

EVERYTHING MEANS SOMETHING ELSE

By Phillip Vassallo

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CAST:

MORT, 18, dressed in a black suit
DIDI, 17, dressed in a black skirt suit

SCENE: A funeral parlor, represented by six folding chairs on either side of a coffin draped in an American flag with a crucifix resting atop it.

TIME: Present

HISTORY: Everything Means Something Else premiered on April 19, 2003, at Rutgers University, New Jersey, presented by Pordenone Playwrights Productions, produced by Deborah S. Greenhut. It subsequently appeared on July 23, 2003, at Champion Studios, New York City, presented by the Italian-American Repertory Company, produced by John Fedele. It was directed by Philip Vassallo with the following cast:

MORT Keith Carne

DIDI Helen Vassallo

Everything Means Something Else was also presented on January 22, 2004, at the Albert Ellis Institute, 45 East 65th Street, New York City, as part of the program The Influence of General Semantics across Common and Uncommon Cultures, delivered by Philip Vassallo for the New York Society for General Semantics, Allen Flagg, President, and Martin Levinson, Vice-President. It was directed by Philip Vassallo with the following cast:

MORT Keith Carne

DIDI Kaitlin Rose

To my daughter, Elizabeth Vassallo

(MORT, holding a textbook, and DIDI, hands folded on her lap, sit at opposite ends of the coffin staring at it. Hold ten seconds.)

MORT: Did you hear from Mom?

DIDI: **(a faked, exaggerated accent)** No go.

MORT: I know what she said. But I didn't think she meant it.

DIDI: No go yo fatha's funeral.

MORT: Stop making fun of Mom.

DIDI: No go.

(Hold five seconds.)

MORT: **(thumbs through book, spots an interesting point, and has a revelation)** Before language, there were the things themselves.

(DIDI turns to him impassively.)

MORT: **(continued)** That's all. Just the things. And no words for them. Nothing to signify them.

DIDI: Oh?

MORT: **(acts out his examples)** Yes. You know that. Before words, we had only sounds. But they weren't enough. Like **(expressing uncertainty)** Huh? **(expressing a request for repetition)** Or huh. **(expressing amazement)** Wow. **(expressing anger)** Or wow. **(expressing fear)** Oooooh. **(expressing sexual pleasure)** Or oooooh. **(beat)** Just too imprecise to represent the objects and ideas of our world.

DIDI: Huh?

MORT: Think about it: If we were limited to these few sounds, we wouldn't be able to represent **(points to his suit)** or **(points to chair)** or **(points to coffin)**

(DIDI shrugs uninterestedly.)

MORT: **(continued)** That's no small matter. Believe me. Without a structured language, how would we understand concepts and distinguish among everything we see?

(DIDI shrugs unknowingly.)

MORT: **(continued)** Darn right. We'd be clueless. That's what makes us human. We need words to say what we mean. They're what we are.

(DIDI shakes head disagreeably.)

MORT: (**continued, challenging her challenge**) No question about it. We wouldn't be able to say more than a cat's screech or a dog's bark.

DIDI: (**does not act out these sounds but says them in rapid succession until she runs out**) Ah, ow, phew, tch, uh, umph, mmmmmm, grrrrrr, brrrrrr, rrrrrrr, uh-uh, hm-hmm, sheee, ga-ga goo-goo, tut-tut, hee-haw, da-du da-du da-du da-du da-du, wee-wee, he-he, rah-rah, Philadelphia.

MORT: See? You'd run out eventually.

(DIDI, up for the challenge, rapidly acts out the following sounds: car speeding and crashing, ambulance, air raid sirens, plane flying, bomb dropping and exploding, gunshot, thunder, waves hitting shore, phone ringing, saxophone, trumpet, harmonica, piano, organ, electric guitar, bass, drums.)

MORT: (**continued**) Are you finished?

DIDI: Uh-uh.

(DIDI acts out five or six unique but understandable sounds of her own invention and stares at him victoriously.)

MORT: And you think you'd get universal agreement on what those sounds mean?

DIDI: (**emphatically**) Words are no better. (**points to MORT's suit, mimes holding a hand of cards**) Your suit? Mine are straight aces. (**points to chair**) Will you chair the committee? (**points to coffin, coughs**) Coffin.

MORT: You're being ridiculous.

DIDI: Being? Or acting?

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