

# Look, Don't Look!



One-Act Plays  
by Gerard Marconi



*A museum mounts an exhibit of erotic art that shocks spectators, pleases critics, and arouses the museum director. Samuel Becket encounters Shakespeare and Helen of Troy in the afterlife; they seem trapped for eternity until one of them decides to escape. On the eve of the Apocalypse a young evangelical encounters a gay couple and tries to convert them. These and other short plays will amuse, shock, or provoke audiences and readers alike.*

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ISBN: 978-1-63490-906-8

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida, U.S.A.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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BookLocker.com, Inc.  
2015

First Edition

# Look, Don't Look

TIME: The present.

SETTING: The gallery of a small but prestigious art museum on the East Coast.

CHARACTERS:

The Museum Director: male, late-forties, handsome and well-dressed.

The Curator of Asian Art: female, mid-thirties, stylish and very attractive.

The following are played by an ensemble of four actors: two art critics, male or female, and museum visitors of various ages and backgrounds.

*As the lights come up the Director enters and looks around the gallery. The walls are all hung with art works, including the imaginary fourth wall at the front of the stage. He glances at one of the walls and does a*

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*double take at what he sees there. The Curator enters behind him.*

CURATOR: Good morning. I think everything is ready for the opening. (She hands him a brochure).

DIRECTOR: Yes. All we need now is the public.

CURATOR: Not to mention the critics and their reaction.

DIRECTOR: Ah, yes. The critics. I've been meaning to talk to you about that. I'm sure you realize there's a great deal riding on this show.

CURATOR: As in future grants and foundation support?

DIRECTOR: As in jobs.

CURATOR: Oh. (Pause). Yours or mine?

DIRECTOR: Both, since it's my first exhibit as Director and yours as Curator of Asian Art. (He opens the brochure).

CURATOR: (She sighs). We'll find out soon enough. There's a crowd waiting to get in. Not very large, I'm afraid, but I recognized at least one critic.

DIRECTOR: (He reads from the brochure). The works in this exhibit represent the Japanese art form of *shunga* which flourished during the 18th century. Their purpose was to present scenes of sexual encounters that were both erotic and instructive. (He looks around). I must say it's much more daring than I anticipated. You've certainly picked examples that are bound to have a big bang. (Pause). Metaphorically speaking.

CURATOR: I thought you were okay with that.

DIRECTOR: I am, even though the decision to mount the show was made before I came on board. You must have been very persuasive with Malcolm.

CURATOR: Yes. I felt very strongly about it. Unfortunately at that point I don't think Malcolm really gave a damn.

DIRECTOR: Tell me again. Where did you find all these works?

CURATOR: The entire collection was locked in our vault, hidden away for over a hundred years.

DIRECTOR: So presumably no one got to see them during that time?

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CURATOR: Yes. (She smirks). Presumably.

DIRECTOR: And there are how many pieces in the show?

CURATOR: Nearly a hundred, but that doesn't include the entire collection. There are more locked away in the vault. I could show them to you sometime. (Pause). That's how I finally persuaded Malcolm.

DIRECTOR: Later, perhaps. There's one here that I find a bit puzzling. Maybe you can enlighten me. (He points at a work on the wall). These men are standing around in a circle showing their...uhm...

CURATOR: Giant penises?

DIRECTOR: Yes.

CURATOR: As the brochure explains, it's a kind of competition. (Pause). They're about to be measured.

DIRECTOR: I understand that, but why the enlarged genitals?

CURATOR: The exaggeration is for effect. (Smiling). Think of it as a visual pun on the phrase *Does size matter?*



DIRECTOR: Right. (Pause). Is it true the Japanese gave Commodore Perry several *shunga* as a farewell gift?

CURATOR: That's the rumor, but we'll never know for sure because they're probably locked away somewhere just like these were.

DIRECTOR: (A chime sounds offstage). Well, here they come. It's time to let the world see what we've got. (Pause). Metaphorically speaking.

*The director and curator leave as spectators begin to enter. They all look intently at art works on the walls before speaking.*

VISITOR #1: I love the kimonos. They're so rich and sensuous.

VISITOR #2: I don't understand. What are those two people doing?

VISITOR #3: And how can they do it wrapped up in all that clothing?

VISITOR #2: I like the teahouse. The colors and shapes in the wallpaper are all like that thing there. What is it? (Looking more closely). Oh, my God!

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VISITOR #1: (Reading a label). I've never seen that word before. How do you pronounce it?

VISITOR #2: *Geni-tail-ee-a*.

VISITOR #3: That boy over there doesn't look sixteen to me.

VISITOR #1: Maybe he came with a parent.

VISITOR #2: Doesn't matter. The sign says no one under sixteen admitted.

VISITOR #4: Holy shit! Is that what I think it is? Wow! This sure beats jerking off. (The others glare at him until he turns away, embarrassed).

VISITOR #3: Bright colors. Strange looking people. Cartoon faces. It's like watching the Simpsons have sex.

VISITOR #1: (Reading the brochure). It says here that *shunga* were often printed as tiny booklets called pillow books. Sounds like an obscene version of pillow talk.

VISITOR #2: Smut. Nobody uses the word anymore, but that's what it is. Smut!

VISITOR #3: What are you doing?

VISITOR #1: Googling that word she used. I've never heard it before. (He reads aloud). *smut. A particle of dirt. A fungus with a formation of black powdery spores on the affected parts.* (He shakes his head). *Obscenity.* That's it. Just another word for pornography.

VISITOR #3: (Smiling). Isn't that why we came?

*Standing apart from the others, a critic reads aloud from his notes as the visitors freeze with mimed reactions to what they see.*

CRITIC #1: (Looking around). Museum spectators stood shoulder to shoulder gazing at paintings and prints of oversized penises and detailed vaginas, all carefully arranged and mounted under glass. There was a sign at the entrance warning about graphic images. But despite their initial shock at the sexually explicit scenes, most visitors seemed fascinated by what they saw. Some people even used magnifying glasses to get a closer look.

*The visitors exchange places and jostle with each other to get a better view of the works.*

VISITOR #1: Aren't those two awfully old to be doing it?

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VISITOR #2: And the guy is so fat he has man tits.

VISITOR #3: Aren't those two awfully young to be doing it?

VISITOR #1: Is that a voyeur watching them?

VISITOR #2: Where?

VISITOR #1: (Pointing) There. In the window at the back.

VISITOR #3: Wow! What an interesting variation of the missionary position.

VISITOR #4: (Turning away). I think it's gross.

VISITOR #3: Don't be such a prude. It's nothing compared to what you can see on the internet these days.

VISITOR #4: Just don't ever try it with me.

VISITOR #1: It feels weird standing next to complete strangers and gawking at these things.

VISITOR #2: Don't gawk. Just look away, like you're thinking of something else, then look back.

VISITOR #3: You never told me this is what's inside the museum. I would have come here sooner if I'd known.

VISITOR #1: Can you take a picture of this one with your cell phone?

VISITOR #2: The sign says no photography allowed.

VISITOR #1: No one will notice. Just be sure to zoom in for a close up.

*Standing apart from the others, another critic reads his notes as the visitors freeze.*

CRITIC #2: The fabric of the clothing with its continuous flow of colors and patterns attracts our attention first. Then the sensuous bodies rendered with delicate undulating lines and pale flesh tones. The smallest gestures are charged with erotic suggestions that emerge from what is hidden or what the artist lets us see. It's as if he's telling us to look but don't look at the same time.

*The visitors exchange places again and jostle with each other to get a better view of the works.*

VISITOR #1: I'm glad we came. This really got me thinking.

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VISITOR #2: About what?

VISITOR #1: My sexual fantasies. (Pause). Where can we buy kimonos?

VISITOR #3: (Raising her voice so all can hear). This is disgusting! How can they get away with showing such filth!

VISITOR #4: Not so loud.

VISITOR #3: Don't shush me! This place gets government money, doesn't it? And they charge admission on top of that, just to look at pornography. Someone needs to picket the museum and shut this down!

VISITOR #1: (Reading the brochure). It says here that there will be a series of lectures in conjunction with the exhibit.

VISITOR #2: What kind of lectures?

VISITOR #1: The Social and Cultural Context of Sex Art in Japan. The Economic Impact of Sex Art in Japan. The Philosophical Implications of Sex Art in Japan.

VISITOR #2: Think I'll skip those.

VISITOR #1: And there's going to be an International Symposium of *shunga* scholars.

VISITOR #2: I still think it's nothing but glorified pornography.

VISITOR #3: I want to buy the exhibit catalogue. It'll make a great birthday present for Howard. He's been hinting lately that we're too old for this sort of thing.

VISITOR #4: And I want to buy copies of these prints. They would look great in my downstairs powder room.

*A chime sounds, indicating that the museum is closing. After the spectators leave, the curator enters and looks around the gallery, smiling. The Director enters behind her.*

DIRECTOR: I've been looking all over for you. The critics loved it and the public reacted exactly as I hoped: with shock, disgust, and protest. The crowds will pour in tomorrow. I'd say the show is a huge success!

CURATOR: So our jobs are safe, at least for a while?

DIRECTOR: At least for a while. (He moves closer to her). But in the future I think we need to work more closely together. I've looked at the works in the other

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galleries. It's interesting how the lovers are entangled with one another; how the shapes of their bodies repeat the curves of clothing and drapery. (He looks into her eyes). And the way that some of their faces are hidden during the moments of greatest passion.

CURATOR: (Returning his gaze). Did you see the swooning woman with her head thrown back, her hair touching the floor, her eyes closed under painted lids as she experienced an orgasm?

DIRECTOR: (Excited). Yes. I really like the sexual energy in some of them, how the women are playful and very active, like equals in a competition. (He speaks more softly). You said something earlier about showing me other works down in the vault?

CURATOR: The vault is a very dark, tight space. (Pause). And it's filled with exotic odors. (She smiles). Can you handle that?

DIRECTOR: (He returns the smile). Absolutely.

*The lights begin to fade as the curator takes his hand and leads him away.*



## The Age of Reason

TIME: The present.

SETTING: A city park with bench and lamppost.

CHARACTERS:

Rachel: in her late teens but looks younger; thin and attractive, she wears jeans and a sweater but no make-up.

Thomas: in his early twenties, dressed in jeans and a hooded shirt.

Emily: Rachel's mentally disabled sister, age seven.

*Thomas sits alone on the bench, staring into the distance. Rachel enters stage left, carrying a backpack and pushing Emily in a large stroller. She parks the stroller by the lamppost, facing away from Thomas, then removes the backpack and speaks to him.*

RACHEL: Hey. What a great day. (Pause). I've seen you here before.

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THOMAS: (He glances at her and then looks away). Yeah. I come here sometimes on my way to work. (He gets up). But I have to go now.

RACHEL: (She leans her backpack against the bench). I was hoping we could talk.

THOMAS: I really have to go.

RACHEL: (Anxious). Wait! Do you have a cell phone? I forgot mine and I really need to call my parents. Please? It will only take a minute.

*He hesitates and then gives her his cell phone. While she walks away from the bench to make a call, Thomas goes to the stroller and stares at Emily. Rachel quickly takes his picture with the phone, then slips it into her pocket and comes back to the bench.*

RACHEL: I know *why* you can't stay.

THOMAS: (Surprised). Excuse me?

RACHEL: I know why you can't stay. In fact, I know all about you.

THOMAS: (He comes back to the bench). You do?

RACHEL: Yes. Your name is Thomas. You live in the building behind ours in apartment 2-B and you're a registered sex offender. Don't worry, I won't tell anyone. (Pause). Not if you do what I say.

THOMAS: (Defensive). I don't know what you're talking about. I was just sitting here minding my own business when you came along and said something about the weather.

RACHEL: (She smirks). My father says that when people talk about the weather they usually mean something else. (Pause). You work at Walmart, stocking the shelves during the night shift. Two years ago you were convicted of a minor sex offense and given a suspended sentence.

THOMAS: (Weakly). It was a misdemeanor. My first and only offense.

RACHEL: But you're not supposed to be in public places like parks. And not within a hundred feet of a minor.

THOMAS: (He collapses on the bench). How did you find out?

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RACHEL: Easy. It's on the Internet. All I had to do was search the sex offender registry by state. (She sits). And because I know all about you, you're going to help me.

THOMAS: (Suspicious). What do you want?

RACHEL: I want to escape, just like you do, Thomas. Meet new people and have some fun, instead of being stuck with Emily here. (She gestures toward the stroller). She's helpless by the way, in case you didn't notice. She was born that way. Someone has to be with her all the time. That's what I do every day after school until my parents get home from work.

THOMAS: But she's your sister. If you feel trapped, how do you think she feels?

RACHEL: She has no thoughts or feelings of her own, at least none that she can express. Sometimes my parents imagine that she does, but they're just pretending because they don't want to feel guilty. And that's really selfish because when they do that, they ignore me. (She glances at the stroller). She's not always comatose. Sometimes she's absolutely spastic and I'm the only one who can calm her down. (Pause). At night, when she's asleep, her face is peaceful, almost pretty, in a retarded

kind of way. (She smirks). I can't use that word at home because my father goes crazy if I do.

THOMAS: Your parents must be making a big sacrifice by keeping her at home, not putting her in an institution.

RACHEL: That's what everyone says, but she still ends up in the hospital. Last month she was there for a whole week because she had seizures and couldn't eat. She had to be hooked up to tubes for feeding and medication. That happens a lot now. (Pause). I used to think it was really sad, that she was special somehow, and it was wonderful that my parents took care of her. But not anymore. They work all day to help pay for her expenses and when they come home at night they don't ask about me or how I feel. (Pause). I remember what it was like when I was the only one. When my parents and I would do things together, just the three of us. One summer we took a road trip all the way to Canada, stopping at every beach and amusement park along the way. I was only five or six, but I still remember.

THOMAS: You shouldn't feel sorry for yourself.

RACHEL: Why not? Nobody else does. Lots of people say they do, but no one wants to be close friends. People were really nasty in middle school. They'd say things

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like is it true your sister is a vegetable? Or just wait till she has her period and you have to deal with that. Even the few friends I had called her a zombie.

THOMAS: What about your mom? Doesn't she understand what you're going through?

RACHEL: Not anymore. Her whole life revolves around Emily.

THOMAS: (He glances at the stroller). How old is she?

RACHEL: Seven. (She smirks). The age of reason.

THOMAS: What?

RACHEL: My mom says the nuns told her that seven was the age of reason, when you're supposed to know good from evil. When you learn to confess your sins and are allowed to receive Holy Communion (Pause). I don't believe that stuff anymore. Who knows good from bad when they're seven years old? I sure didn't and neither does Emily. She'll never know because she's brain dead. I know that sounds terrible and I can't say it around my parents, but it's the God awful truth and they just won't admit it.

THOMAS: Did they know before she was born that she would be like this?

RACHEL: Oh, yeah. When I was twelve or thirteen I found out they knew. That's when I totally lost it.

THOMAS: (Earnestly). I'm sorry. I really am.

RACHEL: (She stares at him). What about you, Thomas? Do you know the difference between good and evil?

THOMAS: (Defensive). What do you mean?

RACHEL: I read the newspaper story online. The girl you wanted to have sex with was only fourteen.

THOMAS: (He gets up). I told you it was a misdemeanor, fourth degree, with parole and probation. I even went through rehab and community service.

RACHEL: But you're still a registered sex offender. I was looking for someone who lived in the neighborhood and there you were. (Pause). I've been watching you for a while now.

THOMAS: You've been *stalking* me?

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RACHEL: (She smirks). Yeah, kind of. I waited outside your apartment one day and followed you to work. You never seem to go anywhere else or talk to many people. Have you always been like this?

THOMAS: (Weakly). Pretty much.

RACHEL: Did you ever have a girl friend?

THOMAS: (He sits again). Not really.

RACHEL: (She leans toward him). Do you find me attractive, Thomas? Do you think I'm *hot*? (She smiles). Just because I'm young doesn't mean I'm innocent. (She pulls out his cell phone).

THOMAS: Hey, that's mine. Give it back!

*Rachel takes his picture as he lunges toward her. Then she gets up and goes to the stroller.*

RACHEL: Here's the deal, Thomas. I'm still a minor, so if I swore you were trying to assault me, or God forbid, rpoor Emily here, you'd be found guilty. And a second offense like that would put you away forever. That's why I took pictures.

THOMAS: What do you want?



RACHEL: I told you. I want to have a normal life. I want to be free.

THOMAS: (He looks away). You'll get over that. Nobody's really free.

RACHEL: Anything would be better than feeding Emily and changing her diapers. Listening to her moan and scream while my parents keep saying she's a special gift from God. (She goes back to the bench). Tell me something. Do you think there are degrees of good and evil?

THOMAS: I'm not sure what you mean. (Pause). What's good for you may be bad for me, and what's good for me may be bad for you.

*Rachel stares at him and slowly repeats what he said.*

RACHEL: What's good for me may be bad for you. That's awesome, Thomas. We're more alike than I thought. (Pause). So here's what's going to happen next. I'm going to leave Emily here with you while I disappear.

THOMAS: What? You won't get far.

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RACHEL: Oh yes, I will. I've been planning this for a long time. Saving up the little money my parents give me for watching her. Figuring out how I could use what I've learned about you. Plus I have a friend on the Internet who's going to help me. I just need a few hours to hook up with him.

THOMAS: You're going to screw up your life big time.

RACHEL: My life is already screwed up and there's no going back.

THOMAS: What if I refuse?

RACHEL: Would you rather be accused of sexually assaulting a seventeen year old? Don't mess with me, Thomas. You're hooked. All you have to do is push the zombie here through the park until you find a cop.

*There is a moan from the stroller. Rachel glances at Emily and then goes to her. She bends down and whispers something in her sister's ear. Then she turns the stroller around to face Thomas.*

RACHEL: I told her goodbye, in case you're wondering. (Pause). I love her. I really do. I just can't stand to be with her another minute.

THOMAS: Did she understand you?

RACHEL: What? (She turns on him). Haven't you heard anything I've said? (She gets increasingly upset as she moves toward him). She has no control over her body. We have to suction the saliva from her mouth and feed her with a tube so she doesn't swallow her tongue. The only movement she can make is to roll her eyes or kick her feet and thrust her arms out. (Standing over him and shouting). IT'S CONGENITAL AND THERE'S NO CURE, SO SHE'S GOING TO BE LIKE THIS FOR THE REST OF HER LIFE!

THOMAS: (He stammers to apologize). I'm sorry...I'm sorry.

RACHEL: (Fighting back tears). And do you know how I found out? My parents wouldn't tell me, so I asked my high school science teacher. And he wouldn't tell me either until I fucked him. I FUCKED HIM GOOD AND HE SHOWED ME ON THE INTERNET! (She falls to her knees crying).

THOMAS: Please stop. I said I'm sorry.

RACHEL: (Sobbing). She's a freak. Do you hear me? One of God's mistakes!

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*Thomas reaches out a hand to touch her but thinks better of it. There is a moment of silence until Rachel stops crying. Then she gets up slowly and grabs her backpack.*

THOMAS: You'll be sorry if you do this.

RACHEL: (Wiping away her tears). What's good for me may be bad for you, remember? I'm leaving now.

THOMAS: (He gets up). What do I tell the police?

RACHEL: You'll think of something. (She looks back at the stroller). Whatever you do, try not to disturb her. If she's startled and wakes up suddenly, she'll start screaming. But if she wakes up on her own, just talk to her softly and she'll be okay. (She pulls out her cell phone from the backpack and checks it).

THOMAS: What about my phone?

RACHEL: I'm keeping it in case you decide to change your mind. (She puts her phone away). That's it. I'm out of here. (She slings the backpack over her shoulder and hurries off right).

THOMAS: (He shouts after her). Wait! (Pause). You never told me your name.

*There is a moment of silence that is broken by a moan from Emily. Thomas looks at the stroller and goes to her.*

THOMAS: (Speaking softly as he rocks the stroller). Hello, Emily. My name is Thomas. Don't be afraid. Everything's going to be alright. (He looks around). It's getting dark. (Pause). Time for us to go.

*The lights begin to fade as he slowly pushes the stroller off left.*



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