

Anthropos

by Alexander Wolfe

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes... Described as “A Short Play In Ten Very Short Scenes,” Alexander Wolfe’s ANTRHOPOS is a veritable nutshell of microplays that tickle a variety of bones from funny to depraved. Some of the scenes in this odd little play are downright dark, which keeps it on the side of provocative experimental theatre rather than sliding into the realm of sketch comedy. It’s a dangerous and delightful dance, resulting in more than a few left turns in the subconscious. With a hint of Gary Larson, notes of Beckett, and a whiff of Freud, ANTHROPOS makes us worry about being a member of this species even as we laugh about it. I’d go see it even without a comp. (Spacing is playwright’s own. Please scroll down.)*

ANTHROPOS

A Short Play In Ten Very Short Scenes

By: Alexander Wolfe

CHARACTERS

Various characters are to be played by a company of any size, though it is suggested that each character in each particular scene is played by a different person. Genders have been assigned to the characters, but are suggestions only.

The almighty author commands you to get weird with it.
(If that's how you're feelin'.)

A CONSIDERATION

The scenes are currently in the order that they are because that is what works best for them on the page.

In performance, that may not be the case.

The only important thing is the meaning and the truth.

Art is never static.

1. THE HEAT

Two shirtless men walk onstage and sit down. One has a water bottle, which he swigs out of, and passes to the other man, Two.

One: Hot one today.

Two: Goddamn right.

One: Haven't seen one this hot in a while.

Two: Not for a few years, at least.

One: Know what I want to be right now?

Two: What's that?

One: Cold.

Two: Cold?

One: Cold.

Two: You shittin' me?

One: I ain't.

Two: Know what?

One: What?

Two: I could stand to be cold myself.

One: No kiddin'?

Two: Not a bit. Cold. Frozen even.

One: Frozen. That's the dream.

Two: It is at that.

The two men each take a drink again, and then spontaneously kiss each other. There is a slight pause.

One: Cold.

Two: Frozen, even.

One: That's the dream.

2. DEATHBED

An old man lays in bed, his family surrounding him. A heart monitor beeps weakly.

Old Man: Please, come a bit closer.

They do so.

Old Man: This, I think, is the last thing I shall ever say...

Somebody bursts into tears.

Old Man: I...I...I...wish I had watched more commercials. People worked hard on them.

The heart monitor flatlines.

3. FIRE

A man sits alone in a room, facing a video camera.

Man: And I watched their faces through the window. I saw them pound the glass with their fists, knowing they couldn't break it, that they were just too small. Occasionally you could hear noises above the roar, never the children, but the pets, the pets were loud. After they caught, the kids, not the pets, they stopped pounding with their hands, and used their whole bodies, even their heads. They were good windows, they didn't break. Their parents drove up just when I thought they'd miss the whole show, just when the crowd was really starting to get big, and the sirens were close. I'll give 'em both credit, as parents, I mean, they didn't hesitate. They were out of the car and into the house faster than I would've thought they'd be able to move. They left the door open, so you could hear them pretty good. I thought that was considerate of them.

The lights go red, and a voice is heard, seemingly through a speaker.

Speaker Voice: What did you do afterwards?

Man: Came here.

Speaker Voice: Why?

Man: I just really wanted to tell somebody.

Speaker Voice: Any reason?

Man: Well I thought it was pretty cool.

4. EXERCISE

A man stands before a small audience, a vision echoing a certain martyr preaching on the streets of a desert town. The crowd parts at a small signal, and the man drops to his hands, and begins to do push ups. When he is exhausted, he again stands.

Man: Can anybody do more than that?

The crowd all shake their heads.

Man: Very well. Than I shall remain king for this day.

5. SCHOOLMARM

A female teacher stands before her young, very excited, students, who sit on the floor in front of her in a half circle.

Teacher: ...and Mr. Jenkins says?

Kids: Hey, hey, hey!

Teacher: And he gets in the old...

Kids: Beat up!

Teacher: Run down...

Kids: Rusty!

Teacher: Pickup truck.

Kids: Vroom!

Teacher: And he pours his...

Kids: Beer!

Teacher: Into his soda can. And he drives home.

Kids: Screech!

Teacher: And when he walks in the door, his wife says...

The kids all push one small girl into the middle of the half circle.

Small Girl: You lying sack of shit!

Teacher: And Mr. Jenkins says...

At this, all the rest of the children get into a line, and one by one, as they take their turn at saying the next line, each hits the Small Girl, very hard.

Kid: Hey, hey, hey!

Next Kid: Hey, hey, hey!

Next Kid: Hey, hey, hey!

And so on. Eventually the Small Girl crumples to the ground. When each child has gone through the line, they all form the half circle again, and sit. Small Girl cries softly on the ground.

Teacher: And when Mr. Jenkins is all done with his fun, he never forgets to say...

Kids: I just love you SOOOOOO much!

Teacher: Now who wants to be my big, brave, volunteer helper for the day?

All the children raise their hands, she picks one at random, pulls out a large, rusty, pair of scissors, and hands them off to the volunteer.

Teacher: Remember, as always, a small piece for everybody, and the eyes for me!

6. THERE-PY

Two men sit in chairs, facing a therapist, who takes notes through the scene.

Man 1: And all of a sudden I just, I don't know, it's hard to put into words, but you're just not as *there* as you were before, and it just, I don't know, it's hard to put into words, but you're not *here* and I don't want to think of where else you might *be*, but I also want to know because I don't want you to keep anything from me, because I want us both to be *here*, but you're not, you're *there* and it makes me sad.

Therapist: Any response?

Man 2: I try to be *here*, as much as I can, but I don't want to be *here* all the time, because if I'm always *here* and never *there* then I have nothing to bring back, and if there's never anything brought back, than *here* is going to get stale. Isn't it?

Therapist: Is it?

Man 2: Is it?

Man 1: But why can't I ever go with you when you're *there*? Why do I have to wait *here*?

Therapist: What would happen if he went with you?

Man 2: If he went with me, than *there* would simply become *here*, and if we go all the way *there* just to have it turn into *here*, well, we haven't really moved, have we?

Therapist: What would happen if you went *there* yourself?

Man 1: I'd be worried the whole time.

Therapist/Man 2: Why?

Man 1: If I go to my *there* and you go to your *there*, how do we know we'll end up at *here* again? How do we know we won't get lost?

Man 2: I suppose we don't know.

7. BREAK-IN

We begin with a dark stage. A click, and lights turn on. In the light we can see a Homeowner, holding a shotgun on a Burglar, who is, in return, brandishing a pistol. A staredown commences, and continues, for a good minute or so, before both men slowly lower their guns, and back of either side of the stage. Just before they exit, the pause, never taking their eyes off each other.

Burglar: Touche.

The two of them back the rest of the way off the stage.

8. GOD BLESS

It is moments after Jesus has ended his stint on the cross. Man takes him back to his hut, and begins patching the wounds. There is a knock at the door.

Man: No.

There is the sound of feet furtively shuffling away. Then, another knock..

Man: No.

Once again, somebody hurries away. Another, final, knock. Man, fed up, goes to the door, opens it, and screams out:

Man: I said NO, MOTHERFUCKER!

Man returns to Jesus, Jesus sneezes.

Man: Bless you.

9. HANDOFF

It is the middle of a relay race. In slow motion, we see Man 1 run up to Man 2, holding out a baton. They try to make the hand off, but Man 2 trips and falls to the ground. Man 1 grabs the baton, and begins to choke Man 2 with it, until Man 2 goes limp. Man 1 pulls a sharpie out of his pocket, signs the baton, and lays it on the ground next to Man 2.

10. DREAM, SWEETLY DREAM

A man in a suit walks onto the stage. He calls:

Man: Thomas.

Thomas walks onto the stage.

Thomas: Yes?

Man: Welcome to your dream, Thomas.

Thomas: Thank you?

Man: You're very welcome, and I appreciate you being so polite. I don't come across many polite people. That's not to say there aren't a few, but the majority...well, you get my drift.

Thomas: Yeah. People suck.

The man laughs a bit.

Man: "People suck". Ha! How nearly eloquent... I love it! Couldn't have been put better myself.

Thomas: Could I get your name, if you don't mind?

Man: I'd give you mine if I had one, but I don't, so I shan't.

Thomas: Oh.

Man: Not much use for one, you see.

Thomas: Why is that?

Man: Well, I used to make up something whenever somebody asked, which happened pretty rarely because, as you said, "people suck", but everybody just eventually kept calling me, "The Man", so, I figured... what's the point?

Thomas: So you prefer, 'The Man'?

Man: It doesn't matter much.

A small noise. Maybe a bell, maybe a bird, maybe a laugh.

Man: The signal! It begins!

Thomas: The dream?

The man smiles, and quickly licks his lips.

Man: The dream. Or dinner. Or both, depending on the vantage point... It's all perspective, you know?

Thomas: You've lost me.

Man: Or I suppose, if you really wanted, you could call it justice...but that term is also so wrapped up in perspective that it doesn't really...well, some accidental humor here, it doesn't really do itself justice, you see?

The man chuckles a bit to himself.

Thomas: Jesus...what did I eat before bed...

Man: A burger and fries if I'm not mistaken.

Thomas: How do you know that?

Man: It's a dream, Thomas. It's all in your head, so I know everything you know, right?

Thomas: Right?

Man: Wrong! In fact, there is something that I know that you don't... Something important...

Thomas: What's that?

Man: Let's play a game, huh? I'm going to say two words, and you're going to tell me what they make you think of, okay?

Thomas: Okay...

Man: Let's see... the first word is ceiling. Ceiling, Thomas. What do ceilings make you think of?

Thomas looks up.

Thomas: There isn't a ceiling.

Man: Oh, you already know what I'm talking about, don't you? And you're trying to hide it...you're so sweet.

Thomas: I'm a little confused.

The man laughs.

Man: Oh no, not yet. You will be though. The second word, Thomas, is Benjamin. More of a name than a word really, but I think it still works out. Do you remember Benjamin, Thomas? Do you remember Benjamin, and the ceiling?

Thomas is silent, and scared.

Man: Such a small boy... such a tragedy. How long did they look? Weeks? Months?

Thomas speaks quietly.

Thomas: They're still looking.

The man chuckles to himself quietly.

Man: But not for long. Because soon he'll really start to drip. And the plastic won't hold in the smell. And they'll go from 'looking' to 'finding'. Eventually. But that won't really matter to you.

Thomas: Why not?

Man: Because his mother, his poor, lonely, grieving, mother...she stopped looking.

Thomas: Why did she stop?

Man: Because she sent me, Thomas. And she knew I'd find you. And she knows what I do. And she wants me to do it to you.

Thomas: What do you do?

Man: I break your mind, Thomas. Because I can kill your reality.

Thomas: What?

Man: Do you know how scary the world is when you don't know what's real and what's not? Maybe it will scare you as much as you scared Benjamin. Maybe more. I hope so.

Thomas turns and walks away.

Man: You can't run from me, Thomas.

Thomas exits the stage, and quickly reappears. He tries again, with the same result. This goes on until it stops.

Man: Given up?

Thomas: It's just a dream. Dreams can't hurt.

Man: Of course not. Everybody knows that.

Thomas: I'll just wake up soon.

Man: In just a couple minutes, actually. But not before I tell you.

Thomas: Tell me?

Man: What I do, Thomas. Tell you what I do.

Thomas: Okay.

Man: Here's what's going to happen. You're dreams are going to start feeling progressively longer over the next few nights. In a couple of weeks, it will feel like every dream you have lasts hours, even days or weeks sometimes. And, here's the kicker, they'll all be perfectly normal. It will feel just like you're going about your every day life, except that you'll be dreaming. Do you see what I'm getting at?

Thomas: ...Kind of...

Man: The line between reality and dreams will start to blur for you, Thomas. It will start slow, just a couple of nagging doubts about whether you're awake or not. But after a couple months, in real time, not dream time, after a couple of months you'll start to get a bit paranoid about it. You'll start to be unable to think of much else. And then, it gets really fun, because for one night, just one night. You won't dream at all. But will you even notice at that point? Will you? Thomas?

Thomas is very frightened.

Thomas: Jesus...

Man: Eventually, of course, you'll kill yourself. But what if it happens that you kill yourself in a dream by accident? You'll just wake up. And then you'll go thinking that you know for sure that you're awake. And the whole thing will stop, and you won't dream at all for a long time. Months, even. And then it starts again. And over. And over. Until you finally do manage to kill yourself while you're awake.

Thomas is silent and staring.

Man: And when that happens, we'll chat again. Because Benjamin has a few questions for you, Thomas. He's waiting, next to the throne. Not the one upstairs-

The man points up.

Man: -or even the one downstairs-

The man points down.

Man: -but MY throne. Behind. In here.

The man touches Thomas' forehead with a finger.

Man: We eagerly await your visit. But we'll have to be patient. For a while, at least.

The man walks to the edge of the stage.

Man: Goodbye, Thomas. Remember our little talk, if you can. Of course dreams just have a way of slipping off into the ether in the light of day, don't they? Oh well. See you soon.

The man leaves. Thomas is alone on stage. He begins to cry. Very softly, but gaining volume, we begin to hear the sound of an alarm clock.

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS...

Humans are pretty silly, huh? Frightening and lovely and cruel and generous and shy and hilarious and wild and filled with too many holes. (Seriously, what's with all the holes?) "Anthropos" means "human" just as ANTHROPOS means "human". It's just people being people, you know?

*Okay, if we're gonna get all into the direct influences, (which is a wonderful way to say "things I ripped off"), the base structure is right out of either the long-running Chicago show *Too Much Light Makes The Baby Go Blind*, the Caryl Churchill play *Love and Information*, or even *Almost, Maine*. The short format sci-fi stories of Fredric Brown probably deserve a mention as well. The content is a distillation of a billion little things I happen to enjoy, (*Home Movies*, *Junji Ito*, *Henry Rollins*, *Monty Python*, the films of *Eric Butler*, the writing of *Monte Monteleagre*), all hopefully spread thin enough that the performer can wear the script like a veil.*

I don't understand people. (Whined the cis-white boy who grew up middle-class and developed some really sexy calf muscles from walking around with all this privilege... don't worry, I know I'm full of shit up to my eyeballs.) We are creatures of contradiction and paradox. For every person picking up litter in their neighborhood there's someone who pees all over a public bathroom. For every person who commits an act of random violence there is another going without food so that they can pay to medicate their neighbors pet goldfish who has the sniffles.

Humans are pretty silly, huh?

AUTHOR BIO:

Who Am I?

I'm Alexander Wolfe, a relatively young man from the Midwest that really likes writing, gardening, and taking care of my cats. Obviously due to me being the voice of my generation, (please God let them pick up on the sarcasm here), a couple of people have taken interest in my work and put it up in the format available at the time: Zoom play versions of an hour long and a one act, [Gravity: A Union](#) and [The Painting Rots And Now We Burn](#), respectively. I also run a relatively successful fictional sci-fi podcast entitled [Voices From The Umbra](#) that has a wonderfully diverse international audience of people willing to give a show that only updates once a month a chance.