

MIRO GAVRAN

FORGET HOLLYWOOD

Premiered at the Epilogue Theatre in Zagreb in 1997.

Cast:

Matthew: Zoran Pokupec

Gabriel: Vedran Mlikota

Director: Zoran Muzic

Costumes: Durda Janes

Music: Prof. Mladen Dervenkar

Characters:

Gabriel, an actor 48 years old

Matthew, an aspiring actor 28 years old

(There is only one setting. It is a small rehearsal room, an improvised mixture between a ballet rehearsal room and a living room. The room has a frame for an 'empty' mirror, a bedside table with a telephone, one armchair, two ordinary chairs, an indoor exercise bike, and two swords and some photographs of Gabriel in various roles on the wall.)

SCENE 1.

(Gabriel is sitting in a large armchair which is lit like a royal throne. He is reciting a monologue from Shakespeare's *Richard III* - Act I - Sc. 1.)

GABRIEL: (...)

Grim-visaged war hath smooth'd his wrinkled front;

And now - instead of mounting barbed steeds

To fright the soul of fearful adversaries, -

*He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber
To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.
But I, - that am not shap'd for sportive tricks,
Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;
I, that am rudely stamp'd, and want love's majesty
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time
Into this breathing world scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them; -
Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to spy my shadow in the sun,
And descant on mine own deformity:
And therefore, - since I cannot prove a lover,
To entertain these fair well-spoken days, -
I am determin'd to prove a villain,
And hate the idle pleasures of these days,
Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous, ...*

(The phone rings and Gabriel gets up out of the armchair, goes to the phone and lifts the receiver.)

GABRIEL: Yes, yes... Yes, I am... Yes, it's me... Flower Square number three, second floor, exactly... what seems to be the problem...? You are on Preradovich Square and you can't find Floral Square? It's one and the same square, you are standing in it... alright, come on upstairs, second floor left.

(Gabriel replaces the receiver.)

GABRIEL: 'I can't find Flower Square' - God, what have I done to deserve such punishment?

(Gabriel takes a bottle of *rakiya* [fruit brandy] and a glass out of the bedside table. He pours himself a drink.)

(He returns the bottle to the bedside table. The front door-bell rings.)

GABRIEL: It's open.

(Matthew comes into the room.)

MATTHEW: Good day.

GABRIEL: Good day.

MATTHEW: I'm Matthew... just now on the phone, and yesterday...

GABRIEL: Alright, alright. I assumed it must be you.

(He looks at his watch.)

GABRIEL: You are ten minutes late.

MATTHEW: I apologise. I got on the wrong tram... I am in Zagreb so rarely, otherwise I planned everything to be here on time, but a lady at the stop told me to get on number eleven, and it should have been the twelve, so I...

GABRIEL: Good, it's alright. It can't be helped now anyway. Let's get down to cases - what was it you wanted to talk to me about?

MATTHEW: Didn't Ms Prpich tell you?

GABRIEL: She did mention something, but I have forgotten.

MATTHEW: Well, I thought... if you were interested, of course... as a renowned actor in the theatre...

GABRIEL: Film, too.

MATTHEW: Film, too, yes, I was wondering if you would be interested in preparing me for the entrance exam audition at the Academy.

GABRIEL: The acting entrance exam?

MATTHEW: Yes, the acting entrance exam.

GABRIEL: You want to be an actor?

MATTHEW: Well, yes, I do.

GABRIEL: But why?

MATTHEW: What do you mean, why?

GABRIEL: Why do you want to be an actor?

MATTHEW: So that I act. It's such a great profession. Isn't it?

GABRIEL: Well, it has its moments.

MATTHEW: I would like you to prepare me for the entrance exam audition, I heard that you had prepared quite a few who were accepted.

GABRIEL: Have you tried before?

MATTHEW: No, I haven't.

GABRIEL: Somehow you look familiar...

MATTHEW: I doubt it. I live in Rijeka.

GABRIEL: Ah yes, in Rijeka. Still, I seem to have seen you acting somewhere.

MATTHEW: With my amateur group perhaps. We have performed a lot in Rijeka and in Istria.

GABRIEL: I don't watch amateur performances. I don't have the stomach for it.

(Silence.)

MATTHEW: Would you agree to work with me?

GABRIEL: I am sorry, young man, but I simply don't have the time.

MATTHEW: I would be very grateful, even if you could only help me a little...

GABRIEL: I have obligations at the Academy and in the theatre, I am sorry, next year perhaps.

MATTHEW: It's still three months to the exam. I have never worked with a professional. Everyone says I have talent, but I know that I need the professional advice of someone like you, Ms Prpich said...

GABRIEL: Ms Prpich is a friend, that is she's my neighbour, but she doesn't have a clue about art and one of the reasons I have to say 'no' is that, right now, I am preparing two new roles.

MATTHEW: In which plays?

GABRIEL: *Richard III* at the Gavella Theatre, and *Faust* at the National. Both demanding and complex roles. Leading roles.

MATTHEW: So you can't help me?

GABRIEL: No, I can't. In any case, real actors are born, not made.

MATTHEW: Pity. I was prepared to pay whatever you asked.

(Matthew starts towards the door.)

GABRIEL: Perhaps I could find the time once or twice a week.

(Matthew pauses and turns back towards Gabriel.)

MATTHEW: I would be extremely grateful.

GABRIEL: In the evening perhaps.

MATTHEW: Wonderful. I can come at any time.

GABRIEL: Otherwise, I charge by the hour.

MATTHEW: Good.

GABRIEL: That's a school class hour - forty-five minutes.

MATTHEW: Good.

GABRIEL: In one day, I tutor for three successive hours.

MATTHEW: Good.

GABRIEL: Usually twice a week.

MATTHEW: Good.

GABRIEL: The price per hour is One Hundred and Fifty Kunas.

MATTHEW: A Hundred and Fifty Kunas!?

GABRIEL: Yes. Three hours - Four Hundred and Fifty Kunas. Eight times a month, that's Three Thousand Six Hundred Kunas or around One Thousand Deutsche Marks.

MATTHEW: Well, you see...

GABRIEL: What is it?

MATTHEW: A Hundred and Fifty Kunas... can I think about it till tomorrow.

GABRIEL: The rate per hour goes up tomorrow. My price will be Two Hundred Kunas per hour. Three hours - 600 Kunas, eight time a month -

4 800 Kunas or 1 380 Deutsche Marks. But, if we agree now - we will stick to the old price right up until the end of the season.

MATTHEW: You see, I...

GABRIEL: As it is too much for you, we'll forget it. You can also prepare yourself for the audition alone.

MATTHEW: No! I agree, I agree to your price. When can we start?

(The phone rings. Gabriel lifts the receiver.)

GABRIEL: Yes, yes... Oh, how are you Ms Prpich... The young man you recommended is right here in my study... yes, he came, he's here... Well, we'll see what can be done. Today, everyone wants to be an actor, they want

fame, popularity, but not just anyone is meant for it... We'll see what can be done...

SCENE 2.

(Gabriel is on his feet, moving around the room, while MATTHEW is sitting on a chair, listening.)

GABRIEL: When I think about it today, Othello was my most significant role, the turning-point in my career. After I played Othello, everyone looked at me differently, acting colleagues and directors, even my butcher. When you have a premiere at the Dubrovnik Summer Festival, everyone in Croatia hears about it, all the papers write about it, you give a few interviews on TV, the public really becomes interested in you, even though the performance is only given four times. Yes, in '83 with Othello I became an actor of the first category, as one critic put it, and everything followed on naturally after that. They said that I really was the very best, even though Iago is a very rewarding role. But he gave such a fumbling performance, with no sense of proportion. Everyone said I completely overshadowed him, so that...

MATTHEW: Excuse me.

GABRIEL: Yes.

MATTHEW: Excuse me for interrupting you, but for half an hour already...

GABRIEL: What 'for half an hour'?

MATTHEW: We have been talking for half an hour, and I...

GABRIEL: Do you think we are wasting time?

MATTHEW: I didn't say that.

GABRIEL: You think this is superfluous, you think that I don't know my job? I have been lecturing at the Academy for eleven years and now a candidate for entrance questions my professionalism.

MATTHEW: That wasn't my intention.

GABRIEL: Yes, it was. You think that I can't see what is going on in your head, that I don't understand what you are thinking. Your generation is too impatient, young man, far too impatient. You are all convinced you know everything, but you know nothing. You only want to deal with the essentials, you are afraid of the accessories, and that's why you don't succeed at anything. Why do you think I was talking about myself, about my roles, my life, why, do you think?...

MATTHEW: I don't know.

GABRIEL: To establish closer contact.

MATTHEW: Closer contact?

GABRIEL: Yes, closer contact. This is our first class, for the very first time two people are facing each other, linked by the same desire - the

desire that the skill of one of them becomes the property of the other. And was is it that I do as an experienced tutor - I don't get to the crux of things immediately, I first try to establish closer contact - but in your head the taximeter is ticking over and counting the Kunas, and time is passing in what you regards as an exercise in futility. You would get right down to it. Your whole generation is like that. That's the way you treat women, too - just screwing, no foreplay, no overture, that's why it happens that young women avoid you, that's why they would rather spend the evening in the company of an old tom cat, who is not in any hurry, rather than with an insecure, impatient and unfulfilled greenhorn. But, alright, if work is what you want - let's do it. Which poem have you prepared?

MATTHEW: Cesariæ's [Tsesarich's] *Returning*.

MATTHEW: Who knows (a, no-one knows anything.

Knowledge is fragile.)

GABRIEL: Dobriša [Dobrisha] Cesariæ: *Returning*.

MATTHEW: Dobriša Cesariæ: *Returning*.

Who knows

(a, no-one knows anything.)

Knowledge is fragile.

Perhaps a ray of truth shone within me,

Or perhaps just dreams.

Love could still happen to us,

Happen - I say,

But I don't know if that's what I want,

Or that's what I don't want.

GABRIEL: Wait! Stop! You can't recite like that. What is a poem?

MATTHEW: What do you mean?

GABRIEL: What is a poem to you?

MATTHEW: A poem is an emotional expression of man's... what are you getting at when you ask what a poem is?

GABRIEL: A poem is either a thought or a feeling. But in your case I don't know if you are reciting it as a thought or as a feeling. Don't sing it to me. Make up your mind, do you want to convey a thought to me or a feeling.

MATTHEW: I don't know. Which one is best?

GABRIEL: What you want is what is best. Come on then, recite it as your thought.

MATTHEW: *Who knows*

(a, no-one knows anything.)

Knowledge is fragile.

Perhaps a ray of truth shone within me.

Or perhaps just dreams.

Love could still happen to us,

Happen - I say,

But I don't know if that's what I desire,

Or what I don't desire.

GABRIEL: That was terrible! Awful! You can't say 'But I don't know if that's what I desire, Or what I don't desire' so tepidly. I have to recognise your doubt. Do you understand?

MATTHEW: Yes.

GABRIEL: If you have understood we can go on.

MATTHEW: From where?

GABRIEL: From 'But I don't know...'.
MATTHEW: *But I don't know if that's what I desire,*

Or what I don't desire.

In the sea of life which eternally bubbles,

Which eternally evaporates,

Are created again, brought together again

Perhaps the same droplets.

And when eternity passes on a more starry way,

A whole empty eternity,

In a kiss again could p'haps be found

The self-same lips.

GABRIEL: What sort of lips?

MATTHEW: Self-same lips.

GABRIEL: That is a thought, a great thought. But you aren't following the thought. You are too young for the thought. Now let us test your acting capacity. Show emotion, show the situation through this poem.

GABRIEL: That is a thought, a great thought. But you aren't following the thought. You are too young for the thought. Now let us test your acting capacity. Show emotion, show the situation through this poem.

MATTHEW: How?

GABRIEL: Don't hurry. I'll explain it to you. Imagine you are a little boy of six and you have come to a pageant at the kindergarten, where you have to perform, to recite this poem. Your grandma and grandpa are in the audience. This is your first public performance, you are very excited. While you were waiting for your turn, you found you had to pee. We in the audience must see that you are a child of six, that you have stage-fright because of your grandma and grandpa, and that you have to pee. Express those feelings and this situation through Cesariæ's poem.

MATTHEW: Through this poem?

GABRIEL: Yes, through this poem.

MATTHEW: I feel sorry for the poem...

GABRIEL: So do I...

MATTHEW:

Who knows

(a, no-one knows anything.)

Knowledge is fragile.

Perhaps a ray of truth shone within me

And perhaps just dreams.

Love could still happen to us,

Happen - I say.

(Matthew squeezes his legs together to discourage his bladder.)

But I don't know if that is what I desire,

Or what I don't desire.

(Matthew bows and runs from the 'stage' to the 'washroom'.)

GABRIEL: Where are you off to?

MATTHEW: To the washroom.

GABRIEL: Children are more excited, it's not stage-fright, it's excitement, you have it all mixed up. Now for the second assignment. Imagine you are ninety years old and that you live in a retirement home. Ten days ago, a very lively eight-six year old lady came to the home. She appeals to you very much, you have fallen in love with her. The director of the retirement home is preparing a show for Independence Day, and you volunteer to perform with a recitation of *Returning*. You want that bright old lady to notice you, you want to win her with the poem. But here again, you are nervous, your legs won't hold you, your voice falters. Try to show all that, and don't forget - your heart's desire is watching in the audience. Do you understand what you have to do?

MATTHEW: Yes, I do.

GABRIEL: Well then, if you please.

(Matthew clears his throat and comes onto the stage walking normally.)

GABRIEL: Wait, that's no good!

MATTHEW: But I haven't even said anything yet!

GABRIEL: Is that the walk of an old man?

MATTHEW: A, yes.

GABRIEL: Enter into the movements, into the rhythm of a ninety-year-old. Enter into the psychology of a man in love. Perhaps you, too, were once in love, perhaps your generation, too, knows what true love is. Let's start from the beginning.

(Matthew comes out with the walk of an old man and starts reciting.)

MATTHEW:

Who knows

(a, no-one knows anything.

Knowledge is fragile!)

Perhaps a ray of truth shone within me,

And perhaps just dreams.

Love could still happen to us,

Happen - I say,

But I don't know if that's what I desire,

Or what I don't desire.

GABRIEL: Awful. You know nothing at all about age. I'll set you an easier assignment. More appropriate. Imagine that you are a shepherd and that wolves are attacking the sheep, there is another shepherd there on the next hill and through this poem you have to communicate to him what is taking place, that the wolves are attacking the sheep, and that he must come to help you before it is too late. Let's see that!

(MATTHEW takes a chair and starts reciting, shouting very loudly.)

MATTHEW (shouting): Dobrišaaaa... Cesariiiiæ... *Returning...*

Who knows

(A, no-one knows anything)

Knowledge is fragile!)

GABRIEL: Louder! You will lose the sheep, man.

MATTHEW:

Perhaps a ray of truth shone within me.

And perhaps just dreams.

Love could still happen to us.

GABRIEL: He can't hear you! The wind is very strong!

MATTHEW:

Happen - I say,

But I don't know if that's what I desire,

Or what I don't desire.

(Matthew sits down on the chair.)

MATTHEW: Was that any good?

GABRIEL: Excellent, you could make a career of it, the only thing is you lost all the sheep. You haven't even got the makings of a shepherd.

MATTHEW: I thought that it was quite acceptable.

GABRIEL: Look, Matthew, your enunciation is catastrophic, you swallow your vowels, your character transformation doesn't have enough thought behind it. You will have to work hard if you want to be ready for the audition, if you want to move from the starting line where you are now.

MATTHEW: You really think I am so bad?

GABRIEL: While you see yourself differently?

MATTHEW: Well, I'm different in front of an audience, you know They see me differently.

GABRIEL: And what sort of audience might that be?

MATTHEW: I have played ten or so roles in Rijeka as an amateur in my group, we have given guest performances all over Istria. Everyone thinks I'm talented.

GABRIEL: Listen, Matthew, the fact that you have acted in that amateur company is your main drawback. I would prefer it if you were coming to me without negative experience, without this dilettante 'experience' which I have to get out of your head.

MATTHEW: But as Stanislavski would say, I got through to the audience.

GABRIEL: But as Jourvet would say, the monkey at the zoo gets through to the audience when it makes faces behind the bars of its cage - but we don't call that acting. You probably think you're talented, but I can tell you with complete frankness that talent is not enough, unless a man is prepared to work bloody hard... listen, I still think I know you from somewhere.

MATTHEW: That's hardly possible. But there are many look-alikes in this world.

GABRIEL: Yes, you are right. Many look-alikes.

SCENE 3.

(Matthew is reciting, and Gabriel is listening attentively to him.)

MATTHEW:

Meanwhile, declining from the noon of day,

The sun obliquely shoots his burning ray:

The hungry judges soon the sentence sign,

And wretches hang that jurymen may dine;

The merchant from th' Exchange returns in peace,

And the long labours of the toilet cease.

Belinda now, whom thirst of fame.... (...)

GABRIEL: Stop, Matthew, stop!

(Gabriel gives a deep sigh.)

GABRIEL: When the heroic couplet seems to be beyond you, let's see how you do with Hedda and her hats. You know who Hedda was?

MATTHEW: I have heard of her, of course.

GABRIEL: When people still read, before television took over, they got most of their news from radio or the newspapers. Hedda Hopper was one of Hollywood's female gossip columnists. She and her arch-rival Elsa Maxwell were very powerful ladies. They could make or break a film star. Hedda was younger than Elsa, better-looking, and crazy about hats. Let's try out your voice box on some tongue-twisting. Here, take this.

(Gabriel hands him a piece of paper.)

GABRIEL: Slowly read what's on the paper.

MATTHEW:

Hedda was hoping to hop to Haiti,

To hack a hibiscus to hang on her hat,

Now Hedda had hundreds of hats in her hat-box,

So how could a hop to Haiti help that.

GABRIEL: Slowly and clearly. Once again.

MATTHEW:

Hedda was hoping to hop to Haiti,

To hack a hibiscus to hack for her hat...

GABRIEL: A little faster now!

MATTHEW:

Hedda was hoping to hop to Haiti,

To hack a hibiscus ...

GABRIEL: Faster!

MATTHEW:

... to hang on her hat,

Now Hedda had hundreds...

GABRIEL: Faster!

MATTHEW: *... of hats in her hat-box...*

(Matthew stumbles over the words, just as Gabriel seems to have hoped.)

GABRIEL: There, that's why you can't become an actor. Your voice-box is simply not up to the profession, son. It's just not. But everyone wants to be an actor, everyone wants the footlights to shine on their face.

(He hands another piece of paper to MATTHEW.)

GABRIEL: Read what's written here.

MATTHEW:

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,

The furrow followed free.

GABRIEL: Again.

MATTHEW:

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,

The furrow followed free.

GABRIEL: Is the sentence clear to you.

MATTHEW: On the whole... yes.

GABRIEL: Then repeat it faster and faster.

MATTHEW:

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,

The furrow followed free...

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,

The furrow followed free...

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,

The furrow followed free...

The fair breeze flew, the white foam blew....

GABRIEL: You see, you mixed it up again. Concentration, concentration is essential in acting, and so is skill - there is no artistry without it.

(Gabriel goes over to the bedside table and takes out the bottle of fruit brandy and two glasses.)

GABRIEL: Would you like a drink?

MATTHEW: Thank you, a small one.

(Gabriel pours fruit about brandy in both glasses, hands one to Matthew, and takes the other himself.)

GABRIEL: Your good health!

MATTHEW: Cheers!

(They both empty their shots in one gulp.)

MATTHEW: Is that cognac?

GABRIEL: No it's fruit brandy, Matt.

MATTHEW: Matthew.

GABRIEL: Fruit brandy, Matthew.

MATTHEW: I read about that Richard III in the newspaper.

GABRIEL: Which newspaper?

MATTHEW: In the *Evening News*.

GABRIEL: Yes. Rehearsals and the premiere have been postponed until autumn because of a squabble between the director of the play and the manager of the theatre. Then they'll postpone it from autumn to winter, and from winter to spring, and the entire thing will probably fall through altogether.

And I was so keen on doing that role.

MATTHEW: How are the *Faust* rehearsals coming along?

GABRIEL: Not at all.

MATTHEW: Why?

GABRIEL: That little goose who plays Marguerite has been shooting an inane TV series for three days now. I said at the very beginning that she was too old for the role. She was my student ten years ago, and Tibor gave her the role of the girl opposite me. A partner who is never there. Television made her popular before she really honed her acting skills. I don't know how I am supposed to rehearse when my most important scenes are with her.

(Gabriel pours Matthew and himself another drink.)

GABRIEL: I can't help thinking... that I know you from somewhere.

MATTHEW: Where from? I don't think so.

GABRIEL: As if I have seen you somewhere.

MATTHEW: I have not been in Zagreb often.

GABRIEL: Didn't you go to college here?

MATTHEW: No, in Zadar in Dalmatia. I finished my courses there, in Literature.

GABRIEL: Finished. So you have a degree?

MATTHEW: Yes. A BA in Literature. I even taught for a while.

GABRIEL: So you've been teaching.

MATTHEW: Yes. Until the day I came to Zagreb and contacted you.

GABRIEL: What does the school have to say about that?

MATTHEW: They contacted me yesterday and told me I need not bother coming back.

GABRIEL: Why?

MATTHEW: They sacked me. I told them I'd been away for a week, but here we are: it's been much longer.

GABRIEL: How will you live?

MATTHEW: I don't know. The only thing I know is that I despise that school as much as I love literature. But the last thing I will ever do again is to teach anyone about the significant of the Iliad and the Odyssey, or explain Don Quixote's behaviour, or Dante's *Inferno*. And apart from that, the only thing I'm interested in is acting.

GABRIEL: What if you aren't accepted?

MATTHEW: Then the only thing will be to jump into the sea. In Rijeka harbour, with a stone tied to my neck. That would mean certain death, the water's so polluted there.

GABRIEL: It's never wise to have that all or nothing attitude. What are you living off now while you're not working?

MATTHEW: I sold my Volkswagen and I'm using the money to pay rent for a pied-a-terre in Dubrava.

GABRIEL: In Dubrava?! How can you live in that area, in that environment?

MATTHEW: I had no choice. Anyway, there's nowhere in Zagreb that's cheaper. My parents are very unhappy about me giving up my job. But I know that teaching does not suit my temperament.

GABRIEL: Are you married?

MATTHEW: No. I had a fiancée but that fell through, too, when I decided to come to Zagreb. She simply was against me leaving my job. I tried to explain that I would always be unhappy if I stayed in teaching, but...

GABRIEL: You can't explain anything to women. Women are egotistical and selfish. All they think of is themselves, their children and themselves. We are here only to give them status and security. I've been married three times, I had to go through three marriages before I understood that no ordinary mortal woman can keep up with an artist. They were all different but they were all the same; they all expected me to be concentrated on them and only them. You see this room, I arranged it as a rehearsal room when I was married to my second wife. I furnished it ascetically not just to use it for rehearsals, but so that I did not have to be with her in the living room. I simply could not stand the conversations she had with me. And the silences were also unbearable. After two years, I stumbled into my third marriage - but it was the same all over again. I kept taking refuge in this room, just to be alone. With my roles, and my books. And even now, after my third divorce, I spent most of my time in here - as if one of my sullen wives in lying in wait for me in the living room. It was a wise move to break up with your fiancée.

MATTHEW: I didn't break up with her, it was the other way round.

GABRIEL: It's the same thing. To be frank, I no longer remember which of my wives left me, and which ones I left. A break-up is always a joint venture, the same way as a beginning is.

MATTHEW: I don't agree.

GABRIEL: Because you are young.

MATTHEW: Perhaps.

(Silence.)

GABRIEL: What role have you decided to prepare for your audition?

MATTHEW: *Hamlet*.

GABRIEL: *Hamlet from Lower Mrdusha*.

MATTHEW: No. Shakespeare's.

GABRIEL: No more, no less, he? Couldn't you find something even more pretentious? All you young people are the same. No sense of moderation. *Hamlet* is too difficult for you, but if that is what you have decided, I will respect your choice.

MATTHEW: The Academy expects candidates to come with three soliloquies and three poems, but I would like to feel *Hamlet* out in dialogue, to put him to the test in relation to other heroes, so that his monologues would become clearer.

GABRIEL: Interesting - to test out the heroes in dialogue. You know what, Matthew, I need a female partner to rehearse *Faust* with, and you need partners for *Hamlet* - perhaps we could be sparring partners.

MATTHEW: Would you be prepared to rehearse your role with me?

GABRIEL: Why not? It could be useful for both of us.

MATTHEW: That's wonderful! I'll be playing with a real actor.

GABRIEL: Rehearsing, Matthew, just rehearsing.

SCENE 4.

(Gabriel and Matthew are in costume. Matthew is wearing a blonde female wig. They are rehearsing a scene from Goethe's *Faust*.)

GABRIEL: *Did you recognise me at once, little angel, when I came into the garden?*

MATTHEW: *You saw it! I lowered my eyes.*

GABRIEL: *Do you forgive my speaking so freely? And the boldness with which I forced myself upon you when you were returning home from mass?*

MATTHEW: *I was all bewildered, having never experienced anything like that; my reputation has never been bad. I thought, is it possible he sees nothing amiss in his behaviour? How would he otherwise dare approach a maid with so much boldness. But I admit: I do not know myself what began to blossom in my heart for you; I only know I was very cross that I was so little offended by your boldness.*

GABRIEL: *O, my beloved!*

MATTHEW: *A moment now!*

(Bending to pick an aster and removing its petals, one by one.)

GABRIEL: *Will you weave a wreath?*

MATTHEW: *No, it's just a game.*

GABRIEL: *What sort of game?*

MATTHEW: *You'll find it droll.*

(Removing the petals and whispering.)

GABRIEL: *What do you whisper?*

MATTHEW (half-aloud): *He loves me - he love me not.*

GABRIEL: *O, divine and wonderful scene!*

MATTHEW: *He loves me - he loves me - not.*

(Pulling off the last petal: exclaiming joyfully.)

MATTHEW: *Yes - he loves me!*

GABRIEL: *Yes, child! That flower's word is God's utterance.*

MATTHEW: *I am all atingle!*

GABRIEL: *O, have no fear. May this look and pressure on your hand tell you all that cannot be uttered.*

MATTHEW: *When you say it, it is my pleasure to heed you.*

(Silence.)

GABRIEL: Good. That's enough for now. The premiere is in three days.

MATTHEW: If she becomes ill, I can step into the role.

GABRIEL: That's all I need.

MATTHEW: Don't you think I'd be a good Marguerite?

GABRIEL: No, you wouldn't. You are too feminine.

(Gabriel pours drinks for both of them.)

MATTHEW: I read in the paper that they will be holding auditions in Zagreb for a Hollywood film, they are making it as a co-production with JadranFilm.

GABRIEL: Yes, I know. One more piece of American screen rubbish in the offing.

MATTHEW: Oh no, it's not. It's an A production. It has some really great stars. The action takes place during the war in Croatia, and they have decided to give one of the five starring roles to a Croatian actor who will be playing the guide of some American journalists on the front. Whichever Croatian actor gets the role, he'll become an international star overnight. And they'll be needing extras - I could have a chance there.

GABRIEL: Motion pictures are not an acting art, but a directing art.

MATTHEW: But you have acted in several films.

GABRIEL: Yes, I have. It's not bad to do a film role now and then, it makes it easier to draw people into the theatre. And you can make good money. Fifteen years ago, I bought a good car for my film acting fee, but my first wife crashed it. The silly bitch was short-sighted. I was left without a car, but, unfortunately... she didn't even get a scratch. It's unbelievable how women love doing things they have no talent for - like driving, politics, raising children... Shall we move on to *Hamlet*?

MATTHEW: Fine.

(Matthew hands the female wig to Gabriel who puts it on his head.)

(*Hamlet*, Act III, Sc. II)

MATTHEW: *Lady, shall I lie in your lap?*

GABRIEL: *No, my lord.*

MATTHEW: *I mean, my head upon your lap?*

GABRIEL: *Ay, my lord.*

MATTHEW: *Do you think I meant country matters?*

GABRIEL: *I think nothing, my lord.*

MATTHEW: *That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs.*

GABRIEL: *What is, my lord?*

MATTHEW: *Nothing.*

GABRIEL: *You are merry, my lord.*

MATTHEW: *Who, I?*

GABRIEL: *Ay, my lord.*

MATTHEW: *O God, your only jig-maker! What should a man do but be merry? For look you how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within 's two hours.*

GABRIEL: *Nay, 'tis twice two months, my lord.*

MATTHEW: *So long? Nay then, let the devil wear black, for I'll have a suit of sables, O heavens! die two months ago, and not forgotten yet? Then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year. (...)*

SCENE 5.

(The room is in darkness. From outside, we can hear the drunken song of Gabriel and Matthew, singing an aria from *Carmen* in two parts. They stagger into the room, Gabriel turning on the lights.)

GABRIEL: I respect you, I respect you very much. Do you know why I respect you?

MATTHEW: No, I don't know why you respect me.

GABRIEL: I respect you because you applauded me loudly, and I respect you because you drank three litres of wine at the party.

MATTHEW: Two, only two.

GABRIEL: Alright, that's still an achievement. But there's one thing I don't respect you for.

MATTHEW: And what's that?

GABRIEL: I don't respect you because you didn't shout 'Bravo'. You should have shouted 'Bravo' when I came forward to take my bows.

MATTHEW: I would have felt uncomfortable.

GABRIEL: Why would you be uncomfortable? That little goose's fans shouted 'Bravo'. For her little paper-doll Marguerite. But you - nothing! Disgraceful! And I begged you, I begged you like a brother before the premiere, but you - nothing. She organised everything... everything. She gave a terrible performance.

MATTHEW: It wasn't really so bad.

GABRIEL: Pardon?! I'm the professor of acting here, not you. I suppose I'm the one who can tell the difference between hamming, and real acting. I have drunk two and a half litres of red wine, but notwithstanding that I know good acting when I see it, and when it's just plain shit. I would be grateful that you take note of that.

(Gabriel picks up a bottle.)

GABRIEL: Will we have a little bit more?

MATTHEW: It's not good to mix your drinks.

GABRIEL: Just a night-cap. OK?

MATTHEW: Well just a small one.

(Gabriel pours for both of them. He hands Matthew his glass. They clink glasses.)

GABRIEL: You're a *mensch*, Matthew, a real *mensch*. My existence, on the other hand, is worthless, I am a nothing. Do you know why I lecture at that bloody Academy, do you know why?

MATTHEW: How could I know that?

GABRIEL: Because I'm afraid that the day will come when I won't be able to act any more. Because I'm afraid that my brain will shrivel and dry up and that I won't be able to learn my lines, to remember them. There, that's why. The Academy is my shelter from fear. Understand? If I go out of fashion one day, if those mangy directors stop wanting me in their imbecilic plays - their Faustus and Richards - I will still have the Academy. Understand? I am really just a bastard, a pure nothing.

MATTHEW: That's what I thought.

GABRIEL: Whaat?!

MATTHEW: I think you're a pure nothing, too. An ordinary actor.

GABRIEL: How dare you, you amateur, you dilettante?!

MATTHEW: You said it yourself.

GABRIEL: Self-criticism always, criticism - never! And certainly not from you, young gentleman from Dubrava.

MATTHEW: I shall say what I think, and you listen to what you want to. You imperious professor of acting, you haven't a clue.

GABRIEL: That's an insult. I will sue you for causing mental anguish. As far as you are concerned, my lad, I am a genius. I was playing Macbeth while you were still peeing in your pants, I was playing Henry V while you were still learning the your a,b,c, I was... what was I?

MATTHEW: Nothing.

GABRIEL: Yes, exactly. I could even be nothing if the role demanded it and if that was what the director wanted. I will agree to anything, just so long as I can act. I yearn to have eyes on me, I yearn for the admiration, the fame...

(He stops suddenly and looks at Matthew.)

GABRIEL: ... Listen, young man, laddy, my boy - I really do know you from somewhere. Know that?

MATTHEW: Of course you know me. You failed me three times in my auditions for the Academy.

GABRIEL: Whaat?! Wait a moment, really?

MATTHEW: I tried the first time seven years ago. The panel failed me, even though I was quite good. I tried the second time five years ago. I was excellent. You failed me. Three years ago - I was even better. And you failed me again. And do you know why you failed me? Because you didn't even bother to listen to me. The last time, that fat one kept on cleaning his teeth with a tooth-pick, while you were wiping your nose. One member of the exam. board was literally asleep... I was the one hundred and thirty-eighth candidate.

GABRIEL: I knew I knew you from somewhere, I just knew it.

SCENE 6.

(Matthew is on the improvised stage. Gabriel is sitting to the side, watching him.)

MATTHEW: (*Hamlet, Act III. Sc. II - 1. 1*)

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it, as many of our players do I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and (as I may say) whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags to split the ears of the groundlings, who (for the most part) are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant. It out-herods Herod. Pray avoid it.

GABRIEL: *I warrant your honour.*

MATTHEW: *Be not too tame neither; but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature; for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the verge and body of the time his form and pressure. (...)*

(Silence.)

GABRIEL: Not bad, Hamlet, not bad.

MATTHEW: Do you think they'll accept me?

GABRIEL: The board has eleven members this year, too, it's hard to predict what humour they will all be in on the day. I can only tell you that you will have my vote. If you manage to get five more, your dream will come true. There are one hundred and seventy-two candidates, and we'll be accepting ten at the most. And now - go on home and get a good night's sleep. You must be rested and fresh tomorrow. And don't think about the Board, concentrate on the sentences, on the feelings you want to express, the thought contained in the sentences. The way we did it together.

MATTHEW: Yes, I will. Good-bye.

GABRIEL: Good-bye.

(Matthew leaves. Gabriel takes the fruit brandy bottle out of the bedside table, pours some into a glass and drinks it. Then he puts away the bottle, goes to the phone and dials a number.)

GABRIEL: Hello... It's Gabriel... Hi... Listen I'm calling about the auditions tomorrow... I won't be able to be a member of the panel... officially: I am sick... I have prepared eight candidates and each one of them expects me to support him, I simply have to fall ill... ah, you directors have it much easier... but listen, one of the candidates is a tall, dark-haired fellow from Rijeka, Matthew's his name... do everything you can to have him fail... he's far too formed already, he is already an actor, if we accept him he will be in the way when we are working with the

more mediocre ones... yes... definitely fail him. He'll manage somehow. He has too much talent, too much... alright... bye.

(Gabriel replaces the receiver.)

SCENE 8.

(Gabriel is alone in his rehearsal room. He is speaking in bad English.)

GABRIEL: There in the distance, that small spot, that's the bridge across the river. The tanks are there. We have to be very careful, it could be mined. I'll take you as far as the bridge, and you'll have to go the rest of the way without me. Their army is on the other side. If they capture you, American journalists, nothing bad will happen to you, but if they catch me, it will be the end of me, so we have to...

(The doorbell rings.)

GABRIEL: Come in, Ms Prpich.

(Matthew comes in, and he seems downhearted.)

GABRIEL: And?

MATTHEW: They failed me, the fourth time.

GABRIEL: What a pity. If I hadn't picked up this flu, I would have been there, and my vote could have made the difference.

(Gabriel sniffs and wipes his nose.)

MATTHEW: I don't think so. It looks as though it's just not for me.

GABRIEL: Why? You have to try again next year. You have to prepare yourself well and be more confident...

MATTHEW: I don't think I shall ever try again. I don't think so.

GABRIEL: What will you do now?

MATTHEW: I don't know, I feel like someone whose beloved has just married someone else.

GABRIEL: Will you be going back to Rijeka?

MATTHEW: Yes, the day after tomorrow. I'll go and audition for that American film tomorrow.

GABRIEL: Really? But that's not for you, it's a complex role, that guide is...

MATTHEW: I put my name down now to try out as an extra, not for the guide's part. When I saw the results at the Academy, I thought it would be a good idea to do some work as an extra so I can pay back some of the money I owe. I've spent all I had over these three months, so I have had to borrow, and it will soon be summertime... The extras will have four days work.

GABRIEL: Ah, that's good.

MATTHEW: I saw the list of people who are auditioning for the guide. Your name is on it.

GABRIEL: Well, I thought I'd play around a bit, and see what American auditions are like. Only if I am feeling better tomorrow.

(Sniffing and wiping his nose.)

MATTHEW: Yes, of course. After I handed in my name, they hung out two lists. The first one lists the applicants for the featured role, and the other one is for the extras.

GABRIEL: And how many names are there?

MATTHEW: Three hundred and ninety on yours.

GABRIEL: Damn it, there must be a lot of amateurs and adventurers applying who don't stand a chance... And how many names are there on your list?

MATTHEW: Only mine.

GABRIEL: Only yours?

MATTHEW: Yes.

(Silence.)

GABRIEL: So you say - you failed?

MATTHEW: Yes - I did. But still, I came to say: thank you. I know you did all you could. It's my own fault. Good-bye.

GABRIEL: Good-bye.

(MATTHEW leaves. Gabriel gives a deep sigh.)

SCENE 8.

(Gabriel is telephoning.)

GABRIEL: Listen sweetheart, I think there's a good chance I'll be going to Hollywood, a big chance... I was so good, so convincing, and the director and the producer watched me very attentively. And when I had finished, the director said: 'We have your number, we'll let you know the results on Thursday'... Do you understand, my pet, he said he will let me know the results, and that means he really noticed me... Hey, it's an A production. If I jump into the role, the world is mine, perhaps even an Oscar waiting for me with a big smile... If I get the role, I'm taking you to the Intercontinental for dinner... I must run now though, I have to keep the line free in case they are calling me... yes, today they'll be phoning the actor they've chosen... alright then, bye sweetie... we won't talk about that now, I have to get off the line, don't nag about that, bye, bye.

(Gabriel puts down the receiver. He goes over to the bedside table and bends down. Matthew comes into the room carrying a bottle wrapped in white paper along with a box of chocolates.)

GABRIEL: Matthew, what are you doing here?

MATTHEW: Professor, I have wonderful news!

GABRIEL: Tell me!

MATTHEW: I passed the audition.

GABRIEL: Of course you did, when you were the only one interested in being an extra.

MATTHEW: No, not as an extra.

GABRIEL: What then?!

MATTHEW: They gave me that big role. They gave me the role of the guide. I will be travelling to Hollywood in a month's time, we're shooting the interiors there, and then the exteriors will be shot in Croatia in autumn.

GABRIEL: Are you sure?!

MATTHEW: Of course, but it has to remain secret for a few days, to give the producer's people time to put together my biography for the public, for the press. The producer thinks they should stress the fact that I was turned away four times at the Academy, so I'll have a real American biography: *Overnight Success Story* or *Rags to Riches*.

GABRIEL: Just a moment, didn't you apply as an extra.

MATTHEW: Yes, I did. But the producer and the director were intrigued that there was only one applicant; they wanted to see what an extra looked like in a country where everyone wanted to play a starring role... then they asked me if I knew any monologues by heart, and I recited the monologues you and I worked on for the Academy exam. I spoke in Croatian, but they liked my performance so much that they gave me the role... there, so I have brought you two small presents.

(Silence.)

GABRIEL: That's very nice of you.

MATTHEW: I asked them their opinion of the man who had been my mentor, I told them I would like you to be able to be in this film, too. The director's PA brought your photograph, and the director looked at it and said...

GABRIEL: Tell me everything he said.

MATTHEW: He said that you were too theatrical. That you weren't suited for the screen, not even as an extra. Those were his words.

GABRIEL: He said that.

MATTHEW: Yes, that's what he said... I am so pleased to be able to share my good luck with you.

GABRIEL: Well, I am pleased, too. Very, very pleased. It's as though they chose me, it means that much to me.

MATTHEW: Finally I'll be doing what I have wanted to do all my life.

GABRIEL: Yes, acting is a wonderful profession.

MATTHEW: Otherwise, Professor, I always thought you were a good actor, but you have played the heavy cold role rather badly.

GABRIEL: I drank a lot of herbal tea, that's why I recovered so quickly, that's all...

MATTHEW: I have an idea why you weren't a member of the exam board. And I don't blame you. You have so many entrance auditions before you, hundreds of ambitious candidates and thousands of hours of acting. You have to conserve your strength.

(MATTHEW takes a roll of notes out of his pocket and tucks it into the Professor's pocket.)

MATTHEW: God keep you, Professor. Good-bye.

GABRIEL: Wait, let me explain.

(Matthew pauses.)

MATTHEW: What's to explain, Professor, and anyhow, you are not important any more because: in a week's time, you will forget Hollywood, and I will forget you.

(Matthew leaves. For a time, Gabriel stands there motionless, saying nothing, then he walks to the armchair and picks up the *Faust* text. He opens the first page and starts reciting.)

GABRIEL:

I have studied philosophy,

And medicine, and even law,

And diligence my studies guided.

(...)

For ten good years now,

Either up or down, this way and that

I only tweak my student's noses

And see, that nothing can be known!

O how that knowledge pains my heart.

THE END

(Note: The excerpts from Shakespeare's plays, *Richard III* and *Hamlet*, his *Rape of the Lock*, and the poem *The Ancient Mariner*, are, of course, given in the English original. The excerpts from Goethe's *Faust* (Verses 354 to 369 and 3156 to 3190), and are given in free English translation; if *Faust* was to be included in a production in English, I would recommend that a recognised English translation in verse be used.)