

On the Edge

A Mystery in Modern Dramatic Verse

S D Anugyan

Foreword for the Online Extract

As with its predecessor ‘Pilot’, ‘On the Edge’ was performed only a few times in the 1990s. Again, the actors and production team were mostly courageous and creative teenagers supported by adults.

As a writer, I had learned from previous mistakes, and managed to be my own fierce editor despite the necessarily wordy exposition at the start. This worked dramatically, so that even very young children could enjoy the play, and did. Design-wise – as in the language – it was very different from ‘Pilot’. Whereas the latter’s stage was dark and heavy with camouflage-netting draped over looming skyscrapers, ‘Edge’ was almost Zen, most of the scene-changes relying on lighting: playful bright colours for most, stark uplighters (‘shin-busters’) for the ‘agent-angel’ scenes.

There is also a lot of music in the play, which is not in evidence in this extract, and may never be heard again, including the prologue (omitted here). Yet now, I find myself living near the cliff-top Minack Theatre in Cornwall, and keep thinking how it would be the perfect setting for the final act...

S D Anugyan 2018

Act One Scene 1 – Isle of Glass

Enter Jason, Andrea and Catherine

ANDREA Jason, allow my warm comfort of loneliness
 To sustain your words in their hesitant escape.
 Your body shakes, a prison of some subtle fit.

JASON I am all right. Just leave me a breath to say more.

ANDREA We will stand back. Look. But distance lessens not
 Any closeness nor true proximity of love;
 Only power to hurt, which we do not have.

JASON Andrea, to persuade the persuaded, or, more,
 A persuader, is a bizarre strategy
 Hatched from the idle dreams of a divine clown
 To induce laughter, both mine and humanity's.
 I feel better, to whiten teeth at destiny
 Herself. So, I will tell you more. I love you
 Both, and will not grant a reciprocated pain.
 To short, you know the session I have just received.

ANDREA Only of it. The matter is wholly missing.

JASON Seven years back a beast was disposed at this doorstep,
 Obsequiously human, enraged with nature
 Whether kind or cruel, ripped from imaginations
 Of a healthy past; which I never had.

CATHERINE Yet you contained respect for form denied yourself
 That led the authorities to bring you here. Rage
 Permitted within, heart-eating, but outwardly
 Stilled. You often forget, Jay, each of your battles
 Lost, dissipated, powerless with good will.

JASON Okay, so helplessness proved the most fit,
 Spitting in the eye of red survival to bring
 Me here. Now listen to my recent odyssey
 Of the mind and know, grateful as I remain to
 You and this world of light, my heart cannot retain
 More, and is shattered to emerald, ruby, quartz,

Opaque, shards, lacerating unreal clarity
And visual arrangements of lies contributing
To wholeness; picking up pieces, forever, caught
In space between cliffs, balanced and opposed, falling;
It is like death; it has to be. This is the risk
And the thrill because I am alive and I exist.
Before, all country fortunes were governed by
Furnished bias and neutrality of angels;
I now know myself a character out of time,
Bewildered by radiance and puppet kisses,
My life a series of jokes, misplaced entrances
And, however beseeched, just one exit.
Your brimming eyes do not speak to me of madness,
A trust that only this oasis can offer,
And, again, thank you. Still there is a pearl within
The core of my sadness and rage possessing me.

ANDREA Old news is that who you are is not yourself.

JASON Yes, and my life an orphaned mystery,
Adrenalin not yet loose. I need to leave quickly
To solve a vicious puzzle long since completed
By those same unknown hands who carefully built
A cage around my heart.

CATHERINE The session you had with Simon – it told you all this?
Was it pure hypnosis or chemically induced?

JASON I am no longer a patient! This is my job,
And pharmaceuticals are not permitted here,
In this case; it was the alchemy of my mind,
His the apprentice, that revealed the hidden mists
That have confused my steps in a landscape of years.
I'll state every letter to spell out the meaning:
My life was sabotaged before birth. I do not know
By whom, or why, only that it occurred before
Conceptual touchdown of my discarnate spirit
Nine months plus eternity by the first breath.
Now you may think me mad, but listen: Our research
Of ourselves has shown life as the razor edge
Of death, that between our last gasping moments and
The first lies an existence beyond puny sense
And understanding. In that realm apart from nature

Is my story. What you see here is a façade.

ANDREA We are a collection of idiot mystics
Perhaps, but still I'd prefer to see stone-proof.

JASON Hear it instead. Within moments Simon had me
Gibbering in baby sounds, recalling the start
Of my life, and its rehearsal. I could detect
The presence of a companion, a girl,
Lover and friend, born, time and place intimate
To mine, twin destinies woven as one where we would meet
In later years with eyes to speak volumes of love, space
Coming together in a singular lifetime of moments.
Remembrance reports her beauty above all sense.

CATHERINE So is this girl, woman, inspired dream-fabric, or true?

JASON As true as love is not, except to herself.

CATHERINE Why, in two years, has there been no mention of this?
Such relationship, whether past or not, could
Have remedied much conflict, making therapy poor.

JASON Because there was no relationship. That is the
Cut of it. Nine years ago I met and loved
Her in a glimpse. Reciprocation was even
Deeper, still, and waits in languid eternity,
Endless silence nicely veiled from life's refractions.

CATHERINE Andrea, please give me some air in this sad tale.
Your silence provokes but far, white oceans of dust.

ANDREA I need to know if the conclusion is an onion
Or a union. Go on, Jay, I can hold my breath.

JASON: Her name is Lydia, saved from 'Cordelia'
To spite her birthright in righteous rebellion
Against the alien affectations of ice-
Minded parents who have a university
As a home. To further her reactionary cause
She married a psychotic ape disguised as a
Businessman, twice her number in years. She was flung
From father to father in silent desperation.

Her inward anguish I know, maybe only I
Know. Hidden from herself, she lives in a box-like death,
Chained by a ring. Once I wished that ring to be mine,
Giving freedom and not pain. Now I have gone
So far from myself I no longer know that
To be true. In my travels I have sown as much
Tears as bliss in a spell of dark ignorance
Along grey, wintry roads under leaded skies,
Betrayed by quick steel threads of rain, yet rejoiced
Anyhow all life's wonder in a selfish cry
Despite what I may have done. But I still wander,
Having come to the tall tower of wealth, to be
Kept out, resigned to singing songs in grim, tone deaf
Mockery. I am the artist denied expression,
The serious fool, the wolf with a cat's meow.

ANDREA The living with a death's head, idiot with mine.
I cannot bear birth-pangs of supposed history
And manly yarns where the very subtlety
Is too subtle. Give me space enough for that. Has
Claire learnt of this? Your intention to go and find
A mythical grail of lost beginnings in a
World that doesn't care, leaving behind that which does?
Has she heard? Do you imagine this poor tale
Will sell copies through its complications by
Making me feel stupid? Many fortunes are wooed
This way, I believe. Shall we insult Claire for you?

JASON I will tell her myself. Now has never been the time,
Till now.

ANDREA I don't think she will scorn. It is only me.

JASON I read the words too well, Andrea. I know you.

Exit Jason

ANDREA I don't know you, nor understand. Not anymore.

CATHERINE Fireworks and starry skies, when those two meet.

ANDREA Always. They wake up laughing, fallen on mossy rooves,

After building thoughts of silence upon silence
In cloudy reverie, debating the gentlest
Humour, touched by passion of sibling strangeness.

CATHERINE And does the eternally unfair demon of
Comparison lurk there for you in jealous glow?

ANDREA How can it when such clear light emanates between
Brother and sister? And Jason and Claire are that.

CATHERINE Well, their appearances hold that to be true, but
Their blood does not, and at times I question their spirit.
For me, I wish he would see me in the same light as
He does her.

ANDREA I'll admit to that too. However, solitude
Cures ailments; Jason's even, and I'll trust
In that above all. It can make sense from nonsense.

CATHERINE I am not recognised as the woman I am.

ANDREA Do you think Claire is, or whether the game is
As heavenly as proclaimed?

CATHERINE Help me prepare dinner and we can talk some more.

ANDREA Okay. Let's keep it simple.

CATHERINE It's a deal.

Exeunt

Act Two Scene 2 – Outside ‘The Isle of Glass Institute’

Enter Lucy, Mike and Raphael

LUCY The cows are in the fields.

MIKE And the owls are in the sky.

LUCY Hello. I'm glad we met correctly.

MIKE: Directions are precise. I trust your calling
The emergency code is justified, Lucy.

LUCY It is. First, who is the shadow
Lurking in your moonlit path?

MIKE He goes by 'Raphael' to oversee
Our movements and due actions.
A lot is invested in this operation,
As I'm sure your dormant presence
In the Institute has told you.

LUCY It has been a long time, Mike.

MIKE To immerse yourself in a squalid sea
Of addiction and abuse, I'm sure it has.

LUCY No. The principle behind it all is the
Intelligent use of consciousness-altering
Drugs, to induce states of awareness
Where psychiatry and previous science fail,
Not to wallow in indulgent, exaggerated seas
Desperately to better reality; here, our desire
Is to confront the truth, not evade it.

RAPHAEL It is best to organise it, as we shall.

LUCY Am I alive, dead or dreaming?
This is as those bitter sweet days when,
Relaxed by the stimulating sense of coffee,
I fall asleep, thinking of sun-blessed storm-clouds
And of my one final terror, beyond reason,
Which is to kill someone and to feel good about it;
Really good, not with the shining glee of a psychopath,
Who lives separate from the larger fields of the heart
In a dirty shack, calling it his home,
But to feel content with deepest innocence:
That contains contradiction enough to torment me
Beyond reason.

MIKE I don't see why. You may be called upon to
 Terminate a situation.

RAPHAEL You were trained in that necessity.

LUCY But I never reached your high standing.
 Here is an oasis either of madness in a world
 All too sane, or of sanity where dry oceans
 Of depravity prevail all around.
 Like possible sanctuaries of old, they permit
 All to drink from the divine nectar of solitude,
 Granting space to measure oneself, to get to know
 That masked by ceaseless clamour of day.
 If there is a panacea, it is that of aloneness,
 A miracle most fine. The person you deposited here is
 Tainted. Nonetheless, I am committed to the past,
 And in that remembrance have watched also
 That man you have been so concerned about.
 Though he seems more of a boy.

MIKE What has happened for you to alert us?

LUCY Something with all the tangibility of ghosts;
 Here, that is reality enough, and soon
 His departure will be plain for even you to see.

MIKE So he is leaving. What has caused this?

LUCY Strange murmurings. He is as much, if not more,
 Loved as one can be; gentleness, wisdom and
 Passion each add to his attributes; his
 Popularity knows no bounds, yet there is a story
 Of unknown interference in his past, and a mystery,
 He claims, which yet has to be solved.

MIKE Did he say anything else?

LUCY I don't know. He talked only to those most
 Intimate to him, which I am not.

MIKE You were charged to be.

LUCY This is not kindergarten! There is sophistication

In relating here the agency has not dreamt of. I have found
What I could, and even that is gleaned
From half-statements, whispered comments and
Secret jokes. I can tell you, though, where
He first goes. To Kent. To stay with some friends.

MIKE Excellent. That is all we need.

LUCY You will follow him from here?

MIKE We will wait for him there. As will you.

LUCY But...

MIKE Your task is terminated here. Provide yourself
With suitable reason for a rapid departure,
And proclaim it loudly. Meet us at
Paradise Café tomorrow at 0700.

LUCY I don't know...

MIKE Your mother's dead. There! An excuse.
What are you waiting for? See you tomorrow.

Exeunt

Act One Scene 3 – Isle of Glass

Enter Catherine and Andrea

ANDREA Never have I seen Claire this way.
Always she has something to say,
Always she can juggle with events,
Always laugh at the meanest temper;
Now she says nothing, does less,
But goes for long, quiet walks in her mind,
A book unturned on her lap, her sewing idle,
Her music asleep, and television dead;
She hears not what I have to say,

Yet drinks in every word, eyes speechless,
Wide open, and saying far too much. *(Pause.)*
I suppose she's taking it better than I expected.

CATHERINE Andrea...

ANDREA And now Lucy leaving as well.

CATHERINE Shhh.

Enter Jason and Claire

JASON Claire,
What kind of friendship is this strangeness?

ANDREA She has said what she feels, Jay.

JASON Is this all?

CATHERINE Jay...

JASON Real compassion does not compromise:
Its pure detachment may not even reach us,
But in that silence, what words,
In such distance, what closeness!
Claire, don't make friendship a curse
With tentacles of the imprisoned mind;
Our feelings for each other were wrought
In the smithy of the sky, and birds say
Life is an open door.

CLAIRE You can fly, Jay. What's stopping you?

JASON Make me a knife for my throat.

ANDREA I hope, Jason, where you are going
There is no call for a knife.

JASON Who can say? Trust me in my adventure. *(Exit Jason.)*

ANDREA Departure should never be like this.

CLAIRE I hate him! I hate him!

CATHERINE Andrea, help me, hold her. She is lashing emptiness
With such frenzy the air may do her harm. That's it,
Claire.

CLAIRE I hate him.

ANDREA It is a pity you say it so late.
Your target has gone, child.

Exeunt

End of 'On the Edge' extract.

Copyright S D Anugyan 2018