautiful girl I'd never seen before behind the counter at the phone company. She explained about the bill.

HELENE: (Diffidently) You see, sir, we've just put in an automatic billing machine and the machine doesn't have all the bugs out of it yet.

NEWT: (To HELENE, as he puts down bill) Not only did I not call Honolulu, I don't think anybody in North Crawford ever has, or will.

HELENE: The machine made a mistake. I'll take the charge off your bill, sir.

NEWT: Are you from around North Crawford?

HELENE: (Shaking head, as she starts writing down information from his bill) I just come with the new billing machine—to teach the local girls how to take care of it. After that, I'll go with some other machine to some place else.

NEWT: (Smiling) Well, as long as people have to come along with the machines, I guess we're all right.

HELENE: (Looking up, blankly) What?

NEWT: (Making a joke) When machines start delivering themselves, that's when people better start worrying.

HELENE: (Not responding; going back to noting information) Oh.

NEWT: (To audience; perplexed) Wasn't very interested in that subject. I started wondering if she was interested in anything. She seemed kind of numb. Almost a machine herself—an automatic phone company politeness machine.

HELENE: Sir? (As he turns back to her, she hands him his bill) I have all the information. Was there anything else?

NEWT: How long will you be in town?