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Dramatic Publishing

THIS IS NOT A PIPE DREAM



DRAMA BY
BARRY KORNHAUSER

THIS IS NOT A PIPE DREAM

AATE Distinguished Play Award Winner

"Charming and extraordinary ... If the life of a surrealist painter seems like a peculiar subject for young audiences, you should be aware of one of the many achievements of *This Is Not a Pipe Dream* ... Audiences will leave with an appreciation for the power to transform the ordinary into the wonderful." —*The New York Times*

"Hats off! ... An innovative, risk-taking venture ... one of the best productions of this theatrical season for audiences of any age ... Hilariously ridiculous ... hauntingly magical ... The clowning will have you guffawing in spite of yourself, and the images of loneliness and loss are so palpable that they can't help but provoke goose bumps." —*Chicago Tribune*

"Kornhauser's exploration of theatre, art and reality is ... fed by Magritte's observations and signature images. [In] this unusual fantasy romp ... fittingly, little is quite what it seems. ... This sometimes thoughtful, sometimes wacky play deliberately keeps the audience guessing about the nature of reality." —*Los Angeles Times*

Drama. By Barry Kornhauser. Cast: 2m., 2w., 1 either gender. Based freely on the work and early life of surrealist artist René Magritte, this is an unorthodox adventure in theatrical form. It celebrates art and the imagination and the ways in which these help us confront life's mysteries. Here is the story of young René who wants to be an artist, a notion dismissed by his father as "a pipe dream." Encouraged by his mother, before her untimely death, the boy begins his quest. He follows his vision into the delightfully absurd magic-realism of his famous paintings. The boy and the audience discover something of the true power of dreams and the triumph of imagination. The multi-image dramatic staging incorporates spectacular color images of René Magritte's artwork. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 50 minutes. Color art image CD available. Code: TL9.*

(Cover artwork: Magritte reproduction courtesy of The Estate of René Magritte.)

ISBN 10: 1-58342-861-5
ISBN 13: 978-1-58342-861-0



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www.DramaticPublishing.com

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by

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Dramatic Publishing Company

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Book by BARRY KORNHAUSER

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(THIS IS NOT A PIPE DREAM)

ISBN: 978-1-58342-861-0

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To all my family
with
love.

This Is Not a Pipe Dream was commissioned by the Fulton Opera House of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and was first produced from February through May, 1988, under the direction of Mary Hall Surface.

Actors:

Holly Baumgardner

Cynthia Charles

Robert Emmett Greene

Rande Mele

Production:

Mary Hall Surface..... Director

Edward H. Jameson Production Stage Manager

Norman B. Dodge, Jr. Set Designer

Beth Dunkelberger Costume Designer

Ross Care Original Music Creator

This Is Not a Pipe Dream

CHARACTERS

(Cast. 2m., 2w., 1 either gender)

ANONYMOUS MAN (ANONYMOUS MEN)

The INTERLOCUTOR

STAGE MANAGER

RENÉ

MOTHER

FATHER

TEACHER

GEORGETTE

PROJECTIONS

Black and white reproductions of the images of paintings and photos so intimately related to this text can be found at the end of the script.

These are available, many in full color, as digital projection images and may be ordered from the publisher, The Dramatic Publishing Company, Inc., for use in production of the play. Should producers prefer to make their own versions of the paintings, they will find the projection images useful for design and rendering.

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PRODUCTION NOTES

This Is Not A Pipe Dream is based both on the early life of artist René Magritte and on the large body of his work. As regards the former, let it be said at the outset that the subject's birth certificate is hardly as valuable a document as the playwright's poetic license. But the ideas and images of the adult artist are treated with a touch more sacrosanctity. In some respects the play serves as a translation of this work, from the language of paint on canvas to that of the stage.

Consequently, one should look to that work for clues to both the performance style and look of the play. The term Magic Realism as it applies to both art and literature may best capture the essence. Michel Foucault once wrote of Magritte's fascination for "heterotopias," sorts of elaborate visual non sequiturs. The dictionary defines the word as "misplacement or displacement, as of an organ/the formation of tissue in a part where it is abnormal." Well, if this play was a person, he'd probably make medical history. It is structured around the displacement of both words and images. Foucault's book, *This Is Not A Pipe Dream* derives its name from the same source as does this drama. Like his book, the play is "a cornucopia of word plays, wisecracks, and slapstick repetitions," perhaps best described as a kind of "analytical cartoon."

The source, of course, is a painting by Magritte. That this canvas and others by the artist appear in some form throughout the work is integral to its design. To this end, a suggestion. A very functional backdrop might assume the appearance of one of Magritte's many polyptychs, with four to six panels. (1) Stage Right Top: A working window painted to convey the illusion that a cloud-filled blue sky lies behind its glass. As this window is opened, in shutter-like fashion, the sky goes with it. The opening must be large enough to accommodate a man's head and torso. (2) Center Top: A reproduction of Magritte's *La trahison des images/The Perfidy of Images* (This painting has alternately been

titled *L'usage de la parole* /The Use of Language I, *L'air et la chanson* /The Air and The Song, and not surprisingly, *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* /This Is Not A Pipe.) including the legend in its original French. Refer to Projection 2. (3) Stage Left Top: A rear-projection screen. (4) Center Bottom: A readily removable panel, the appearance of which is unimportant as it will be obscured by a large box, described below.

(5 & 6) Stage Right and Left Bottom: Optional. Standard, illustrative Magrittian icon can be selected. The apple, the stone, the bowler hat, or the paper cuts-out are all good choices (Fulton Opera House production eliminated the use of projections and replaced them with interchangeable panels on the back drop itself, manipulated by the actors to create an ever transient background for the play. The window, placed centrally on the top row of the polyptych, was constructed so that it could be hidden by panels when so desired. See Illustration A).

One of René Magritte's earliest memories was of a large box in his bedroom. The large box, mentioned above, that hides the bottom central panel of the backdrop, has a lid for its top, and a false back so that entrances and exits can be made from there through the backdrop. The only other set piece at the top of the show is an easel holding a canvas, its back to the audience, standing downstage to one side.

As one of the purposes of this play is to negate the traditional theatrical illusion of reality, masking is intended to heighten effect, not to conceal the "workings" of the piece. The stage manager, then, and his equipment are placed in clear sight of the audience. Should additional masking be desired, it can be modeled after Magritte's curtain-shaped "flats" as seen in **Projection 21. *Le beau monde* /The Beautiful World.**

Music is called for to underscore certain scenes. Certainly, it can be used elsewhere as director and composer see fit. In all instances, a sound, that is clearly synthesized, best serves the play. The scenes generally speak for themselves; only in a few special cases

is any specific reference made to the ambient mood the scoring must convey, and there are places where the music of vaudeville shows, silent film comedies, and carnivals is clearly most appropriate. All music is taped, as are various sound effects, although most should be live and the responsibility of the stage manager. His use of a tuba on stage would be welcome as this instrument is one of Magritte's common images. However, in a touring production, the bulk of this brass beast makes the question of "Tuba or not tuba" purely academic.

As the audience arrives, the stage manager can help with seating. If there is no fixed arrangement of chairs, it is advisable to establish two central aisles, cutting the audience vertically and horizontally, and of course, aisles along the sides. An introduction is provided, and the play begins.

This Is Not a Pipe Dream

SCENE 1

AT RISE. *Music. Projection 1. Le mois des vendanges/The Time of the Harvest*

(One of Magritte's ubiquitous men in bowler hat and top-coat appears briefly at the window, looking this way and that.

This figure shall henceforth be referred to as the ANONYMOUS MAN, both for his universality of appearance and generality of purpose. Ultimately, all four of the actors in the play shall assume this role, often two or three concurrently. But audience members should always be persuaded that it is one omnipresent figure that they are seeing. To this purpose, each should assume the same particular posture, style of movement, and vocal mannerisms, and wear identical half mask, exposing only the lower jaw.

After leaving the window, the ANONYMOUS MAN appears at one side of the backdrop. Again, he peers about before tip-toeing across to the other side. He disappears behind the backdrop and reappears almost instantaneously where he began. Several humorous bits of business occur in which one man somehow appears to be in almost two places at once; the window being used along with the two entrances on either side of the backdrop. After a time, the audience is allowed to see two identical men simultaneously. It becomes increasingly apparent, and comically so, that a pursuit is underway. A third such figure soon becomes involved. All

three of these men are the pursuers, who eventually wield segments of “metal” pipe. Finally, their intended victim appears. It is an actress disguised by the characteristic top-coat and bowler hat of the ANONYMOUS MAN, but with radically different trousers, shoes, and shirt.

This actress will soon assume a special role in the play. To call that role “narrator” does not do it justice. More appropriate is the use of a term borrowed from the minstrel show—the INTERLOCUTOR—that special conversational go-between, between performers, and performers and spectators.

Our INTERLOCUTOR is spotted and is pursued into the audience by the three others. Slapstick, cartoon-like elements of chase are encouraged here and throughout the scene. The actress loses her pursuers in the crowd. She hides in the box, the lid slamming behind her. Alerted by the sound, the pursuers arrive, open the box, and violently attack its insides with their pipes, to the accompaniment of appropriate sound effects. At one point, they stop and speak in absolute unison.)

ANONYMOUS MEN (*to audience*). Don’t try this at home.

(They resume. Before long, the actress appears from the wings and closes each of the pursuers in the box. Sound stops. Then she lifts the lid for a peek. Sound. A game ensues between the actress and the STAGE MANAGER, she tries unsuccessfully to foil his cues. Before long, she notices the spectators, takes one last look into the box—with sound—and then turns to address her audience.)

SCENE 2

INTERLOCUTOR. Oh, you needn’t be too concerned. This isn’t

real, you know. It's just a play. The performing artist's living canvas. (*Pointing to the reproduction on the polyptych and the identical **Projection 2. La trahison des images/The Perfidy of Images.***) In 1928 and 29, another artist, named René Magritte, painted a canvas of his own—the portrait of a pipe with the accompanying legend (*Marking each French word on the picture.*) “This is not a pipe.” Well, just as a PICTURE of a pipe is not, in fact, a pipe, neither is a play real life. Here.

*(The window on the backdrop opens. An ANONYMOUS MAN appears, an apple floating In front of his face. **Projection 3. La grande guerre/The Great War** The apple is plucked by the INTERLOCUTOR.)*

INTERLOCUTOR (*cont'd*). An apple.

(The ANONYMOUS MAN drops a stone in her hand, and closes the window.)

INTERLOCUTOR (*cont'd*). A stone. In reality, quite different.

*(**Projection 4. La grande table/The Large Table.**)*

INTERLOCUTOR (*cont'd*). In art, the same. Bits of pigment on canvas. Onstage—props.

(She mimes biting into the apple; we hear the sound of a loud crunch and swallow. She then mimes a bite into the stone; we hear the very same sound effect.)

INTERLOCUTOR (*cont'd*). In a play, one can get hit on the head ...

(An ANONYMOUS MAN pops out of the box, beaming the INTERLOCUTOR with his metal pipe to the accompaniment of a sound effect that will become a standard

throughout the show.)

INTERLOCUTOR (*cont'd*). without injury, because ...

ANONYMOUS MAN. This is not a pipe ... (*Exits back into the box, grabbing his apple.*)

INTERLOCUTOR. but rather a facsimile made of foam-rubber, the accompanying sound effect provided by the stage manager—who must be ready for anything at the drop of a hat.

(The STAGE MANAGER stands, flashes an “APPLAUSE” sign, and does a hat-trick—the dropping of a hat—in way of a bow. The INTERLOCUTOR drops the stone in his hat, which he flips back onto his head.)

INTERLOCUTOR (*cont'd*). In fact, putting a play together is the work of many hands.

(Many hands fly over the backdrop onto the stage, some sound effect accompanying their flight.)

INTERLOCUTOR (*cont'd*). And is no small feat.

(The INTERLOCUTOR squats and covers her head, expecting a deluge of “feet.” Instead, an ANONYMOUS MAN with huge clown feet enters and kicks her in the seat of the pants, with the accompanying standard sound effect. She somersaults forward. He exits.)

INTERLOCUTOR (*cont'd*). A slapstick classic. The Kick-In-The-Old-BE ...

STAGE MANAGER (*abrupt, interrupting her*). Ahem!

INTERLOCUTOR. ... YOND the stage manager, there is a complement of talented individuals, including director ...

(An ANONYMOUS MAN enters as the director, rapidly miming—with sound effect—impossible orders that leave the INTERLOCUTOR in a tangle, one hand out-stretched. The “director” exits.)

INTERLOCUTOR. playwright ...

(Another ANONYMOUS MAN enters, the playwright, furiously rewriting—with sound effect—placing a script change into the waiting hand of the INTERLOCUTOR before noticing the audience and hurriedly scurrying off. The INTERLOCUTOR, untangling, continues—now reading from the “playwright’s” script change.)

INTERLOCUTOR *(cont’d)*. the designers ... *(A look both ways: no designers.)* ... who create these props,” *(Wads up the “rewrite,” the prop to which she refers, and tosses it over the polyptych.)* set, *(Kicks the box—a sound effect—and grabs her foot in pain.)* and costumes. *(Lifts that foot up high, showing off her shoe.)* And thusly clothed —*(Motioning to the rest of her costume.)* and painted—*(Motioning to her face.)* there are, of course, the actors ...

(Three ANONYMOUS MEN appear—without masks. They bow simultaneously and strike dramatic poses.)

INTERLOCUTOR *(cont’d)*. who speak the ...

ANONYMOUS MAN 1 *(actress who plays MOTHER)*.
WORDS.

(The INTERLOCUTOR signals her dissatisfaction with the reading. A sound effect reinforces this. ANONYMOUS MAN 1 exits.)

ANONYMOUS MAN 2 *(actor who plays FATHER, unsure)*.
WORDS?

(The INTERLOCUTOR again signals disapproval. Sound effect. ANONYMOUS MAN 2 exits.)

ANONYMOUS MAN 3 *(actor who plays RENÉ)*. WORDS.

(The INTERLOCUTOR likes this interpretation; a different sound effect conveys this also.)

INTERLOCUTOR. ... WORDS that help bring characters to life. This actor will portray the aforementioned artist, René Magritte, or rather Magritte as a youth, or rather yet, our interpretation of that youth. What you shall see is what an actor will do with what a director does with what a playwright has done with what a child did.

(During the above lines, ANONYMOUS MAN 3 begins his conversion to childhood, both through various physical manifestations and by the removal of his topcoat and bowler hat revealing a small cloth pack underneath, worn over his shoulders. As the INTERLOCUTOR approaches her last few words, he hands her the discarded garments. At her finish, the two cross one another's paths with a broad motion, a sound effect—a chime perhaps—underscoring the move and conveying its special magic. The actor takes his place at the easel on stage, and during the following begins to paint.)

INTERLOCUTOR *(cont'd)*. As so we call this character René. Never “Magritte.” For he is not Magritte. He is no more Magritte than this pipe is a pipe or a play—is real life. *(Pause.)* Ultimately, even the audience has a role in the making of a play. At the very least, the way you respond impacts on the performance.

(The STAGE MANAGER flashes the “APPLAUSE” sign.)

INTERLOCUTOR (*cont'd*). So theatre is collaborative—that is, it takes the cooperation and teamwork of many.

(Music. In the high-speed, pixilated slapstick manner of an old-time silent film comedy, two ANONYMOUS MEN clear the stage of hands, then disappear. End music.)

INTERLOCUTOR (*cont'd*). But painting is a lonely art.

RENÉ (*cleaning up, the canvas finished for now*). Oh no, ma'am. I am only lonely when I am not painting.

(Musical segue as he exits, leaving easel, canvas and brush in place.)

SCENE 3

INTERLOCUTOR. René's interest in art begins early, sparked by a particular incident that occurs some years after the turn of this century.

VOICE OF ADULT MAGRITTE (*recorded, with music, as the INTERLOCUTOR takes a position at the easel*). In my childhood, I liked playing ... in the old abandoned cemetery of a small country town. We would explore those underground vaults whose heavy iron trapdoors we were able to open and then shut upon us. Lifting them again, we would soon climb back into the daylight.

*(RENÉ emerges from the box, it opening with a haunting creak. Once out, we see **Projection 5. The Artist at the Easel [optional]**. The INTERLOCUTOR paints at the easel on stage.)*

VOICE OF ADULT MAGRITTE (*cont'd, recorded*). There an artist from the city would be painting in a picturesque walk with broken stone columns scattered among the dead

leaves. It seemed to me, at that moment, coming upon this after the darkness of the underground, that the art of painting was somehow ... magical.

(RENÉ has been drawn to the easel, an unfamiliar but inviting object. The INTERLOCUTOR offers him the brush. He slowly reaches for it, but the magic of the moment is broken by a summoning voice.)

MOTHER *(offstage)*. René?

*(The music fades. The INTERLOCUTOR exits with the brush and the easel. **Projection 6. The Family Portrait [optional]**. MOTHER enters, her dress based on that in the photograph.)*

MOTHER. There you are. And look at you. You've been playing in the graveyard again.

RENÉ. Mama ...

MOTHER. How many times have I told you to better honor the dead?

RENÉ. Mama ...

MOTHER. Just look at you. *(Begins mopping his face with a cloth. There is an accompanying sound.)*

RENÉ. Moth ...

MOTHER. La! You could grow potatoes in these ears!

(MOTHER swabs each ear to the accompaniment of some sound effect, and then has RENÉ blow his nose into the cloth with yet another sound.)

RENÉ *(as MOTHER brushes off his clothes)*. Mother. Mother, is it foolish of me to wish to become an artist?

MOTHER. My dear young sir. If that is your wish, then it

would only be foolish of you not to try. (*Kisses him.*) We'll see about buying some paints and brushes, and arranging lessons at the school. Oh yes, you must always honor your dreams, too, René.

FATHER (*entering, dressed as an ANONYMOUS MAN without mask, perhaps moustached as in the family portrait, pipe in hand*). Not, my dear, when they are pipe dreams. No son of mine is going to "Become-An-Artist." What utter drivel. Flapdoodle. Poopnoddy nonsense! "Become-An-Artist?" Why, it's a pipe dream! Nothing more.

INTERLOCUTOR (*appearing at the window, holding a framed painting of a cloud amidst blue sky*). A "Pipe Dream?"

FATHER (*loudly, raising his pipe to a position immediately in front of the cloud. **Projection 7. La bonne foi/The Good Faith***). It is not some sleeper's nightmare of his smoking apparatus.

INTERLOCUTOR (*to FATHER*). Pipe down.

(In two distinct and precise motions, FATHER lowers his pipe, then sets it back into his mouth. The INTERLOCUTOR removes the painting and continues to the audience.)

INTERLOCUTOR (*cont'd*). But rather a wish that could never come true.

FATHER. Pipe Dream!

MOTHER. Leopold, a few lessons ...

FATHER. are a few too many.

INTERLOCUTOR (*appearing*). René's father is a difficult man.

*(**Projection 8. L'empire des lumières/The Empire of Lights.**)*

RENÉ. If my mother says

MOTHER. Night

RENÉ. my father says

FATHER. Day!

INTERLOCUTOR. The incontestable king of his castle

(Projection 9. Le chateau des Pyrénées/The Castle of the Pyrenees.)

FATHER. I am the head of this household. I expect to be obeyed, without question without comment. *(Holding his pipe in RENÉ's face.)* If I tell you that this is not a pipe, then this is not a pipe. *(With a hat-trick, he hands his bowl-er to his son.)* If I say to you that this is my ... underwear, then this is my underwear. Discipline. Order. Structure. Routine. Uniformity. REGULARITY!

MOTHER *(handing him a bowl)*. Your prunes, dear.

FATHER. DUTY. ... Thank you.

MOTHER. You're very welcome, I'm sure.

FATHER *(pleased by this example for RENÉ)*. MANNERS! Breeding. Good Taste. *(Which reminds him of the prunes. Eats and belches.)* Refinement. P's and Q's. Cut & Dry. Spic & Span. Facts & Figures. Time & Money. Clockwork. Business-As-Usual. Everything in its proper place!

(As he says this last line, he grabs his hat from RENÉ, but puts the prune dish on his head by mistake. Realizing his error, he hands the hat back, removes the dish, and returns it to his wife.)

MOTHER. Leopold ...

FATHER. No, Regina. The boy has got to learn. This discussion is closed. Not another word.