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By T. C. Eisele

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes... Tom is just your average shmoe on a spiritual quest. He wants to meditate, to see something that his mind hasn't showed him yet, and to surrender – "to the eternity of this moment." Tom's Mind, however, has another plan. In T.C. Eisele's clever short play Original Face, Tom's doing his best to shut out the monkey chatter taunting him to scratch his nose and then some, instigated by Tom's Mind in protest of those annoying guttural chants:*

Tom: Ohmmmmm.....

Tom's Mind: *(Looking at Tom)* Good God!!!!!! I hate it when he does that.....It feels like a tractor-trailer engine idling in my bowels!

The near-constant ejaculation of thoughts from Tom's Mind plays as an inner monologue while Tom – as the physical self in this adversarial duo - is in meditation mode (or trying to be). Part philosophical debate, part meditation lesson, this existential exploration between body and mind gets more than our nose to itch. A few short scenes in, Tom and Tom's Mind are having a heated discussion. Is Tom truly ungrateful for the command center of his central nervous system? What about those prayers Tom's Mind is channeling; are they a fear response? How will either of them learn what is real? Who knows? Just be prepared to see the two sides of Tom bare their souls– and here's to a couple of brave actors who are prepared strip it all down.

Tom's Mind: You can only know what the mind does grasshopper.....You have no clue how to control it.....Why do you even try?

Original Face

A Short Play

by T.C. Eisele

Website: the13thpath.com

Scene One

Setting

In the center of an otherwise empty stage, a man dressed in a t-shirt and drawstring pants is sitting on the floor in full lotus position. This is Tom and as he sits there a stick of incense burning near the edge of his meditation matt emits a thin, aromatic ribbon of smoke.

At some point, another man dressed exactly like Tom will enter the scene. This is Tom's Mind and as he wanders aimlessly around the stage his movements should be slow, deliberate, and quiet as he tries not to disturb Tom's meditation. This tableau of movement and stillness should continue until the mutual presence of both Tom and Tom's Mind have reached a monotonous co-existence, at which point Tom's Mind will address the audience.....

Tom's Mind: Hi...I'm Tom's Mind...(Gesturing toward Tom)
And, of course, that's Tom.....As you can see, he's trying to meditate.... The reason he's doing this is because he feels the need to gain some sort of control over me.....Like I'm the big,

bad wolf or something.....To tell you the truth, I'm both amused and affronted by this behavior.....It's amusing because he seems to think that I won't have anything to say about his attempts to control me... I'm affronted because he has no frigging idea whatsoever how much I actually do for him on a continual basis.....Talk about ungrateful...I mean let's face it, does he think his blood would flow or his immune system would work if it wasn't for me?..... He talks about expanding his consciousness, but does he really think he's ready to take over all the unconscious stuff that I do?

(Shaking his head and chuckling)

You know I don't believe he's realized that without me he doesn't exist.....

(At this point Tom takes a deep breath and begins to chant.)

Tom: Ohmmmmm.....

Tom's Mind: *(Looking at Tom)* Good God!!!!!! I hate it when he does that.....It feels like a tractor-trailer engine idling in my bowels!

(When Tom eventually runs out of breath, he inhales again and continues chanting.)

(Tom's Mind puts his hands over his ears and continues in a louder voice.)

I've tried to tell him it would be a lot easier if he just bought himself an mp4 player and some hot new ear buds....Then he could download any meditation music he wanted.....I mean

some of that stuff is actually quite relaxing, but nooooo, he has to go all hard core Zen Monk on me and start yodeling like that!

(Tom continues to chant until Tom's Mind eventually reaches the end of his rope and begins waving his arms in frustration)

That's it!!! That's... fucking.... it!!!!..... I can't take anymore!!!!!!

(Pointing angrily at Tom) Your nose itches!!!!!!

(Tom shows no reaction and keeps on chanting)

(Tom's Mind now starts shouting) I SAID YOUR NOSE ITCHES!!!..... SCRATCH IT, DAMMIT, SCRATCH IT!!!!!!!!!!

(Suddenly Tom stops chanting and scratches his nose)

Stage lights go dark

Scene Two

(Still sitting in full lotus position, Tom is now meditating quietly as Tom's Mind stands over him and glowers.)

Tom's Mind: So now you think you can shut me out, huh?.....Oh fuck no!.....I will make you think of the stupidest, most irrelevant nonsense I can come up with.....

(He begins pacing back and forth.) Let's see.....

(Suddenly he stops and points at Tom) Oh yeah, remember that time you were standing outside that hole in the wall bar down on the Lower East Side?....You were smoking a joint and that homeless guy squatted on the curb right in front of you and crapped on the street.....*(Laughing)*.....It looked like almond butter coming out of the grinding machine in Whole Foods.....

(Tom suddenly opens his eyes and scrunches up his face)

Tom: What the hell!.....Why am I thinking of that homeless guy I saw shit in the street?.....That was like 20 years ago!

Tom's Mind: *(Bowing with a flourish to the audience)*

Ha ha ha!!!!.....The Great and Munificent Oz knows all and sees all.....

Tom: *(Trying to rally)* Okay, let's get back on track.....The mind is the breath.....

(He closes his eyes) Each breath is a thought.....Breathe slowly and softly and let the mind ride on the rhythm of my breathing.....

(He begins to breathe slowly, quietly, deliberately.....)

Tom's Mind: Oh no, no, no.....

(He goes into the Kung Fu position known as "the drop stance.")

My Kung Fu is way better than yours grasshopper.....By the way, did you remember to take your keys out of the front door after you came back from shopping?.....

(Tom suddenly opens his eyes and turns around to look off stage right, after which Tom's Mind jumps to a standing position and giggles.)

Oh my God.....This is way too easy.....

Tom: *(Visibly frustrated)* Shit!

Tom's Mind: You can only know what the mind does grasshopper.....You have no clue how to control it.....Why do you even try?

(Undaunted, Tom once again tries to settle himself and focus on his breathing.....Meanwhile, Tom's Mind starts to do a little hip-hop dance, periodically cuffing Tom on the head or poking his shoulder in order to cause him to keep shifting his position.....)

Stage lights go dark

Scene Three

(Both Tom and Tom's Mind are sitting on the floor in full lotus position and staring at each other. Eventually they begin a conversation.)

Tom's Mind: Do you remember how you felt when your mother brought you to the first day of kindergarten and left you all by yourself in the schoolyard with the other kids?.....I do.....Want to hear about it?

Tom: *(Calmly)* What was my original face before my mother and father were even born?

Tom's Mind: *(Scoffing at him)* Really?.....A riddle?.....That's how you want to play this?.....

Tom: Yes, because I don't want to know anymore what you've been taught or what you remember.....I want to know what's real.....I want to hear something original from you.....

Tom's Mind: I'll show you what's real.....

(He quickly pops up and playfully, but roughly cuffs Tom in the head and then resumes his meditation posture.)

Improvise an idea based on that Einstein.....Or does it just remind you of that time you were beat up in the park after school and all your friends watched?

Tom: Why must you always go back to something that already happened?.....I want you to show me something not yet known.....

Tom's Mind: Oh, I get it, you mean like this.....

(Looking up and Reciting)

"Down the passage which we did not take

Towards the door we never opened”

Tom: That’s T.S. Eliot, “Four Quartets”You’re like an actor that always needs a prompt.....

Tom’s Mind: What? Have you no respect, Four Quartets is a classic!

(Snidely) No wonder you only got a thousand on the SAT.....

Tom: No, *you* only got a thousand on the SAT.

Tom’s Mind: Well that was because instead of studying you insisted on distracting yourself with useless nonsense which, I might add, I happen to remember verbatim..... Do you want to hear some of it?.....Come on, let’s get nostalgic and resurrect the vapid interests of a sexually frustrated teenager

Tom: No, I don’t want to hear any more of your monkey chatter bullshit!.....I want to be like an open-eyed man falling into a well.....Show me something I don’t know.....

Tom’s Mind: *(Smiling and holding out his arms for an embrace)*

You don’t know me.

Tom: You’re right.....I only know what you remind me of, and that’s the problem!

Tom’s Mind: Speaking of memories, do you recall when you were a boy in your Father’s car and you burned yourself with the automatic cigarette lighter?

(He giggles)

You pushed it in and after it popped out you became fixated on the bright orange color of the glowing metal coil..... And then you touched it!.....I mean how stupid can you get?..... After you screamed and started sucking on your burnt finger what was it that your Father said?...

(Pause)

Oh yeah.....Right.....*(Imitating a gruff, older man's voice)* Bet you won't do that again, will ya smart guy?

(Tom's Mind starts to laugh uncontrollably.)

Tom: *(Sarcastically)* Thank you for that.....One should always be reminded of their mistakes.....

Tom's Mind: Like it said on the Oracle at Delphi, "Know thyself."

Tom: To know is only to remember.....To not know is to be.

Tom's Mind: Did you make that up yourself, or is it another one of your Zen koans with sprinkles?

Tom: *(Snidely)* Why are you asking me? Shouldn't you already *know* that?

Tom's Mind: *(Surprisingly annoyed)* Why you little shit! How dare you talk to me like that! If it wasn't for me you wouldn't even be alive.....Do you think you'd be able to breathe, or speak, or even fart without me?.....I'm the most important part of your whole body, in fact, I'm your whole goddamn existenceI facilitate your sight, your smell, your touch, your hearing,

your taste, not to mention the entire bio-terrain in your fucking body.....And that's not all, without me to help you learn and remember the rules of society you'd most likely be dead, or mad, or locked away like an animal by now.....You owe everything to me!!!

Tom: *(With the calm of an assassin)* And what will happen to you when I die?

Tom's Mind: What?

Tom: You heard me.

Tom's Mind: *(Automatically, like a robot)* "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me....."

Tom: Oh yeah?.....And *Who*, specifically, will be with you?

Tom's Mind: The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.....

Tom: Wait a minute..... Are you saying you're a sheep?

Tom's Mind: *(Nervously)*.....No.....No!.....I think...therefore... I am.....

Tom: Really?.....So what are you, exactly?.....Where does your awareness come from?

(Tom's Mind now seems confused as he silently stares into space..

At this point, Tom stands and goes over to Tom's Mind, where he then kneels and gently pats him on the back.)

There, there.....Just let it go.....Let it be.....Surrender yourself to the eternity of this moment.....

(Tom's Mind recoils in apprehension.....In response, Tom smiles and extends his hand.)

Would you like to meet our spirit?

Tom's Mind: What?.....No.....no.....

Tom: *(Continuing to hold out his hand)* Why?

(When Tom's Mind doesn't respond, Tom grasps his hand, stands, and then begins to pull Tom's Mind into a standing position.)

Tom's Mind: Wait, what are you doing?

(As Tom continues to pull, Tom's Mind offers little to no resistance until eventually they are standing face to face.)

Tom: *(Starting to remove Tom's Mind's shirt)* Shhhhhh.....Just go with it.....

Tom's Mind: Please.....Don't.....

(Once Tom has Tom's Mind's shirt off, he drops it on the floor and then does the same with his own shirtNext he starts to pull down Tom's Mind's drawstring pants.....At this point, Tom's Mind is no longer offering any resistance so that once his pants are down around his ankles he gently steps out of them Tom now lets his own pants drop to the floor and for the next

few moments both Tom and Tom's Mind stand there and stare at each others nakedness.)

Tom: "The Mind is the great Slayer of the Real.....Let the disciple slay the Slayer."

(Tom now takes on the Kung Fu stance that Tom's Mind had used earlier.)

Tom's Mind: *(Kneeling in obedience and looking downward.)*

"Existence is all that can be known but it is not all that is real."

(Maintaining these positions, Tom and Tom's Mind now begin to chant in unison.)

Tom and Tom's Mind: Ohmmmmm.....

The lights slowly fade to darkness

Curtain

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: What inspired my submission?

I have forever been fascinated by the Taoist notion that we may know the conditions of the mind, but we will never know its essence.....

What issues and themes did I want to explore?

The Philosopher J.G. Bennett once wrote, "I is the most hazardous place in the world." Of course this ultimately depends to a significant degree on how seriously we take ourselves and/or our sense of humor.

Who are my stylistic and literary influences?

My favorite dramatist is Edward Albee.

AUTHOR BIO: My name is T.C. Eisele and I am a Professional Astrologer, Author, and Playwright living in New York City. My previous publication credits include; "Psychic Reading" (A Play) 2017, "Liber Tao" (A New Tao Te-Ching) 2015, "The Exalted Man" (Haiku) 2014, and "Liber Quantum" (Non-fiction) 2011, all from Rebel Satori Press. In addition I have been a frequent contributor to a number of periodicals and online zines including, "The Astrology Quarterly", "Cosmopolitan Online", "Poetry East", "Ashé", "The New York Quarterly", "Exterminating Angel Press Magazine", and "The Rumor Mill News." A complete selection of my plays can be found on The New Play Exchange."