

The Typists

Murray Schisgal

Premiere: Orpheum Theatre, New York City, 1963

Setting: An office

Paul Cunningham, a bright young man in his twenties, is going to law school at night. Today is his first day of work at an office job, typing addresses from the phone book onto postcards. Paul's co-worker Sylvia Payton shows him the ropes. She's Paul's age and is attracted to him. Between postcards they chat, until suddenly both of them stop and stare out at the audience. One after the other, they tell their life stories. From this point, the play progresses surrealistically. As the two typists work toward the end of the alphabet, they grow older and older. By the end of the "workday," they're both in their sixties.

Monologue One: Paul

Monologue Two: Sylvia

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Murray Schisgal comments: "The monologues in the play were used to break the fourth-wall convention. More important, though, was the characters' need to justify their lives to strangers, i.e., the audience. Monologue does not permit of contradiction or interrogation. It is the ultimate weapon of any character. 'Listen to me! Listen to me! I have something to tell you!' And we must listen to him. He doesn't give us a chance to talk.

"The theatre started with the monologue and it will end with a monologue. 'Listen to me! Listen to me!'"

— I —

PAUL

I was born in a poor section of Brooklyn. My parents were at each other's throat most of the time. It was a miserable childhood. I had no brothers or sisters; there was only the

three of us living in this old rundown house, with cats crying and screaming all night in the alley. Why my parents ever got married, I don't know, and why they stayed together for as long as they did I don't know that either. They're separated now. But it doesn't much matter any more. They were as unlike as any two people could be. All my father wanted was to be left alone to smoke his pipe and listen to the radio. My mother—she was a pretty woman, she knew how to dress, all right—she liked to go out and enjoy herself. I was stuck between the two of them and they pulled on both sides. I couldn't talk to one without the other accusing me of being ungrateful; I couldn't touch or kiss one of them without being afraid that the other one would see me and there would be a fight. I had to keep my thoughts to myself. I had to grow up wishing for some kind of miracle. I remember coming home from school one afternoon. I must have been twelve or thirteen. There was this man in the living room with my mother. They weren't doing anything; they were just sitting and talking. But I felt that something was going on. I seemed to stop breathing and I ran out of the house and threw up on the curbstone. Later on I swore to myself that I would make a miracle happen; that I wouldn't ever have to be where I didn't want to be and I wouldn't have to do what I didn't want to do; that I could be myself, without being afraid. But it's rough. With a background like mine you're always trying to catch up; it's as if you were born two steps behind the next fellow. (*They type, stop suddenly. They both stare at the audience, SYLVIA leaning forward, PAUL back in his chair, etc.*)

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SYLVIA

My family never had money problems. In that respect we were very fortunate. My father made a good living, while he was alive, that is. He passed away when I was seventeen. You could say he and my mother had a fairly happy mar-