

I had agreed that the magazine was no longer funny, many of its "jokes" being about alcoholism, mental illness, homosexuality, and race prejudice.

Comments on this essay will be welcomed.

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TWO DIVERSIONS

THE REBIRTHING after Harold Pinter

(A rather bare room in a squat. The Rebirther is curled up in a foetal position, head against a wall, to R. The Meditator sits in a meditation position on a cushion, to L.)

Rebirther: *(Grunts and strains intermittently for a few minutes)*

Meditator: *(Silence)*

Rebirther: I'm never going to get out . . .

Meditator: *(Silent)*

Rebirther: I'm stuck! Help! I can't get out . . . *(Grunts etc)*

Meditator: *(Silent)*

Rebirther: It hurts. It's terrible. When will it ever end?
I'll never get out.

Meditator: *(Turns to look at him)* You don't look very comfortable to me.

Rebirther: I'm being born and I can't get out . . .

Meditator: You look very tense. Why don't you sit on this nice comfy cushion and have a bit of a meditate?

Rebirther: Of course I'm tense. That's what it was like in the womb. I'm not coming out - not till I've been through this bit of thinking I can't get out.

Meditator: *(Silent - then)* Suppose you don't get out? You might get stuck.

Rebirther: Of course I get out. It's just that I think I can't.

Meditator: *(Silent)*

Rebirther: *Struggling)* Ow. I can't get out. Let me out.

Meditator: Shall I give you a hand?

Rebirther: Don't be silly. I'm stuck.

Meditator: You said 'Let me out'. You really are interrupting my meditation, you know.

Rebirther: That was what I was feeling. I feel I want to be let out, but I know I'm not going to be. Until I am.

Meditator: I was only trying to help . . .

Rebirther: You don't understand.

Meditator: I'm not trying to understand. I'm meditating. I stopped trying to understand on May 12th 1976. It came to me. In the High Street. Outside Mac-Fisheries. In a blinding flash. Don't try to understand. Now I meditate.

Rebirther: Well, you might as well get on with it for all the good it's doing me.

Meditator: It's not meant to do you good. It does me good.
(*Meditates*)

Rebirther: (*Grunts. Silence*)

Meditator: You all right? Sure you can manage?

Rebirther: (*Grunts*)

Meditator: (*Meditates*)

Rebirther: (*Yawns. Stands up, shakes, tidies up clothes etc.*)
Coming for a drink?

Meditator: What happened?

Rebirther: Nothing. I'm going for a drink.

Meditator: You got out then?

Rebirther: No.

Meditator: You haven't been born then?

Rebirther: Couldn't make it.

Meditator: What a shame . . . will you be all right?

Rebirther: Hard to say . . . coming for a drink?

Meditator: I **am** meditating . . .

Rebirther: You can meditate in the pub.

Meditator: It wouldn't be the same.

Rebirther: Pint of Younger's. Set you up . . .

Meditator: It's not the same . . .

Rebirther: . . . I think you're holding out on me.

Mediator: (*Silent. Meditates*)

Rebirther: Holding out. Blocking me. I could get aggressive with you. Paranoid. Obstruction - in the womb. I could act out. Beat you up. Strangle you with my umbilicus . . . I could get nasty.

Mediator: (*Slowly collapses, stunned, in crumpled heap on floor*)

Rebirther: I'm going to get a drink. On my own. But I'll be back . . .

Mediator: (*Looks about, fearfully, after Rebirther has gone. Then in a series of jerky movements, involuntarily goes into a foetal position, curling up, grunting, pressing head against the wall. Grunts and strains, as curtain falls*)

THE FAWLTY GROWTH CENTRE

*(The Foyer: looking remarkably like the foyer of Fawlty Towers. Basil sits in reception area. The front entrance is next to the stairs. There are three group rooms, numbered 1, 2 and 3. During the early part of the scene, group members wander in and go through into rooms 1 and 2. Basil grunts at them, looks them up and down etc. but continues to read his copy of **Self and Society**, which is just about concealing a copy of **Total Orgasm**)*

Sybil's Voice: (*from upstairs*) Basil!

Basil: Yes dear . . . (*hiding **Total Orgasm** in drawer*)

Sybil: I'm just going off to pick up the three leaders from the terminal.

Basil: Yes dear. Two.

- Sybil:** No three, dear. Macdonald, Dayville and Baskin-Robbins.
- Basil:** Macdonald and Dayville. Two groups this weekend.
- Sybil:** (*appears from upstairs*) **Three**, dear.
- Basil:** (*Raises eyebrows scornfully*) Two groups: Creative Repression and Gestalt Gymnastics.
- Sybil:** Just check the files dear . . .
- Basil:** (*Usual business*) Just check the files . . . (*mumble mumble*) Don't trust Basil, he couldn't possibly be right. It's all a question of Trust, isn't it . . .
- Sybil:** Basil. You're projecting again . . . Anyway, I've got to go now. You sort it out by the time I get back . . . (*Exit*)
- Basil:** (*Mumble mumble. Then comes up against the Awful Truth*) Stan Macdonald - Creative Repression. Bill Dayville - Gestalt Gymnastics. Mel Baskin-Robbins - Release from Release . . . Release from Release! Mel Baskin-Robbins! Weekend Workshop! Only visit to Europe this year! A privilege to have this leading member of the Human Potential Movement . . . Esalen . . . Big Sur . . . (*Collapse*) Quick - group - must get a group - group for Mel - Release from Release - Get a grip on yourself - no psychosis just now - business first. (*Screams*) (*Two group members wander in, heading for the two rooms which are filling. He intercepts them and grabs the first, grinning.*) Yes - no. Creative Repression? No - it's now called Release from Release. Yes, this way please. (*Indicates Room 3*) Yes, the title's been changed. Yes, these Americans . . . so laid back . . . he says he's in a different place - space - right now.

1st Group Member: I don't want Release from Release. I really need creative repression right now. It that's not

need creative repression right now. It that's not what you're offering, I'm going. *(Turns to move off)*

Basil: *(Muttering)* All right. Be like that. Anybody can see from your body you need release from release . . . *(smiling)* No - I beg your pardon - don't leave - I made a mistake - of course, Room 1. Yes, Creative Repression. So sorry. Yes, go on in. *(Pushes him into Room 1 and slams door. Turns with big smile to 2nd Group Member)* Gestalt Gymnastics? Well, non, actually, the title of the group's been changed to Release from Release. Same thing really. Only the leader has moved on in his own evolutionary process and has now reached this higher plane of self-awareness.

2nd Group Member: What, Bill Dayville? But I only saw him in New York last week, and he said . . .

Basil: *(Hearty laughter)* Oh, yes . . . Of course - Bill Dayville. I thought you meant - no - I was confused. Ha ha. Of course. Yes - Bill Dayville - Gestalt Gymnastics - Ye-e-es. Room 2. This way. *(ushers him in. Slams door)* Release from Release! *(looks at watch. Screams)*

Postman: *(enters, reading from label on parcel)* Dr Baskin-Robbins?

Basil: *(has back to him - grits teeth)* Room 3. All other groups are full . . . *(suddenly hears: swings round)* Did you say Baskin-Robbins? How did you know . . . Oh!

Postman He has to sign for it. Room 3, did you say?

Basil: No, he's not . . . Yes! Room 3 Go straight in - he'll be along in a moment. (*Ushers him into Room 3 and quietly locks door*)

Plumber: (*enters*) ' Morning! I've come to fix that leaking radiator . . .

Basil: Thank you, yes - Upstairs, room on the left. No! I mean - in here - Room 3. Yes. Go right in. You'll find out which one it is. Try them all. Take your time. No hurry . . . (*lets him in Room 3 and locks door on him.*)

Little Man in Raincoat: (*enters*) Good Morning. I've come about the vibes.

Basil: The WHAT?

Little Man: The vibes. Bad vibes. I'm from the Psychic Defence League. Got a note here from a Well-Wisher. I enclose deposit and request you send representative to inspect the vibes at the Fawlty Growth Centre. My opinion is there are bad vibes there' . . . Might be nothing in it, you know. But it's worth checking. You never know. Could be dangerous.

Basil: (*hysterical*) I regard this as a total infringement of my . . . (*pause*) Ah - ha, ha - yes, well, all right. There **might** just be something in what they say - Yes - try Room 3. My wife was holding a Women's Group in there, so you never know, do you? Yes - go in. Sniff around. Get out the old Psychic Detection Kit. Rub up your Orgone Lamp. In here. Take your time - no hurry. (*Ushers him in. Locks door. Goes back to chair, rubbing hands, looking at watch.*)

Manuel: (*enters, beaming.*) Meesta Fawlty, I find you at last!

Basil: (swivels round, aghast)

Manuel: They say me, Meesta Fawlty is now a Groupie. I no understand. I tell them, Manuel only want to cook for him again. They say, only Macro-Biotic. I cook Macro-Biotic. You tell me where I buy this. All I want is cook for you. I fry it, this Macro-Biotic, stew it, boil it, make paella, anything!

Basil: (*forced smile*) I'm just a bit busy now, Manuel. If you wouldn't mind waiting here - Room 3 - there are a number of applicants for the post - yes - in here. Right.

Manuel: Anything, I do. Wait. Yes. Room 3 . . .

Basil: (*Locks him in also. Voices start to protest from inside Room 3, and grow gradually louder. Banging on door etc. He ignores it.*)

Five Neighbours: (enter, aggressively) Mr. Fawlty?

Basil: Yes? You've come for a group? Yes - there are just a few places left - you're lucky. Just in time. Starting in a few minutes.

1st Neighbour: No, we've come to lodge a complaint.

2nd N.: You realise there are five of us . . . others in this road too.

3rd N.: It's got to stop. The noise . . .

4th N.: Screams - howls. Like a Zoo, it is.

5th N.: My aunt was horrified.

1st N.: Just lose control they do. It's a disgrace.

- 2nd N.:** If it goes on we'll get the police. My little boy couldn't sleep.
- 3rd N.:** Quiet respectable neighbourhood.
- 4th N.:** House prices'll drop overnight . . .
- 5th N.:** Never heard such language . . . weirdos . . . long hair.
- 1st N.:** Grandma swore she saw a naked body through the window.
- 2nd N.:** This is a deputation, Mr. Fawlty . . .
- Basil:** Yes, well- gentlemen, gentlemen - we don't want to lose our cool now, do we? Getting a bit hot under the collar, aren't we? Don't want to **lose control**, do we? (*mimics nutcase, which silences them*) Now, I suggest you all come in here and wait till I've **just** finished a little business I'm attending to, then we can talk **calmly reasonably** about it. You just go in Room 3 there and meet some of the other people who visit the centre. They're all ordinary people - no weirdos - men-in-the-street like yourselves. I shan't be long now, just seeing to my speech for the local Conservative Party. Yes - in you go. (*Locks them in, pockets key, rubs hands*) Yes, well - that makes nine . . . Mmm . . . perhaps the vicar will call today. (*Group leaders are heard arriving*) Aaah . . . (*turns to greet them, hand outstretched*)
- Macdonald:** Hi. Stan Macdonald. Pleased to meet you, Basil. Sybil said she'll be along in a moment. Gone to get gas.
- Dayville:** Bill Dayville. Good to be bringing the message to Europe again.

Baskin-Robbins: Mel Baskin-Robbins. It's a privilege to be with you beautiful people. Nice place you've got here here . . .

Basil: Delighted, delighted . . . Yes, well, your groups are waiting. Are you all ready to begin? Stan - Room 1 - your group. Lovely bunch, really in into it. (*Macdonald goes in*) Bill - Room 2. All ready and waiting for you. Got some really t tuned-in people in there, Bill. (*Dayville goes in*) "And Mel - Room 3 . . .

Baskin-Robbins: They sound kind of angry. What's goin' on in there?

Basil: Ha, ha. Well, yes, just warming up - doing a little psychodrama - getting into their sub-personalities, you know.

Baskin-Robbins: I can't get the door open. They must've locked it.

Basil: Ha! Playing out their imprisonment fantasies. Yes, well, we'll soon find a key.

Baskin-Robbins: Hmm. I didn't believe it when they said the British were all passive resisters . . .

Basil: Yes - here we are now. Ready? Right . . . (*Unlocks door, pushes him in, locks door. Noise, and a howl from Baskin-Robbins. More noise. Covers his ears, returns to desk, sits down and starts reading **I'm OK, You're OK.***)

Sybil: (enters) OK, dear? All sorted out?

Basil: Mmm. (*head in book*)

Sybil: That's a noisy group, Basil. What's going on in there?

- Basil:** Oh, it's thumbs down. I mean, the lions have got him - I mean, the groups got a lot of energy going, don't you think? Baskin-Robbins - Release from Release.
- Sybil:** Basil??
- Basil:** They're doing a spot of discharge. Good for the old system. Colonic irrigation would probably work just as well . . .
- Sybil:** Basil! I think someone's being torn apart.
- Basil:** Yes, well it's a marathon . . .
- Sybil:** Baskin-Robbins isn't doing a marathon . . .
- Basil:** He is now.
- Sybil:** The noise is dreadful. What will the neighbours say?
- Basil:** They're saying it. I mean - let them say it.
- Sybil:** Well . . . I don't know . . .
- Basil** No. You don't know, do you? That's you all over, isn't it? Always in your head . . . Why don't you just shut your eyes and get in touch with what you're feeling?
- Sybil:** You don't have to be nasty, Basil. I'm only trying to take responsibility for my process . . . (*She goes off upstairs*)
- Basil:** (*Stares at Room 3. Picks up 'phone, dials.*) Hallo. Is that EST? Yes . . . This is the Fawlty Growth Centre. Could you send one of your people down here right away . . . ?
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