

# RIVERS, FIRST DRAFT

## working script, cast list, production credits

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O'Grady's most autobiographical performance was a "three-ring" simultaneous narrative performed one time only in the Loch section of Central Park on August 18 for "Art Across the Park," curated by Gilbert Coker and Horace Brockington. This script, redrafted until the day of performance, and a set of photo-documents are the only remains.

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### STILL IMAGES (SILENT)

#### 1. **The Woman in the White Kitchen**

On the near bank of the stream, there is a house frame of 2 x 4's painted enamel white. It is of the front of the house only and has no wall.

On the ground, in front of the frame and extending inside the "house," is a bed of white pebbles forming a square white garden. It flows from under the kitchen furniture which consists of a white stool and miniature white table.

A brown-skinned woman wearing a white halter dress and white wedgies, with a 40s hair style (pompador type) and bright red lipstick, sits at the table preparing white food — either grating coconut, or flaking codfish and mixing it with chopped onion and flour.

In front of the house frame is an artificial potted plant: it is a fir-palm (the combination hybrid of a fir and a palm) and seems to be a metaphor for the West Indian transplanted to New England.

In the kitchen, a short-wave radio tuned to a New York station (WLIB) blasts a 5-minute newscast delivered in a West Indian accent. The broadcast has been creatively taped by selecting out the most pompous statements, the most stereotypically eager to appear sophisticated and American, and repeating them.

The image that the Woman-in-White projects with her repetitive grating, flaking, chopping, or sifting actions is that of a perfectionist, not one who is tight and determined, but more relaxed — her perfectionism seems less an inner need to *be* perfect than a need to *appear* perfect to the alien world in which she now lives.

Her activity continues uninterrupted throughout the entire performance, from just before the start of the West Indian newscast until after the procession goes down the stream at the end.

## 2. **The Nantucket Memorial**

A statuary complex reminiscent of New England granite. One or two men, in nor'easters, slickers and fishermen's boots, enter the stream at the same time the Woman-in-White sits down at her kitchen table. They wear a rowboat structure suspended from their bodies in such a way as to leave their hands free. On the side facing the audience, the boat is painted with the words "NANTUCKET MEMORIAL." The whaler(s) stand still as statues in the boat, hands resting on its frame. The whole image, men and boat, is colored granite grey.

The stone whaler(s) are positioned at the far end of the stream, standing perfectly still all the while, until the next-to-last scene. They should look and feel (and be ignored) like statues that are part of the park landscape, ultimately blending in.

### 3. **Black Male Artists in Yellow**

On the other side of the stream, behind a grey door off the castle corridor (the space of the castle is marked by four tall poles with grey banners), there are four black men dressed in yellow shirts and black pants.

The men are engaged in silent intellectual and artistic activities — reading, writing, drawing, painting, whatever. They can be working individually and consulting with each other occasionally. Or two can be working individually, two collaboratively.

Whatever activities they are engaged in, their impression is of concentration, engagement (whether of pleasure or of frustration) with what they are doing.

They are in place at the start of the performance, and except for their interruption by the woman in red, they remain totally enclosed in their own world(s). They pay no attention to the movements and sounds going on in the rest of the performance, and continue to do so through the end of the performance.

## STILL IMAGES (SPEAKING)

### 1. **Young Girl in White Memorizing Lessons**

Approximately 2-3 minutes after the Woman-in-White and "The Nantucket Memorial" have taken their places, and the West Indian broadcast begins in the woman's kitchen, a young, fair-skinned black girl, about 10-12 years old, comes out and occupies a space midway between the audience and the stream.

The girl is wearing a white cardboard Greek helmet (like that worn by Pallas Athena), a short white organdy dress (rather sedate), white ankle socks and shoes, with a bright pink sash around her waist, and she is carrying a green Harvard book bag over her shoulder that is filled with books. Though she looks dressed for a party, she is actually about to do her homework.

Over the sound of the West Indian radio broadcast, which gradually lowers and disappears, the girl begins to memorize her lessons by rote: she studies, in order: Section 297 of Bennet's *New Latin Grammar*, "Substantive Clauses of Result"; Section 324, "Subjunctive by Attraction"; and the 1775 resolution of Congress ordering the Convention of Massachusetts Bay to call an Assembly for electing a Council to govern the colony in place of the King's Governor.

The girl's activity of memorizing continues until the next-to-last scene, her voice ebbing and flowing depending on whether or not it is reinforced, with the Latin phrases and their English translations acting at times as a kind of poetic comment on the rest of the action.

For instance, over the section in which the debauchees dance in the castle corridor, such phrases as: *ex quo efficitur, ut voluptas non sit summum bonum*, FROM WHICH IT FOLLOWS THAT PLEASURE IS NOT THE GREATEST GOOD; and *gravitas morbi facit ut medicina egeamus*, THE SEVERITY OF DISEASE MAKES US NEED MEDICINE.

Over the section where the Woman in Red enters and attempts to stay in the room with the Black Male Artists in Yellow, who are artists and intellectuals, such phrases as: *cum diversas causas afferrent, dum formam sui quisque et animi et ingenii redderent*, THEY BROUGHT FORWARD DIFFERENT ARGUMENTS, WHILE EACH MIRRORED HIS OWN INDIVIDUAL TYPE OF MIND AND NATURAL BENT.

When each of the two lessons from Bennet's *New Latin Grammar* is successfully completed, the little girl recites a poem from memory that begins:

“Back home deep in the woods of Vermont,  
I dropped the first atomic bomb.

Good old Yankee know-how:  
ten years, a few good men  
and stubbornness beyond belief

The center held. . .”

and ends with:

“Come to our place for Thanksgiving.  
We'll serve you the Caribbean with all the  
trimmings.

Come to Jamaica — all we have to offer is  
three days on an island  
where dance is a way of life

Isn't it time you took a vacation?”

The actress should bear in mind that the combined lessons take a total of 6 minutes and the poem takes 1 minute to recite at a normal pace, and time herself accordingly, keeping aware of the pace of the other actions. She may have to contract or expand the action of memorizing, depending on what else is happening. She needs to be beginning to memorize

the Resolution of Congress Concerning the Massachusetts Bay Colony while the Woman in Red is still in the castle kitchen, but she doesn't have to finish memorizing the Resolution. It is OK if her memorization is interrupted when it is time for her to go into the stream.

The actress should set her microphone so that her voice competes equally with the West Indian newscast at the beginning, or is slightly lower. Later, the setting should be increased to allow her voice to drown out the New Wave and reggae music on the other side of the stream.

In addition, the sound of her voice should go in and out. She only goes on mike when she can do the recitation. In other words, a couple of attempts, either in a normal voice or silently while clearly mouthing the words, then a third successful recitation on mike. Tasks should be broken down, so that there is only one Latin phrase and English translation at a time. Probably the Resolution of Congress should be recited in blocks of 3 or 4 lines.

Overall, the affect the little girl gives should be one of intelligence and vitality, of creative energy being used up by these reductive exercises, without her seeming to mind. She enjoys what she is doing, takes pride in accomplishing her tasks.

The actress should feel free to sit, stand, pace back and forth, engage in any activities she feels natural to the process of memorizing and reciting.

## 2. **Art Snobs**

The two Art Snobs come on during the action of the Debauchees, about the same time that the Woman in Red begins circling the other dancers. Wearing purple and electric blue T-shirts and motorcycle goggles,

they stand on the path that represents the castle parapet. They are carrying megaphone/microphones and engaging in conversation.

The Art Snobs are the opposite of the Debauchees. Instead of being self-involved, they give the impression of having no selves at all, of being all-concerned with outward effect and impressions. They carry on a snobbish "who's who and what's what in the art world" conversation guaranteed to make everyone who hears it feel put down. They are more shallow than intellectual, but they are just intellectual ENOUGH to give their comments a cutting edge.

Since the Art Snobs come on about 7:30 into the performance and cut out at about 21:00 minutes, this gives them about 13.30 minutes of extemporaneous conversation. As opposed to the Little Girl's rote memorization, their exchanges are totally improvised, with the actors chosen for their knowledge of the art world. Their conversation is in counterpoint with the Little Girl's school lessons. Their voices should be over and under hers, as well as over and under the New Wave and Reggae music that is on the soundtrack at that time.

But whereas the Little Girl's lesson recitations have almost the effect of poetic comment on the action, the Art Snobs' commentary should have the effect of social static, the stuff that goes on constantly as while we lead our private, inner lives — media overload, too many social and professional obligations, distracting phone calls, and the petty jealousies that keep us from developing our best potential. The effect of the Art Snobs on the Woman-in-Red, though she pays no apparent attention to them throughout the performance, or if she does, only as though to one more distracting message she can't quite get, is to make her feel badly, put down, and above all, aware of passing time. They make her feel out of it, as if she

is going to have to do *something* either to catch up with them or to make them not count.

## MOVING IMAGES

### 1. **The Debauchees**

About two minutes after the entrance of the Little Girl Memorizing Her Lessons, music starts up on the other side of the stream. It sounds very New Wave (e.g. Gang of Four, et al) and contrasts strongly with the image of the little girl reciting her Latin lesson. If there is more than one source of sound, the New Wave music will gradually drown out the West Indian talk show, if there is just one sound source it will simply replace it.

Approximately 30 seconds after the music begins, four dancers in exotic costumes made of brightly colored silk ranging in hue from pure yellow to pure red begin to dance randomly, individually, but somewhat following the lead of the dancer in yellow.

The first two dancers are white women, the third a white man in an orange-ish dress, the fourth a mulatto woman in red.

The effect each dancer should give is of a totally self-involved pursuit of private pleasure. A waking dream, with music, movement, individual props such as wine bottles, hand mirrors, etc. The selection of props and quality of image should be left up to each dancer to fulfill his/her private fantasy of self-absorption.

The only dancer without props is the woman in red.

2. **The Woman in Red**

The Debauchees first come into view dancing along the imaginary stone corridor of the castle. Two minutes after their entrance, the Woman in Red separates out from the group (she entered last in line).

While the other Debauchees make their slow progress along the corridor, the Woman in Red begins to move somewhat faster. She circles in and out of the Debauchees, as if trying to interact with them. They stay completely self-absorbed, paying her no attention.

3. **Girl in Magenta**

A fair-skinned black girl/woman, about 18 years old, comes out onto the near bank of the stream. She is dressed in a tube top and a pair of peddle-pushers that are halfway in color between the Little Girl's bright pink sash and the Woman in Red's carmine dress.

The Girl in Magenta is obviously depressed. When she comes on, she walks listlessly, with her head down, her eyes not focusing (if the actress has any private "depression habits," they will come in handy here). However, she isn't definitively depressed. She goes in and out of self-absorption and shallow awareness of the surrounding environment. When the Young Man in Green comes strolling up the bank from the opposite end of the stream, she gradually becomes aware of him.

4. **Young Man in Green**

He is considerably older than the Girl in Magenta, about 27, and this will ultimately be the source of difficulty. He responds to the Girl in Magenta's overtures tentatively, but she is very persuasive. Throughout their lovemaking, which is quite gentle, he is thoughtful and attentive. However, when it is over, he is searching for a way to let her down easy, so that he can leave.

The Girl in Magenta compulsively tries to hold on to him. She has not really been relating to him, but rather using him as a way to escape from her depression. If he goes, she will be alone again.

When the Young Man in Green discovers that he is basically an object, it turns him off and makes it easier for him to break away rather abruptly.

After the Young Man in Green leaves, the Girl in Magenta feels terribly afraid. Now she goes into an even deeper depression, so deep that after wandering about in a daze, she lies down and goes to sleep on the bank of the stream. Her lying down is in preparation for the Woman in Red's lying down on the bed jutting out into the stream. When the Girl in Magenta lies down, the Art Snobs leave.

## 5. **The Woman in Gold**

After circling and intersecting the Debauchees and getting no response from them, and perhaps having been made a little uneasy by the conversation of the Art Snobs overheard on the parapet, the Woman in Red begins to dance in a different direction from the other Debauchees. She starts slowly down the corridor toward the grey door.

About a minute and a half later, she reaches the door and tries to open it. It is stuck closed. She tries and tries, and after about half a minute, she is finally able

to get into the room where the Black Men in Yellow have been engaged in silent intellectual and artistic pursuits from the beginning of the performance.

When she sees what they are doing, the Woman in Red tries to join in their activities. The Black Artists in Yellow firmly refuse to let her stay. They quickly escort her to the door and point out to her the way downstairs.

But instead of going downstairs, the Woman in Red dances back up the corridor. Soon she is intersected by the Debauchees who are coming back down again.

The Woman-in-Gold, the dancer leading the Debauchees, pins the Woman in Red against an imaginary wall and makes love to her against her will, but without the Woman in Red protesting too strongly.

When the Woman in Gold breaks away and continues dancing with the others, the indignity of this experience seems to have strengthened the Woman in Red's will. She begins to move back down the corridor and to descend the stairs, slowly, hesitantly. It takes her a minute and a half to reach the castle kitchen.

## 6. **The Production Assistants**

As the Woman in Red approaches the castle kitchen, reggae music begins playing on a radio in the Woman-in-White's kitchen, with cuts from Jimmy Cliff's "Unlimited" album — "Under the Sun, Moon, and Stars," and "On My Life." The New Wave music has already cut out a minute earlier, and the Debauchees have disappeared. The Girl in Magenta and the Young Man in Green, their lovemaking spent, are lying quietly. The Art Snobs and the Little Girl, after being temporarily quiet, start up again under the sound of the reggae music.

When the Woman in Red picks up a spray can and starts painting the stove red, the Girl in Magenta tries to make love to the Young Man in Green again, but he resists.

The Woman in Red picks up a red enamel pot and appears to cook something, which, when she tastes it, seems to be missing something. At this point, the Young Man in Green breaks free from the Girl in Magenta.

The two production assistants bring an accordion-folded photo album, made of 50 to 75 eight-by-ten black-and-white glossies. It takes all three of them, including the Woman in Red to hold it as she looks at the images. They keep folding and unfolding it, as it seems to go on forever. When she is ready to lie down, the PA's fold up the album and give it to her to take with her to bed. During the process of looking at the album, the reggae music stops and the Art Snobs disappear. The Little Girl continues, her voice the only sound.

## 7. **The Nude Swimmer**

As the Woman in Red lies down on the bed with the folded photo album, the Little Girl's voice continues reciting, the Girl in Magenta is lying down on the bank in a depressed sleep, the Black Men in Yellow continue their silent intellectual and artistic activities behind the grey door off the castle corridor, the Woman-in-White continues grating coconut in her now silent white kitchen, and the Nantucket Memorial statue stands in its place at the far end of the stream.

The Woman in Red lays the photo album down on the bed beside her and (depending on the prop) either watches a movie on TV or goes to sleep and dreams.

Suddenly the image she is seeing (either watching TV or dreaming) materializes physically. A nude swimmer comes onto the bed where she is lying (either through the TV screen or out from under the bed, emerging from the end nearest her head), and brushkisses her lightly in a sweeping, rolling motion, and then says: "I'm not interested in meaning or significance or importance."

Next the two Production Assistants come to the foot of the bed and say: "And what about the Bomb?" "Will anything last?"

As if responding to this, the Woman in Red breaks free of the Nude Swimmer and forces him off the bed.

Apparently trying to get back to something real, she picks up the photo album and looks at it again, carefully, as if either remembering or making aesthetic decisions, it's hard to tell.

## 8. **The Nantucket Memorial**

Soon after the Woman in Red has started perusing the photo album again, the whaler in the Nantucket Memorial suddenly begins to furiously bail for dear life. As he does, the Little Girl concludes her recitation and stays quite still.

Now the Nantucket Memorial moves purposefully toward the Woman in Red lying on her bed. When he reaches her, he extends his hand and helps her enter the stream. As he does, the sound of a woman's voice, singing the Episcopal Advent hymn "O Come Emmanuel" in a flat West Indian accent, begins.

While the Nantucket Memorial waits for her in the stream, the Woman in Red approaches the bank where the Girl in Magenta lies asleep and the Little Girl stands quietly. The Woman in Red bends down

over the Girl in Magenta, and as she does, the Little Girl, in her white dress and bright pink sash, comes toward them. Together, the Little Girl and the Woman in Red rouse the Girl in Magenta from her deep sleep. They put their arms around her and incline their heads toward her reassuringly and help her into the stream.

As the Nantucket Memorial precedes down the stream and the West Indian woman’s voice continues to sing the Advent hymn, the three figures — the Woman in Red, the Girl in Magenta, and the Little Girl with Pink Sash — walk together toward the end of the stream. They are not holding hands nor are their arms linked, but their attitudes are obviously relaxed and friendly toward each other. Every once in a while the Woman in Red spontaneously hugs the Girl in Magenta.

On either bank of the stream, the Black Male Artists in Yellow and the Woman in the White Kitchen continue as before.

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**c a s t**

WOMAN IN WHITE.....Marilyn Worrel  
NANTUCKET MEMORIAL.....Robert Feinberg  
MALE ARTISTS.....Lorenzo Pace, Noah Jemison, George Mingo  
LITTLE GIRL.....Bouqui Kya-Hill  
ART SNOBS.....Andrea Radu, Cesar Palma

WOMAN IN GOLD.....Beverly Trachtenberg  
DEBAUCHEES.....Francine Berman, Richard De Gussi  
WOMAN IN RED.....Lorraine O'Grady  
TEENAGER.....Darnell Martin  
YOUNG MAN.....Fred Wilson  
THE PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS.....Emily Velde, Bern 1905  
NUDE SWIMMER.....Richard De Gussi

## **p r o d u c t i o n   c r e d i t s**

WRITER, PRODUCER.....Lorraine O'Grady  
DIRECTORS.....Lorraine O'Grady, Ellen Sragow, Emily Velde  
COSTUME DESIGNER.....Bern 1905  
SET DESIGNERS.....Noah Jemison, Lorenzo Pace  
SOUND EDITOR.....Richard De Gussi  
NEW WAVE TAPE.....Bill O'Connor  
WEST INDIAN NEWSCAST.....Claude Tate, WLIB  
FLYERS AND PROGRAMS.....Beverly Trachtenberg  
ATHENA HELMET.....Fons

MUSIC CREDITS:

Jimmy Cliff, "Under the Sun, Moon, and Stars," "On My Life,"

Warner Bros. Records

Nina Hagan, "Smack Jack," by F. Karmelk, CBS Records

Tom Tom Club, "Wordy Rappinghood," Sire Records

John Foxx, "Metal Beat," Island Music Ltd.

Public Image Ltd., "Graveyard," Warner Bros. Records