

# The Men from the Mechanical Age

By Ioana Cosma

**WHY WE LIKE IT:** *A heavy duty existential drama set in a pre-digital pre-virtual world, when watches were wound and pictures developed, that feels like the Twilight Zone but manifests like Ionesco—not for everyone, maybe, but we urge you to give it a try. This is second language theatre and we were impressed by this Romanian playwright’s grasp of the subtleties and lyrical complexities available in the English language. They get a new, fresh take here and we are treated to some wondrous passages.*

*Quote:* Our pockets are filled with fond memories Raphael, our eyes are swimming like nostalgic fish for the tepid waters of pacific times when the machineries had just started. But our stomachs are empty for now, so have a little bite.

*There is an elegiac tone to the play and Uri and Raphael are not just citizens in a small Soviet town but iconic (as in icon) stand-ins (like the painted elders in ancient icons)—solemn and Socratic, vertical and ritualized in characterization. We have no idea whether the playwright is familiar with Eliot’s Thomas Beckett but for us it has something of the same vestigial weight and ring. The inherent touch of ‘outsider-ism’ never fails to charm.*

*Quote:* The scene of my life served on a silver platter. And my head with it. If we lose our minds, who will take care of our souls?

*(Spacing and font size are playwright’s own.)Eds.*

## The Men from the Mechanical Age

The action takes place in the photographer's laboratory. He is a man of 60 whose wife has become estranged after the loss of their only child, a girl. He believes that the girl is transmitting him signs from beyond through his photographs. He is friends with a clockmaker, his age, who is a widower. One day a stranger brings him a watch that he fails to repair. From then on, he will become atemporal, he will miss appointments, sleep for days on end and begins to live either in the future or in the distant past. Through his photographs, the photographer will slowly take him back to the present where they will both have to cope with the idea of imminent death. Topics: time, after-life, death, photography, the past, the future, friendship.

### Scene 1

The laboratory lit only by the red and green lamps. The photographer is alone saying a prayer.

URI

Our Father who are  
Because you are  
You cannot not be  
Beingness being your primal attribute  
Just like not being is not really an option  
Or is it?  
Where are those who are not?

[the iron door squeaks and the lights change]

RAPHAEL:

Hello? Anybody in?

URI:

Come in, my friend, join me, I was just having lunch

RAPHAEL:

Oh, is it lunch time already? I went to the cemetery this morning to take some flowers to Maria's tomb. It's a splendid day, you should come out of your den once in a while, the park in spring is beautiful. What are you having?

URI:

Just some bread and cheese and these what do they call them now, cherry tomatoes.

RAPHAEL

(sighs) There was a time when I would pick tomatoes from my parents' garden. They were plump and juicy and oh so tasty. If we didn't pick them in time, they would rot in the ground but the seeds remained or were nibbled by birds. Warm clothes like bread from the oven for a soul that was pure and humble. Enough to watch the days go by, the evening fall gently on the cattle and grass and our small house.

URI

I spent my days watching the mountain tops in the distance. The silence was interrupted only by the shriek of vultures and hawks. I remember the sheep returning from greener pastures, I remember the cicadas and their wailing song. It's a memory like a postcard that some people frame on their mirrors, it reflects time and the way we once were. The light was extraordinary, crystal blue and blinding bathing everything like a caring mother.

RAPHAEL

The days and nights were shorter running like spring water, I was in a hurry myself to catch up on the living and the sound of sirens luring me to the city, it was like a dream.

URI

Our pockets are filled with fond memories Raphael, our eyes are swimming like nostalgic fish for the tepid waters of pacific times when the machineries had just started. But our stomachs are empty for now, so have a little bite.

RAPHAEL

If you insist, but I can't stay long, I have a client coming with an old watch.

URI

How is the old business going? Do people still need their clocks?

RAPHAEL

Like a baby lark the sound of his mother's song, there are people bringing all sorts of watches to my shop: Soviet watches, American watches, Swatches, cuckoo clocks, pendulae, or gold watches. There are clock lovers like there are music lovers or movie lovers. Time keeping can even be a vice but I sometimes wonder do they arrange their lives in tune with the ticking or is it the object as jewel that attracts them? For me, it will always be the mystery of minutes, seconds, hours chasing one another and then starting all over each new day. Everything seems to be like that in this world. The moon, the Earth, the Sun. The sea and the shoreline. The hills and the horizon. Our frail bodies always trying to keep up with our tireless minds. I sometimes think my brain is ticking to the sound of a thousand clocks in my shop.

URI

Our brains can be deceiving, don't let time fool you Raphael. Time is just a convention, an illusion.

RAPHAEL

No, it isn't. It is part of the great artificer's plan for existence. Without time, we would burst into black holes, time is like magnetic fields, it holds planets apart from one another, it gives us chances to become better or worse, to make up for old sins or to make [new ones](#) <others. It is one of the greatest mysteries of all time.

URI

When I take a picture, time stands still and I see as if through and out of time, like there were another world where time is irrelevant and there are other things that matter like love, attention, compassion. Beauty, mostly. I keep seeing Veronica in my pictures, you know. I don't know if she wants to tell me anything or if I just get glimpses from the other world. Or if my mind wills her there, still in my life, even like this.

RAPHAEL

She's been gone for so long...one day I'll ask you to show me those pictures where you keep seeing her. Now, I must leave as that client is supposed to arrive real soon. Thank you for the wonderful lunch. Take care of you and come out of this laboratory and not just for taking pictures but for walks in the park, the city has become so vibrant and vital, the youth are amazing even if I don't understand them much, they look tricky.

URI

I lost interest. Anyway I don't think I can keep up with the latest changes. There have been too many in our lives already.  
Here I'm at home.

[end of scene I]

## Scene II

[Uri alone in his lab, working with his photographic paper in the revelatory substance. He carefully places the photographic paper in the yellow tray, moves it around with some pincers, then, using the same pincers, he attaches the pictures which begin to reveal themselves behind droplets of water. These are black and white pictures but a strange red object appears in each of them.]

URI

These are the days and nights of our short living, they are the angels of dusk and the angels of soot rising from the shadows gently unfolding blindfolds.

Our father

Blessed be thy children

Who are in heaven

The meek and the bold

The lions and la.....

[Raphael enters tempestuously]

Raphael

You won't believe what I have been doing for the past week. I have been trying to fix a watch. Need I say, to no avail. I've repaired thousands of watches, from the most complex ones to children's watches, it has never been a problem for me. And this one isn't old either and is a good brand too. I just can't repair it, I can't (starts crying)

Uri

Are you sure it is a real watch? Maybe it is a decoration or some piece of jewelry. Maybe someone wanted to play a trick on you.

Raphael

I know a watch when I see one. This one is real as the palm of my hand. Wait you haven't heard the whole story. Ever since I got it, I haven't been able to sleep and I've started missing appointments. You know me, I'm a punctual man. Well, not anymore.

Uri

What do you mean you started missing appointments?

Raphael

I'm either awfully late or terribly early. I cannot fix the time in my head anymore it slips through my fingers like sand through the hourglass. I think I'm losing it my friend. Slowly but surely. I don't know if I should tell you this but the other day, when I went out of my shop, I thought I saw...Veronica

Uri

You mean Veronica, my daughter? How do you know it was her?

Raphael

She looked exactly like she did before dying--sweet little girl with pony tails and red dress. But this is not everything. The whole town had changed like in the time when she was still alive. The streets were grey and dusty, there were workers coming from the factory in their blue overalls, the sirens were screaming "Stay indoors", like that day of the Chernobyl explosion. I tried to find my car but it was nowhere I'd left it. My heart began to race and my feet to shake and I think I fainted.

Uri

And?

Raphael

When I woke up, there were people all around me, the ambulance had arrived. Everything was back to normal and I felt somewhat relieved. Then I came over to you.

Uri

This is not like you, not like you at all. If I say it is your mind that played a film in front of your eyes, would you believe me? Listen, I think that our mind has this kind of capacity of actualizing other worlds, of accessing different dimensions, even other temporal dimensions, universes, galaxies. It's like a short-circuit that sends us through a portal.

Raphael

It certainly felt like a short-circuit. I've been getting these strange dreams too, you know.

Uri

Tell me more about Veronica, what was she doing?

Raphael

She was chasing a balloon and laughing. She turned to me and waved - that's how I know for sure it was her - and then went on her way.

Uri

Listen, I wasn't going to show you these pictures but, given the situation, I think I should.

[Uri starts showing the latest pictures to Raphael. In the first one, there is a crane but in the right hand corner, we can see the red skirt of a girl and part of her pony tails; the next picture, still black and white portrays an army officer one of whose gloves is red; the third picture is of the store where the clockmaker works but there is a red line crossing through the building; the fourth picture is a self-portrait of Uri, there's a red aura around his head; the last picture represents the theatre building with a red bird sitting on its roof. The pictures are displayed on a large screen behind the stage]

You would say it is an impossibility with black and white film and you are right. But see, these pictures have been

overexposed: too much light has impacted them and this is the result. It's like a thin red line from Peter Greenaway's short movies, you must have seen them too: A Walk through H. H can mean anything: Heterotopia, Heaven, Hell, Hours, History...But in my case, I think Veronica is signaling me from her world.

Raphael (more and more amazed)

History is crumbling my friend. I think we are the last rhinoceros to inhabit this planet. The machines have become liquid and the dreams have become specks of astral dust bringing us into unfamiliar worlds. I fear for my mind and for your sanity. I hope at least there will be some sort of dignity in the end.

Uri

In the end, there will be only love, that's what Paul said. All crafts will disappear, ours included. This is what we've had on our hands loveless, brainiac crafts and our search, oh our millennial search. Taking us from the heart of things to the heart of darkness...you were foraging the minutes while I was extemporizing stills. We killed time that's what we did!

Raphael

How will love save me from this temporal madness? Will Paul perhaps come with his hosts of angels to repair my watch? To give me back my sleep? To make room for the future, the present, the past? All aligned beautifully and orderly like toy soldiers on the battlefield of days? I need my routine back, the lunchtime and bedtime, the times that I visit you to relax, the time to cry for my wife.

Uri

There is no longer time for laments. The time of wailers has now passed. Now enter the time of forgetting and forgiving and letting go. Living alongside the ghosts if necessary but never crying for them. Never.

Raphael

(in tears)

But this is all that I have. My memories and my tears washing the roses that I take to my wife's tomb. Is there no more place for nostalgia and melancholy?



Uri (sternly)

No

Raphael

Where will we go, Uri? Who will come to bring flowers to our graves? Who will remember us? We've been out of time, all along, I now see. Nobody keeps the time in Communism for fear of the outcome. And nobody takes pictures of Communism for fear of evidence. And now that we are free, we are disposable heroes of an age that's best not remembered.

Uri

Maybe you're wrong. We stand proud on the crest of a wave that's shattered time first by parching it like the body of a despised god and then played with it like playdough. But we still stand. You gave a purpose to people's lives attaching them to an order other than the one from above and I stole stills of beauty from a not so beautiful time. We stand for much more than you think.

Raphael

But now, all of that is over. I will never be able to repair a watch in my whole life. I fear time, it's like a locust eating away the remnants of my mind. I fear the ghosts too.

Uri

The ghosts are just impressions from our minds on the film of days. They are harmless and probably scared themselves. Veronica is long gone as you say but her passage through time has impregnated my world and yours with images that endure. What is the meaning of the red signs that you see in the pictures that I showed you? Is there a meaning even?

Raphael

Maybe our time is black and white and silent like a film from the thirties. We have long been on a procession coming as though from a Greek tragedy and this color, Veronica's color, is to show us that real time, the time of the living, be they dead or alive, is elsewhere.

Uri

When you dream, Raphael, what is the color of your dreams? Do you dream a movie or a set of stills?

Raphael

I rarely dream in color and all I remember from dreams are glimpses, or as you call them, stills. So far, even my dreams were chronological, they had a beginning, a middle and an end.

Now it seems to start from the middle and take me to another story and another and another like a Russian doll. I wonder what is the structure of time?

Uri

My pictures tell me that time is both chronological and... I don't know how to put it, something else, that I still haven't figured out. But when I photograph a mere tree, there's a sense of that tree's history but also of its treeness, the story of this tree and other trees. The picture singles it out and makes it eternal in a moment in time.

Raphael

Maybe we are all like trees and this is the meaning of eternal life, our existence, as human beings peopling the planet, is the sum total of all people who have ever lived and will live, nothing is lost, everything transforms itself.

Uri

Yes, but if nothing is lost, then where does it go? Where are those who are not?

Raphael

Follow the red signs, they might lead you somewhere. I just hope I'm never going to be displaced from the present again. It's a terrifying experience.

Uri

I think you are right, I should be starting to get out of the laboratory once in a while. See the world as it is, enjoy the sunrises and the lark song like I used to. How is the world these days, Raphael?

Raphael

It has changed a lot. My small shop looks from out of time as compared to the things that have appeared. Fast and luxurious cars - they are driving them like crazy in this small town of ours, you should be careful when you cross the street - children with headphones in their ears, they look like they're drowned in

a sea of dreams, busy businessmen and businesswomen in a hurry and impatient all the time, many many children who are obsessed with money and riches, but, saddest of all, nobody walks around anymore, they are all driving their cars.

Uri

I remember when I was walking with Veronica in this park. I was trying to put a blindfold on her eyes, not to see the terrible world we had brought her into, I took pictures of her in fields of flowers and told her she was a flower herself. Then again we were the only strollers in a deserted town, people were hiding or were too tired and discouraged to hang out. She did love those walks of ours. She used to say: "Daddy, when I grow up, I want to be just like you, work with you in this laboratory and make up stories that I steal from the world".

Raphael

Maybe this is what she is doing right now, making up a story for you.

Uri

Maybe. Have you been to the marketplace lately?

Raphael

Yes and that hasn't changed much you know. Besides the import flowers that they now bring, it's the same hustle bustle you know, the same women from the country with their wonderful produce, stories and jokes.

Uri

How about the Chapel Hill? Are still people walking there?

Raphael

There are a few elderly people like you and me who go there religiously, it's a small community by now. They climb the hill up to the terrace every day and they stop for chats, they exchange recipes and memories. But that's pretty much it. I've seen a youth or two, they're usually running. By the way, sports has become a big fad for the young people nowadays. They no longer smoke and drink. They go to the gym. They are becoming more and more beautiful too.

Uri

I hope they will make beautiful lives for themselves like we once did. Although we did smoke and drink. For a while. And we aren't that pretty, are we now Rapha?

Raphael (chuckles)

There wasn't much you could do with beauty in the times that we lived. We lived the time of invisibility and anonymity. A beautiful face would have got us into trouble, for sure.

Uri

I imagine the town stripped of its framework of steel and iron, with the houses it used to have and not the ugly buildings they built. I imagine its parks and hills extending to the horizon and people roaming them freely and simply enjoying life. I imagine, well, as you know, I imagine a lot of things but it's getting late now.

Raphael

Yes, we should probably head home.

Uri

Goodnight, Raphael

Raphael

Goodnight, Uri

[the lights go off and music is heard]

Scene 3

Uri

Our Father

Come Thy Kingdom

Of daffodils and sparrows

Of startled suns

And mustard moons

Here on earth

The world has changed unlike me who looks dusty and stuck in an unfinished project. But I love it with all my heart. Just like I love Raphael. Don't you just love Raphael, Veronica? He's a crazy old clockmaker and the ghosts are making fun of him. Do you hear me, Veronica? I know that you're here. I saw you as a bird today [picture of a red bird in a tree] you called out my name and I followed you. Then the sun became red for a second but it filtered the light so as to see the people again, Veronica. And they were beautiful, like you. What do you think, do people deserve second chances?

I know you will say they do and your mother would be so proud of you shining like a tiny star from your world up there. Tell me, do the dead hear us?

Yes, they hear us like the angels in Wim Wenders movie, a cacophony of voices reading in the library fighting with our lovers for our lives, reciting verses, praying. This is no Tower of Babel and men are not yet speaking in tongues. They are just begging for mercy most of the times. Did you see the Chapel Hill, Veronica, in its viriscent glow? I took a picture, look, of the cell tower up on the hill where we used to go. [picture of the cell tower, there is a red house in the distance]. Where is home now? Here in this laboratory or at our old house where your poor mother plays music all day long. She's left us too, you know. I saw her, the other day, when I was following your signs, I went to the theatre and there she was sitting on the bench a red book in her hand [picture of wife on the bench]. She looked up at me and smiled but I don't think she recognized me. What do you think, Veronica, should we show her our pictures?

*[five pictures are shown on the big screen, the first one is an image of a market seller selling tomatoes, she is smiling broadly, the second picture is of an old man sleeping on a red bench while pigeons are gathering around him, the third picture is Klee's Angel of History, the fourth picture is of a young girl talking on the phone and holding a bunch of red tulips in her hand and the last picture the red clock in the center of town].*

What of this world, Veronica, isn't it wonderful? I was a fool to leave it for so long! A crazy old fool. You're making me laugh, my sweet girl for the first time in many years. What do we say, shall we save your mother and Raphael?

*[enter Raphael]*

Raphael [*looking frightened and distraught*]

I think I'm nearing the end, Uri. Today I went to the cemetery and there was a stranger at my wife's grave, wearing a red scarf and there were poppies all over her tomb. I think your photos are doing it, they are transforming our world. After I left the cemetery, I was again in a loop where I beheld the town as it was in my parents' time, with buggies and horses, merchants screaming out to sell their products, women dressed like in the thirties, wearing sun umbrellas and all that. The sky was the color of amber and I watched everything in replay. It was like the movie of my life were played all over again in non-chronological order.

Uri

Wait a minute, what time was that?

Raphael

It was around noon, I think. But I could be wrong.

Uri

I was out taking pictures at that time. Nothing of the kind you are telling me in this part of town. But I did see a red bird and the sun become red for a second too. What happened, how did you come back again?

Raphael

It was in the blink of an eye. One minute the whole show was there, in front of my eyes and the next minute, I knew I was back in the present with cars roaring past me on the highway, with birds flapping their wings and people bumping into me. I don't know how long it lasted. Oh God, please make it stop.

Uri

Tell me more about the man you saw at your wife's grave. What did he look like?

Raphael

Now that I think about it, he looked familiar, actually he looked like me but younger. I don't care for this man, I want to have my old life back. Little as there's left of it.

Uri

These are our lives now, for better or worse. Maybe we needed a little shake-up. We were becoming dusty like a primadonna's closet full of moths. Maybe God has something in store for us, something we've been waiting for our whole lives. What do you fear, Raphael? Dying?

Raphael

Yes, but more than that, I fear being suspended in an a temporal space where I have to watch the same scene over and over again.

The scene of my life served on a silver platter. And my head with it. If we lose our minds, who will take care of our souls?

Uri

Don't worry about that right now. Have you considered going to church?

Raphael

What for? The church is where other scared people go to get some relief and they get it for a while but then they're back to their old problems, cheating wives, disobeying children, harassing bosses. The last time I went to church was to bury my wife. You know what the priest said? Pray for her sins. Her sins! She was the most innocent person I've ever known and she didn't deserve to die so young. And I didn't deserve to lose her.

Uri

It's time to grow up, Raphael, people do die, some earlier, others later on. We have both lost dear, innocent ones too early. But there's nothing we can do about it now. Let's start to forgive the world and God

*[looking for something]*

Did the stranger at the grave look like the man in this picture?

Raphael

Yes, exactly. Where did you get this picture?

Uri

But it's you, my friend, forty years ago. Don't you recognize yourself?

Raphael

Can't be. Was I wearing a moustache?

Uri

Yes, you were, you were quite the dandy.

Raphael

Maybe I was but I'm sure not that anymore. Are you telling me that the young man I saw at the grave is me forty years ago? And I saw myself??? This is getting way too weird, I need air

Uri

Yes, let's go outside in the park

*[the landscape changes, they are now in the park, beside Uri's lab; they are sitting on a bench]*

Raphael

The trees never change. Did you know that the gingko tree lives for thousands of years? It has a modular design and structure, its parts regenerate themselves gradually, as they go. But people have envied the trees and their long-lasting lives and their verticality. We have cut them in huge numbers and made houses out of them as though they would guard us from death.

I've known these trees here since I started coming to your laboratory. Nobody has cut them yet, fortunately

Uri

These are the trees of benevolence and the trees of forgiveness, they grow from a root that's theirs only partially. They have grown on a scaffold of muted dreams and hope in a better world. On a thin scaffold of incoherence and wooden language but they survived. And so did we. It is our crafts that saved us.

Raphael

Crafts also involve the cutting of wood and its transformation into ships that sail the seven seas into combs and pins that adorn the hair of the Salomes of the world, but also of Ophelia and Iphigenia. Tragic heroes all. Why have so many women had tragic destinies? Even when nothing happens to them it's that nothingness that kills them. Think of Virginia Woolf.

Uri START

I'm thinking about her "Hours". Do you know where the word "hour" comes from? The Horae, who were the goddesses of seasons



and of the natural portions of time. They were always dancing in tune, obeying to their god, Chronos, ensuring that time stays unchanged and unaltered. The Horae or Horai have now disappeared at once with our age. They have been replaced by Persephone, whose mother Ceres wants the fruit of land. The fruit of man.

The reapers are approaching.

Raphael

Even the trees shiver hearing your words, Uri. Look, the wind is blowing strong and it will chill our bones. Maybe we'll turn to stone, we'll be the Philemon and Baucis of friendship, dying both at the same time.

Uri

Or achieving eternal life at the same time.

Raphael

What makes a man deserving of eternal life? They teach us it's his good deeds. But the old book says it is by our words we will be judged. By our words, do you imagine? Most of the times we don't even realize what we are saying. Will the trees and animals judge us too? If that is the case, then I fear. I fear everything these days: the wind, the nights, the temporal loops, the dead and the dying. Sometimes, I fear you too. I sometimes feel you are hiding something from me.

Uri

If I am, it's only for your protection, Raphael. You have been so humble all your life and I would like to give you the whole world, actually more than just one world, all the possible worlds, to show you that you have a place in each of them just like Jesus told the Apostles that he's going to find them a spot in His Father's House. I want you to know you will always have a spot in my home and in my heart. Listen, I want to take some pictures of you.

Raphael

Pictures of me? What for?

URI

For us, to remember these times, when we are both unconsciously grazing the invisible. Making the invisible visible that's my job, remember?

Raphael

I sometimes think you're a magician, Uri

Uri

You can call me that too.

Just stand still please there on the bench, legs crossed, look  
in the distance or in my eyes.

Raphael

Should I smile or wave at you?

Uri

Do as you please

Good. Now please go next to that tree over there. You may hug  
it. Looks like it needs a hug

Raphael

Ok

Uri

Now let's have a look at you and the city. Go to that fence over  
there overlooking the city. Wait it's contre-jour. Go to the  
other side please.

Raphael

Is here all right?

Uri

Yes. Now please go next to that field of flowers. I want to take  
your picture there

Raphael

That one here? OK. [looks awkward]

Uri

The shooting session is over. You may come back on the bench. I  
think you're quite photogenic. Wait I also have one of those new  
cameras, digital. Let's take some selfies.

Raphael

Some selfies? What are those?

Uri

Just sit still and smile. [Uri places his head gently on Raphael's head and takes some selfies]. It's close-ups of you and me.

Raphael

I like the idea.

[end of scene 3]

Scene 4

Uri

Our Father

As in the sky

So on earth

The angels and the ghosts

The bread and the wine

Our memories and their aftermath.

I should go, or else I'll be late [leaves the laboratory]

In the next scene, he is alone in the middle of a stadium:

My pictures come out of the night like stars on the zenith, they flicker too. What if Raphael is right? What if we did stop time? Opened a vault into the black hole from before time? The days are now shorter, they say we have lost four hours from the sum total of time. What is that reported to a single human being life?

[enter Raphael, disconcerted]

Raphael

God, this is happening again. One minute ago it was day and now night has fallen. What is this place? I saw Veronica again chasing the red balloon and I followed her, from the town center, to the marketplace, through the park and here I am. From the two spaces of confinement and dream to the high planes where vultures fly in majestic circles, I've seen this world and its beauty. I've bathed in the oceans of crowds, in the amnesiac

waters of the mass-media, lulling us to slumber and to insignificant details. I've seen the big picture and the small picture, I've touched the high and the low. But not this, dear Lord, not this. I wonder if Veronica is around here. [sees Uri approaching]. Uri is that you?

Uri

In flesh and bones and rags like vagabonds. I'm trying to take a picture of this stadium that looks like a Roman arena. How about you, what are you doing here?

Raphael

I was following Veronica. Haven't you seen her?

Uri

No (sighs).

It's just you and me. Looks like it's going to rain. Have you ever seen the drops of rain in a picture? They look like droplets of crystal become solid like glass. They have all the shades of grey in a black and white photo and the color of the rainbow in a color photo. What is the form that keeps that running water in that perfect tear shape? Remember, Rapha, the stadium and the manifestations in the scorching sunlight? Remember the neatly aligned groups of pioneers and workers chanting hymns as though to a god?

Raphael

Oh, I remember that all too well. I wish I could forget that part. I'm beginning to forget more and more. But I remember you and Veronica on that motorbike cheering happily while you were taking pictures of her and the crowds. That had a beginning and an end. These were the days of our lives.

Uri

There will be many more days of our lives and I will be happy to spend them with you. Remember when we first met [a picture of light is displayed in the background] I came to you to have a watch repaired. I was distressed because it was a gift from my wife and I didn't want her to know I had managed to break it so fast. We started talking about politics and the world that we both knew so well. You had those big eyes and I thought they were the warmest loving eyes I'd ever seen.

Raphael

And you looked like a dissident with your long curly hair and trapeze jeans and leather jacket. You looked like a wayward angel to me. We were small but felt like giants [picture of the sky and the sea]. I thought you were baptizing the world with light.

Uri

We lost and found each other on several occasions like two widowed penguins we took care of one another, we took care of the world, of the course of rivers and the phases of the moon, of the four corners of attention and of the saplings that were planted in those times

Raphael

The saplings had a red ribbon around them to keep them tight and upright now they have become the parks, the parks have become the forests and the forests were felled like summer grass. [picture of forest] Giants step on tall trees and ants, they devour the world in their passage. Were we giants or elves, Uri?

Uri

I prefer to think we were human, with our failings and sins, carrying burdens that others wouldn't carry, showing a small glimpse into the heart of things, unveiling the clothes of time and making up for the lost connection. But our connection, Raphael, what would you say about it?

Raphael

All I can say is that I wouldn't have been able to make it through without you. You are my only family now. There's a crack in the clouds, a surreal sunlight is beckoning us. It's like judgement day. Will we be found pure or tainted? Sinful or innocent? Will the good or the bad prevail?

Uri

The starry sky above me and the moral law in me [picture of the starry sky], that's what Kant said. We have tried to be good, more than some and less than others. We have made mistakes and will continue to make them. My father used to say "I don't kill and I don't steal, so there should be no problem". But I wonder if that's enough. For the old Greeks, excessive pride was a mortal sin. Ate, it was called. When the humans wanted to be

like gods, with free will and all that. We have been a bit like gods, you and I. You were intervening with time and I was compressing distance.

Raphael

We were doing our jobs mainly. Putting to work our god-given skills. When I was fixing a watch, I got a feeling of the beautiful job done, of having put things into their right order. Like a peasant at the end of a working day. Or like God in the seventh day. All of His creation aches for this service, the planets and plants, the animals and the animae celestes, the children in their games, the young in their tempestuous treading and the old in their wondering ways. We haven't served in a war but in a peace treaty.

Uri

A frail peace treaty, where God has put all of His creation in our hands and we have tried our best to preserve it. Our children and other people's children are the heirs of an architect's dream, of a poet's plunge to the sky, of a city built by romantics and visionaries. This is our home, our hearth and battlefield. I was angry with God when Veronica died. But she has taught me that the world is alive in all its zones.

Raphael

I'm still angry with God for closing the world down on us like we were some extras in a movie we don't even understand. If only I could grasp the meaning of this, then it would be easier. If only I could fix that watch!

Uri

Sometimes things cannot be fixed. They are irreparable. In life we should mourn only for irreparable things, like losing a loved one.

Raphael

I mourn the mornings and evenings, I mourn the trains and telegraphs, I mourn the books and the soda bottles, I mourn the zeppelins and the submarines.

Uri

When the all the ships set sail, from Viking ships to sky rockets, we forget once more about time, time expands and

compresses like an accordion, it becomes nothing and everything.  
I remember "Youth without ageing and life without death". When  
the hero comes back home, he feels he hasn't been long gone but  
in reality all his loved ones are either very old or dead. Did  
our dead travel through time, Raphael? Or did they age awfully  
fast?

Raphael

I travel through time and you're still here ageing and ageless  
like a gingko tree. I am still here, which is somewhat of a  
miracle. I'm not one to believe in miracles. Not for me. But I'm  
beginning to believe in a force that keeps us alive and intact,  
apart and together, a force other than gravity or time or  
distance.

Uri

I reckon, because it feels like reckoning day, that you have  
somewhat changed. Have we been here since the beginning of days?  
And returning only to find one another again and again? [picture  
of Uri and Raphael, the light changes turning to normal  
daylight]

Raphael

How long has it been, Uri? Since we've been here?

Uri

The whole night long

Raphael

Are we still good?

Uri

Yes

Raphael

What are we going to do from now on?

Uri

We'll find our way home

Raphael

Where is home?

Uri

Home is where your heart is

Raphael

What kind of heart?

Uri

A heart of gold

Raphael

Do I have a heart of gold?

Uri

For a noble heart, the most precious gift becomes poor, when the  
giver stops loving. (Shakespeare)

Raphael

I never stopped loving you. Do you love me, Uri?

Uri

More than you will ever know

Raphael

Is love the force that holds everything together?

Uri

Like a Pablo Neruda poem

Raphael

What do you mean?

Uri

Like the gaze that faces the stranger's gaze and sustains it  
answering back, like a face that becomes like a poster in your  
mind, like the sky that appears blue but actually it isn't the  
sea water looking green, it is all in the force of sustaining an  
appearance



Raphael

I wonder what God looks like

Uri

They say the angel of death has a thousand eyes. How many more God must have! In Buddhism, we are all god and He is someone who is playing hide and seek with himself, appearing in a different image in each and every one of us

Raphael

That's what Christ told the apostles, that they are gods but I doubt whether they believed him. Uri, if we are good, why were we judged?

Uri

I guess everyone gets judged. Even angels. More harshly than others even. But maybe not. If they are really cute (smiles and looks in the distance). Let's take a look at the pictures I've taken ever since I got here [first there's Raphael alone in the middle of the stadium, under ominous, cloudy skies; then, there's the two of them under the same skies, then the light reemerges and their faces are transfigured by the light, in the last picture there's just the stadium looking modern but deserted)

Raphael

Amazing. It's like time out of time. Maybe they needed time beyond time too. The minutes, the seconds and the hours, the myriad months with their secret numbers and names. The years to remember birthdays. The time of the sun and the time of the moon. The time of stars and galaxies. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant, a time to reap. A time to kill, a time to heal. A time to laugh, a time to weep.

Uri

How can ghosts find their way back in the world without time? [there is a red glow in the scene] I think it's time. Goodbye, my love.

[end of scene 4]

Scene 5

[Uri alone in the laboratory]

Uri

Our Father

Forgive us our sins

Those we have forgotten

And those we cannot forget

Paint us gold and silver

Give us back our wings

Books, books. Where can I find some? I used to be a bookworm, devouring books for days on end. Now that the old book is obsolete, I wonder what will guide our steps out of the long night? Morning has broken over this young generation who is supposed to think in a non-linear fashion. I wonder what that means. Will they have greater brain capacities? Look what we have achieved with limited ones.

[enters Raphael, timidly, smiling]

Raphael

May I?

Uri

Of course, do come in. I was waiting for you.

Raphael

I'm just coming from the market place and I got you this nice bunch of flowers. I got a few tomatoes and cheese if you'd care to join me for lunch

Uri

Of course, that's lovely. Where shall I put these flowers?  
[takes a plastic bottle, cuts it in half and places the flowers in it]

Raphael

You won't believe what happened. I managed to fix the watch. And the guy who brought it to me never came back for it. So I figured I would give it to you.

Uri

To me? Are you sure?

Raphael

Yes. I want you to keep it. For me. For you. For everybody else. I have more clocks than I can handle in my old shop. I hear their ticking again and I'm happy. For some people, it's the bells from the church, for others, the roar of cars, for others the song of the nightingale. For me it's the ticking of clocks.

Uri

Thank you so much. Listen, I have something for you too. It's my old Zmena that I've been using to take photographs for years. I think I'll no longer use it. A student of mine has taught me how to work with one of those new digital cameras. It's quite fascinating, you can take as many pictures as you like and then you can alter them as you please. You can draw and paint in them, you can play with light, distance and even time.

Raphael

Tell me about this student of yours. And thank you

Uri

It's just this very talented kid who wants to become a movie director. He takes these amazing photographs that I only half-understand, they're very filled with detail but in a non-linear fashion. He's having an exhibition this afternoon. Do you want to go?

Raphael

Sure, I've nothing to do this afternoon.

Uri

Wonderful! My wife will be coming too. I showed her the pictures of Veronica. You know what she said? "For me, it's been music. But I'm glad that you showed them to me. Now I know for sure". I think we needed photography in the twentieth century. So many unbelievable things have happened, the future generations would have had a hard time believing them if we didn't have this sort of evidence.

Raphael

Yes, the wars, Fascism and Communism, Hiroshima, Chernobyl, the cold war, the cars and space travel, Hollywood and rock music. It's all there on photographic paper. God knows what they will see in them. In us.

Uri

I will never forget the picture from Hiroshima. They say the people's shadows were imprinted on the walls during the explosion. Like a bloody Xray. The xray, psychoanalysis and pictures, these are the apex of Modern man's search. We haven't been very discrete. On the contrary. We have wanted to touch the kernel of things, to take each object and unveil it like a lover, like a famished lover. We have been myopic too. The new age will take us from the detail to the big picture. These kids they are visionaries, they see through the heart and soul and beyond.

Raphael

They already travel in different temporalities. On the internet, they say that time expands like a ripe pumpkin. It also flies. But they will have enough time to assimilate the huge encyclopedia that we have left them. And then connect the dots. And then draw their own picture. Make their own encyclopedia.

Uri

They say the kids nowadays are ignorant and less profound. I beg to differ. From the students I see come into my laboratory, I can tell that they are very creative and inquisitive. They ask a lot of questions and speak a lot. Unlike us. Remember, we were terrified to speak in class. Unless you had something brilliant to say, you had better shut up. But now, the new generation speaks up their mind, they are critical and passionate about what they're doing. They're no longer interested in the heart of things but in the way the heart of things relates to the world

and themselves. Although they take selfies, they are not narcissistic

Raphael

Were we narcissistic, Uri?

Uri

A bit and for a while. Enough to feel a bit too sorry for ourselves, as if the whole world were limited to our sorrows and frustrations. Enough to look for Mercury in the skies, in the ground and in water. But Mercury cannot be grasped, he conspires with and is hidden by time. Just like light. But enough is given us to see partially through Maya's veils.

Raphael

I no longer fear death or time. Time takes care of its servants and children. And I think I have served it well for the past forty years. Even if I have remained a child in time. We have advanced so much but we have remained children. To us the kingdom of heaven

Uri

To us the freedom and the sparrow's flight, to us the soaring song of splendid guitars and violins, to us the written page and the unwritten testament, to us the three-dimensional space and the two-dimensional space complimenting and reinforcing each other, to us the libraries of Babel and the spiral steps, to us the ebony towers and the cathedrals of green. When I go in the world now, I feel like I'm stepping through soft air and I find all of creation beautiful. There's nothing I wouldn't take a picture of.

Raphael

When I go outside now, I hear the bells from the church up the hill and I see this town of chapels become filled with compassion and trust. I see myself as part of a greater design and I see everyone else as having a glorious destiny. I have seen the light and the glory. It was frightening at first but so was the burning bush.

Uri

We were baptized in water but brought to light the burial and the necessity for rebirth. And the crafts will not disappear.

Will the potter stop making pottery? Will the children stop playing games? Will the artificer stop making art?

Raphael

I'll never stop repairing watches, that's for sure. And if the time comes that I won't be able to do that anymore, I will tie ribbons of grass around the old monuments, I will weave wreaths of flowers that I will place on the doors of small shops and I will light a candle actually two: one for the living and one for the dead.

Uri

When the time comes, I will take my wife to watch a movie from the 50's, I'll drive her home and tell her that she's beautiful, I will look for you when night falls and I will show you the world in my eyes.

Raphael

The world is beautiful in all its zones but I still think we are living in the best of all possible worlds.

Uri

I wouldn't mind visiting a few other worlds. Just for the sake of comparison. Just to see how it feels. But I don't want to be alone like the Little Prince.

Raphael

We'll always be together, Uri [gently places his head on Uri's shoulder]. [we hear Like a Bridge over Troubled Water and the curtain falls].

**THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:** *This play is inspired by my father, who was the only photography and film teacher in our hometown during Communism in Romania. In this play, I wanted to explore the magic of "kindred spirits" of a friendship such as it could exist between a photographer and a clockmaker during inauspicious times. Another theme which is extremely important is that of time and timelessness: ageing, dying, but also transcending (time), becoming*

*immortal, etc. My main influence is Beckett and Modernism. This is my first play and it has never been performed before.*

**PLAYWRIGHT'S BIO:** I am a poet from Romania. My was volume was published with a Romanian press, the second one with Silver Bow in Canada and my third is forthcoming with New Meridian Arts.