

**NINE MONOLOGUES FROM
 “THE TOTAL IMMERSION OF MADELEINE FAVORINI”
 BY
 FRANK GAGLIANO**

The International Ernest Hemingway Writing competition

is held each year at Sanibel Island, Florida, in the United States—in honor of the great American writer, Ernest Hemingway. Awards are given for novel, short story, poetry, essay — and play categories.

The 1999 award for playwriting went to Frank Gagliano for his play:

“THE TOTAL IMMERSION OF MADELEINE FAVORINI” _

THE TOTAL IMMERSION OF MADELEINE FAVORINI is a surreal 3-performer piece (some have called it a dramatic poem) in which thirty-eight year old Madeleine Favorini journeys from dutifulness to rebellion on a gynecological examining table that takes wing.

When the play begins Madeleine Favorini, in her slip, has been waiting for her doctor, her feet in the stirrups of a gynecological examining table — for two weeks! Madeleine is a dutiful woman who, all her life, has denied any rebelliousness in her nature. Today, her exhausted body rebels and the gynecological table — the play’s only prop — becomes a kind of magic carpet that takes Madeleine through a series of encounters; with her Italian-American family, her philandering former husband — and out into the realm of mythology, where she meets and falls in love with a Sicilian bandit, El Bandido Grandido — actually a God who, like an earth-bound Flying Dutchman, is doomed to roam the earth, until a specific woman can release his despairing spirit. Madeleine Favorini is that woman and she must destroy El Bandido Grandido, her first grand love, in order to give him his “full out rest;” and in order for her to face an eternity that has frightened her all her life.

THE TOTAL IMMERSION OF MADELEINE FAVORINI is noted for long spoken arias (including the soaring “vacuum vagina” speech) filled with lyricism and images; and for its outrageous humor, painful discoveries and theatrical encounters.

The role of Madeleine Favorini is very demanding and the other two performers must play the many characters who confront Madeleine on her journey.

NINE FAVORINI MONOLOGUES

1) MADELEINE

No! Don't leave me alone! Nonno! Nonno! Light the way for meeeeeeeee!

(She gets back onto the examining table)

Go! Go! Follow Nonno Pazzotesto! Follow him to—YES! Sicily. Sicily! There! There! This table is moving me there. To the end of this magical tunnel! And there!. . .there it is. I see it! —Sicily! My land of roots and ruts and riverdercis! Singing couples, singing in Piazzas on the holy days; pinning molti, molti Euro to statues of the blue Madonna, bobbing on the young men's shoulders, through the crowded square. My family's there! See?!! See!! In and on a painted cart pulled by our family donkey! And everyone protects me. And everyone is proud of me. Because on this feast day, I play. . . —the Holy Ghost. A tongue. A dove. A presence. And I need my family. They're the only ones who care for me. No one else would give a roast for the Holy Ghost. After all, what's he do? After all, what's she do? But my family, they knew and cheer me on. So , I choose to play the tongue and lick my way over every head that's bowed before the bobbing blue Madonna. And so I do, but am not seen; and maybe that's the best way? — No! It is not! Not being seen is death, is rot! So all I've got is my family, who do see and dote on me. And Papa gets angry and takes his whip and lashes every guinea ass in sight! "See my daughter!" he screams. "Grab onto each holy rung and climb and mount that holy tongue! See my daughter or this lash will burn your lower cheeks to ash!" And that's how Papa does for me. . .IN SICILY!

(Laughter is heard off)

That laughter! Around the bend! Whose is it? . . .It's—o God, it's his laughter.

2) MAMA

Listen, Madeleine. Your mother is exhausted. Your vegetable father exhausted me. The roles I have had to play: The rages I have had to sit on: Not having money—having to "make do"—exhausted me. And trying to mother you, make sense out of what you are or could be, really exhausted me. From the time you were born, you wore me out. An almost impossible delivery. You nearly killed me. And not long after, the hysterectomy. Oh, they said there was no connection, but I don't know: A Sicilian lady with just one child—a girl child at that. "Vergogna." Shame. "Vergogna." That's the only Sicilian word I've not been able to forget. "Vergogna," your grandmother would spit at me —"Vergogna," for a Sicilian lady to have just one girl child. All right. Then I'll not be a Sicilian lady. I'll be an American lady. And, like every American lady, I'll work to be totally free. So that no one could ever "vergogna" me again. Well, now I am free; of your poor father; there's some money trickling in; I am totally assimilated—with not one trace of Sicilian peasant in me any longer, thank God —and I want to be free of you. Unencumbered. To be unencumbered. What you have can drag me down again. And now I want "up." Up. Up!

3) PAPA

You've got to know I've hated every minute of my life; except that last minute—a minute ago—when I died. For when I died, I unencumbered your mother. By God I did that.

(Mama gives him a kiss on the cheek
and moves into the shadows, dimly seen)

And you can, too. I'm afraid we're alike, you and I, Maddie. But if that means, like me, you're tired, frightened. . .quietly desperate. . .it also means you are cursed with knowing right from wrong. And the right curse now is to give in to your mother's wishes. Do you realize that woman has never had a proper teenage. Now, with the insurance I leave her, she can travel and date and flirt and dress up. She worked hard for it. And for de-wopping us all—

(discovery)

. . .not every minute! I mean, what I said before, about hating every minute of my life, is not, strictly speaking, true. There were minutes I liked being a barber; the minutes I got not one hair down a man's back! And remember the minute you and I sneaked out to the opera and discovered "Cavalleria Rusticana?" The minute there was during the playing of the Intermezzo. I didn't look at you because that's one thing we never do in our family, I know—look directly at each other—but I felt you cry, Maddie, when I cried. The same minute. It was the melody, of course.

(Hums a bit of the melody)

Simple and beautiful.

(Hums again)

Yes! Perhaps there might be other such minutes for you. Yes, that simple Sicilian gift of song may still be alive in you. In that sense we may not be alike.

. . .For the melody left me long ago. For good. . . .

—So it's in your own self interest, Maddie. Break the bonds. Unencumber your mother. And perhaps you'll unencumber yourself. There's a good girl.

4) MADELEINE

NO NONNO! DON'T GO! NOT WITHOUT ME! I'M A 46-YEAR-OLD DISCARDED WOMAN AND SOMETHING IS SLIPPING AWAY! PLEASE NONNO! Deodorants make me nauseous and don't work on me anymore—though I dutifully use them. . . .Mindlessness scares me—always has—but here I am in a mindless age and I don't know how to act—except to shiver. I shiver a lot now, Nonno. And I'm afraid to jog for fear my breasts will fall off. . . .Since Jonathan ran out on me I've wanted desperately to have my ears pierced like every Sicilian child has, but every time I pierce them, the skin grows back. . . .I went

4) MADELEINE

(Continued)

to college and I feel so dumb. I majored in Literature and so was good for nothing. And laughed at, of course. But at least I could thrill to the audacity and awesome language of the Masters. Could quote them from memory, in fact. But now—those great words frighten me—make me dizzy, sick. And every time I need to use the "facility"—I mean, the toilet—I have this fear that I won't be able to go because all of my orifices will have been sewn up. . . .I look at babies and old people and I imagine infinity. Which scares me and makes me want to throw up. The only foods that have any taste for me are fast foods. But fast foods nauseate me. And make me fat—though I dutifully eat them and hold them down. The really awful thing, though. . .is that I can't look people in the shoulder anymore. Only in the back. And so I always walk behind. Even when I'm in front. . . .The only thing I seem to get close to—immerse myself in, I guess, are motel bed sheets reeking with stale smoke. But stale smoke makes me sick now. So does loud talk and trendy things and giant portable stereos growing out of the heads of walking young men and—

5) MADELEINE

Nonno! No! Take me with you! Nonno Nonno please don't abandon meoicannotsee O I CANNOT SEE! I'm blind. I'm-fee-ling-the-air-in-spa-sms-be-cause-I-am-blind. . . .I'm feeling around the ground on my hands and knees . . .because I've been stricken blind. But why, why? I NEVER MASTERBATED! —Well once maybe, but only boys went blind, I thought, andoicanseeagain I CAN SEE AGAIN! I'm not blind anymore. I'm . . .alone.

(Takes in her new surroundings.

Slow discovery as the images drop in)

On a Mediterranean Cruise. Abandoned. Single lady once again, using up her savings, to cruise her bruised self back together again. Long days and nights, with silk scarf headkerchief breezing about her face, she leans on a rail and looks at the sea omylook. O my, look; a silver school of silver fish moving past. Like an oil slick omy. O My! They're whatchamacallits! Rubbers! Condoms! A school of condoms in the Mediterranean?! No! I don't want to see that! I want to see—. . .him. HIM! Captain Marvel! There. In the ballroom. Through the porthole. See? Captain Marvel. That's his name. Really. The Captain of this Cruise. There; dancing the tango with his white even teeth, and even more even crease in his pressed uniform; and Lady Buxom in his six-foot-two-arms, pressed against the two thousand ribbons on his chest, because tradition demands he service the top-deck ladies first—until he works his way to below-deck me. He kissed my hand, you know, when I came aboard. —Well, it is true he kissed all the ladies' hands. But mine he lingered over; and I could see he wanted to lick my knuckles. I pulled my hand away. I didn't want him to get into trouble. But,

5) MADELEINE

(Continued. Coyly)

it's clear, throughout the cruise, his darting tongue's been making thrusts at me. Even now

(She tangos)

As—he—tangos
 [he knows I'm out here]
 and—he—sees—me
 [his eyes keep darting]
 out—the—port—hole
 [I know he wants me]
 in—his—arms—too
 [his chest is massive]
 and—I'm—fainting
 [especially when we DIP]

(She dips.

Captain Marvel materializes,
 keeping a distanc

6) CAPTAIN MARVEL

No. The time of the cruise has come when I must be alone, away from everyone. The time of the cruise has come when one gets depressed, distracted, disturbed, distempered; when one gets convinced the cruise will go on forever. If you were to come with me now I might strangle you and throw you overboard. In the fog with me, you see, you'd represent everything outside of the fog; everything I've come to loathe by this time of this—endless—cruise. No. I want to—I must—move over there and allow the fog to be over me, in front of me, in back of me and under me. I must float in the fog all night. So that I'll be able to resume my role in the morning. As Captain. And all that that means. Good evening.

7) LA BANDIDA

"Psht! I am the God Prometheus—psht! —What Prometheus has become; Messenger of pain and revelation. But I don't care anymore; as long as they leave my liver alone. — Psht! Psht! — Listen. Your mother was a goddess; her husband, a mighty God. Your mother diddled with another God and you were born. —Psht! — In revenge, the mighty God turned your mother into a giant Koala bear — psht! psht! — then cursed the baby God-bastard — YOU! — to roam the earth as a rebellious spirit. But when the voice of Amalia is heard —

7) LA BANDIDA

(Continued)

psht!psht! — Amalia, the Muse of Painful Song — when your Koala/mother finds you again and when you meet a woman with the initials "MF" you may find a way to your full-out rest. — Psht! Psht! — But before that can happen, this must happen—"

(As La Bandida again)

And in that dungeon, the Dwarf-Prometheus pulls from the red hot coals beneath a kettle of steaming beef bourguignon, a branding iron with the red hot initials "MF," and brands those initials right through the mask into the face of El Bandido Grandido.

(As the Dwarf-Prometheus.
she brands El Bandido)

"Hisssssssssssssssssssssss!"

(El Bandido and Madeleine scream.
He writhes on the floor, clutching at his face.

As herself)

And in the instant, his face and mask are one! Soldered together! Homogenized! Congealed! Laminated! Fusèd! And, for good measure, the Dwarf Prometheus brands that mask again: "Hisssssssssssssssssssssss!"

(Madeleine runs to El Bandido. Kneels to him)

8) LA BANDIDA

Listen, my darling El Bandido: I have immersed myself in the role of the Wax Prometheus many times; and I have always accepted the implications. But, this woman's being here now deeply troubles me. Consider: We have shared and cared, you and I; felt and dwelt, you and I; smoked and stroked, you and I; sighed and cried together, you and I. And there was the pain—your pain! And I was pained because I could not trigger your rest; though your pain triggered my pain and my desire to help you rest. And I thought that—yes—the finding of "MF" was an overriding need so that your spirit could rest. And now she's here. And now I face the reality of what may be—and what may be is your going from me. No! No! I must tell you that I now loathe this intruding bitch! and want you to kick her ass out of here! Right over to Sicily!

9) MADELEINE

—Listen, Deedo: Before—a journey ago—I felt all sewn up. But becoming all those others has—. . .yes!—it has cut the thread; opened me up! Totally. Has made me feel one long tunnel; from my pasta pit up to my mouth! Now —if I want—I can mount telephone poles. Skyscrapers. Giant Sequoias. Capitol domes. The entire Italian Alps! YES! I recline and my openness is as powerful as a million Hoovers. And a humongus procession can be sucked in. Truck fleets. Giant discarded D.C. 10s. A thousand teenage boys on skateboards. The Boston Marathon. Hundreds of illegal aliens streaming into me, the juice of me. And I suck it all in, yes. . . .yes. . . .Yes! YES! I, Madeleine Favorini, am now the Vacuum Vagina of the World! I suck in all the world's debris, redundancies, fads and pain. And when I've anointed them all with my life's fluid, and my belly skin is stretched to transparent—THEN I push them all out in one great Lamaze effort; flush them out of me in one cleansing tidal wave. And because they've all been part of me, I can be part of them. But you. . . .you I'll keep forever—warm behind some secret fold in me until. . . .until I die. But you won't. Because my death contraction will push you out for you to journey on and on and on and—