

Snowstorm Pandemiconium: A Play[gue]

I am very sorry for your illness, and your unpleasant and uncertain situation, for which, unfortunately, I can give no better consolation than in the worn-out and wearying-out word, patience. What you mention of your private feelings on an interesting subject, is indeed distressing What we love in those early days is generally rather a fanciful creation of our own than a reality. We build statues of snow, and weep when they melt.

Sir Walter Scott

CHARACTERS

RADIOMAN

A generic white man in a suit and tie who might be variously played by a baby-faced young man in a bowtie or a balding geriatric man with his neck spilling over his collar, though the real sweetspot would be the slick 50-year silverfox who looks like he has what he calls "a passion for hot broads and boating." Red-faced, regardless and extremely angry at the apparent apathy of his listeners, he repeats himself over and over again, working himself into a frenzy. He uses sarcasm in the mode of a petulant teenager. Pining after the leave-it-to-beaver fantasies of his formative Barry Goldwater years, unshakably confident in the trickle-down Reaganomics of his post-graduate business years, entirely emasculated by Trump's election and occasionally wearing a red-white-and-blue-choker bejeweled with the president's name, he paradoxically paints the picture of a world falling to pieces due to constant attacks by those deemed the radical left, on the one hand, and – simultaneously on the other – a panglossian insistence that we live in the best of all possible worlds.

VIRAL CHILDREN

A chorus of children dressed in blow-up costumes of the Covid-19 virus: dusty gray balls with lipstick-red mushrooms of spike proteins erupting in every direction.

FLOCK OF SHEEP

A collection of old folks dressed in cottonball costumes of sheep: billowy and white, their wrinkled faces protruding from lamb-eared hoods, their legs protruding in white tights from their fluffy-tailed rumps.

OBITUARIES

Each individual wears a costume made from the clippings of newspaper obituary sections. Other names and descriptions might easily be substituted for the ones used here, and any production of the play is encouraged to use the obituary sections as opportunities for improvisation in order to drive home various communities significantly impacted by the coronavirus. The names and descriptions for the template document have been pulled at random from the New York Times article "An Incalculable Loss" which compiled - "from hundreds of obituaries, news articles and paid death notices that . . . appeared in [various] newspapers and digital media over the past few months" - "the descriptions of the lives of a thousand people in the United States who died because of the coronavirus."

SETTING

America (though more specific communities might be highlighted depending on where the production takes place).

TIME

Coronavirus Pandemic.

ACT 1 : SCENE 1

(The sound of television static begins before the audience has settled into their seats. A crescendo. Blackout. Static jumps to life – snow, snow, snow – across the screen of the enormous television on stage. The rest of the stage is empty. The RADIOMAN stutters to life on the screen. An organ begins playing the hymn “Blessed Assurance” as a flock of sheep migrate slowly through the audience – down the aisles toward the stage – their faces, like the faces of the audience, bathed in the light of the TV screen as they sing along.

*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine;
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.*

Old sheep, they move gracelessly, their skinny legs wobbling in their loose tights, the cottonballs of their bodies hunched and crooked. They squint into the light. They use canes and walkers as they ascend the steps onto the stage, singing and humming the tune.

*This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long.*

One or two are in wheelchairs. Several of their comrades must work together – straining, straining – to hoist them onto the stage. A few tote portable oxygen tanks that they bounce laboriously up the steps. Several more smoke cigarettes and cough as they stumble through the words.

*Perfect submission, perfect delight,
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending, bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.*

They grumble in a flock – onto the stage – toward the television set, and finally the hymn comes to an end.)

RADIOMAN

(as sarcastic preacher)

Tonight I can report that the sky is falling. Absolutely.

(FLOCK OF SHEEP duck and cover)

We are all doomed. The end is near.

(FLOCK OF SHEEP look to the sky)

RADIOMAN

The apocalypse is eminent and you are all going to die. Every last one of you. Dead.

(FLOCK OF SHEEP begin wailing)

RADIOMAN

And it's all the president's fault.

(FLOCK OF SHEEP stomp their feet and call out in protest)

RADIOMAN

Or . . .

(shushing the sheep. becoming serious)

Or . . . at least that's what the media mob and the democratic extreme radical socialist party would like you to think.

(FLOCK OF SHEEP continue to protest)

RADIOMAN

They think they can pull one over on you! They think that you are a bunch of sheep.

FLOCK OF SHEEP

(shouting protests and stomping feet, their anger eventually becoming a collective chant)

We are not sheep. We are not sheep. We are not sheep.

RADIOMAN

The left is rooting for this "corona virus" to wreak havoc in the United States. Rooting for it!

(VIRAL CHILDREN – their arms linked together – begin filing onto the stage from either side)

RADIOMAN

Why? you ask. Why?

FLOCK OF SHEEP

Why? we ask. Why? Why? we ask. Why?

RADIOMAN

I'll tell you why. To score cheap, repulsive, political points. They want pandemonium! The radical leftists. A pandemic? Give me a break!

(VIRAL CHILDREN – their arms linked together – encircle the FLOCK OF SHEEP)

RADIOMAN

The left is politicizing – and weaponizing – an infectious disease. They're using it as an effort to bludgeon the president. It's disgusting, I tell you.

FLOCK OF SHEEP

Disgusting. Disgusting. Disgusting.

RADIOMAN

And I've heard some things, folks. I've heard some things that you all have probably heard as well.

VIRAL CHILDREN

(dancing in a circle around the FLOCK OF SHEEP and singing)
Ring around the rosie.

SHEEP #1

A ploy by the Jews, perhaps.

SHEEP #2

Perhaps the Chinese. Who knows?

CHILDREN

A pocket full of posies.

SHEEP #3

I heard it was cooked up in a lab.

SHEEP #4

Bill Gates probably had a hand in it.

SHEEP #5

Or George Soros.

SHEEP #6

The Clinton Foundation, for sure.

CHILDREN

Ashes. Ashes.

SHEEP #7

They are up to something. All of *them*. That much is clear.

CHILDREN

We all fall down.

(VIRAL CHILDREN fall down simultaneously)

FLOCK OF SHEEP

They want to get rid of *us*.

(VIRAL CHILDREN get up – their arms no longer linked – and begin dancing along the edges of the stage, then whirling off of the stage, then twirling up and down the aisles between the members of the audience. their antics continue throughout the rest of the play.)

RADIOMAN

It's us against them - us against them! - and it's pretty clear who the victim is . . .

(OBITUARIES enter one-by-one on the opposite side of the stage from the television, then exit after they drop their ping-pong ball (which means they're dead))

- I am Patricia Dowd, an auditor in Silicon Valley. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.
- I am Marion Krueger, a great-grandmother with an easy laugh. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.
- I am Cornelius Lawyer, a sharecropper's son. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.
- I am Loretta Mendoza Dionisio, a cancer survivor from the Philippines. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.
- I am Patricia Frieson, and I used to be a nurse. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.

- I am Merle C. Dry, an ordained minister. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.
- I am Luis Juarez, a traveler across the United States and Mexico. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.
- I am Black N Mild, a bounce D.J. and radio personality in New Orleans. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.
- I am Michael Mika, a Vietnam veteran. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.
- I am Donald Raymond Haws, and I administer the Holy Eucharist to hospital patients before they die. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.

RADIOMAN

The victim is America itself.

- I am John Cofrancesco, an administrator at a nursing facility. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.

(another ping-pong ball falls from the ceiling)

RADIOMAN

(repeating himself - a glitch in the TV)

The victim . . .

- I am Alan Lund, a conductor with an amazing ear. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.

(another ping-pong ball falls from the ceiling)

RADIOMAN

. . . victim . . .

- I am Ronald W. Lewis, a preserver of New Orleans performance traditions. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.

(another ping-pong ball falls from the ceiling)

RADIOMAN

. . . victim . . .

- I am JoAnn Stokes-Smith, a globetrotter from Charleston, South Carolina. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.

(another ping-pong ball falls from the ceiling)

RADIOMAN

. . . is America . . .

- I am Fred Walter Gray, and I like my bacon and hash browns crispy. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.

(another ping-pong ball falls from the ceiling)

RADIOMAN

. . . America . . .

- I am John-Sebastian Laird-Hammond, a member of Franciscan Monastery. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.

(another ping-pong ball falls from the ceiling)

RADIOMAN

. . . America . . .

- I am Alvin Elton, a pipefitter like my father before me. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.

(another ping-pong ball falls from the ceiling)

RADIOMAN

. . . itself . . .

- I am Mike Longo, a jazz pianist, composer, and educator. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.

(another ping-pong ball falls from the ceiling)

RADIOMAN

. . . itself . . .

- I am Arnold Obey, an educator and marathoner. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.

(another ping-pong ball falls from the ceiling)

RADIOMAN

. . . itself . . .

- I am Peggy Rakestraw, and I love reading mystery novels. (drops a ping-pong ball). I am dead.

(another ping-pong ball falls from the ceiling)

RADIOMAN

The victim is America itself.

(SHEEP #1 bangs the television set. ping-pong balls continue falling one by one from the ceiling)

RADIOMAN

This whole "corona virus" thing is a fraud perpetuated by the deep state to spread panic in the populace.

- I am Donald J. Horsfall. (drops a ping-pong ball).
- I am Kevin Charles Patz. (drops a ping-pong ball).
- I am Larry Rathgeb. (drops a ping-pong ball).

RADIOMAN

To manipulate the economy.

- I am Louvenia Henderson. (drops a ping-pong ball).
- I am Susan McPherson Gottsegen. (drops a ping-pong ball).
- I am Michale McKinnell. (drops a ping-pong ball).

RADIOMAN

To suppress dissent.

- I am Bob Burnum. (drops a ping-pong ball).
- I am Noel Sinkiat. (drops a ping-pong ball).
- I am Sherman Pittman. (drops a ping-pong ball).
- I am Minette Goff Cooper. (drops a ping-pong ball).

RADIOMAN

Look at the timing! The outbreak! The coverage! It raises a lot of red flags!

(the flurries of ping-pong balls from the ceiling increase until there is a full-blown snowstorm on stage)

RADIOMAN

It's clearly the new impeachment. Clearly! Just another pathway for hammering the president. Pathetic, I tell you.

FLOCK OF SHEEP

(looking at the sky, ducking out of the way of the ping-pong balls)

Pathetic. Pathetic. Pathetic.

Snowstorm Pandemiconium

- I was an early woman on Wall Street and a big-time Bank official. (drops a ping-pong ball). My name was Carole Brookins.

RADIOMAN

A lot of hyperbole, really.

- I was a ballroom dancing star. (drops a ping-pong ball). My name was Laneeka Barksdale.

SHEEP #1

Really nothing more than the common cold.

- I was an unflappable New York Times journalist. (drops a ping-pong ball). My name was Alan Finder.

SHEEP #2

The common cold is what I heard.

- I was a playwright who wrote about gay life. And I won a Tony for it. (drops a ping-pong ball). My name was Terrence McNally.

SHEEP #3

I heard it's only as bad as the common cold.

- I was a nurse in the Covid fight. (drops a ping-pong ball). My name was Kious Kelly.

SHEEP #4

You know, the more I learn about it, the less concerned I am.

- I saved 56 Jewish families from the Gestapo. (drops a ping-pong ball). My name was Romi Cohn.

SHEEP #5

I'm not concerned at all.

- I was a Green Bay Packers season ticket holder for 50 years. (drops a ping-pong ball). My name was Kenneth R. Going.

SHEEP #6

Me neither. Not at all.

- I was a reading tutor who focused on student success.

(drops a ping-pong ball). My name was Susan Rokus.

SHEEP #7

I'm more concerned with stepping on a used heroin needle than getting the corona virus, but maybe that's just me.

- I devoured art in every medium. (drops a ping-pong ball).
My name was Mary Virginia McKeon.

RADIOMAN

The government and the media.

FLOCK OF SHEEP

The government and the media.

- I was a champion of social justice through architecture.
(drops a ping-pong ball). My name was Michael Sorkin.

RADIOMAN

Promoting pandemonium.

FLOCK OF SHEEP

Promoting pandemonium.

(ping-pong balls continue falling—now in torrents. Enormous fans
begin blowing them around on the stage)

- Thomas A. Real. (drops a ping-pong ball).

(one hundred more shake from the sky)

- James Quigley. (drops a ping-pong ball).

(two hundred more shake from the sky)

- Sandra Piotrowski. (drops a ping-pong ball).

(three hundred more shake from the sky)

- Basseyy Offiong. (drops a ping-pong ball).

(four hundred more shake from the sky)

- Bobby Joseph Herbert. (drops a ping-pong ball).

(five hundred more shake from the sky)

- Robert Rust. (drops a ping-pong ball).

(six hundred more shake from the sky)

- Jéssica Beatriz Cortez. (drops a ping-pong ball).

(seven hundred more shake from the sky)

- Marie Caronia. (drops a ping-pong ball).

(eight hundred more shake from the sky)

- Harvey Bayard. (drops a ping-pong ball).

(nine hundred more shake from the sky)

- Luiza Ogorodnik. (drops a ping-pong ball).

(one thousand more shake from the sky, and continue falling in a deluge)

RADIOMAN

And you see these people out here wearing their little masks, don't you?

FLOCK OF SHEEP

Muzzles. Muzzles. Muzzles.

RADIOMAN

They don't care about getting sick!

FLOCK OF SHEEP

Muzzles. Muzzles. Muzzles.

RADIOMAN

They only care about making a political statement!

(VIRAL CHILDREN begin making their whirling way to the stage again, bumping into one another, rolling around on the ground, hopping and skipping and jumping about, throwing ping-pong balls back and forth)

- Wallace Roney
- Alby Kass
- Martin Douglas

- Regina D. Cullen
- Jerry Manley
- Frank Gabrin
- Audrey Malone
- Mary Minervini
- Salomon S. Podgursky
- Dale E. Thurman

RADIOMAN

As the president has pointed out, these people are wearing masks not to prevent the spread of the virus but as a way to signal disapproval of him.

(an organ blasts a minor chord, which resolves to a major, providing a signal for the children)

VIRAL CHILDREN
(singing loudly)

Over the river and through the woods

To grandmother's house we go;

(repeating the second line for emphasis)

To grandmother's house we go!

To grandmother's house we go!

(as they ascend onto the stage - repeating the final phrase - they chase the sheep this way and that, bumping and jostling them all about. the sheep flee in terror, coughing, sputtering, wailing. the organ bangs another chord as a signal.)

The horse knows the way to carry the sleigh,
Through the white and drifted snow! -OH!

- Ellis Marsalis
- Bucky Pizzarelli
- Antonio Checo
- Tarlach MacNiallais
- Beverly Collins
- Scott Melter
- Norma Hoza
- Lucius Hall
- Glenn Daniel Bellitto
- Ronnie Estes

RADIOMAN

Even if it is deadly – and maybe it is, I never said it isn't – even if it is deadly, so are a lot of other things! You know, folks, pandemics happen from time to time. Everybody knows that. But at worst, at the absolute worst, worst-case scenario, it might be as bad as the flu.

VIRAL CHILDREN

Over the river and through the woods,
Oh how the wind does blow!

(one of the SHEEP falls down dead)

- Anita Fial
- Patricia Bosworth
- Azade Kilic
- John E. Broadly
- Samuel Kramer
- Sean Boynes
- Marco DiFranco
- John A. Bailargeon
- Judith Plotkin-Goldberg
- Chester Dwulet

RADIOMAN

But I would rather die than see America die, wouldn't you? I think a lot of you would. Because you know that the economy is more important here, folks. You all know that. Sometimes you just have to take one for the team.

VIRAL CHILDREN

It stings the toes and bites the nose,
It cleaves the breath and leads to death,
It makes you cough (shouting) and kills you off,
As over the ground we go.

(several more sheep fall down, and a few of the VIRAL CHILDREN begin jumping up and down on their limp bodies)

- Lloyd Paul Leftwich
- Randy G. Addison
- Ann Kolb
- Rhoda Hatch
- Regina Dix-Parsons
- John Timothy Barr
- Julie Butler

- Lila A. Fenwick
- Vincent Lioni
- Thomas Waters

RADIOMAN

Even if it is real – and I’m not saying it isn’t, I have never said that – even if it is real, no president has ever acted as fast as our president! He was on this thing from the very beginning.

VIRAL CHILDREN

Over the river and through the woods,
And straight through the barnyard gate.

(all of the SHEEP have fallen down dead)

- Jeanne Hammond Byrnes
- Alice Coopersmith Furst
- Thomas A. Adamavich
- Kyra Swartz
- John Cassano
- Barbara Yazbeck Vethacke
- Kimarlee Nguyen
- Kamal Ahmed
- Raymond Copeland
- Patricia H. Thatcher.

RADIOMAN

From the very beginning – the very beginning, folks – we – the president and me – we were the first to sound the alarm. The virus was spreading while the left was still busy distracting the public with the president’s impeachment. Y’all remember that, don’t you? I was the very first. Remember? I have always taken this thing seriously. Always. From the very beginning.

(the screen turns to snow again)

VIRAL CHILDREN

(linking arms and facing the audience)

We seem to go extremely slow
It is so hard to wait!

(the reset of the 100,000 ping-pong balls dump from the ceiling.
blackout. the balls continue bounding onstage)