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"The Invisible Foot" By Steve Taylor

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***The Invisible Foot* by Steve Taylor**

Lee Devin

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The Invisible Foot is wonderful! Very smart, dialogue I can hear in my mind's ear, great ideas clearly and poetically presented. Growth as an addictive drug: outstanding.

It is not, strictly speaking, a script to make into a play. It's a Platonic Dialogue. And a damned good one.

Why is it not a play?

Plays imitate human actions. They do this by presenting characters *doing*: suffering, deliberating, and choosing. An idea spoken by an actor isn't a character. Plays almost always concern family. Once in a while there's one that doesn't, but that's very rare. Rhetoric, the skill of finding the best possible argument, rarely works as drama; drama, the art that imitates human action.

Example. To prepare for rehearsal, a director first studies a play's form. That's the script's arrangement of repetitions, it's plot. Second, s/he begins to discover and invent the given circumstances of the play's action. Where does it take place? Who are the characters? Where do they live? What social background, position, aspirations do they have? What brings them together? What does each need to accomplish by coming to this place, at this time? How does each perceive each of the others? Are they friends? Enemies? Will they help? or hinder?

This script needs and offers no answers to these questions. So, it's not a script we can use to make a play.

What is it then? It's a form nearly as old as drama, a Platonic Dialogue. A damn' good one. Plato created discussions of his ideas in dialogue as a way to present them to his readers. We call the participants (Socrates, Glaucon, etc.) characters, but they aren't the same as characters in a play. Socrates says what he says in order to advance Plato's argument; Oedipus says what he says because it's the only way he can get what he needs. Characters in plays often make arguments (Bernard Shaw, for example.) but their arguments advance an effort to relieve a need or achieve a goal. Now, *The Invisible Foot* includes materials that are *potentially* dramatic: the two women (until one of the women becomes Satan). But that's not enough.

Characters in a play do three actions: they suffer, they deliberate, and they decide what to do. Plays mostly don't show the doing, it's the choice that's important. You can describe a play's action as a character suffers, thinks of all the things s/he could do about that, and chooses one. Here's an example from *Hamlet*. Suffering:

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,

But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
 Could force his soul so to his whole conceit
 That from her workings all his visage wanned
 Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
 A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
 With forms to his conceit?

That the player can willfully cause himself to cry, on cue, for a mere artistic purpose, amazes Hamlet. He compares that to his own difficulty in planning and executing a necessary revenge. After a while he quits suffering.

About my brain.--I have heard
 That guilty creatures, sitting at a play
 Have by the very cunning of the scene
 Been struck so to the soul that presently
 They have proclaimed their malefactions

Hamlet gets an idea and thinks it over. Should I, should I not? The devil may be misleading me; am I sure Claudius killed my father? Etc. He executes the character's second action: he deliberates.

And finally, he decides what to do.

I'll have these players
 Here play something like the murder of my father
 Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks,
 I'll tent him to the quick. If he but blench,
 I know my course.

....
 The play's the thing
 Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.

Normally, Shakespeare wouldn't stage the play within a play. And he doesn't do it in order to show the audience the details of what Hamlet decided. He uses it to present another example of the three actions: Claudius suffers (watches the play), deliberates (comes to understanding of the play's significance—Hamlet knows!), and makes a choice: he books. "Give me some light! Away!"

I go into this at length so that we can *properly* appreciate what Taylor has done in this wonderful piece. I'm told that Plato wrote pretty good dialogue; scholars who don't care if you can say those words aloud have made uniformly lame translations: they only want to read them silently. And, of course, that's what Plato wrote them for. I don't know this, but I'm pretty sure he didn't envisage casting and performing his dialogues.

Taylor writes such good dialogue, though, that I can easily, eagerly, imagine presenting *The Invisible Foot* to audiences. What a great way to introduce a discussion of these issues as they play out in contemporary culture. Imagine five good actors reading at music stands as the opening for a Deep Dive session at the AMA meetings. An audience alternately in stiches and agog at something terminally smart. Just think how much bullshit would be declared off limits by Taylor's excellent inventions.