

NOTES ON THE WRITING AND RECEPTION OF THE STAGE PLAY *BETTER PEOPLE*

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Editor's Note — Much of the feminist criticisms and analyses of the new reproductive technologies and of biotechnology in general has taken the form of articles, books, and presentations at women's conferences, and it has been carried on by feminists working in academia, activists, and practitioners. Recently, the voices of women directly affected by these technological developments have begun to be heard. Now, Karen Malpede, a feminist artist and playwright expresses her own concerns about biotechnology and the future of humanity in her play *Better People*. We are publishing two scenes of her play and an article describing her experiences in the writing and reception of the play because it seems appropriate and timely that her work be known to our readers.

We need a wide array of perspectives, styles, and formats in order to effectively deal with the social, political, and ethical ramifications brought forward by the developments in biotechnology. We also need to constantly enlarge the frame of our discussions and participation so that effective collective action can emerge. Only then will women be able to have a decision-making role regarding technologies that directly affect our lives.

It also seems important to break down the barriers between academic, political, and artistic work, and to start creating alliances between feminists working in different modalities and in different areas. The overwhelming presence of technology in our lives demands that we strive to create an integrated and multidisciplinary approach. It is in this light that I see the work of Karen Malpede as being of interest and relevance to our readers.

The scientists that attended the Cambridge reading of her play "Better People" are directly involved in developing the technologies that the play scrutinizes and satirizes. While most of those scientists would probably not pick up an issue of *IRAGE*, they did attend a theatrical performance and were thus directly exposed to a feminist criticism of their work. That was a unique event in which scientists were confronted with a layperson's in-depth critique of their views. I believe this was a significant and inspirational action, and something that we need to support and publicize because, in general, as we all know, a deferential and passive attitude towards scientists seems to be the norm.

The play highlights the political and economic contexts in which biotechnology is developed, the power inequalities in which scientific work is embedded, and the for-profit operations that have become an essential part of modern science. The two scenes that were chosen seemed especially appropriate because they bring these aspects of the scientific world into focus. As a result, the values that underlie much of the scientific enterprise quickly come into the foreground, facilitating an understanding of the dynamics of big science. This contributes to the empowerment of non-scientists and the questioning of the so-called experts, two goals we seek to promote in our journal.

—RitaArditti

Synopsis — A personal account by the playwright of the process of creation of the play *Better People*, which is about genetic and reproductive engineering. Also an account of the New York production and a description of presenting a reading of scenes from the play in conjunction with a Conference on the Human Genome Initiative, held at Harvard University.

Aristotle wrote that chief among the subjects unsuited to drama is childbirth. This tabu still holds, though I have broken it in all my plays — for what is more dramatic than tales of birth, birthing, or choosing not to birth, tales of self-birth and of giving or being unable to give birth to

others? Every woman's reproductive history is an heroic tale. So many chances, choices, and missed chances; so much sorrow, violence, and grief due to incest or rape, stillbirth, or the death of a child. The wild beyond all expectation joy in the birth of a wanted child. Menses, labor, lactation — each an

awesome initiation, changing the whole body/soul. Abortion, which is, at once, a loss and a wondrous release, a return to self and a clear-sighted recognition of one's own financial, physical, psychological limits. Every woman's pelvis remembers so much tragedy and pain, such effort and joy. Women have hardly begun to fathom the depths of our reproductive mysteries, though, at last, through our writings and culture-making we have begun. And now our understanding itself seems threatened by reproductive and genetic engineering, which, while marketed as providing more choice for women, actually removes us farther from our bodies and desires, farther from the great drama of our roles as life-givers, life-withholders, farther from knowledge of the cycles of our own infertility and fertility and farther from one another.

During the Baby M trial, when I was active with a group of feminists in support of Mary Beth Whitehead's legal rights to the child she had conceived and born, a number of women, several of them already working on books or articles, suggested I write a play about surrogate motherhood. But I was unable to focus on just one issue when I felt the gestalt of reproductive and genetic engineering had to be addressed. I kept reading and thinking and trying to write, but the play about reproductive and genetic engineering remained resolutely outside my grasp. So I gave it up. Months later, because the idea would not let go, I began to interview a number of geneticists who represented many different viewpoints about and involvements in genetic engineering.

In the middle of this series of interviews, one morning at the computer, I heard two voices speaking so I wrote down what they said. Two characters had appeared. Haila Gudenschmartz, a feisty, old, woman scientist, a resister of Hitler's eugenic experiments, her research on female reproduction ignored and misconstrued by the scientific establishment; and, Edward Chreode, her son, bonded to his imposing mother by awareness of her suffering and needs. Like his mother, Chreode was a potential visionary, though currently enslaved to the Human Genome Project in order to fund his lab.

At the same time as I encountered these characters, I realized that the play would have to alternate between their dream and waking realities. The play demanded a style all its own, part dream

play, part drama of ideas, part comedy with a surreal edge. The play had to be frightening because genetic engineering is frightening, but also hopeful, because we become slaves to technology only insofar as we refuse to feel.

Two other characters soon appeared. Theodora Forensic is the first woman conceived by the genes of two male Nobel Prize Winners. Bred, like Athena, in the heads of her brilliant fathers, Theodora takes up their cause and is determined to become the first scientist to alter and transplant genes in human beings. Philbert Wallace, CEO of the genetic engineering firm Generecombo, Inc., head of the Genome Project and chair of the biology department at "this great university," controls everyone with money. He marries Theodora and in exchange for funding her laboratory, he demands she give him all her eggs. With his sperm, Theodora's eggs, and a stable of surrogates, Philbert dreams of creating 2910 "better people" in the next 25 years.

Looking back, I can say I wrote the stage play *Better People* as an attempt to provide an experiential contrast between two world views, one dominant in western culture and one emergent, or reemergent. I shall call them mechanism and holism, though they might equally be named patriarchy and eco-feminism.

An holistic world view can seem much harsher than mechanism because it recognizes the reality of the life's limits. Genetic engineering, in contrast, promises perfection, and, maybe, even immortality.

Reproductive engineering promises to cure women of our reproductive ills. Our age, the toxins to which we have been exposed, our own past sexual or medical traumas, and society's lack of respect for our integrity are meaningless. We can be impregnated with the perfect baby, or pay someone else to have it for us. And we should all submit to whatever advance in prenatal diagnostic tests or treatments are developed as soon as they can be marketed to us. The fetus is the patient, after all.

Middle-aged women, poised between the fertility of youth and the sterility of menopause, become especially susceptible to the promise of fertility treatments. This moment of passage from potential mother to potential crone is immensely difficult in a society that does not honor women's intellects, creative efforts, or wisdom. No wonder women in their 30s and 40s become slaves to IVF.

A reasoned critique of genetic and reproductive engineering is so all-encompassing that no one play can hope to raise all the questions or address all possible human scenarios. What satisfied me most about *Better People* was its playfulness and its hopefulness as three of its four characters refused to accept the mechanistic scenario any longer and began to understand different scientific practices and paradigms. At its best, the play woke the audience, at least momentarily, from our entrapment in the world of mechanistic values.

I directed the premiere production of *Better People* at Theater for the New City in New York City, in February 1990. On February 3, we hosted a day-long symposia with Mexican dinner and performance of the play. It was a particularly memorable event; the panels and discussions were exciting, the food was good, the play was wonderfully received, with great bellows of shared laughter, and the mix of art and discourse intoxicated everyone. We continued to invite scientists, historians of science, and ecofeminists to dialogue with the audience on Friday nights after the play. Our audiences were continually large and enormously enthusiastic. (This was despite a generally hostile press. *The Village Voice* printed an uncomprehending review. *The New York Times*, a newspaper dedicated to covering in enthusiastic detail every new development in genetic engineering, refused the play any coverage. A rave review did appear in the *New York Law Journal*, and, also, a very favorable letter to the editor in the *Voice*.)

In June 1990, George Bartenieff, who produced and starred in the play's premiere production, and I were invited to give a reading from the play along with two Harvard students, Heather Cross and Richard Nash at a Meeting on the Social and Historical Significance of the Human Genome Initiative co-sponsored by Harvard and M.I.T.

It was a guerilla action from the start, though neither George nor I fully realized just how amazing the event actually would be. We had been invited by the conference organizer, a Harvard graduate student, Michael Fortun and a professor of the history of science at M.I.T., Charles Weiner, who had seen and loved the New York production and who had a wish to shake up this rather in-group conference, which would be attended by many people already working on the Human Genome Initiative.

Walter Gilbert was there. He is the Nobel geneticist who said he would form a private company to sequence the human genome if the U.S. government wouldn't support the project. At the conference, he unveiled his vision of the day in the near-future when we all have our own genetic blueprint available on compact disk. How this information will be used, for what purposes of social control, or medical treatment, is, of course, unclear. There was talk of the "asymptomatic ill," people whose genes "predispose" them to certain "diseases" for which, supposedly, they will be able to be "treated" before onset. Gilbert proclaimed himself "a thorough-going reductionist" because reductionism "offers explanations." He also said that once the genome has been mapped, "the Huntington's gene will be the first to go" out of the gene pool, although he didn't clarify exactly how. Forced sterilization of Huntington's carriers, perhaps? Or, merely, forced abortions, after forced diagnostic tests? How will we legislate away a gene? No one at the conference asked.

Gilbert also said that the map of the human genome would allow reasonable people to finally take on the religious fundamentalists and demolish their position because there would be absolute proof of how close the human genome is to the genomes of the other primates. (Although this has been known for years.) No one questioned Gilbert's own brand of fundamentalism, nor the absurdity of his thought that he could make those other fundamentalists listen to *sacred reason* at last.

In fact, at this conference, although many interesting things were said in passing, and many mild criticisms of genetic engineering and its potential pitfalls made, no one really questioned anything at all. The noticeable lack of debate was due to inbred academic habit and to the fact that with one exception, everyone at the Conference was white. It was also due to Nancy Wexler's presence. Nancy Wexler holds the purse most conference participants depend upon.

Nancy Wexler has been appointed to chair the Ethics Committee of the Human Genome Initiative. Three percent of the projected 13- to 15 billion dollar cost of the project is mandated to be dispensed by the Ethics Committee for research into the ethical dilemmas raised by the mapping and sequencing of the human genome and the consequent tests and procedures which will become available. Of course, since the Ethics

Committee is contained within the project itself, the major ethical question about the project, "Should it be done at all?" will never be addressed. And one wonders how many other ethical dilemmas will actually be dealt with as high-powered genetic engineering firms rush each and every discovery past the Ethics Committee on the way to lucrative market. The Ethics Committee represents the Genome Initiative's attempt to scrutinize itself, an attempt which those involved clearly view as evidence of the project's moral impeccability.

Nancy Wexler's mother had Huntington's disease and she, herself, has refused to take the diagnostic test which might determine if she carries the gene and will die sometime in midlife of the disease's progressively debilitating effects. This fact of Nancy Wexler's life is singularly well-known. It is the only fact about her personal life that I know, and it has been repeated to me, often, whenever her name comes up. Nancy Wexler comes to the Genome Initiative, as she says, from the "disease constituency" representing those people who are suffering from genetic diseases or who have lost family members to identifiable, supposed single-gene diseases like Huntingtons or cystic fibrosis. Nancy Wexler seems to be one of the few women in a position of any power within the Genome Initiative. She comes to the project as a public sufferer and the representative of others who are suffering.

When Walter Gilbert said the "Huntington's gene would be first to go" out of the human gene pool, Nancy Wexler winced. The disease constituency wants cures, not prohibitions, and rightly so. If genetic engineering could be limited to the project of curing heretofore incurable single-gene diseases, it would be foolish to object. Yet even if such mechanistic treatments can be developed, it remains to be seen if they will work on the holistic organism which the human body is. From antibiotics to AZT to chemotherapy to organ transplants, the miracles of modern medicine can weaken or kill with side effects.

It's also difficult to imagine mechanistic scientific research setting limits on itself. "If it can be done, let's do it." The body is a machine. As Charlie Weiner pointed out at the conference in the years before genetic engineering technologies became reality, there were serious debates about the ethics of proceeding with the inquiry at all, but

once the technology was on line, the ethical debate stopped. The race for products had begun. In the meantime, many millions more children die each year of social neglect than of genetic defect.

We presented our reading from "Better People" at the end of the first day of this conference, in the experimental theater of Harvard's Loeb Drama Center. Most of the conference participants attended, including Walter Gilbert, but excluding, I believe, Nancy Wexler. It's always difficult to excerpt from a play, especially a play like this one, which is so inherently theatrical and puts the audience through an experience which should be had in total. I think it's fair to say that the Harvard experience of the play was less strong esthetically than the experience had by the New York audience at a full production. But that difference accounted for, nothing quite accounts for the viciousness of the response to the play by a number of the conference participants.

These people were truly upset. Upset by the criticism of genetic engineering and the Human Genome Initiative implicit in the play; upset by the strong woman-centered, "devouring" one man called them, images in the play; upset by the fact that the Big Science character, named oddly enough Philbert Wallace, was not the hero of the play. How could I have committed the ultimate transgression and reduced the Faust character to a lesser role? How could I be more interested in the psychology of the three characters who begin to re-imagine science, than in that of the character who is selling out to genetic engineering, much as Faust sold his soul to magic? How was it that *they* were not central to this drama? And that their angst (the drama of the soullessness of mechanism) was not the only story I chose to tell? How did I dare to make a metaphysical scientist and two renegade women scientists the moral centers of this piece? The play gives voice to holistic science and begins a discourse with the public. These are its heresies.

The large percentage of the audience which was shocked reacted as all people who have been profoundly shocked by a work of art react. They proclaimed the play bad art.

What else could a play be that criticized the mechanistic view of science, except a very bad play? After all, the major portion of the DNA strand is called "the junk DNA" by genetic engineers because they do not understand its function.

SCENES 2 AND 7 FROM *BETTER PEOPLE: A SURREAL COMEDY* ABOUT GENETIC ENGINEERING

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CAST OF CHARACTERS IN SCENES 2 AND 7

DR. HAILA GUDENSCHMARTZER, very, very old, the senior woman geneticist in the nation. A refugee from Hitler.

DR. EDWARD CHREODE, her son, also a geneticist.

DR. PHILBERT WALLACE, Chair of the Molecular Biology Department at this great university; president of Generecombo, Inc.; three-time winner of the Nobel Prize.

DR. THEODORA FORENSIC, is the first woman born of the genes of two male Nobel Prize winning scientists. She is the brilliant young post-doctorate assistant to Dr. Gudenschmartzter, later, wife to PHILBERT WALLACE and head of her own laboratory.

SCENE 2

[The auditorium of this great university, where the NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE is meeting. As a DISTINGUISHED SCIENTIST takes his place behind the plexiglass podium and greets the assembled audience, EDWARD CHREODE wheels his mother, HAILA GUDENSCHMARTZER, into a front row seat, among the audience.]

For production information: George Bartenieff, Executive Director, Theater for the New City, 155 First Ave., New York, NY 10003.

Writers Guild Reg. # 058342-00.

HAILA GUDENSCHMARTZER: Not here, Edward, not here. Over there.

EDWARD CHREODE: Here? HG: Three. We need three seats.

DISTINGUISHED SCIENTIST: May we have order, please, order. Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. President, distinguished members of the National Academy of Science, welcome to this auspicious gathering.

(applause)

This meeting marks a very special occasion. We gather together to celebrate the completion of the Human Genome Mapping Project, (applause) We now know the precise location and the complete DNA sequence of each of the 100,000 human genes. We can now write down in exact detail all the genetic instructions for making a complete human being, (applause, again. He holds up his hands for silence.) Yes, ladies and gentlemen, I know, it's absolutely intoxicating.

[Throughout the scene, Haila makes her remarks and elicits responses as "under-talk" during the formal speeches of the scientists. The whispered dialogue is amplified and is delivered simultaneously with the speeches.]

HG: (in a loud whisper) Yes, drunk on power, they all are. (spotting a late arrival) There she is. Stand up and wave to her, Edward. Theodora. Theodora Forensic, over here.

THEODORA FORENSIC: (stumbling across audience feet to them) How terrible to be late.

Forgive me, please. I was caught up in the lab.

HG: Theodora Forensic, my new post doc, meet Edward Chreode, my son.

TF: Dr. Chreode, I'm so very glad to meet you.

EC: Dr. Forensic, my pleasure. Here, sit here. We've saved a seat on the other side of mother.

TF: Thank you. How kind of you, Dr. Gunderschmartzler. Have I missed much?

HG: The usual self-congratulatory clap-trap.

DISTINGUISHED SCIENTIST: Together scientific visionaries, venture capitalists, and the United States Government joined forces to create what I think we must all agree is the most significant accomplishment of the 20th century. The map of the human genome is the first step in affording us complete mastery over the human gene pool, (applause)

HG: And what will they do now? Make better people.

TF: Oh, yes. Don't you think so . . .

EC: I think there's something essential we haven't even formulated yet.

HG: If that's what you really think stop blathering about it, Edward, and get to work.

TF: I'm afraid I don't follow what you're . . .

("hush" sounds from the audience.)

DISTINGUISHED SCIENTIST: Like the Manhattan Project of the 1940s, the Human Genome project of the 1990s has put America first in the areas of visionary scientific breakthrough, major technological accomplishment and renewed economic edge over the rest of the industrialized world.

HG: The Manhattan Project was the first scientific concentration camp in this country; this genome project has been the second.

EC: Mother . . .

HG: Edward . . . you've done nothing for the past 10 years but count proteins.

TF: Dr. Chreode, how thrilling.

DISTINGUISHED SCIENTIST: Among the eminent research scientists who joined forces to complete this massive project in record time, no one man deserves our thanks more than Dr. Philbert Wallace.

(applause)

HG: Philbert Wallace is a self-serving fool.

EC: Mother, please, you're not having breakfast with me, you're in a crowded room.

HG: Where I am does not alter the character of Philbert Wallace one slight bit.

EC: Hush.

DISTINGUISHED SCIENTIST: Philbert Wallace, three time Nobel Prize winning scientist and fortune 500 CEO who from his adjacent laboratories at this great university and offices at Generecombo, Inc., directed the mapping of more of the human genome than any other senior researcher.

HG: To think, I taught him everything he knows about science. I suppose his own mother is responsible for the corruption of his character.

TF: Gene alteration is my special area of interest. Are you deeply involved, Dr. Chreode?

HG: He sequenced genes ad nauseam. It's miraculous his brain is still in working order.

EC: Mother, for god's sake, you can't keep talking like this . . .

HG: Can't I? Don't forget, Edward Chreode, I spoke up against Hitler in '34. I criticized his mad eugenics program then and I did my time in a camp because of it.

DISTINGUISHED SCIENTIST: Dr. Ladies and gentlemen. Distinguished fellows of the National Academy of Science, may I present to you, Dr. Philbert Wallace.

[As the applause increases, and during the following dialogue, the actor who had played the DISTINGUISHED SCIENTIST turns around and takes off moustache or beard, changes ties, etc., becoming PHILBERT WALLACE, when the transformation is complete he begins his speech.]

HG: Our kind ought to be unwordly, monkish. Philbert's a master politician. It's dangerous.

EC: Mother, please, this isn't Germany; it's not 1934.

HG: Philbert's had Congress eating out of hands for the past 10 years, and they've eaten plenty of shit.

[Enormous applause for PHILBERT WALLACE. He holds up his hands for silence. Philbert Wallace speaks with studied confidence and a smooth, ingratiating manner. He has learned how to win an audience.]

PHILBERT WALLACE: My fellow colleagues in this great enterprise, thank you very much for your warm enthusiastic welcome. You know, it's been said that a man has nothing until he has won the respect of his peers. If that's so, then I must be among the very richest men in the world.

HG: He's made a fucking fortune off of science, science, which ought to be done for love.

HG: Will you try to listen to Philbert's speech. Afterwards, you can judge.

HG: The arrogance appalls me. The "human genome" as if there were some single one.

EC: Yes, well did it ever occur to you that insults aren't terribly effective?

HG: Mark my words, Edward Chreode, mark my words. A entirely new theoretical formulation is what's needed.

EC: That's exactly what I'm working toward. A new vision.

HG: Well, hurry up. And stop doing shit work for Philbert Wallace.

EC: How else does one fund oneself?

PW: You know it wasn't always this way. I remember days and weeks and months of people telling me I was nuts, that the human genome couldn't be mapped, that we didn't have the technology necessary to master such a task. Then there were the arduous and depressing Congressional hearings spent answering our critics, the environmentalists, the feminists, the Catholic Church, even those few doubters within our ranks, people and organizations who for their own, I'm certain, honorable motives cling to the outmoded notion that human beings are not equipped to interfere with nature and that human knowledge itself ought to be limited. Well, let me tell you something right here and now, human knowledge is not limitable. Human knowledge is a God given gift and we are here on this earth in order to carry out the greatest of all human projects, to join hands with nature, not against her, in the perfection of human life itself.

(applause)

TF: Oh, I'm so excited to be sitting here, at this moment! Now that the genome has been mapped, human gene alteration is around the corner.

HG: Have you read any history along with all that science?

TF: We're making history today.

HG: Regrettably.

EC: Hush. He's about to acknowledge his colleagues.

HG: Memory. Memory! Where, in what gene, does the collective memory reside?

(An amplified "Shushhh", as if from all the people seated around Haila.)

EC: Mother, you've got to be quiet now.

PW: Now, let me tell you something you might not already know. I wasn't always a research scientist. No, once I was a humble resident on a hospital ward and I saw, day in and day out, the suffering of human beings. I saw cancer deaths, heart attack

deaths, deaths by stroke, deaths from genetic diseases like Parkinsons, Huntingtons, Cystic Fibrosis, Tae Sachs. One Christmas Eve, my esteemed friends and colleagues, I lost four beautiful children to the ravages of leukemia. The deaths of those four innocent children on Christmas Eve drove me into the lab, ladies and gentlemen, fellow scientists. The deaths of those four innocent babes led me to devote the rest of my life to the two-pronged task of curing and preventing genetic defects in our young. The deaths of those four blameless children made me promise myself that I would not rest until the entire scientific community had been adequately mobilized against human suffering. Yes, I promised myself I would not rest until the human genome had been mapped. And I have not rested and we have brought this project home a full five years ahead of schedule, (applause) And now that this enormous task has been accomplished, I want to renew my promise, in front of you and with you. I will not rest until the molecular biology community has learned how to prevent or to correct each and every terrible trick the human gene pool persists in playing on human beings. As the new millenium approaches, ladies and gentlemen, let's create a disease free future for humankind!

Gene alteration is the *answer*, ladies and gentlemen. Once we learn how to alter genes we will hold the future in our hands. Gene alteration will allow us to cure, in utero or in vitro, any of the over 10,000 genetic maladies that are currently detectable, and many other malfunctions we don't even label as diseases, yet. With gene alteration, every couple's natural longing to achieve the best possible genetic make-up for each of their off-spring will become a glorious reality. Once parents, acting in concert with The Recombinant DNA Advisory Commission are actually able to choose the physical and intellectual characteristics of their off-spring who can doubt that a world of gods and goddesses awaits us? With gene alteration techniques under our belts, we will have become impervious to illness, to defects and, ultimately, even to death.

We have mapped the human genome, ladies and gentlemen, now we must use the wealth of information at our finger-tips. Our goal is nothing

less than genetic perfection for every American. This and only this is the great work before us.

(deafening applause)

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much.

HG: Reach into my bag, Edward Chroede; I've brought some ripe tomatoes just for this very moment.

EC: Mother, everyone we know is here. I won't let you humiliate yourself like this.

HG: Theodora, hand me my tomatoes.

[The three of them begin to move out of the auditorium; Edward wheels his mother's chair across the floor in front of the stage, where the following dialogue is played.]

TF: It's so inspiring, isn't it, Dr. Chroede. Philbert Wallace is brilliant. Genetic perfection. A disease free world. Such a challenge is worth an entire lonely lifetime in a lab.

EC: You've been bred to the task, haven't you?

TF: You mean because I was born from two sperm inserted into an egg from which all the genetic material except the extra X had been previously removed. My fathers are feminist men. They made a bet with other less enlightened Nobel Prize winners that a woman might for once make a lasting mark on science.

HG: After all these years, my accomplishments aren't seen as major.

TF: But, of course, I didn't mean to suggest . . . Your work on memory is supreme. (She bends enthusiastically over HAILA's chair, paying homage.) You are the most highly esteemed woman scientist alive, Dr. Gudenschmartz. That's why I'm here. I felt the need of a strong female influence since I never had a mother. I want to be a credit to my sex. I intend to perfect gene alteration techniques.

[For a moment, THEODORA, her hand on her breast, gazes out into her glorious future.]

HG: Listen to her, Edward, you need guts like that.

TF: But you were involved in the genome mapping project weren't you, Dr. Chreode.

EC: Call me, *Edward* Chreode, please. My real work is something else. My wonderings are a bit diffuse right now. Difficult to pin down. But the speculations are endlessly fascinating. I do believe I'm on to something.

TF: Could you introduce me to Dr. Wallace, Dr. Chreode? Gene alteration is the way to go. I have some rather concrete ideas for experiments.

HG: She'll marry the first Nobel Prize winner who asks her. She'll get money, patronage, a lab, of her own; it all comes attached to his penis. And you, Edward, you will never find a brilliant wife until you win the Prize.

EC: Mother, I'm certain Dr. Forensic and I . . .

HG: (Ignoring Edward, to Theodora) I created Edward Chreode by myself. He's fatherless. So that I might present a masculine antidote to their pseudo-scientific twaddle and gibberish. A compassionate man with a brain. That's what I meant him to be. [EDWARD wheels his mother off-stage; THEODORA follows. The rest of the speech is heard as if it took place in the hall leading to the laboratory doors.] A feelingful soul with a speculative flare. Edward, my dear, self-assertion comes so very hard to you. But now the time has come for you to take a bold stab at a theory, publish, make yourself known. Wheel me back to the lab. Edward, Theodora, I feel the blood begin to thunder in my veins. We have important work ahead.

[THEODORA opens the door to HAILA'S lab. The two enter.]

SCENE 7

[Absolutely deafening applause]

[Triumphal music, celebratory lights. THEODORA wheels HAILA backwards in front of the stage. HAILA throws confetti at PHILBERT WALLACE who is carried in on the shoulders of EDWARD CHREODE and another scientist in white lab coat. PHILBERT is deposited on stage at the podium. This is PHILBERT'S DREAM. HE begins to speak.)

PW: Today, I'm thrilled to announce to the entire human race that we have completely mastered gene alteration techniques. There are no defects we cannot correct.

TF: He's brilliant. Absolutely brilliant. What a mind. How glad I am to join my genes with his.

HG: I'm prouder of him than I am of my own flesh and blood. I consider him my real son.

EC: What a man! The best around. I am honored to assist in his great plans.

PW: Suffering has been abolished by us, the genetic scientists. No loss, no pain, no doubt, no handicaps, mental or emotional, come between the individual and his or her full potential. Everyone is optimized at genius level.

[Thunderous applause]

EC: Thank god for scientific vision.

TF: Thank Philbert Wallace. Thank the scientists who do what god could never do.

HG: At last, we are freed from destiny and fate. Freed from the past.

PW: Of course, we must now leave the earth which threatens us still with disease and with death. The entire galaxy beckons us, offering unparalleled potential for economic development and human betterment.

[Thunderous applause. PHILBERT holds his hands for silence.]

Ladies and gentlemen, I have a special surprise guest for you this afternoon. May I have your attention and a very warm welcome for our very own Mother Earth.

[In PHILBERT'S dream, HAILA is MOTHER EARTH. She comes to the podium wearing a plastic world globe which is decorated to look like a rather frowsy suburban matron's hat. She speaks in a halting, low, apologetic, passive, mother's voice.]

THE EARTH: Thank you, Philbert. Thank you very much. Well, I thought . . . I'm not really used

to public speaking. I hardly ever say anything at all. But I thought, well, as you are all about to depart, well, I couldn't really let you go without offering some few words of advice. You know how mothers are. We always do want the best for our children and we try, well, we do try, in our own imperfect ways, to do the right thing, we worry, you know, those of you who are mothers will understand what I mean. Are there any mothers left out there? Oh, yes, yes, I see a few hands, one or two.

Yes, well then, you will understand. You will understand what I mean when I say one of the hardest things to do is to admit the mistakes you've made with your children. To really look hard at your own failings and at all the ways your own limitations have warped your off-spring.

Yes, well all we mothers can do is try. We all do try just as hard as we can. Now, of course, that you've perfected birth, you've forgotten all of that. No one woman is responsible. Perhaps, I should have thought it out like that. Maybe it's the best way, after all. In any case I wish you luck. And I do just want to take a moment of your time to leave you all with a few parting words. Some little saying to carry away, some words to live by on your outer-spacial journey. Well, I'm not going to tell you how much I'm going to miss you. I will miss you. That might seem strange to you, after all the troubles we've had, but I will miss you. I know you don't think you're going to miss me one little bit, but I have always had your best interests at heart. I have tried and I have given a lot. I've done my best. And if that best wasn't good enough, well, now, I promised myself I wouldn't go on like this. I really just came here because I do simply want to leave you all with a word or two that might somehow be helpful. I'll try not to bore you with much, but I did want to say, well, in all these years that you've been here with me, and in all the years before you came, and maybe, too, in all the years to come once you leave me alone to clean up your mess I've only had one thought, really, one thought only has guided me. Odd, how hard it is to put it into words. I suppose I had hoped you would see it for yourselves.

Well, all right, now. Yes. Yes. Let me tell you that one thought of mine I always have had. It goes a

little bit like this: No matter what ever happened, no matter how many mistakes I made, no matter what ever was done to me, from the first time they cut me to mine oil and coal, to the time they dropped the atom bomb, to more recent years when they took from me the secrets of the genes, and started putting human growth hormones into pigs so the poor little things couldn't stand up, and were depressed all the time, I've always thought only one thing, and it's been this: whatever happens to you, mother, you just keep on doing what you've always done, you just keep on answering everything with life, you just keep putting forth life, you just keep making the green earth sprout. And in the cities, you know, I had the plants grow right up through the sidewalks. And even in the barren deserts and the jungles I made so many diverse species. Why the colors on the wings of the moths alone, well, I thought that would give you pause. I really thought you would understand. Well, that's all I wanted to say. I just wanted to remind you and ask you to remember that as you go on your way. It wasn't enough, I understand. It wasn't enough to make you happy in the end. Maybe in space where there aren't any other forms of life you will be more comfortable and you'll be able to look after yourselves better out there than you have done here, where you had so many brothers and sisters and the competition seemed to overwhelm you. So I wish the very best to each and every human being. Thank you for taking the time to listen to me. Thank you, Philbert. Thank you all.

[silence]

PW: Thank you, mother. How about a round of applause.

[The dream sequence ends as THEODORA enters, holding print-out material.]

TF: Philbert, I must speak with you.

PW: (snaps awake, takes her pages, scans them hastily): Theodora, I find these results unsatisfactory.

TF: So do I, of course, that's why I'm here.

PW: These results are inconclusive. We need the answer. We need a fool-proof method for gene alteration. We need it now.

TF: But it isn't going to work.

[SHE storms out, HE follows her through the hall to her office.]

PW: Of course, it will work.

TF: Look, Philbert, we've already proven conclusively that the attachment of new genetic material has completely unpredictable effects. The organism becomes totally confused. It seems to me that DNA has been vastly overrated.

PW: Theodora, do you want a divorce? TF: Yes.

PW: Traitor.

TF: Don't you see, I'm stuck. I can't make gene alteration work.

PW: You were my brightest hope, Theodora, the brilliant star on the horizon. You've failed me, Theodora. My lawyer will phone your lawyer in the morning.

TF: Philbert, something we haven't dreamed of yet is happening.

PW: Legally, I'm entitled to joint custody of your eggs and if you don't behave admirably, I'll sue you for full custody in perpetuity.

TF: I'm telling you I have to abandon all my research. What do you think I am a prize winning hen?

PW: Team work, Theodora, team work. Your eggs and my sperm.

TF: I don't need to reproduce, Philbert. I need to work.

PW: My parents didn't care what I achieved, Theodora. They had no aspirations for their son. My father was a mechanic; my mother cooked lunches at the high school. As a child, I used to dream that these people were just my surrogate caregivers, and that my real parents, my gene donors, were out in the world somewhere being brilliantly successful. Maybe I was right. Legally, Theodora, I am owed your eggs.

TF: Take my eggs, Philbert, if you want them so much.

PW: You really are totally without maternal feeling.

TF: I suppose I can stand one thoroughly invasive medical procedure. The pain might be a relief from the unbearable agony of this failed research.

PW: For a real woman, the pain is bearable. We simply drill a small hole through the uterine wall.

TF: I know the procedure, Philbert.

PW: Give me your eggs, Theodora, I'll forget I ever wanted you to share my life.

TF: You never cared about my work, my mind. The minute my research dead-ends, all you can think about is grabbing my eggs. Well maybe I'm not as brilliant as you had hoped, Philbert? Did you ever consider that? Maybe my eggs aren't worth much. Maybe I'm a fraud.

PW: Nonsense. I'll take care of your eggs, Theodora. I'll see to the details of their fertilization and their implantation. I'll follow through on their maturation. I'll send them to all the great universities. I'll let you remain a fully-funded researcher in my lab.

TF: I tell you, I'm stuck. I don't know which way to turn.

PW: How many short-sighted people said the atom couldn't be split. Genes can be altered. They will be. We will do it. Here, in these labs. All of us. Together. Like a family, Theodora. We must. Theodora, I want you standing next to me the day we conquer DNA. We can reconsider our divorce, Theodora, it was never just for your eggs . . . I had hoped . . .

TF: No, Philbert, no. These personal things mean nothing to me. You're right, of course, I can't start questioning the very premises of all of our work just because I'm momentarily frustrated.

PW: Think! Theodora, think!

TF: Maybe, if I can devise a simple alteration in the experimental technique, perhaps, if I change the order of several steps . . . yes, I begin to see a

way to proceed. Let me take another look at those results.

PW: That's the spirit, Theodora. I'll schedule you in for complete egg removal.

TF: (Thoroughly preoccupied) Right, Philbert, right. Just make certain they don't want to keep me overnight. I can't take that much time off.

[SHE takes the papers and leaves.]