



THE TOTALITARIANS

BY PETER SINN NACHTRIEB



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

THE TOTALITARIANS
Copyright © 2015, Peter Sinn Nachtrieb

All Rights Reserved

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that performance of THE TOTALITARIANS is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth), and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission for which must be secured from the Author's agent in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for THE TOTALITARIANS are controlled exclusively by DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC., 440 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance the written permission of DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC., and paying the requisite fee.

Inquiries concerning all other rights should be addressed to Bret Adams, Ltd., 448 West 44th Street, New York, NY 10036. Attn: Mark Orsini.

SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce THE TOTALITARIANS is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears, including printed or digital materials for advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. Please see your production license for font size and typeface requirements.

Be advised that there may be additional credits required in all programs and promotional material. Such language will be listed under the "Additional Billing" section of production licenses. It is the licensee's responsibility to ensure any and all required billing is included in the requisite places, per the terms of the license.

SPECIAL NOTE ON SONGS AND RECORDINGS

For performances of copyrighted songs, arrangements or recordings mentioned in these Plays, the permission of the copyright owner(s) must be obtained. Other songs, arrangements or recordings may be substituted provided permission from the copyright owner(s) of such songs, arrangements or recordings is obtained; or songs, arrangements or recordings in the public domain may be substituted.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Kenneth Prestinzi for a joyful and insane collaboration from start to finish; Judith Hawking for being the brilliant and fearless muse for Penny; the amazing love chamber that is the New Dramatists family, including Emily Morse, Todd London, Joel Ruark, John Steber, Erin Detrick, and Rachel Hutt; to the nationwide community of awesome people who helped this play along the way, including Jason Loewith, JoJo Ruf, NNP, Aimée Hayes, Southern Rep, Jessica Podewell, Leon Contravesprie, Ben Carbo, Woolly Mammoth, Robert O'Hara, Miriam Weisfeld, Howard Shalwitz, Kirsten Bowen, Nick Loumos, Sean Meehan, Emily Townley, Dawn Ursula, Lisa Steindler, Z Space, Andrew Humann, Jamie Jones, Alexis Lezin, Liam Vincent, Emily Schooltz, Axel Arth, Jeff Binder, April Matthis, Brian Hastert, Sarah Sokolovic, Brendan Griffin, Lucas Near-Verbrugge, Danielle Slavick, Ken Marks, Aaron Costa-Ganis; and Mark Orsini, Bruce Ostler, Alexis Williams, Aislinn Frantz, Colin Hunt, and Bret Adams Ltd.

Special love to the Nachtrieb family and to Mark Marino, who continues to be the source for some of the best lines.

THE TOTALITARIANS was produced at Southern Repertory Theatre (Aimée Hayes, Artistic Director) in New Orleans, LA, as part of the National New Play Network's rolling world premiere, opening on February 1, 2014. It was directed by Kenneth Prestininzi; the set design was by Marty Aikens; the costume design was by Kirche Zeile the lighting design was by Mandi Wood; the sound design was by Brendan Connelly; and the production stage manager was Elizabeth Harwood Zaganiski. The cast was as follows:

FRANCINE Jessica Podewell
JEFFREY Leon Contavesprie
PENNY Judith Hawking
BEN Ben Carbo

As part of the National New Play Network's rolling world premiere, THE TOTALITARIANS was subsequently produced at Woolly Mammoth Theatre (Howard Shalwitz, Artistic Director) in Washington, D.C., opening on June 6, 2014. It was directed by Robert O'Hara; the set design was by Misha Kachman; the costume design was by Frank Labovitz; the lighting design was by Colin K. Bills; the sound design was by Linday Jones; the projection design was by Jared Mezzocchi; and the production stage manager was William E. Cruttenden III. The cast was as follows:

FRANCINE Dawn Ursula
JEFFREY Sean Meehan
PENNY Emily Townley
BEN Nicholas Loumos

As part of the National New Play Network's rolling world premiere, THE TOTALITARIANS was subsequently produced at Z Space (Lisa Steindler, Artistic Director) in San Francisco, CA, on November 22, 2014. It was directed by Kenneth Prestininzi; the set design was by Giulio Perrone; the costume design was by Michelle Mulholland; the lighting design was by Jim Cave; the sound design was by Drew Yerys; and the production stage manager was Kevin Johnson. The cast was as follows:

FRANCINE Alexis Lezin
JEFFREY Liam Vincent
PENNY Jamie Jones
BEN Andrew Humann

THE TOTALITARIANS was originally commissioned by the National New Play Network in partnership with Full Stage USA at New Dramatists, a program made possible by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

CHARACTERS

FRANCINE: mid-30s – early 40s. A speechwriter.

JEFFREY: mid-30s – early 40s. Francine's husband. A doctor.

PENNY: mid-40s – 50s. A candidate. Hypnotizingly watchable.

BEN: early/mid-20s. An aspiring revolutionary.

All characters can be portrayed by actors of any ethnicity.

PLACE

Some version of Nebraska.

Nobody is dressed well, everything looks old and drab.
(That's not specific to Nebraska, just the play.)

TIME

The not-too-distant future.

Which is much like the present.

On the brink.

Of revolution? Oppression? Or just an election.

Note: A slash (/) in the text indicates that the following line should begin.

THE TOTALITARIANS

ACT ONE

Something alarming begins the play. A rifle shot, flitting birds.

The sound of a TV signal being hacked into. An unidentifiable man, Ben, in front of a camera. A tackily patterned ski mask covers his face, perhaps with a tuft.

Something is messed up with the sound. It's garbled, horrendously muffled and mumbled by the mask, like a sock in the mouth. But it sounds very dramatic. Phonetics just to give you the idea; translation is in [brackets.]

BEN. Garghlings, frallah cutreemeffff. [Greetings, fellow countrymen.]
Ee InAirUh Iss Oddcahst ow oo if uh olloween oo uh eepuh uh
Nebraska: [We interrupt this broadcast now to give the following
warning to the people of Nebraska:]

Ooo Ahh Eee Ane-uh. [You are in danger.]

Eh-aska ee ee Ane-uh. [Nebraska is in danger.]

Eh ah owafah orces afft seh oo ehstroh eh-ee-ing ee uhv about
Ehbraska eh story uh ah. Ih ih ache awe uh ow eheggee oo aw em.
[There are powerful forces afoot set to destroy everything we love
about Nebraska and destroy us all. It will take all of our energy to
stop them.]

Iss iss uh owes impurtaht ehehecshu uh or mai tai [This is the most
important election of your lifetime.]

Oo ought oat oh EhEhlOheE Eeesir. [Do not vote for Penelope
Easter.]

Ee ee. [Repeat.]

Oo ought oat oh EhEhlOhEe Eeesir owe IhBihEE ill ee EhToy!

[Do NOT vote for Penelope Easter or Liberty will be Destroyed!]
The over-dramatics send Ben into a coughing fit that diminishes
the climax of his rhetoric.

Eh-oo ee. [Excuse me.]

Eh-ee-ay, ee us ite oh ow Ee-um [Anyway, we must fight for our
Freedom!]

Ee-um! Ee-um! [Freedom! Freedom!]

Ee — [Free —]

Jeffrey closes a laptop. He's been watching. Ben is gone.

*The bedroom of Francine and Jeffrey. Jeffrey is dressed in
unfashionable clothes for a night out at a moderate restaurant.*

Francine is in her underwear. She has a pencil and notepad.

FRANCINE. Change. Progress. Motion. Forward. Forward motion.
Moving progress forward. Motion change forward progress bullshit
bullshit bullshit.

JEFFREY. Francine ...

FRANCINE. Ascension. Salvation. Emancipation.

JEFFREY. You gonna get / dressed?

FRANCINE. Liberation.

Beat.

JEFFREY. Are you going to get / dressed?

FRANCINE. Revolution!

Beat.

JEFFREY. You know they only hold the table for fifteen minutes
after your official reser/vation —

FRANCINE. No.

JEFFREY. — Your official / reservation time so ...

FRANCINE. No no no. What. *What?*

JEFFREY. Dumplings. Fortune cookie. Pillow fight. So you should
probably get —

FRANCINE. Freedom.

JEFFREY. OK.

FRANCINE. Freedom. Freedom Freedom. Freedom.

JEFFREY. Francine.

FRANCINE. Fine. Shit. Freedom. Freedom. Freedom!

JEFFREY. Yay. Shall we —

FRANCINE. But *more*.

JEFFREY. OK, shall we —

FRANCINE. More freedom. Freedom plus. New freedom.
Freedommm. Real freedom. Grade-A freedom, freedom is the best,

hell yeah freedom, liberating freedom, helping free freedom, help yourself to a helping of freedom FUCK YOU FREEDOM. FUCK YOU IN THE ASS!

Beat.

I'm getting dressed as fast as I can.

JEFFREY. I'm gonna give 'em a quick update.

Jeffrey texts.

FRANCINE. From. Freedom *from*. Freedom from freedom from ... Freedom from ... what. Despair. Danger. Terror. Hatred. Blight. Crime. Animals.

Jeffrey fidgets, sneezes?

Freedom from Sex. Sabotage, disappointment, failure, shame, regrets, freedom from life. Freedom from ...

Francine thinking, stuck ...

JEFFREY. Lost dreams?

FRANCINE. Stop it.

JEFFREY. Freedom from troubled journeys. Freedom from false hope.

FRANCINE. I don't want suggestions. And it can only be three words.

JEFFREY. Freedom from time.

FRANCINE. No.

JEFFREY. Nature's most beguiling sojourn. The only possible salvation from time is that it might not be real.

Francine works.

Freedom from death?

FRANCINE. Jeffrey.

JEFFREY. That would be a candidate I would vote for.

FRANCINE. It needs to be feasible. Vaguely feasible. And we are all going to die.

JEFFREY. I know. God, I know. I had a patient the other day. Young. Bright. Tons of energy. And he comes in for a routine physical. He's preparing for some intense "mission" or "cause" or school project something and he's really really excited about it. Wouldn't stop talking about, "Getting ready for the battle of my life." "Fulfilling my destiny," and how we should all be, um, (*Reads off a slip of paper:*) "Not allowing ourselves to become lifeless wedges of brie on the cheeseboard of the powerful."

FRANCINE. Freedom from cheese?

JEFFREY. And I was doctor-listening and then I said, "Wow, I wish I had as much excitement about something as you." A joke. And this boy ... grabbed me by the shoulders. Yelled at me. Said that I am

“exactly what is wrong with Nebraska. If we are not fighting for something, then what are we living for?” And then he half-shouted, half-growled. Like a Scottish warrior. Fist in the air. The nurse came in. It was very intense. He has a website.

FRANCINE. Freedom from anecdotes.

JEFFREY. He also has a lump near his ribs. Like an old lime. I ordered a few tests. And the lump is just the nubbin of a mass like a cauliflower. It's in his bones, blood, everywhere, and it doesn't take a specialist to know that nothing will stop it. Surgery, chemo, radiation, nada. A few months, tops. I have to tell him tomorrow.

FRANCINE. Jeffrey.

JEFFREY. I don't want to tell him.

FRANCINE. Jeffrey.

JEFFREY. Don't you think it would be better if I didn't tell him?

FRANCINE. You have to tell him.

JEFFREY. I know! I know I know. It's just ... He was so ... (*A gesture of Ben's passion.*) I wish it wasn't my job to tell people these things.

FRANCINE. Why did you tell *me*?

JEFFREY. Did it help?

Francine commits an act of violence on her notepad.

FRANCINE. No. No it did not.

JEFFREY. Oh honey.

FRANCINE. I'm fucked.

JEFFREY. You are not fucked.

FRANCINE. This speech is tomorrow night.

JEFFREY. That's still plenty of / time.

FRANCINE. Freedom from what the hell is the third / word?

JEFFREY. OK you are getting into that negative space that / is never —

FRANCINE. I don't have a slogan. I can't write a fucking slogan.

JEFFREY. (*Chanting.*) Yes, you, can. Yes, you, can.

Francine gives Jeffrey a stare.

You know you are an amazing writer.

FRANCINE. Not when it matters. When it actually matters, I'm a fucker-upper. I can feel the debacle rising up from my ankles.

JEFFREY. Hey now, you are the best campaign manager I've ever met.

FRANCINE. What's that supposed to mean?

JEFFREY. Maybe you need something to eat.

FRANCINE. Maybe I should not be living in Nebraska. PLEASE SOMEONE GET ME OUT OF NEBRASKA!

Beat. Jeffrey hugs or spoons Francine.

She has great hair. That is the only positive attribute that comes to mind when I think of my candidate. Gorgeous texture. More “sheen” than I ever thought possible. And it is *huge*. She makes me hate my hair. And in the minus column, she has no experience, no intelligence, and a perfect track record for saying the wrong thing. JEFFREY. I love your hair / so much.

FRANCINE. She doesn't know what Arbor Day is. She thinks the Ogallala Aquifer is a water park. She consistently refers to her spouse as her Gay Husband. What the fuck do I with that?

JEFFREY. But you like what she stands for?

FRANCINE. She's waiting for me to tell her what she stands for.

JEFFREY. You've worked with worse. That moist guy for school board.

FRANCINE. At least he was after *something*. Who is Penelope Easter? What is she about? Is she the one who will do what we want? I don't know.

JEFFREY. I really hate it when your work gets you this upset.

FRANCINE. I'm supposed to be on a campaign with a plane by now.

JEFFREY. I don't like that you are feeling these feelings.

FRANCINE. It's going to get worse. I'm going to get more frustrated. Dejected. Cheated from the career I deserve. I will get resentful of the younger and lesser that are doing better. I will be angered by happiness, bitter at the world and I will blame you.

Beat.

JEFFREY. Or, I could impregnate you.

FRANCINE. Jeffrey.

JEFFREY. Ooo what if I impregnated you right now?

FRANCINE. That would require intercourse.

JEFFREY. I *know*.

FRANCINE. Jeffrey!

Jeffrey tries to seduce Francine. Massaging her, kissing her neck and shoulders.

JEFFREY. Mmm you feel so soft.

FRANCINE. That is a terrible compliment.

JEFFREY. Mmm my soft Francine. I don't want to see you keep torturing yourself with candidates.

FRANCINE. OK, that tickles.

JEFFREY. I hate seeing you waste all your talent, sweat, and breath on helping unqualified people obtain positions of power.

FRANCINE. I am a campaign manager.

THE TOTALITARIANS

by Peter Sinn Nachtrieb

2M, 2W

We might be on the brink of revolution in Nebraska. Penny, a compulsive and compulsively watchable candidate for state office enlists the help of Francine, a silver-tongued operative. Francine's husband Jeffrey, a doctor, is lying to his dying patients — one of whom opens his eyes to Penny's nefarious plans for the Cornhusker State. *THE TOTALITARIANS* is a raucous dark comedy about the state of modern political discourse, modern relationships, and how easy it is to believe truths without facts.

"Forget red versus blue, or donkey versus elephant. For those who are sufficiently disillusioned by Washington politics, the only important distinction between politicians is stupid versus evil. Kudos, then, to Peter Sinn Nachtrieb's hilarious political satire [which] combines the two into a maybe-evil, definitely-stupid candidate from hell ..."

—**DCist.com**

"The campaign trail gets considerably nastier — and a whole lot funnier — in Peter Sinn Nachtrieb's oh-so-dark political satire THE TOTALITARIANS. Sex, money, thorough misrepresentation and a total lack of scruples — perhaps even a well-timed murder or two — play comically toxic parts in the race for a statewide office ... Nachtrieb's mastery of plentiful, surefire, unexpected punch lines and circuitous plot twists is on full display."

—**SFGate.com**

"THE TOTALITARIANS is the kind of hilarious but unsettling show in which a character gurgling on his own blood while he's trying to make a speech gets huge laughs from the audience."

—**Washingtonian.com**

Also by Peter Sinn Nachtrieb

BOB: A LIFE IN FIVE ACTS

BOOM

COLORADO

and others

DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.

ISBN: 978-0-8222-3429-6



9 780822 234296