Front centre, touching one another, three identical grey urns about one yard high. From each a head protrudes, the neck held fast in the urn's mouth. The heads are those, from left to right as seen from auditorium, of w2, m and w1. They face undeviatingly front throughout the play. Faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of urns. But no masks.

Their speech is provoked by a spotlight projected on faces alone.

The transfer of light from one face to another is immediate.

No blackout, i.e. return to almost complete darkness of opening, except where indicated.

The response to light is immediate.

Faces impassive throughout. Voices toneless except where an expression is indicated.

Rapid tempo throughout.

The curtain rises on a stage in almost complete darkness.

Urns just discernible. Five seconds.

Faint spots simultaneously on three faces. Three seconds. Voice faint, largely unintelligible.

w1: Yes, strange, darkness best, and the darker the worse, then all well, for the time, but it will come, the time will come, the thing is there, you'll see it, get off me, keep off me, all dark, all still, all over, wiped out--

w2: Yes, perhaps, a shade gone, I suppose, some might say, poor thing, a shade gone, just a shade, in the head--[Faint
wild laugh,]--just a shade, but I doubt it, I doubt it, not really, I'm all right, still all right, do my best, all I can--

Together.

M: Yes, peace, one assumed, all out, all the pain, all as if . . . never been, it will come--[Hiccup,]--pardon, no sense in this, oh I know . . . none the less, one assumed, peace . . . I mean . . . not merely all over, but as if . . . never been--

I said to him, Give her up--

One Morning as I was sitting--

We were not long together--

[Spots off. Blackout. Five seconds. Spot on W1.]

W1: I said to him, Give her up. I swore by all I held most sacred--

[Spot from w1 to w2.]

W2: One morning as I was sitting stitching by the open window she burst in and flew at me. Give me up, she screamed, he's mine. Her photographs were kind to her. Seeing her now for the first time full length in the flesh I understood why he preferred me.

[Spot from w2 to M.]

M: We were not long together when she smelled the rat. Give up that whore, she said, or I'll cut my throat--[Hiccup.] pardon--so help me God. I knew she could have no proof. So I told her I did not know what she was talking about.

[Spot from M to w2.]


[Spot from w2 to w1.]

W1: Though I had him dogged for months by a first-rate man, no shadow of proof was forthcoming. And there was no denying that he continued as . . . assiduous as ever. This, and his horror of the merely Platonic thing, made me sometimes wonder if I were not accusing him unjustly. Yes.

[Spot from w1 to M.]

M: What have you to complain of? I said. Have I been neglecting you? How could we be together in the way we are if there were someone else? Loving her as I did, with all my heart, I could not but feel sorry for her.

[Spot from M to W2.]

W2: Fearing she was about to offer me violence I rang for Erskine and had her shown out. Her parting words, as he could testify, if he is still living, and has not forgotten, coming and going on the earth, letting people in, showing people out, were to the effect that she would settle my hash. I confess this did alarm me a little, at the time.

[Spot from W2 to M.]

M: She was not convinced. I might have known. I smell her off you, she kept saying. There was no answer to this. So I took her in my arms and swore I could not live without her. I meant it, what is more. Yes, I am sure I did. She did not repulse me.

[Spot from M to W1.]

W1: Judge then of my astonishment when one fine morning, as I was sitting stricken in the morning room, he slunk in, fell on his knees before me, buried his face in my lap and . . . confessed.

[Spot from W1 to M.]

M: She put a bloodhound on me, but I had a little chat with him. He was glad of the extra money.

[Spot from M to W2.]
W2: Why don't you get out, I said, when he started moaning about his home life, there is obviously nothing between you any more. Or is there?

W1: I confess my first feeling was one of wonderment. What a male!

M: The next thing was the scene between them. I can't have her crashing in here, she said, threatening to take my life. I must have looked incredulous. Ask Erskine, she said, if you don't believe me. But she threatens to take her own, I said. Not yours? she said. No, I said, hers. We had fun trying to work this out.

W1: Then I forgave him. To what will love not stoop! I suggested a little jaunt to celebrate, to the Riviera or our darling Grand Canary. He was looking pale. Peaked. But this was not possible just then. Professional commitments.

W2: She came again. Just strolled in. All honey. Licking her lips. Poor thing. I was doing my nails, by the open window. He has told me all about it, she said. Who he, I said filing away, and what it? I know what torture you must be going through, she said, and I have dropped in to say I bear you no ill-feeling. I rang for Erskine.

M: Then I got frightened and made a clean breast of it. She was looking more and more desperate. She had a razor in her vanity-bag. Adulterers, take warning, never admit.

W1: When I was satisfied it was all over I went to have a gloat. Just a common tart. What he could have found in her when he had me--

W2: When he came again we had it out. I felt like death. He went on about why he had to tell her. Too risky and so on. That meant he had gone back to her. Back to that!

W1: Pudding face, puffy, spots, blubber mouth, jowls, no neck, drugs you could--

W2: He went on and on. I could hear a mower. An old hand mower. I stopped him and said that whatever I might feel I had no silly threats to offer--but not much stomach for her leavings either. He thought that over for a bit.

M: When I saw her again she knew. She was looking--[Hiccup.]--wretched. Pardon. Some fool was cutting grass. A little rush, then another. The problem was how to convince her that no . . . revival of intimacy was involved. I couldn't. I might have known. So I took her in my arms and said I could not go on living without her. I don't believe I could have.
W2: The only solution was to go away together. He swore we should as soon as he had put his affairs in order. In the meantime we were to carry on as before. By that he meant as best we could.

W1: So he was mine again. All mine. I was happy again. I went about singing. The world--

M: At home all heart to heart, new leaf and bygones bygones. I ran into your exdoxy, she said one night, on the pillow, you're well out of that. Rather uncalled for, I thought. I am indeed, sweetheart, I said, I am indeed. God what vermin women. Thanks to you, angel, I said.

W1: Then I began to smell her off him again. Yes.

W2: When he stopped coming I was prepared. More or less.

M: Finally it was all too much. I simply could no longer--

W1: Before I could do anything he disappeared. That meant she had won. That slut! I couldn't credit it. I lay stricken for weeks. Then I drove over to her place. It was all bolted and barred. All grey with frozen dew. On the way back by Ash and Snodland--

M: I simply could no longer--

W2: I made a bundle of his things and burnt them. It was November and the bonfire was going. All night I smelt them smouldering.

W1: Mercy, mercy--

M: When first this change--

W2: To say I am--

M: When first this change I actually thanked God. I thought, It is done, it is said, now all is going out--

W2: To say I am not disappointed, no, I am. I had anticipated something better. More restful.

W1: Or you will weary of me.

W1: Then I began to smell her off him again. Yes.

W2: When he stopped coming I was prepared. More or less.

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W1: Or you will weary of me.
other thing. Definitely. There are endurable moments.

W 2 : When you go out--and I go out. Some day you will tire of me and go out . . .

M : I thought.

W 2 : When you go out--and I go out. Some day you will tire of me and go out . . .

M : Peace, yes, I suppose, a kind of peace, and all that pain as if . . . never been.

W 2 : Give me up, as a bad job. Go away and start poking and pecking at
someone else. On the other hand--

W 2 : Give me up, as a bad job. Go away and start poking and pecking at
someone else. On the other hand--

M : It will come. Must come. There is no future in this.

W 2 : On the other hand things may disimprove, there is that danger.

M : Oh of course I know now--

W 1 : Is it that I do not tell the truth, is that it, that some day somehow I may tell
the truth at last and then no more light at last, for the truth?

W 2 : You might get angry and blaze me clean out of my wits. Mightn't you?

M : I know now, all that was just . . . play. And all this? When will all this--

W 1 : Is that it?

W 2 : Mightn't you?

M : All this, when will all this have been . . . just play?

W 1 : I can do nothing . . . for anybody . . . any more . . . thank God. So it must
be something I have to say. How the mind works still!

W 2 : But I doubt it. It would not be like you somehow. And you must know I am
doing my best. Or don’t you?

M : Perhaps they have become friends. Perhaps sorrow--

W 1 : But I have said all I can. All you let me. All I--

M : Perhaps sorrow has brought them together.

W 2 : No doubt I make the same mistake as when it was the sun that shone, of
looking for sense where possibly there is none.
M : Perhaps they meet, and sit, over a cup of that green tea they both so loved, without milk or sugar not even a squeeze of lemon--

[Spot from M to W2.]

W 2 : Are you listening to me? Is anyone bothering about me at all?

[Spot from W2 to M.]

M : Not even a squeeze of--

[Spot from M to W1.]

W 1 : Is it something I should do with my face, other than utter? Weep?

[Spot from w1 to w2.]

W 2 : Am I taboo, I wonder. Not necessarily, now that all danger is averted. That poor creature--I can hear her--that poor creature--

[Spot from w2 to w1.]

W 1 : Bite off my tongue and swallow it? Spit it out? Would that placate you? How the mind works still to be sure!

[Spot from W1 to M.]

M : Meet, and sit, now in the one dear place, now in the other, and sorrow together, and compare--[Hiccup.] pardon-- happy memories.

[Spot from M to W1.]

W 1 : If only I could think. There is no sense in this . . . either, none whatsoever. I can't.

[Spot from w1 to w2.]

W 2 : That poor creature who tried to seduce you, what ever became of her, do you suppose?--I can hear her. Poor thing.

[Spot from W2 to M.]

M : Personally I always preferred Lipton's.

[Spot from M to W1.]

W 1 : And that all is falling, all fallen, from the beginning, on empty air. Nothing being asked at all. No one asking me for anything at all.

[Spot from w1 to w2.]

W 2 : They might even feel sorry for me, if they could see me. But never so sorry as I for them.

[Spot from w2 to w1.]

W 1 : I can't

[Spot from w1 to w2.]

W 2 : Kissing their sour kisses.

[Spot from W2 to M.]

M : I pity them in any case, yes, compare my lot with theirs, however blessed, and--

[Spot from M to W1.]

W 1 : I can't. The mind won't have it. It would have to go. Yes.

[Spot from W1 to M.]

M : Pity them.

[Spot from M to W2.]

W 2 : What do you do when you go out? Shift?

[Spot from W2 to M.]

M : Am I hiding something? Have I lost--

[Spot from M to W1.]

W 1 : She had means, I fancy, though she lived like a pig.

[Spot from W1 to W2.]

W 2 : Like dragging a great roller, on a scorching day. The strain . . . to get it
moving, momentum coming--

[Spot off W2. Blackout. Three seconds. Spot on W2.]

W 2 : Kill it and strain again.

[Spot from W2 to M.]

M : Have I lost . . . the thing you want? Why go out? Why go--

[Spot from M to W2.]

W 2 : And you perhaps pitying me, thinking. Poor thing, she needs a rest.

[Spot from W2 to W1.]

W 1 : Perhaps she has taken him away to live . . . somewhere in the sun.

[Spot from W1 to M.]

M : Why go down? Why not--

[Spot from M to W2.]

W 2 : I don't know.

[Spot from W2 to W1.]

W 1 : Perhaps she is sitting somewhere, by the open window, her hands folded in her lap, gazing down out over the olives--

[Spot from W1 to M.]

M : Why not keep on glaring at me without ceasing? I might start to rave and--

[Hiccup.]--bring it up for you. Par--

[Spot from M to W2.]

W 2 : No.

[Spot from W2 to M.]

M : --don

[Spot from M to W1.]

W 1 : Gazing down out over the olives, then the sea, wondering what can be keeping him, growing cold. Shadow stealing over everything, Creeping. Yes.

[Spot from W1 to M.]

M : To think we were never together.

[Spot from M to W2.]

W 2 : Am I not perhaps a little unhinged already?

[Spot from W2 to W1.]

W 1 : Poor creature. Poor creatures.

[Spot from W1 to M.]

M : Never woke together, on a May morning, the first to wake to wake the other two. Then in a little dinghy--

[Spot from M to W1.]

W 1 : Penitence, yes, at a pinch, atonement, one was resigned, but no, that does not seem to be the point either.

[Spot from W1 to W2.]

W 2 : I say, Am I not perhaps a little unhinged already? [Hopefully.] Just a little?

[Pause.] I doubt it.

[Spot from W2 to M.]

M : A little dinghy--

[Spot from M to W1.]

W 1 : Silence and darkness were all I craved. Well, I get a certain amount of both. They being one. Perhaps it is more wickedness to pray for more.

[Spot from W1 to M.]

M : A little dinghy, on the river, I resting on my oars, they lolling on air-pillows in the stern . . . sheets. Drifting. Such fantasies.

[Spot from M to W1.]
W 1 : Hellish half-light.
[Spot from W 1 to W 2.]
[Spot from W 2 to M.]
M : We were not civilized.
[Spot from M to W 1.]
W 1 : Dying for dark--and the darker the worse. Strange.
[Spot from W 1 to M.]
M : Such fantasies. Then. And now--
[Spot from M to W 2.]
W 2 : I doubt it.
[Pause. Peal of wild low laughter from W 2 cut short as spot from her to W 1.]
W 1 : Yes, and the whole thing there, all there, staring you in the face. You will see it. Get off me. Or weary.
[Spot from W 1 to M.]
M : And now, that you are . . . mere eye. Just looking. At my face. On and off.
[Spot from M to W 1.]
W 1 : Weary of playing with me. Get off me. Yes.
[Spot from W 1 to M.]
[Spot from M to W 2. Laugh as before from W 2 cut short as spot from her to M.]
M : Mere eye. No mind. Opening and shutting on me. Am I as much--
[Spot off. Blackout. Three seconds. Spot on M.]
As I much as . . . being seen?
[Spot off M. Blackout. Five seconds. Faint spots simultaneously on three faces. Three seconds. Voices faint largely unintelligible.]

W 1 : Yes, strange, etc.
W 2 : [Together] Yes, perhaps, etc.
M : Yes, peace, etc.

[Repeat play.]
M : [Closing repeat.] Am I as much as . . . being seen?
[Spot off M. Blackout. Five seconds. Strong spots simultaneously on three faces. Three seconds. Voices normal strength.]

W 1 : I said to him. Give her up--
W 2 : [Together] One morning as I was sitting--
M : We were not long together--

[Spots off. Blackout. Five seconds. Spot on M.]
M : We were not long together--
[Spot off M. Blackout. Five seconds.]

CURTAIN
LIGHT

The source of light is single and must not be situated outside the ideal space (stage) occupied by its victims.

The optimum position for the spot is at the centre of the footlights, the faces being thus lit at close quarters and from below.

When exceptionally three spots are required to light the three faces simultaneously, they should be as single spot branching into three.

Apart from these moments a single mobile spot should be used, swivelling at maximum speed from one face to another as required.

The method consisting in assigning to each face a separate fixed spot is unsatisfactory in that it is less expressive of a unique inquisitor than the single mobile spot.

CHORUS

| W 1  | Yes strange | darkness best | and the darker | the worse |
| W 2  | Yes perhaps | a shade gone | I suppose | some might say |
| M    | Yes peace   | one assumed | all out | all the pain |
| W 1  | till all dark | then all well | for the time | but it will come |
| W 2  | poor thing | asshade gone | just a shade | in the head |
| M    | all as if | never been | it will come | [Hiccup.] pardon |
| W 1  | the time will come | the thing is there | you'll see it | |
| W 2  | [Laugh . . . ] | just a shade | but I doubt it | |
| M    | no sense in this | oh I know | none the less | |
| W 1  | get off me | keep off me | all dark | all still |
| W 2  | I doubt it | not really | I’m all right | still all right |
| M    | one assumed | peace I mean | not merely | all over |
| W 1  | all over | wiped out-- | | |
| W 2  | do my best | all I can-- | | |
| M    | but as if | never been-- | | |

URNS

In order for the urns to be only one yard high, it is necessary either that traps be used, enabling the actors to stand below stage level, or that they kneel throughout play, the urns being open at the back.

Should traps be not available, and the kneeling posture found impracticable, the actors should stand, the urns be enlarged to full length and moved back from front to mid-stage, the tallest actor setting the height, the broadest the breadth, to which the three urns should conform.

The sitting posture results in urns of unacceptable bulk and is not to be considered.
REPEAT

The repeat may be an exact replica of first statement or it may present an element of variation.

In other words, the light may operate the second time exactly as it did the first (exact replica) or it may try a different method (variation).

The London production (and in a lesser degree the Paris production) opted for the variation with following deviations from first statement:

1. Introduction of an abridged chorus, cut short on laugh of w 2, to open fragment of second repeat.
2. Light less strong in repeat and voices correspondingly lower, giving the following schema, where A is the highest level of light and voice and E the lowest

C First chorus.
A First part of 1. 1
B Second part of 1.
D Second chorus.
B First part of Repeat 1. Repeat 1
C Second part of Repeat 1.
E Abridged chorus.
C Fragment of Repeat 2.

3. Breathless quality in voices from beginning of Repeat 1 and increasing to end of play.
4. Changed order of speeches in repeat as far as this is compatible with unchanged continuity for actors. E.g. the order of interrogation w 1, w 2, M, w2, w1, M at opening of 1 becomes w2, w1, M, w2, M, w1 at opening of repeat, and so on if and as desired.