

# DIALOGUE

THE ART OF VERBAL  
ACTION FOR THE PAGE,  
STAGE, AND SCREEN

ROBERT  
MCKEE

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF **STORY**

## *PDF Contents*

### *Scenes from;*

1) *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

2) *Breaking Bad*

3) *Casa Blanca*

4) *Art*

5) *True Detective*

6) *Gladiator*

7) *Agnes of God*

8) *30 Rock*

9) *Sideways*

### *Scenes with Beat Analysis*

1) *The Sopranos*

2) *Frasier*

3) *A Raisin In the Sun*

4) *The Great Gatsby*

5) *Lost in Translation*

## *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

In this play written by Edward Albee in 1962, George and Martha, a middle-aged couple, endure a conflict-filled marriage. For two decades they have fought constantly over every minute aspect of the raising of their son, Jim. After an exhausting, raucous, drink-filled, insult-filled, adulterous party, topped off with a vicious argument about their son in front of their guests, George turns to Martha and says:

GEORGE. We got a little surprise for you, baby. It's about sunny-Jim.

MARTHA. No more, George....

GEORGE. YES!...Sweetheart, I'm afraid I've got some bad news for you...for us, of course. Some rather sad news.

MARTHA. (afraid, suspicious) What is this?

GEORGE. (oh, so patiently) Well, Martha, while you were out of the

room...well, the doorbell chimed...  
and...well, it's hard to tell you,  
Martha...

MARTHA. (a strange throaty voice)  
Tell me.

GEORGE....and...what it was...it  
was good old Western Union, some lit-  
tle boy about seventy.

MARTHA. (involved) Crazy Billy?

GEORGE. Yes, Martha, that's right...  
Crazy Billy...and he had a telegram,  
and it was for us, and I have to tell  
you about it.

MARTHA. (as if from a distance)  
Why didn't they phone it? Why did  
they bring it; why didn't they  
telephone it?

GEORGE. Some telegrams you have to  
deliver, Martha, some telegrams you  
can't phone.

MARTHA. (rising) What do you mean?

GEORGE. Martha...I can hardly bring  
myself to say it...(sighing heav-  
ily) Well, Martha...I'm afraid  
our boy isn't coming home for his  
birthday.

MARTHA. Of course he is.

GEORGE. No, Martha.

MARTHA. Of course he is. I say he is!

GEORGE. He...can't.

MARTHA. He is! I say so!

GEORGE. Martha... (long pause)...our son is...dead. (silence) He was... killed...late in the afternoon... (a tiny chuckle)...on a country road, his learner's permit in his pocket, he swerved, to avoid a porcupine, and drove straight into a...

MARTHA. (rigid fury) YOU...CAN'T... DO...THAT!

GEORGE...large tree.

MARTHA. YOU CANNOT DO THAT.

GEORGE. (quietly, dispassionately) I thought you should know.

MARTHA. (quivering with rage and loss) NO! NO! YOU CANNOT DO THAT! YOU CAN'T DECIDE THAT FOR YOURSELF! I WILL NOT LET YOU DO THAT!

GEORGE. We'll have to leave around noon, I suppose...

MARTHA. I WILL NOT LET YOU DECIDE THESE THINGS!

GEORGE:...because there's matters of identifications, naturally, and arrangements to be made...

MARTHA. (leaping at him, but ineffectual) YOU CAN'T DO THIS! I WILL NOT LET YOU DO THIS!

GEORGE. You do not seem to understand, Martha; I haven't done anything. Now pull yourself together. Our son is DEAD! Can you get that into your head?

MARTHA. YOU CAN'T DECIDE THESE THINGS!

GEORGE. Now listen, Martha; listen carefully. We got a telegram; there was a car accident; and he's dead. POUF! Just like that! Now, how do you like it?

MARTHA. (a howl that weakens into a moan) NOOOOOOoooooooo... (pathetic) No; no, he is not dead; he is not dead.

GEORGE. He is dead. Kyrie, eleison. Christie, eleison. Kyrie, eleison.

MARTHA. You cannot. You may not decide these things.

GEORGE. That's right, Martha; I'm not God. I don't have power over life and death, do I?

MARTHA. YOU CAN'T KILL HIM! YOU CAN'T HAVE HIM DIE!

GEORGE. There was a telegram, Martha.

MARTHA. (up, facing him) Show it to me! Show me the telegram!

GEORGE. (long pause; then, with a straight face) I ate it.

MARTHA. (a pause; then with the greatest disbelief possible, tinged with hysteria) What did you just say to me?

GEORGE. (barely able to stop exploding with laughter) I...ate...it.  
(Martha stares at him for a long time, then spits in his face) Good for you, Martha.

The climax of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* turns on the revelation of George and Martha's backstory secret: Jim, their contentious son, is imaginary. They made him up to fill their empty marriage. The use of backstory to turn story is the single most powerful technique in the execution of exposition.

Personal conflicts embroil friends, family, and lovers. Intimacy, by its nature, begins in talk, then builds, changes, and ends in talk. Personal conflicts, therefore, roil with multilayered, multi-meaning dialogue.

For example, this exchange between Walter White and his wife, Skyler, in Season 4, Episode 6 of BREAKING BAD. From the first season's first episode on, Walter White's characterization portrays a nervous, insecure, defensive man. But by the end of this scene we glimpse his true character.

INT. BEDROOM—DAY.

Husband and wife sit on the bed.

SKYLER

I said before, if you are in danger,  
we go to the police.

WALTER

No, I don't want to hear about the  
police.

SKYLER

I do not say that lightly. I know  
what it could do to this family, but



if it is the only real choice we have, if it's either that or you getting shot when you open your front door—

WALTER

—I don't want to hear about the police.

SKYLER

You're not some hardened criminal, Walt. You are in over your head. That's what we tell them, that's the truth.

WALTER

That's not the truth.

SKYLER

Of course it is. A schoolteacher, cancer, desperate for money—

WALTER

(getting up)

—We're done.

SKYLER

—roped into working, unable to quit. You told me that yourself, Walt. Jesus, what was I thinking?

(pause)

Walt, please, let's both of us stop trying to justify this whole thing, and admit you're in danger.

Walter slowly turns to her.

WALTER

Who are you talking to right now? Who is it you think you see?

(pause)

Do you know how much I make a year? Even if I told you, you wouldn't believe it. Do you know what would happen if I suddenly decided to stop going to work? A business big enough that it could be listed on the NASDAQ goes belly up. Disappears. It ceases to exist without me.

(pause)

No, you clearly don't know who you're talking to, so let me clue you in. I am not in danger, Skyler. I am the danger. A guy opens a door and gets shot. You think that's me? No, I am the one who knocks.

He walks out of the bedroom; Skyler stares after him.

# DIALOGUE IN FILM

## Three: Extreme Characters

VIVIAN

Speaking of horses, I like to play them myself. But I like to see them work out a little first to see if they're front-runners or come from behind, find out what their hole card is, what makes them run.

MARLOWE

Find out mine?

VIVIAN

I think so. I'd say you don't like to be rated, you like to get out in front, open up a lead, take a little breather in the backstretch, then come home free.

MARLOWE

You don't like to be rated yourself.

VIVIAN

I haven't met anyone yet who could do it. Any suggestions?

MARLOWE

Well, I can't tell till I've seen you over a distance of ground. You got a touch of class but...I don't know how far you can go.

VIVIAN

That depends on who's in the saddle.

MARLOWE

There's one thing I still can't figure out.

VIVIAN

What makes me run?

MARLOWE

Uh-huh.

VIVIAN

I'll give you a little hint. Sugar won't work. It's been tried.

## LINE DESIGN

A line's design pivots around its key term—the word or phrase essential to its meaning. An author can place that key term first, last, or anywhere in the middle. That choice results in one of three fundamental line designs: suspenseful, cumulative, balanced.

### The Suspense Sentence

In other words, the periodic sentence is the suspense sentence.

For example, the opening scene from *Art*, a play by Yasmina Reza, translated by Christopher Hampton. I have put the core word or phrase in each sentence in bold.

Marc, alone onstage.

Marc: My friend Serge has bought  
a **painting**. It's a canvas about  
five-foot by four: **white**. The



background is **white**. If you screw up your eyes, you can make out some **fine white diagonal lines**.

Serge is one of my oldest **friends**. He's done very well for himself, he's a dermatologist and he's keen on **art**.

On Monday, I went to see the **painting**; Serge actually got hold of it on the Saturday, but he's been lusting after it for **several months**. This **white painting with white lines**.

At Serge's.

At floor level, a white canvas with fine white diagonal scars. Serge looks at his painting, thrilled. Marc looks at the painting. Serge looks at Marc looking at the painting.

Long silence: from both of them, a whole range of **wordless emotions**.

Marc: Expensive?

Serge: Two hundred thousand.

Marc: Two hundred thousand?

Serge: Huntington would take it off my hands for **two hundred and twenty**.

Marc: **Who's** that?

Serge: Huntington?

Marc: **Never heard** of him.

Serge: Huntington! The Huntington Gallery!

Marc: The Huntington Gallery would take it off your hands for two hundred **and twenty?**

Serge: No, not **the Gallery. Him.** Huntington himself. For his **own collection.**

Marc: Then why didn't Huntington **buy it?**

Serge: It's important for them to sell to **private clients.** That's how the market **circulates.**

Marc: Mm hm...

Serge: Well?

Marc:...

Serge: You're not in the **right place.** Look at it from this **angle.** Can you see **the lines?**

Marc: What's the **name** of the...?

Serge: Painter. **Antrios.**

Marc: Well-known?

Serge: **Very.** Very.

Pause.

Marc: Serge, you haven't bought this painting for **two hundred thousand Euros?**

Serge: You don't understand, that's what it **costs**. In an **Antrios**.

Marc: You haven't bought this painting for **two hundred thousand Euros**?

Serge: I might have known you'd **miss the point**.

Marc: You paid two hundred thousand Euros for **this shit**?

Serge, as if alone.

Serge: My friend Marc's an **intelligent** enough fellow, I've always **valued** our relationship, he has a **good job**, he's an aeronautical engineer, but he's one of those **new-style intellectuals**, who are not only **enemies of modernism**, but seem to take some sort of incomprehensible pride in **running it down**...<sup>5</sup>

## Mixed Designs

In Season 1, Episode 3 of TRUE DETECTIVE, the co-protagonist, Rustin Cohle, relates his worldview to Detectives Gilbough and Papania. Once again, I bolded the core words. Note where each is located within its sentence. (DB is cop-talk for dead body.)

RUSTIN COHLE

This...**This** is what I'm talking about. This is what I mean when I'm talkin' about **time** and **death** and **futility**. All right there are broader ideas at work, mainly what is owed between us as a society for our **mutual illusions**. Fourteen straight hours of staring at **DB's**, these are the things **ya think of**. You ever done **that**? You look in their **eyes**, even in a picture, doesn't matter if they're dead or alive, you can still **read 'em**. You know what you **see**? They **welcomed** it...not at first, but... right there in the last instant. It's an unmistakable **relief**. See, 'cause they were afraid, and now they saw for the very first time how easy it was to just...**let go**. Yeah, they saw,

in that last nanosecond, they saw...  
**what they were.** You, yourself, this  
whole big drama, it was never more  
than a jerry rig of **presumption and  
dumb will,** and you could just **let  
go.** To finally know that you didn't  
have to hold on so tight. To realize  
that all your life, all your love,  
all your hate, all your memories, all  
your pain, it was all the **same thing.**  
It was all the same *dream,* a dream  
you had inside a locked room, a dream  
about being a **person.** And like a lot  
of dreams, there's a **monster** at the  
end of it.

## THE DUELOGUE

Think of the thousands of hours of bad film, television, and theatre you have suffered through. I suspect that more often than not, the shallow, tinny acting was not the fault of the actors but of the unactable duologues that writers and their directors forced them to recite. **Duelogue** is my term for face-to-face confrontations in which two characters talk directly, explicitly, and emotionally about their

immediate problem. Duologues have the resonance of a brick because every line is on-the-nose, nothing left unsaid.

For example, this scene from the film GLADIATOR. The Emperor Commodus has imprisoned his rival Maximus Decimus Meridius. That night Maximus discovers Lucilla, Commodus's sister, waiting in his cell.

INT. DUNGEON—NIGHT

Guards take Maximus to an empty cell and chain him to the wall. As they leave, Lucilla steps out of the shadows.

LUCILLA

Rich matrons pay well to be pleased  
by the bravest champions.

MAXIMUS

I knew your brother would send assassins. I didn't think he would send his best.

LUCILLA

Maximus...he doesn't know.

MAXIMUS

My family was burned and crucified while they were still alive.

LUCILLA

I knew nothing—

MAXIMUS

(shouting)

—Don't lie to me.

LUCILLA

I wept for them.

MAXIMUS

As you wept for your father?

(grabbing her by the throat)

As you wept for your father?

LUCILLA

I have been living in a prison of fear since that day. To be unable to mourn your father for fear of your brother. To live in terror every moment of every day because your son is heir to the throne. Oh, I've wept.

MAXIMUS

My son...was innocent.

LUCILLA

So...is...mine.

(pause)

Must my son die too before you will trust me?

MAXIMUS

What does it matter whether I trust you or not?

LUCILLA

The gods have spared you. Don't you understand? Today I saw a slave



become more powerful than the  
emperor of Rome.

MAXIMUS

The gods spared me? I am at their  
mercy, with the power only to amuse  
the mob.

LUCILLA

That is power. The mob is Rome, and  
while Commodus controls them, he con-  
trols everything.

(pause)

Listen to me, my brother has ene-  
mies, most of all in the senate.  
But while the people follow him,  
no one would dare stand up to him  
until you.

MAXIMUS

They oppose him yet they do nothing.

LUCILLA

There are some politicians who have  
dedicated their lives to Rome. One  
man above all. If I can arrange it,  
will you meet him?

MAXIMUS

Do you not understand, I may die  
in this cell tonight, or in the  
arena tomorrow. I am a slave.  
What possible difference can I  
make?

LUCILLA

This man wants what you want.

MAXIMUS

(shouting)

Then have him kill Commodus.

LUCILLA

I knew a man once, a noble man, a man  
of principle who loved my father and  
my father loved him. This man served  
Rome well.

MAXIMUS

That man is gone. Your brother did  
his work well.

LUCILLA

Let me help you.

MAXIMUS

Yes, you can help me. Forget you ever  
knew me and never come here again.

(calling out)

Guard. The lady is finished with me.

Lucilla, in tears, leaves.

As you read this passage, notice how the line structure places the core word or phrase at or near the end of speeches. This technique creates crisp cueing and a well-paced rhythm of action/reaction:

MOTHER SUPERIOR: Look, I know what you're thinking. She's an hysteric, pure and **simple**.

DOCTOR LIVINGSTON: Not simple, **no**.

MOTHER: I saw the hole. Clean through the palm of her hand. Do you think **hysteria** did that?

DOCTOR: It's been doing it for centuries—she's not unique, you know. She's just another **victim**.

MOTHER: Yes, God's victim. That's her innocence. She belongs to **God**.

DOCTOR: And I mean to take her away from Him. Isn't that what you **fear**?

MOTHER: You bet I **do**.

DOCTOR: Well, I prefer to look upon it as opening her mind, so she can begin to **heal**.

MOTHER: But that's not your job, is it? You're here to diagnose, **not to heal**.

DOCTOR: I'm here to help her in whatever way I see fit. That's my duty as a **doctor**.

MOTHER: But not as an employee of the court. You're here to make a decision on her sanity as quickly as **possible**.

DOCTOR: Not as possible. As quickly as **I see fit**.

MOTHER: The kindest thing you can do for Agnes is to make that decision and let her **go**.

DOCTOR: And what then? If I say she's crazy, she goes to an institution. If I say she's sane, she goes to **prison**.

Now, I'll rephrase the lines and move their core words back into the middle of each speech. Notice how the overall meanings stay more or less the same, but the cueing stumbles, the actions/reactions seem to spasm, and the scene staggers along.

MOTHER: Look, she's an hysteric, pure and **simple**. I know what you're thinking.

DOCTOR: **No**, not simple.

MOTHER: Clean through the palm of her hand. Do you think **hysteria** did that? I *saw* the hole.

DOCTOR: It's been doing it for centuries. She's just another victim. She's not unique, you know.

MOTHER: Yes, she belongs to **God**.  
God's victim. That's her innocence.

DOCTOR: Is that what you **fear**? That I  
mean to take her away from Him?

MOTHER: I **do**, you bet.

DOCTOR: Well, opening her mind, so  
she can begin to **heal**, is how I pre-  
fer to look upon it.

MOTHER: You're not here to **heal** but to  
diagnose. That's your job, isn't it?

DOCTOR: My duty as a **doctor** is to  
help her in whatever way I see fit.

MOTHER: You're here to make a deci-  
sion on her sanity as quickly **as pos-  
sible** as an employee of the court.

DOCTOR: As quickly as **I see fit**. Not  
as possible.

MOTHER: Make that decision and let  
her **go**. That's the kindest thing you  
can do for Agnes.

DOCTOR: And what then? She goes to  
**prison** if I say she's sane. She goes  
to an institution if I say she's  
crazy.

# 30 ROCK

## *Season 5, Episode 1, “The Fabian Strategy”*

This half-hour comedy series takes place in the offices and studios of NBC in New York’s Rockefeller Center.

John Francis “Jack” Donaghy (Alec Baldwin) serves as vice president of East Coast television and microwave oven programming for General Electric. Liz Lemon (Tina Fey) works for Jack as producer and head writer of a prime-time variety show. Avery (Elizabeth Banks) is Jack’s fiancée.

The passages below sample Jack’s verbal style. The phrases and words in bold signal his unique characterization and hint at his true character.

On his first morning back from summer vacation, Jack calls Liz on the phone:

JACK

Oh, Lemon, **Avery** and I just got back from the most amazing vacation on **Paul Allen’s yacht. Sheer bliss.** Avery is the **most perfect woman ever created. Like a young Bo Derek stuffed with a Barry Goldwater.** (pause) But

it's back to reality. No more making love on the beach surrounded by a **privacy circle** of **English-trained butlers**.

(Note: Paul Allen co-founded Microsoft.)

In a meeting later that day with Liz and her show's producers, Jack fears that the network's weak performance will jeopardize an all-important merger:

JACK

In order for our merger to stay attractive to our friends at Kabletown, we have to **seem like a sexy, profitable company**, and we're **almost pulling it off**. **The Harry Potter Theme Park is a huge hit with both anglo-philés and pedophiles**. **The movie division has a James Cameron movie the whole world will see whether they like it or not**. Only NBC continues to be the **engorged whitehead** on the otherwise **flawless** face of Universal Media.

As their workday ends, Liz confesses that she suffers relationship problems, so Jack gives her this advice:

JACK

**You can't just do the vacation part.** At some point **you have to** go home to the same house, unpack your dirty laundry, and have **a life together**. And one of you says, "We should redecorate." And the other says,

"Please, Avery, I'm using the **commode** right now."

LIZ

Oh, she wants to redecorate? She just moved in.

JACK

Avery has **opinions. I love her for that.** Unfortunately, she wants to repaint the upstairs hallway in a **striae faux** finish called "**Husk.**" I **prefer** the color that's already there, a reddish brown shade called "**Elk Tongue.**"

LIZ

So tell her "No." It's your house.

JACK

This is how I know you've never had an adult relationship. **If** I say "No," **then I will be required to say "Yes"** to something else in the future and the stakes in the future might be higher.

LIZ

Then say "Yes."

JACK

**If** I give in, **then** I'm no longer **the alpha in my house.** Before you know it, she'll have me **wearing jeans** and **reading fiction.**



LIZ

Yeah, well, "Yes" and "No" are kind of your only two choices.

JACK

**For most men, sure,** but there is a third option—the **Fabian Strategy...** The Fabian Strategy **derives** its name from **the Roman general Quintus Fabius Maximus.** He ran away, Lemon. Rather than engage in battle, he would retreat and **retreat until the enemy grew fatigued and eventually made a mistake.** Although I **abhor** it as a military strategy, **it is the basis for all my personal relationships.**



# SIDEWAYS



MAYA

Why are you so obsessed with Pinot?  
That's all you ever order.

Miles smiles wistfully at the question. He searches for the answer in his glass and begins slowly.

MILES

I don't know. It's a hard grape to grow. As you know. It's thin-skinned, temperamental. It's not a survivor like Cabernet that can grow and thrive anywhere...and withstand neglect. Pinot's only happy in specific little corners of the world, and it needs a lot of doting. Only the patient and faithful and caring growers can do it, can access Pinot's fragile, achingly beautiful qualities. It doesn't come to you. You have to come to it, see? It takes the right combination of soil and sun... and love to coax it into its fullest expression. Then, and only then, its flavors are the most thrilling and brilliant and haunting on the planet.

Maya has found this answer revealing and moving.

MILES

(CONT'D)

I mean, Cabernets can be powerful and exalting, but they seem prosaic to me

for some reason. By comparison. How about you, why do you like wine so much?

MAYA

I suppose I got really into wine originally through my ex-husband. He had a big, kind of show-off cellar. But then I found out that I have a really sharp palate, and the more I drank, the more I liked what it made me think about.

MILES

Yeah? Like what?

MAYA

I started to appreciate the life of wine, that it's a living thing, that it connects you more to life. I like to think about what was going on the year the grapes were growing. I like to think about how the sun was shining that summer and what the weather was like. I think about all those people who tended and picked the grapes. And if it's an old wine, how many of them must be dead by now. I love how wine continues to evolve, how every time I open a bottle the wine will taste different than if I had uncorked it on any other day, or at any other moment. A bottle of wine is like life itself—it grows up,

evolves and gains complexity. Then it peaks—like your '61—and begins its steady, inexorable decline. And it tastes so fucking good.

Now it's Miles's turn to be swept away. Maya's face tells us the moment is right, but Miles remains frozen. He needs another sign, and Maya is bold enough to offer it: she reaches out and places one hand atop his.

MILES

But I like a lot of wines besides Pinot too. Lately I've really been into Rieslings. Do you like Rieslings?

She nods, a Mona Lisa smile on her lips.

MILES

(pointing)

Bathroom over there?

MAYA

Yeah.

Miles gets up and walks out. Maya sighs and gets an American Spirit out of her purse.

Now I'll rewrite their speeches on-the-nose, pulling the bragging and promising from the subtext and putting it directly into the text by eliminating the third thing.

#### MILES

I'm a hard guy to get to know. I'm thin-skinned and temperamental. I'm not tough, not a hard-hearted survivor. I need a cozy, safe little world and a woman who will dote on me. But if you are patient and faithful and caring, you will bring out my beautiful qualities. I cannot come to you. You must come to me. Do you understand? With the right kind of coaxing love I will turn into the most thrilling and brilliant man you could ever have the luck to know.

#### MAYA

I am a woman with a passion for life. Hour after hour, day after day, season after season, I thrive in the golden light of time, savoring its every precious spell. I am in my

prime—old enough to have learned from mistakes, young enough to grow and evolve, so that with every passing day I will become ever more complex, ever more amazing. When I peak, and believe me, I am peaking at this very moment with you, I will taste good, oh so very, very good. Please fuck me.

# THE SOPRANOS



Once you have a sense for how the scene arcs, reread it against my analysis of the beats, their subtext, and the shaping of the action.

**INT. DR. MELFI'S OFFICE—EARLY EVENING**

**As PATIENTS from a group session file out,  
Tony enters like a lost little boy.**

*BEAT 1*

**Dr. Melfi looks up, surprised to see him.**

**MELFI**

**Anthony.**

**As Tony glances down, embarrassed, Dr. Melfi  
strides up to him.**

**MELFI**

**Hello.**

**TONY**

**(with a shy smile)**

**Hi.**

ACTION: Tony turning on the charm.

REACTION: Melfi gearing up for trouble.

SUBTEXT: Twice that day Tony asked Dr. Melfi out for dinner, and twice she turned him down. Tony senses he's out on a limb, so as he enters, he plays sensitive and shy, hoping to win her sympathy. Beneath her cheerful welcome, she puzzles over why he's back yet again and readies herself for a third confrontation.

**BEAT 2**

**TONY**

**(handing her an envelope)**

**A friend of mine had these and  
couldn't use them. And I figure, well,  
maybe we could.**

**(explaining)**

**Tickets . . . Bermuda . . .**

**(doing a little dance)**

**. . . lodging at the Elbow Beach Hotel.**

**MELFI**

**(amazed)**

**I turn down a wonderful dinner invi-  
tation and you think I'll go away  
with you?**

ACTION: Tony propositioning her.

REACTION: Melfi calling him an idiot.

SUBTEXT: Tony bought the tickets himself. He not only lies about that, but far worse, his underlying action treats Dr. Melfi like a whore. Dinner for two might cost \$200; a weekend at the five-star Elbow Beach Hotel would run into the thousands. Tony ups the ante, thinking she turned down his previous offers because they were too cheap.

Tony's disrespect and delusions offend Dr. Melfi, but because she knows he's prone to violence, she avoids direct confrontation by repaying his insult with a rhetorical question. This ancient verbal tactic asks a question but not to get an answer; it assumes the answer in the question. So if we were to rewrite Melfi's dialogue on-the-nose, it might read: "What kind of man thinks I'll sleep with him just because he takes me to Bermuda? An idiot."

### **BEAT 3**

**TONY**

**Well, the guy couldn't use 'em and,  
you know, he gave 'em to me and  
what'd you want me to do, throw 'em  
away?**

**Dr. Melfi stands in silence.**

ACTION: Tony claiming his innocence.

REACTION: Melfi avoiding conflict.

SUBTEXT: Tony tries to shrug off her criticism by pretending his proposition wasn't manipulative, just practical—he's the innocent victim of a friend's generosity.

Dr. Melfi knows he bought the tickets as a sexual bribe, but rather than call out his canard, she turns silence into a weapon. In the right context, refusing to speak can be more powerful than anything said.

## BEAT 4

**TONY**

**(continuing)**

**Come on, Doc. I'm breaking out the big guns here. You're turning me into half a stalker.**

**MELFI**

**Listen, Anthony. I'm not going to go out with you, okay, and it's not because you're unattractive or I don't think I would have a good time. It's just something I'm not going to do. I would like you to respect my decision and just try to feel that I know what's right for me. Okay?**

**Long pause.**

ACTION: Tony playing for pity.

REACTION: Melfi blaming him.

SUBTEXT: By accusing her of demeaning him, he plays the victim again and adds guilt-tripping to his tactics, all in the hope that she'll feel sorry for him.

Instead, she begins with the "It's not you, it's me" tactic, seeming to put the blame on herself. But the phrase "I know what's right for me" alerts Tony. Despite her opening ploy, it implies that he is not right for her because there's something wrong, something broken inside him.

Tony came to her in hopes of getting laid, but when she hints at his flawed nature, the subconscious need that has driven Tony through the entire series takes hold. He desperately longs for an answer to the core question of his life, a question only his psychiatrist can answer: What is wrong with me?

## BEAT 5

TONY

But it's not just the psychiatric ethics stuff, is it?

MELFI

I want to preserve the option for you that you could always come back to our work, if you wish, and that we could pick up where we've left off.

ACTION: Tony looking for a way out.

REACTION: Melfi giving him a way out.

SUBTEXT: On the conscious level, however, Tony would rather not confront the truth about himself, so if she had said, "Yes, it's a matter of medical ethics," he would have been relieved and the scene would be over. Instead, she offers him the hard, painful work of self-awareness through therapy.

## BEAT 6

TONY

I don't think you get this. I want you!

MELFI

That's very flattering to me.

TONY

I'm not interested in flattering you.

MELFI

I know you're not.

ACTION: Tony laying it on the line.

REACTION: Melfi buying time.

SUBTEXT: Tony evades the big question to make a brutal pass, hoping that the offer of sex for sex's sake will excite and distract her. It doesn't, of course. Instead, she uses non-answer responses to buy time while deciding just how truthful she dares to be.

## **BEAT 7**

**TONY**

**Then, what is it, okay? What is it?**

**(pause, quieter)**

**Just . . . help me understand it, okay?**

**MELFI**

**You know, Anthony, during our work I never judged you, or your behavior.**

**It's not the place of a therapist to do so.**

**TONY**

**All right, I get all this. Go, go.**

**MELFI**

**In a personal relationship, I don't think I could sit silent.**

ACTION: Tony asking for trouble.

REACTION: Melfi crossing the line.

SUBTEXT: Tony begs for the truth, but Dr. Melfi knows the furious effect truth can have on him, so she stalls. Still, he insists, so after sidestepping for six beats, she finally crosses the line from professional to personal, and by doing so, she puts herself in grave danger.

## **BEAT 8**

**TONY**

**About what?**

**MELFI**

**Our values are . . . just very different.**

ACTION: Tony cornering her.

REACTION: Melfi belittling him.

SUBTEXT: When he pressures her for an answer, she insults him and hints for the second time that she knows his hidden weakness.

Tony can read subtext with the best. When she says that the values separating them are “just very different,” he knows that that’s PC for “My values are clearly better than yours, but let’s not fight about it.”

The word “values” startles Tony, and its insinuations anger him, but he manages to hold his rage in check.

## **BEAT 9**

**TONY**

**You don’t like my values?**

**MELFI**

**Honestly?**

**TONY**

**Yeah.**

**A tense pause.**

**MELFI**

**No.**

ACTION: Tony daring her to cross him.

REACTION: Melfi denying his worth.

SUBTEXT: We measure a person's worth in the quality of his values and the actions they motivate. By rejecting Tony's personal values, she rejects his value as a person.

When Tony confronts Dr. Melfi, she does not flinch. Instead, she states her disdain for him with such sudden, unexpected power that he drops his bullying tone.

### ***BEAT 10***

**TONY**

**Okay.**

**(pause)**

**Like what?**

**MELFI**

**(glancing at her watch)**

**It's getting late.**

ACTION: Tony asking nice.

REACTION: Melfi giving him a last way out.

SUBTEXT: Feeling vulnerable and dreading the worst, Tony softens his tone. Dr. Melfi, knowing that her insights will wound Tony and perhaps enrage him, offers him an excuse not to know.

### ***BEAT 11***

**TONY**

**No, no, no, no. Come on. It's okay.**

**It's okay.**

**MELFI**

**Well . . . you're not a truthful person. You're not respectful of women. You're not really respectful of people.**



ACTION: Tony inviting the worst.

REACTION: Melfi pulling her punch.

SUBTEXT: At some level, Tony realizes that the answer to “What is wrong with me?” will scald his sense of self, but he pursues it to the blistered end.

Notice that when Dr. Melfi hits Tony with the bitter facts, her language softens the blow. She could have called him a liar, abuser, or worse. Instead, she keeps her cool control—“not a truthful person,” “not really respectful.”

## **BEAT 12**

**TONY**

**I don't love people?**

**MELFI**

**Maybe you love them, I don't know.**

**You take what you want from them by  
force, or the threat of force.**

ACTION: Tony doubting himself.

REACTION: Melfi firing the first barrel.

SUBTEXT: Tony has never for a moment doubted his love for his family, friends, and lovers. But the instant Dr. Melfi shows him his essential tyrannical nature, he cannot argue back. Instead, he phrases his denial as a question, a question he seems to ask himself as much as her.

Line by line, fact by fact, Dr. Melfi has destroyed Tony's self-worth. She knows full well that, humiliated and emasculated, he might lash out in violence. She faces a dilemma between speaking the final full truth and the violence it might bring versus keeping silent and staying secure. She makes her choice of action and dares to launch the final beat.

**BEAT 13**

**MELFI**

**(continuing)**

**I couldn't live like that. I couldn't  
bear witness to violence or—**

**TONY**

**—Fuck you . . .**

**Tony runs out, slams the door, and shouts  
from the lobby:**

**TONY**

**. . . you fucking cunt.**

ACTION: Melfi firing the second barrel.

REACTION: Tony killing her with words.

SUBTEXT: In Beat 12 she impugns Tony's morals, but in Beat 13 she denigrates the whole gangster life and, with that, everyone close to him.

He could kill her for those insults; he has killed others for as much. But he runs out instead because of the way the writers staged the opening. As Tony entered Dr. Melfi's office, a dozen members of a group session filed out past him. She saw Tony standing in the crowd and called out to him. In other words, there were witnesses. If he were to attack her now, those people could put him at the scene by name. Tony's too savvy to make that mistake, so he fires off the most lethal words he knows.

This final beat turns with a sharp irony. Dr. Melfi tells Tony that she cannot witness violence, but we suspect that subconsciously she relishes face-to-face brushes with violence and the adrenaline rush they bring.

So even though Tony starts every beat but the last, it's Dr. Melfi's passive aggression that carries the scene to its climax. At first, she deflects his sexual moves, then in Beat 4 she provokes his desire to

## Subtextual Progression

Scan the list of subtextual actions below. Note how they progress the scene: Conflict builds through the first four beats, backs off for a moment in Beat 5, then progresses to the climax of Beat 13. Next note how this progression arcs the three values at stake in the scene: 1) Friendship/hatred in the doctor/patient relationship swings from positive to negative. 2) Tony's comfortable self-deception (positive irony) turns to painful self-awareness (negative irony). 3) Peril/survival for Dr. Melfi pivots from negative to positive.

BEAT 1: Turning on the charm/Gearing up for trouble.

BEAT 2: Propositioning her/Calling him an idiot.

BEAT 3: Claiming his innocence/Avoiding conflict.

BEAT 4: Playing for pity/Blaming him.

BEAT 5: Looking for a way out/Giving him a way out.

BEAT 6: Laying it on the line/Buying time.

BEAT 7: Asking for trouble/Crossing the line.

BEAT 8: Cornering her/Belittling him.

BEAT 9: Daring her to cross him/Denying his worth.

BEAT 10: Asking nice/Giving him a last way out.

BEAT 11: Inviting the worst/Pulling her punch.

BEAT 12: Doubting himself/Firing her first barrel.

BEAT 13: Firing her second barrel/Killing her with words.

**FRASIER**

As in the previous chapter, I will work with the scene from two angles: Viewing it from the outside in, I will look at the beats of action/ reaction that shape the scene's progression as well as the changing charge of its values. Reversing the angle to the inside out, I will trace the steps of behavior—desire, antagonism, choice, action—that translate the intentions and tactics of Frasier and Niles into comically expressive dialogue.

Once again, the scene is printed in bold. Read it through without break and then review it in light of my notes.

**INT. HOTEL ROOM—EARLY MORNING**

**As Niles nods off in front of the computer keyboard, Frasier pulls open the drapes.**

**BEAT 1**

**FRASIER**

**(looking out at the day)**

**Oh, dear God! It's dawn! It's Friday!**

**(turning to his brother)**

**Niles, why don't we just admit it? We can't work together. There's never going to be any book.**

**NILES**

**No, not with that attitude, there isn't.**

**ACTION:** Frasier urging Niles to accept failure.

**REACTION:** Niles blaming their failure on Frasier.

**SUBTEXT:** Niles and Frasier begin with the same scene intention: the desire to fix blame. To Frasier's credit, he's willing to share blame, but Niles, to preserve his pride, places the fault squarely on his brother.

They instantly become each other's antagonist, and for the next four beats choose name-calling as their underlying tactic. At first, their spiraling insults masquerade as accusations, but by Beat 6 the masks fall. **TECHNIQUE:** Comedy writing calls for artful exaggeration. Over-the-top distortion itself often prompts laughs, but its primary work is to promote enough distance between the characters and the reader/audience that we can judge behaviors against what society considers normal and find them ridiculously out of step.

Note Frasier's first line: He could have simply said, "It's morning." Instead, he calls upon the deity. Comic dialogue thrives on overstatement (although understatement is also an exaggeration).

## **BEAT 2**

### **FRASIER**

**Will you get off it? Come on. The fat lady has sung. The curtain has been rung down. Let's just go home.**

### **NILES**

**Well, I guess I shouldn't be surprised you'd give up so easily. It's not your dream after all. Why should it be, mister big shot radio host.**

**ACTION:** Frasier calling Niles an idiot.

**REACTION:** Niles calling Frasier a snob.

**SUBTEXT:** Frasier accuses Niles of being oblivious to the obvious. We have a name for those people: idiots. Niles, in turn, accuses Frasier of being arrogantly self-important and looking down on lesser souls. We have a name for those people: snobs. Their accusations become humiliations with a literary touch.

Both Niles and Frasier are culture vultures, so notice that when Frasier declares that their work is done, he references opera and theatre.

### BEAT 3

#### FRASIER

Is that what this little tantrum is all about, huh? You're jealous of my celebrity?

#### NILES

It's not a tantrum and I'm not jealous. I'm just **FED UP!** I'm fed up with being second all the time. You know, I wanted to be a psychiatrist, just like mom, way before you did, but because you were older, you got there first. You were first to get married; you were first to give Dad the grandchild he always wanted. By the time I get around to doing anything, it's all chewed meat.

ACTION: Frasier calling Niles a petulant child.

REACTION: Niles calling Frasier an upstaging ham.

SUBTEXT: Frasier's accusation is on point. Niles lapses into an adolescent snit as he accuses Frasier of deliberately hogging life's spotlight and thus ruining his dreams. To save his pride Niles conflates coincidence with malevolence—a massive exaggeration.

TECHNIQUE: Note the phrase “chewed meat.” Its incongruity pops a smart laugh, but more to the point, the allusion fits hand and glove with the rest of the scene. Mothers around the world pre-chew meat so their infants can swallow it. The whole scene plays as an elaborate Benjamin Button–like metaphor, regressing the brothers to their diapered days, so that at climax Frasier can reenact his failed infanticide of Niles.

## **BEAT 4**

### **FRASIER**

**You're crying about something we  
can't change.**

### **NILES**

**You wouldn't change it if you could.  
You love it.**

ACTION: Frasier calling Niles a masochist.

REACTION: Niles calling Frasier a sadist.

SUBTEXT: Frasier accuses Niles of crying for no reason. We have a name for people who indulge needless suffering: masochists. Niles, in turn, accuses Frasier of reveling in his misery. We have a name for people who enjoy watching others suffer: sadists. These brothers are psychiatrists; they punch the secret places below the belt.

TECHNIQUE: A joke is a design in two parts: setup/payoff. The setup arouses energy; the payoff explodes it into laughter. Comic energy comes from three primary sources: defensive emotions, aggressive emotions, and sex. For this reason, when we look deeply into comic subtext, things can get scary, angry, and wild. But then, the more powerful the setup, the bigger the laugh.

You may or may not agree with the darkness of my interpretation, but when we reach the climax, look back and ask if it doesn't fit.

## **BEAT 5**

### **FRASIER**

**Oh, let it go, Niles.**

### **NILES**

**I can't let it go. My nose is rubbed  
in it every day. I'M the one on the  
board of the Psychiatric Association;**



**MY research is well respected in academic circles; four of MY patients have been elected to political office, but it's YOUR big fat face they put on the side of buses.**

ACTION: Frasier calling Niles a crybaby.

REACTION: Niles calling Frasier a show-off.

TECHNIQUE: Note how the writers build the joke in Beat 5. They use a technique known as trivializing the exalted.

Niles's anger over injustice infuses his setup, but he contains the energy inside a list of institutions of respect: "Psychiatric Association," "academic circles," and "political office." Then his punch line throws a bomb of banality: "big fat face they put on the side of buses."

SUBTEXT: Niles immediately senses that Frasier actually takes pride in his public transportation portrait. With that, he suffers his final humiliation. The value of humiliation/pride has run its course, and now a deeper value rooted in sibling rivalry comes to the fore: winning/losing.

## **BEAT 6**

**FRASIER**

**(indignant)**

**I do not have a fat face.**

**NILES**

**Oh, please, I keep wondering how long you're going to store those nuts for winter.**

ACTION: Frasier defending his face.

REACTION: Niles attacking his face.

SUBTEXT: By Beat 6 their subtext has risen to the text, and so the beats that follow are all more or less on-the-nose.

*BEAT 7*

**FRASIER**

Well, at least I'm not spindly.

**NILES**

Who are you calling spindly, fat  
face?

**FRASIER**

You, spindly!

**NILES**

Fat face!

**FRASIER**

Spindly!

**NILES**

Fat face!

**FRASIER**

Spindly!

**NILES**

Fat face!

ACTION: Frasier calling Niles ugly.

REACTION: Niles calling Frasier ugly.

TECHNIQUE: "Spindly," a unique vocabulary choice, characterizes Frasier perfectly. Nonetheless, he loses the name-calling contest because he is in fact more fat-faced than Niles is spindly. Back to the wall, he escalates from verbal to physical.

## **BEAT 8**

**FRASIER**

**You take that back!**

**NILES**

**You make me!**

ACTION: Frasier making a fist.

REACTION: Niles making a fist.

SUBTEXT: By “making a fist,” I mean they take a moment to mentally and emotionally prepare for a fight.

## **BEAT 9**

**FRASIER**

**I will make you.**

**NILES**

**I don't see you making me.**

ACTION: Frasier deciding where to punch.

REACTION: Niles daring him to punch.

SUBTEXT: Under this brief beat, the brothers make decisions about how far to take the fight. Frasier chooses to start light.

## **BEAT 10**

**FRASIER**

**Oh yeah, well...**

**(ripping hairs out of his  
brother's chest)**

**...here's making you.**

**Niles winces in pain.**

ACTION: Frasier attacking Niles.

REACTION: Niles gathering his counterattack.

SUBTEXT: Under his wince and yelp, Niles chooses all-out war.

TECHNIQUE: After all of their threatening bluster, pulling out chest hairs makes a superb comic understatement. Note how the repetition of make/make/making/making gives the actors staccato, pace-building rhythm.

### ***BEAT 11***

**Frasier turns to leave, but Niles races across the room, jumps on Frasier's back, and wrestles him into a violent headlock.**

**FRASIER**

**(shouting)**

**Ow! Ow! Niles, stop it! We're psychiatrists, not pugilists!**

ACTION: Niles attacking Frasier.

REACTION: Frasier deceiving Niles.

SUBTEXT: Frasier could have used simpler language: "We're doctors, not fighters." Instead, to dupe Niles with vanity, he names their prestigious medical specialty and the Latinate for "boxer." The trick works.

### ***BEAT 12***

**Niles lets Frasier go.**

**FRASIER**

**I can't believe you fell for that.**

**Frasier spins around and clamps Niles into a fierce headlock.**

ACTION: Niles surrendering to Frasier.

REACTION: Frasier attacking Niles.

SUBTEXT: As they regress to childhood, Frasier's ploy suggests that they have pulled these tricks on each other many times.

### **BEAT 13**

**Frasier throws Niles on the bed, jumps on top on him, grabs him by the throat, and starts strangling him.**

#### **NILES**

**My God, my God, I'm having a flashback. You're climbing in my crib and jumping on me.**

ACTION: Frasier going for the kill.

REACTION: Niles recoiling in terror.

SUBTEXT: Their roughhouse releases a wild, archaic instinct in Frasier.

Niles, in terror, flashes back to his babyhood and remembers the day when Frasier actually tried to kill him.

### **BEAT 14**

#### **FRASIER**

**(roaring as he throttles his brother)**  
**You stole my mommy!!**

**Shocked by his murderous actions, Frasier jumps off the bed and rushes out the door.**

ACTION: Frasier strangling his brother.

REACTION: Frasier fleeing the scene of the crime.

SUBTEXT: This hugely exaggerated beat explodes laughter because it draws energy from a primal impulse. The Cain and Abel story is a foundational archetype in Western culture. Sibling rivalry leads to violence more often than we like to believe. Ask any parent. In a drama, this last beat would be tragic. But comedy bundles catastrophe in laughter. “You stole my mommy!”, delivered with Kelsey Grammer’s frenzy, takes the beat delightfully over the top.

## Subtextual Progression

This scene doesn’t arc so much as it drills down. Scan the following list of subtextual actions to sense the spiral.

BEAT 1: Urging Niles to accept failure/Blaming their failure on Frasier.

BEAT 2: Calling Niles an idiot/Calling Frasier a snob.

BEAT 3: Calling Niles a petulant child/Calling Frasier an upstaging ham.

BEAT 4: Calling Niles a masochist/Calling Frasier a sadist.

BEAT 5: Calling Niles a crybaby/Calling Frasier a show-off.

BEAT 6: Defending his face/Attacking Frasier’s face.

BEAT 7: Calling Niles ugly/Calling Frasier ugly.

BEAT 8: Making a fist/Making a fist.

BEAT 9: Deciding where to punch/Daring him to punch.

BEAT 10: Attacking Niles/Gathering his counterattack.

BEAT 11: Attacking Frasier/Deceiving Niles.

BEAT 12: Surrendering to Frasier/Attacking Niles.

BEAT 13: Going for the kill/Recoiling in terror.

BEAT 14: Strangling his brother/Fleeing the scene of the crime.

The brothers begin by attacking each other’s personalities, then descend into sneering at each other’s physical defects, followed by emotional assaults, bottoming out with near-lethal violence: fourteen beats of fraternal ferocity made hysterically funny.

# ***A RAISIN IN THE SUN***

## **Act 1, Scene 1**

**The Younger apartment kitchen. As Ruth makes breakfast, her husband, Walter Lee, enters.**

It's useful, I believe, to think of scenes as mini-dramas, often triggered by a mini-inciting incident of their own. In this case, Walter throws the morning out of balance by bringing up his liquor store

plans. He knows Ruth scorns the idea, so as she makes breakfast in a sour mood, he opens the scene with a smile.

**WALTER: You know what I was thinking 'bout in the bathroom this morning?**

**RUTH: (She looks at him in disgust and turns back to her work) No.**

### ***BEAT 1***

ACTION: Walter inviting her to talk.

REACTION: Ruth snubbing his offer.

Notice that as the scene below builds, Hansberry never repeats a beat.

**WALTER: How come you always try to be so pleasant!**

**RUTH: What is there to be pleasant 'bout!**

### ***BEAT 2***

ACTION: Walter calling her a killjoy.

REACTION: Ruth calling their life a misery.

**WALTER: You want to know what I was thinking 'bout in the bathroom or not?**

**RUTH: I know what you thinking 'bout.**

### ***BEAT 3***

ACTION: Walter insisting she listen.

REACTION: Ruth dismissing his idea.

In the first three beats, Hansberry quickly establishes that after years of struggle to make ends meet, they're experts in hurting each other.



**WALTER:** (Ignoring her) 'Bout what me and Willy Harris was talking about last night.

**RUTH:** (Immediately—a refrain) Willy Harris is a good-for-nothing loudmouth.

#### **BEAT 4**

ACTION: Walter ignoring her.

REACTION: Ruth ridiculing him.

**WALTER:** Anybody who talks to me has to be a good-for-nothing loudmouth, ain't he? And what you know about who is just a good-for-nothing loudmouth? Charlie Atkins was just a "good-for-nothing loudmouth" too, wasn't he! When he wanted me to go in the dry-cleaning business with him. And now—he's grossing a hundred thousand dollars a year. A hundred thousand dollars a year! You still call him a loudmouth!

**RUTH:** (Bitterly) Oh, Walter Lee... (She sits at the table and drops her head on her folded arms)

#### **BEAT 5**

ACTION: Walter blaming her.

REACTION: Ruth hiding her guilt.

Note Hansberry's skill: This is a superb example of how to set up a future payoff. At this point neither the audience nor any other character knows that Ruth is pregnant and contemplating an abortion. As the scene plays, the audience's first impression may be that there's some truth in Walter's complaint, that Ruth's pessimism is a drag on his life. But that's Hansberry's deft setup for a forthcoming

payoff. When Ruth's pregnancy is revealed, we'll suddenly grasp the real reason she's in a tetchy, sullen mood. We'll see her character, this scene, and its subtext with a rush of deep, unexpected but retrospectively logical perception.

Therefore, the actor playing Ruth must create the pain and dread of her secret without giving it away and spoiling the audience's discovery when the Act 1 climax pays off this scene's setup.

For example, Hansberry calls for Ruth to drop her head on her arms at the table. It looks like frustration over Walter's badgering, but it could actually be that she's suppressing morning sickness. The actor might play this secretly to herself, but she wouldn't, for instance, clutch her stomach and tip off the audience.

**WALTER: (Rising and standing over her) You tired, ain't you? Tired of everything. Me, the boy, the way we live—this beat-up hole, everything. Ain't you? (She doesn't look up, doesn't answer) So tired—moaning and groaning all the time, but you wouldn't do nothing to help, would you? You couldn't be on my side that long for nothing, could you?**

**RUTH: Walter, please leave me alone.**

**WALTER: A man needs for a woman to back him up...**

**RUTH: Walter...**

## **BEAT 6**

**ACTION:** Walter calling her selfish.

**REACTION:** Ruth giving in.

Ruth submits to listen, or at least pretends to listen. It's easier than battling the relentless Walter. He sees it as a sign he's getting somewhere, so he changes his manner to sweet talk.

**WALTER:** Mama would listen to you. You know she listen to you more than she do me and Bennie. She think more of you. All you have to do is just sit down with her when you drinking your coffee one morning and talking 'bout things like you do and—(He sits down beside her and demonstrates graphically what he thinks her methods and tone should be)—you just sip your coffee, see, and say easy like that you been thinking 'bout that deal Walter Lee is so interested in, 'bout the store and all, and sip some more coffee, like what you saying ain't really that important to you—and the next thing you know, she be listening good and asking you questions and when I come home—I can tell her the details. This ain't no fly-by-night proposition, baby. I mean we figured it out, me and Willy and Bobo.

**RUTH:** (With a frown) Bobo?

### **BEAT 7**

**ACTION:** Walter seducing her.

**REACTION:** Ruth smelling a rat.

It doesn't occur to Walter that the coffee klatch scene he acts out ridicules women. In fact, the audience wouldn't have noticed and might even have found it amusing because in 1959, offhanded sexism was commonplace and virtually invisible. But not to Hansberry. This is another of her excellent setups. She's planting Walter's sexism here so she can harvest it at the end of the scene when he attacks all black women for their alleged betrayal of black men.

**WALTER:** Yeah. You see, this little liquor store we got in mind cost seventy-five thousand and we figured the initial investment on

the place be 'bout thirty thousand, see. That be ten thousand each. Course, there's a couple of hundred you got to pay so's you don't spend you life just waiting for them clowns to let your license get approved—

**RUTH:** You mean graft?

### **BEAT 8**

ACTION: Walter playing the businessman.

REACTION: Ruth foreseeing disaster.

**WALTER:** (Frowning impatiently) Don't call it that. See there, that just goes to show you what women understand about the world. Baby, don't nothing happen for you in this world 'less you pay somebody off!

**RUTH:** Walter, leave me alone!

### **BEAT 9**

ACTION: Walter proving his worldliness.

REACTION: Ruth rejecting his folly.

Ruth is a deeply moral woman. The thought of an abortion, which was a felony in the 1950s, eats at her. She must be desperate to talk about it, but note how Hansberry wisely keeps it in the subtext.

**RUTH:** (She raises her head, stares at him vigorously, then says quietly) Eat your eggs, they gonna be cold.

**WALTER:** (Straightening up from her and looking off) That's it. There you are. Man say to his

woman: I got me a dream. His woman say: Eat your eggs. (Sadly, but gaining in power) Man say: I got to take hold of this here world, baby! And a woman say: Eat your eggs and go to work. (Passionately now) Man say: I got to change my life, I'm choking to death, baby. And his woman say—(In utter anguish as he brings his fists down on his thighs)—your eggs is getting cold!

### ***BEAT 10***

ACTION: Ruth placating him.

REACTION: Walter accusing her of disloyalty.

**RUTH: (Softly) Walter, that ain't none of our money.**

**Walter falls silent and turns away from her.**

### ***BEAT 11***

ACTION: Ruth swinging a moral hammer.

REACTION: Walter coping with defeat.

FIRST TURNING POINT: This scene plays in not one but two movements. The first movement begins at the positive as Walter has hope that he can convince Ruth to help him get his mother's money. He runs a guilt-tripping argument, claiming that because Ruth ruined his prior chance at business success, she owes him her help now. What's more, as his wife, she is morally obligated to support her husband's venture. Of course he undermines his "moral" position with his willingness to pay bribes. Ruth finally explodes his argument by pointing out that they have no right to the money. His dead father earned that money with decades of sweat and pain. It's Lena's money, not theirs. It would

be immoral to seduce her out of it. Beat 11 creates a negative turning point that shatters Walter's scene intention. He knows he cannot argue against that truth, so he goes silent for a moment to gather himself for an attack in a new direction with a new scene intention: to escape his overwhelming sense of failure.

**WALTER:** (Not listening at all or even looking at her) This morning, I was lookin' in the mirror and thinking about it. I'm thirty-five years old; I been married eleven years and I got a boy who sleeps in the living room—(very, very quietly)—and all I got to give him is stories about how rich white people live...

**RUTH:** Eat your eggs, Walter.

**WALTER:** Damn my eggs...damn all the eggs that ever was!

**RUTH:** Then go to work.

## *BEAT 12*

**ACTION:** Walter begging for sympathy.

**REACTION:** Ruth ignoring his plea.

**WALTER:** (Looking up at her) See—I'm trying to talk to you 'bout myself—(shaking his head with the repetition)—and all you can say is eat them eggs and go to work.

**RUTH:** (Wearily) Honey, you never say nothing new. I listen to you every day, every night and every morning, and you never say nothing new. (Shrugging) So you would rather be

**Mr. Arnold than be his chauffeur. So—I would rather be living in Buckingham Palace.**

***BEAT 13***

ACTION: Walter accusing her of not loving him.

REACTION: Ruth accusing him of living in a fantasy.

**WALTER: That is just what is wrong with the colored woman in this world...don't understand about building their men up and making 'em feel like they somebody. Like they can do something.**

**RUTH: (dryly, but to hurt) There are colored men who do things.**

***BEAT 14***

ACTION: Walter blaming her for his failure.

REACTION: Ruth blaming him for his failure.

SECOND TURNING POINT: After his self-pity and guilt trips fall on deaf ears, Walter tries this logic: All black women make all black men failures. Ruth is black. Therefore, she's to blame for his failure. But again she destroys his argument, this time with a fact and its implication: Some black men succeed. He is responsible for his failed life. She's right and he knows it. Her bitter truth turns the scene to a double negative.

**WALTER: No thanks to the colored woman.**

**RUTH: Well, being a colored woman, I guess I can't help myself none.**

## **BEAT 15**

ACTION: Walter clinging to his lame excuse.

REACTION: Ruth sneering at his self-deception.

**WALTER: (Mumbling) We one group of men tied  
to a race of women with small minds.**

**Ruth looks away in silence.**

## **BEAT 16**

ACTION: Walter soothing his wounded ego.

REACTION: Ruth retreating into her fears.

Let's look at Hansberry's sequence of beats and how she designed their progression. She starts with a mini-inciting incident: Walter's cheerful invitation to talk, followed by Ruth's hostile, one-word answer, "No." From Beat 1 to Beat 6, Hansberry builds the beats to the negative. Each exchange tops the previous beat as Ruth and Walter add pain on pain, humiliation on humiliation, putting their love and hope in greater and greater jeopardy.

BEAT 1: Inviting her to talk/Refusing his invitation.

BEAT 2: Calling her a killjoy/Calling their life a misery.

BEAT 3: Insisting she listen/Dismissing his idea.

BEAT 4: Ignoring her/Ridiculing his idea.

BEAT 5: Blaming her/Hiding her guilt.

BEAT 6: Calling her selfish/Giving in.

Ruth surrenders for a moment to listen to what he has to say.

As Walter acts out the "coffee klatch" in Beat 7, the scene takes on a lighter, almost amusing tone. The mood rises toward the positive, and we begin to feel that Ruth might take his side. But when he mentions Bobo, she reacts with suspicion, and the scene swings back toward a deeper negative, building to the turning point at Beat 11.



BEAT 7: Seducing her/Smelling a rat.

BEAT 8: Playing the businessman/Foreseeing disaster.

BEAT 9: Proving his worldliness/Rejecting his folly.

BEAT 10: Placating him/Accusing her of disloyalty.

BEAT 11: Swinging a moral hammer/Coping with defeat.

Beat 11 climaxes Walter's scene intention. He realizes that Ruth will never help him get his mother's money. Walter has failed again. This blow silences him for a moment, and the scene takes a breath while Walter gathers his anger and unleashes the scene's second movement.

First he must somehow bandage his wounded ego. So in Beat 12 he tries pleading for Ruth's understanding, but then in Beats 13 and 14 he turns on her to blame her and all black women for his failure. Finally she nails him with the truth.

BEAT 12: Begging for sympathy/Ignoring his plea.

BEAT 13: Accusing her of not loving him/Accusing him of living in a fantasy.

BEAT 14: Blaming her for his failure/Blaming him for his failure.

Beat 14 climaxes both the second movement and the scene as Ruth forces Walter to confront his responsibility for his own miserable life.

BEAT 15: Clinging to his lame excuse/Sneering at his self-deception.

BEAT 16: Soothing his wounded ego/Retreating into her fears.

The last two beats are a resolution movement that eases the tension as Walter retreats into self-pity and Ruth retreats into her secret fears about her pregnancy.

A sampling of the gerunds used to name the actions and reactions of husband and wife lays out the scene's asymmetrical conflict:

Walter's actions: inviting, insisting, blaming, seducing, proving, accusing, versus Ruth's reactions: dismissing, hiding, giving in, placating, ignoring, retreating.

A sampling of lines reveals the word choices and modals used to carry out those actions.

# ***THE GREAT GATSBY***

*BEAT 1*

“You live in West Egg,” she remarked contemptuously. “I know somebody there.”

“I don’t know a single—”

“You must know Gatsby.”

“Gatsby?” demanded Daisy. “What Gatsby?”

## **BEAT 2**

Before I could reply that he was my neighbor, dinner was announced; wedging his tense arm imperatively under mine, Tom Buchanan compelled me from the room as though he were moving a checker to another square.

Slenderly, languidly, their hands set lightly on their hips, the two young women preceded us out onto a rosy-colored porch open toward the sunset where four candles flickered on the table in the diminished wind.

## **BEAT 3**

“Why candles?” objected Daisy, frowning. She snapped them out with her fingers.

## **BEAT 4**

“In two weeks it’ll be the longest day in the year.” She looked at us all radiantly. “Do you always watch for the longest day of the year and then miss it? I always watch for the longest day in the year and miss it.”

## **BEAT 5**

“We ought to plan something,” yawned Miss Baker, sitting down at the table as if she were getting into bed.

“All right,” said Daisy. “What’ll we plan?” She turned to me helplessly.

“What do people plan?”

Before I could answer her eyes fastened with an awed expression on her little finger.

“Look!” she complained. “I hurt it.”

We all looked—the knuckle was black and blue.

### ***BEAT 6***

“You did it, Tom,” she said accusingly. “I know you didn’t mean to do it but you did do it.”

### ***BEAT 7***

“That’s what I get for marrying a brute of a man, a great big hulking physical specimen of a—”

“I hate that word ‘hulking,’” objected Tom crossly, “even in kidding.”

### ***BEAT 8***

“Hulking,” insisted Daisy.

That ends the scene.

## TURNING POINT/SCENE CLIMAX

The scene arcs the Buchanan marriage dynamically from positive to negative in eight beats. In the first beat, their marriage seems respectful and faithful. By the last beat, Daisy's actions reveal a marriage filled with hatred and disrespect as she plots her path back to Gatsby. At the same time, each negative action against the marriage becomes a positive beat for Daisy's desire for the adventure that Gatsby brings to her life. Daisy's tactic works: She wins the war against her husband and gives Jordan and Nick the message they will carry to Gatsby.

The eight beat progression takes this shape:

BEAT 1: Revealing/Concealing

BEAT 2: Walking/Planning

BEAT 3: Destroying/Concealing

BEAT 4: Opening a subject/Turning the subject to herself

BEAT 5: Wondering aloud/Turning attention to herself

BEAT 6: Accusing/Hiding

BEAT 7: Insulting/Ordering

BEAT 8: Attacking/Retreating

**LOST IN TRANSLATION**

INT. PARK HYATT BAR-NIGHT

Bob sits alone over a drink.

*BEAT 1*

BOB

(to the Barman)

He got married a couple of times to some nice women, beautiful women, too, I mean you and I would be crazy for these women, but there were always rumors. I never liked his acting, so I never gave a damn whether he was straight or not.



**ACTION:** Bob trying to impress the Barman.

**REACTION:** The Barman pretending he's impressed.

Intimacy/Isolation (-)

Rather than starting with that all-too-familiar image of a solitary man sitting at a bar, staring into the back of his head, Coppola opens the scene with showbiz chitchat. A Hollywood star gossiping to a Japanese Barman makes Bob's loneliness character-specific and poignant. This first beat hits an amusing note that counterpoints the dark beat that climaxes the scene.

## **BEAT 2**

**Charlotte steps up to the bar. The Barman  
pulls out a stool near Bob.**

**CHARLOTTE**

**(to Barman)**

**Thank you.**

**(to Bob)**

**Hi.**

**(to Barman as she sits)**

**Thanks.**

**ACTION:** The Barman seating her.

**REACTION:** Charlotte fitting in.

Intimacy/Isolation (-)

When composing a scene, ask this question before committing to any line of dialogue: At this precise moment, what are my character's choices of action? Which tactic could she take? Which does she take? Every choice of tactic suggests a quality in the character's nature and determines the words she'll use to carry it out. Once again, dialogue is the outer result of inner action.

So, what are Charlotte's reactions, choices, and tactics as she enters this all-but-deserted bar and sees a world-famous movie star sitting on a stool alone? She could be intimidated and leave, she could give him his privacy and take a table, or she could sit within talking distance.

As the Barman offers her a stool, she makes the boldest choice of the three and joins Bob. Her choice to sit, at the risk of embarrassment, expresses poise.

### ***BEAT 3***

**BARMAN**

**What can I get you?**

**CHARLOTTE**

**Hmmm... I'm not sure... hmmm.**

**ACTION:** The Barman attending to her.

**REACTION:** Charlotte testing her welcome.

Intimacy/Isolation (-)

Again, choices: Charlotte could have ordered her favorite drink immediately. But tensed by the risk she's taking, she hesitates and gives Bob a chance to react. What he does now tells her whether or not she's actually welcome.

### ***BEAT 4***

**BOB**

**(quoting his commercial)**

**For relaxing times, make it—**

**BOB & BARMAN**

**(in unison)**

**"Suntory time!"**

**CHARLOTTE**

**I'll have a vodka tonic.**

**Bob glances at her, impressed.**

ACTION: Bob making her feel at home.

REACTION: Charlotte joining in.

REACTION: Bob endorsing her choice.

Intimacy/Isolation (+)

Bob's choice of self-ridicule makes her feel welcome. As she orders a serious drink, he nods in approval, and their sense of intimacy versus isolation moves toward the positive. Two strangers settle in to talk.

Bob's self-ridicule announces a character dimension: Actors take their work, even in commercials, seriously, but he chooses to mock himself. This choice of action reveals an inner contradiction between his artist's pride and self-disdain.

**BEAT 5**

**CHARLOTTE**

**(to Bob as the Barman leaves for her  
drink)**

**So what are you doing here?**

**BOB**

**Couple of things . . . Taking a break  
from my wife, forgetting my son's  
birthday, and, ah, getting paid two  
million dollars to endorse a whis-  
key when I could be doing a play  
somewhere.**

**CHARLOTTE**

**(staring in disbelief)**

**Oh.**

ACTION: Charlotte inviting a conversation.

REACTION: Bob confessing to his three chief failures in life.

REACTION: Charlotte concealing her shock.

Lost/Found (-)

Charlotte opens a door to the unexpected. If you were her, imagine your reaction as you sit next to a world-famous movie star whom you think leads an enviable lifestyle, ask him how he's doing, and, offhandedly, he tells you that his life is misery. The phrase "taking a break" doesn't tell Charlotte whether Bob blames himself, his wife, or both for his marital problems, but he clearly damns himself for forgetting his son's birthday and, most of all, for corrupting his creative life by choosing money over art.

Bob's declaration of failure not only surprises Charlotte, but it crosses a red line—that formal distance we traditionally keep between strangers and ourselves. His trespass puts Charlotte under a bit of pressure. Now that the personal value of lost/found has entered the conversation, she wonders if she should take a giant step toward intimacy and add her confession to his. She does. Bob's revelation wrenches their chat into cycles of confession.

## **BEAT 6**

**BOB**

**But the good news is the whiskey works.**

**She laughs.**

ACTION: Bob soothing her feelings.

REACTION: Charlotte sympathizing.

Intimacy/Isolation (+)

This beat of mutual empathy takes them a smidge closer to intimacy. Bob's confession in Beat 5 upset her, but he's sensitive enough to see what he has done and regret it. He quickly softens the moment

with a joke. She, in return, sees that he's embarrassed, so she laughs in sympathy to ease his chagrin.

### **BEAT 7**

**BOB**

**What are you doing?**

**CHARLOTTE**

**Hmmm, ah, my husband's a photographer, so he's working, and, hmmm, I wasn't doing anything, so I came along. And we have some friends who live here.**

**ACTION:** Bob inviting her confession.

**REACTION:** Charlotte confessing to an empty, perhaps troubled personal life.

Lost/Found (--)

From the moment their eyes met in Beat 4, they communicate openly and honestly. Cocktail chat becomes in vino veritas. In Beat 5 Bob dared an intimate confession, and now he tempts her to join him. Once again choices: She could have replied, "Oh, I'm having a wonderful time. My husband's on a photo shoot and I'm enjoying some old friends." Instead, her passive, tepid phrases imply the unflattering truth of her married life. Bob reads her troubled subtext.

### **BEAT 8**

**Bob lights her cigarette.**

**BOB**

**How long have you been married?**

**CHARLOTTE**

**Oh, thank you.**

**(pause)**

**Two years.**

**BOB**

**Twenty-five long ones.**

ACTION: Bob readying his pass.

REACTION: Charlotte preparing to take it.

REACTION: Bob making his pass.

Intimacy/Isolation (--)

Charlotte has just confessed that her married life is unfulfilling, so Bob cannot resist making a pass at this beautiful young woman by complaining about his unfulfilled married life.

Note how Coppola has the older man make his move: He reacts to his own action. He asks Charlotte how long she's been married, knowing that whatever number she might name, he can top it with a quarter century of dissatisfaction.

Note also Charlotte's choice. As he lights her cigarette, she sees the pass coming and could have deflected it by answering, "Two wonderful years," or more aggressively, with a question of her own, "Why do you ask?" Instead, she lets it skate.

But make no mistake. This is a sexual proposition. How serious is hard to say. Bob could be doing it out of masculine ritual, but when a middle-aged guy laments his lengthy, less-than-happy marriage to a young woman at a bar, he's hoping for more than sympathy.

Bob's pass could push Charlotte away, but instead, she moves closer:

## **BEAT 9**

**CHARLOTTE**

**You're probably having a midlife crisis.**

(pause)

Did you buy a Porsche yet?

BOB

(amused)

You know, I was thinking about buying  
a Porsche.

ACTION: Charlotte foiling his pass.

REACTION: Bob complimenting her wit.

Intimacy/Isolation (+)

Charlotte knows his pass is halfhearted at best, and so she teases him about his age in order to say “No” with a touch of kindness. He graciously acknowledges her wit.

*BEAT 10*

CHARLOTTE

Twenty-five years...that's, ah...  
well, it's impressive.

BOB

Well, you figure, you sleep one-third  
of your life. That knocks off eight  
years of marriage right there. So  
you're, you know, you're down to  
sixteen and change, and, you know,  
you're just a teenager...like mar-  
riage...you can drive it, but you  
can...there's still the occasional  
accident.

CHARLOTTE

(laughing)

Yeah...

ACTION: Charlotte offering a silver lining.

REACTION: Bob confessing his rocky marriage.

REACTION: Charlotte complimenting his wit.

Lost/Found (-)

From previous scenes, we know Charlotte has doubts about her husband and her future. When she tries to compliment Bob's marriage, he reminds her of a reality she knows from her own life: Relationships rarely live up to our dreams. Bob softens that harsh truth with a deft comparison of marriage to teen driving, but his cynical answer offers no hope. Nonetheless, Charlotte laughs to compliment his insight.

Note that Beats 4, 5, 8, and 10 play in three steps, rather than the conventional two. Normally, a new action immediately follows an action/reaction. Instead, these beats run action/reaction/reaction. When a reaction triggers yet another reaction, it often signals a deeper connection between the characters, a greater sense of intimacy.

As Oscar-winning screenwriter Philip Yordan put it: "Do not drown your script with endless dialogue and long speeches. Every question does not call for a response. Whenever you can express an emotion with a silent gesture, do so. Once you pose the question, permit it to linger before you get a reply. Or better yet, perhaps the character cannot reply; he or she has no answer. This permits the unspoken response to hang in midair."

## **BEAT 11**

**BOB**

**What do you do?**

**CHARLOTTE**

**Hmmm, I'm not sure yet actually. I just graduated last spring.**

**BOB**

**And what did you study?**



**CHARLOTTE**

**Philosophy.**

**BOB**

**Well, there's a good buck in that racket.**

**CHARLOTTE**

**(embarrassed laugh)**

**Yes . . . well, hmmm, so far it's pro bono.**

ACTION: Bob inviting her personal story.

REACTION: Charlotte confessing to an unpromising future.

Lost/Found (-)

Having made his second confession in Beat 10, Bob draws Charlotte out again, and she confesses that, like her personal life, her professional life is adrift.

## ***BEAT 12***

**BOB**

**(laughs)**

**Well, I'm sure you'll figure out the angles.**

**CHARLOTTE**

**(laughs)**

**Yeah . . .**

ACTION: Bob offering false hope.

REACTION: Charlotte laughing it off.

Intimacy/Isolation (+)

Lost/Found (-)

The world-weary Bob offers hope encrusted with irony. Charlotte's laugh lets him know she gets it, and then she needles him with:

**BEAT 13**

**CHARLOTTE**

**I hope your Porsche works out.**

**Bob nods.**

ACTION: Charlotte also offering bogus hope.

REACTION: Bob signaling that he too gets it.

Intimacy/Isolation (++)

Lost/Found (-)

They both get it: Unhappy as they are, they won't lie to themselves. Sharing this tough truth draws them closer yet.

**BEAT 14**

**CHARLOTTE**

**(toasting)**

**Cheers to that.**

**BOB**

**Cheers to that. Kam pai.**

ACTION: Charlotte celebrating their victory over self-deception.

REACTION: Bob joining her celebration.

Intimacy/Isolation (+++)

This upbeat gesture prepares for the downbeat turning point that caps the scene.

## BEAT 15

**A long pause.**

**CHARLOTTE**

**I wish I could sleep.**

**BOB**

**Me, too.**

**Another long pause.**

ACTION: Charlotte confessing she feels lost within herself.

REACTION: Bob confessing that he, too, feels lost.

Lost/Found (---)

Intimacy/Isolation (++++)

The lines “I wish I could sleep” and “Me, too” intimate a subtext of suffering as moving as any I can remember.

Sleep restores sanity. Without it, existence becomes a mad, ticking clock. When you toss and turn, unstoppable racing thoughts send worries and fears swirling and churning through the mind. Charlotte and Bob cannot sleep. Why not? Jet lag? Racing thoughts?

In my reading of the subtext, their sleeplessness has a deeper cause. As their confessions reveal, they feel cast off from their marriages, adrift in their working lives, and at sea within themselves. A hollow place has opened up inside both that neither family nor work can fill. Charlotte and Bob have lost their purpose in life.

### **Character and Dialogue**

As the film’s title suggests, the co-protagonists cannot translate their emptiness into fullness; they cannot imagine their future; they cannot interpret life’s absurdity into meaning. In more romantic times, Charlotte and Bob would have been known as “lost souls.”

Notice how Coppola’s aesthetic avoids verbal combat and uses

Below are the beat by beat gerunds of action/reaction with the value charges they cause. Overall, the positive charges of isolation/intimacy alternate with the negative charges of lost/found to pace the scene dynamically without repetition:

- BEAT 1: Impressing/Pretending  
Intimacy/Isolation (-)
- BEAT 2: Seating her/Fitting in  
Intimacy/Isolation (-)
- BEAT 3: Attending/Testing  
Intimacy/Isolation (-)
- BEAT 4: Welcoming/Joining/Endorsing  
Intimacy/Isolation (+)
- BEAT 5: Inviting/Confessing/Concealing  
Lost/Found Life (-)
- BEAT 6: Soothing/Sympathizing  
Intimacy/Isolation (+)
- BEAT 7: Inviting/Confessing  
Lost/Found Life (-)
- BEAT 8: Readying/Preparing/Making a pass  
Intimacy/Isolation (-)
- BEAT 9: Foiling/Complimenting  
Intimacy/Isolation (+)
- BEAT 10: Offering hope/Confessing/Complimenting  
Lost/Found Life (-)
- BEAT 11: Inviting/Confessing  
Lost/Found Life (-)
- BEAT 12: Offering false hope/Laughing it off  
Intimacy/Isolation (+)  
Lost/Found Life (-)
- BEAT 13: Offering false hope/Shrugging it off  
Intimacy/Isolation (++)  
Lost/Found Life (-)
- BEAT 14: Celebrating/Celebrating  
Intimacy/Isolation (+++)
- BEAT 15: Confessing/Confessing

Lost/Found Life (---)

Intimacy/Isolation (++++)

The personal revelations of losses in Beats 5, 7, 10, 11, 12, and 13 continually top each other in terms of the damage to their lives. In Beats 10 through 12, the characters' confessions become all the more honest and all the more sad. When Charlotte and Bob toast the wreckage in Beats 13 and 14, their newfound intimacy lifts the mood for an instant, but it turns sharply into the powerful irony of Beat 15.

In the pause that follows their third and most painful confession ("I wish I could sleep"/"Me, too"), each suddenly recognizes a kindred spirit. Their immediate desire is realized in Beat 15 as their lives shift from Isolation (-) to Intimacy (++++). With irony, of course: They can't sleep (--), but they can talk (++); they're lost souls (---) who connect with a mirror soul (++++).

When you survey the gerunds that name their actions, notice how Charlotte and Bob mirror each other. When two people sit at a bar, unconsciously imitating each other's posture and gestures, then echoing each other's subtextual actions, they connect with an intimacy they themselves may not realize.

The scene climaxes on an overall positive irony and a glimmer of hope. This quiet but surprisingly dynamic scene arcs from easy rapport to bleak loss to the possibility of love. The last beat hooks strong suspense for the rest of the film: Now that Bob and Charlotte have joined forces, will they grow into lives found?