

James Saunders

James Saunders was born in Islington, London in 1925. He has a rather unusual background for a playwright, having been a chemistry teacher, who took up dramatic writing as a hobby while studying for a science degree at Southampton University. Like David Campton and Alan Ayckbourn, Saunders has written for and been closely associated with the Theatre in the Round at Scarborough, one of the most important centres for new talent and ideas outside London. Saunders is better-known to London theatre-goers than Campton. His first play for the West End was *The Ark* in 1959, and this was followed by *Next Time I'll Sing to You* (his first West End success) in 1962 and *A Scent of Flowers* in 1964. Saunders has written for the stage, radio and television and his plays range in style from realistic observation to absurdist drama, from comedy to plays of ideas. Among his more recent plays are *The Travails of Sancho Panza* (1969), *Games* and *After Liverpool* (1973).

Over the Wall first appeared in print in a collection of one-act plays from five different playwrights entitled *Play Ten* (1977).

THE PLAY

A Narrator tells the story, and the islanders act it out, of an island with a wall running across it. Who built it, why it was built, or what lies behind it nobody knows or cares — nobody, that is, except one man.

CHARACTERS

Any number can play. But the speeches have been numbered from one to nine. The narration (N) may be shared out.

OVER THE WALL

- N: There was once an island, if you believe it, on which lived a people no better and no worse than most. They had enough to eat, without stuffing themselves,* everyone had a day's work (which in those times was considered a great blessing), the old were looked after, as long as they didn't outstay their welcome, and the young were respected as individuals — within reason. All this had been so for as long as anyone could remember, and so they hoped it would continue. For, while they were not exactly happy, they were not exactly unhappy either. And as they said to each other when they bothered to talk about it:
- 1: If it was good enough for my father it's good enough for me. That's what my father used to say, and it's what I say too.
 - 2: Absolutely. Leave well alone, that's my motto.*
 - 3: We should count our blessings.* It's better than it was in the bad old days.
 - 4: Mind you, it's not so good as it was in the good old days.
 - 5: But things could always be worse. That's what we should think of.
 - 6: They could always be better, of course.
 - 5: But they could always be worse.
 - 7: At least we're allowed to work all day.
 - 8: And we're allowed not to work on Saturday and Sunday.
 - 9: And we've got the vote. We didn't have that in the bad old days.
 - 6: (*female*) We didn't have it in the good old days.
- N: So they counted their blessings and rested content. Now what made this island different from any other you might have in mind was a wall, which ran across the island a bit more than halfway down and which had been there as long as anyone could remember, and as long as anyone they could remember could remember. For ever, in fact, as far as they knew or cared. They called it 'The Wall', and if they ever talked about it they said things like:

- 1: There's always been a Wall and there always will be, that's the way things are. It's a fact of nature. There's nothing you can do about it.
- 2: There must be a purpose in it, that's what I say. Everything has its purpose: wars, walls, it's all meant.
- 3: There are things beyond us. A higher Wall, I mean Will. Someone's in charge up there. The great Wall-Builder in the sky. He knows what's best for us. Leave it to Him, that's what I say.
- 6: Or Her.
- 4: After all, when you think of us — human beings — crawling on the earth . . . I mean humility's called for. It's not for us to seek to understand the sublime purpose.
- 5: *Of* which the Wall is part.
- 4: *Of* which the Wall is part.
- 1: It was good enough for my father, and it's good enough for me. That's what my father used to say. Leave it at that. Nuff said.*
- N: So they went on with their business, working as they were allowed to through the week, and on Saturdays and Sundays working, as they were allowed to, at what they called their leisure activities. This wall, now, was not quite straight but curved outwards, so that you could never see the two ends of it together. Not that it had ends for, as the fishermen knew, it continued, when it reached the sea, back along both shores to meet itself again at the far end of the island, so encircling the half of it — a bit more than half.
- 7: Lor, Jarge, yon Wall goos roit rained the oisland.*
- 8: Oi knoos thaat, Taam. Tis a well-knoon faact.*
- N: So they spoke when they fished. High it was, and smooth, and impregnable,* and how it got there no one knew. There were theories, of course.
- 9: There is no doubt that it was constructed in the Neoplasticene* Age by primitive tree-worshippers, to enclose the sacred grove* of the earth-goddess . . .
- 1: It was built of course, by invading Venusians, as a navigational aid and to protect the space-ships from marauding* dinosaurs.
- 2: Obviously a natural outcrop of rock, pushed up by volcanic activity and then worn smooth by the wind and rain, an

- interesting phenomenomenom.*
- 3: It's a figment* of the imagination. The Wall only exists in our minds. If we stopped thinking it was there it wouldn't be.
- N: No one could prove this theory wrong.
- 4: I walked into it last night in the dark. Look at the bump on my forehead.
- 3: Psychosomatic. You *imagined* it was there, so when you got to where you imagined it was you walked into it and imagined you hurt yourself. It stands to reason.*
- 4: It still hurts.
- 3: You think it does.
- N: But since it seemed to make not much difference, if you thought you walked into it, whether you were really hurt or only thought you were, people tried not to. Except for one poor fellow who so convinced himself that the wall was imaginary that he took a flying leap at where it was, or wasn't, and dashed his brains out. Or so it seemed.
- 5: Excuse me, I'm conducting a survey. May I ask what *you* think is on the other side of the Wall?
- 6: I don't want to talk about it. I think it's disgusting. There's enough nasty *this* side of the Wall, never mind the *other* side of the Wall.
- 7: It's like a beautiful garden, with fruit hanging down and bambis* and pretty flowers. And you don't have to wear any clothes.
- 8: It's like a sort of a ooze,* a sort of — like a — ooze, sort of.
- 9: Nothing.
- 5: Nothing?
- 9: Nothing. Everything finishes at the Wall. Then there's nothing.
- 1: The fifth dimension.*
- 2: Ethereal vibrations.*
- 3: That is to say, beyond the Wall the laws of space-time as we know them no longer operate. Call it ethereal vibrations, call it the fifth dimension, call it a rolypoly pudding* . . .
- 1: In other words, as far as we're concerned it doesn't exist in there — if one can say 'in there' for a 'there' which doesn't exist and therefore cannot be said to be either *in* or *there*. As for *what* doesn't exist . . .
- 3: It's like a mathematical point really . . .

- 9: Like I said, nothing.
 2: Don't know.
 3: Don't know.
 4: Don't know.
 6: Don't care.
 N: So there it was. Or wasn't, or was in a different way, or seemed to be.
 1: Mum!
 2: What?
 1: What's over the Wall?
 2: You wash your mouth out with soapy water!* I'll give you over the Wall! Wait till I tell your father!
 3: Dad!
 4: What?
 3: What's over the Wall?
 4: Ask your teacher. What d'you think I pay rates and taxes for? To teach you myself?
 3: I asked my teacher.
 4: Well?
 3: Said to get on with my algebra.
 4: Well, then, do what your teacher says.
 3: But what *is* over the Wall?
 4: The toe of my boot. Get on with your homework.
 3: I've done my homework. What *is* over the —?
 4: Then do something else. Can't you see I'm trying to watch telly?!
- N: Or whatever it was they watched in those days; it wasn't telly.
 4: Can't you see I'm trying to watch the goldfish?
 5: Can't you see I'm trying to get this ferret out of my trousers?*
- 6: Can't you see I'm trying to invent the wheel?
 7: — cook the joint?*
- 8: — bath the baby?
 9: — darn my socks?
 4: — frame a photo of my mother?
 5: — write a sonnet?
 6: — make a fortune?
 7: — get my head out from between these railings?
 8: — bury the cat?
 9: — dig a well starting at the bottom?

- N: Or whatever. And so, in short, on the whole, more or less, without splitting hairs,* broadly speaking, in a nutshell,* they ignored it.
 1: Pretended it wasn't there.
 N: Well, no, they couldn't do that. Because it was. No, they just . . . ignored it; as you might ignore a gatecrasher* at a party whom nobody knows and nobody wants to, who turns up in the wrong gear* with a nasty look on his face and what looks like a flick-knife* sticking out of one pocket.
 3: It's ridiculous.
 2: What is?
 3: It's stupid. I can't believe it. It's ludicrous.* Here we are with a great Wall across the island and we don't even know why and no one seems to care.
 2: It's not for us mere mortals to ask why.
 3: Why not?
 2: Because we're mere mortals, that's why not.
 3: I'm not a mere mortal, I'm a rational human being.
 5: We're not meant to understand everything, you know.
 3: Why not, who says so?
 6: There's enough needs putting right *this* side of the Wall, never mind the *other* side of the Wall.
 7: Get on with your work and think yourself lucky. Thinking about the Wall won't do you any good.
 8: Do some leisure activities, take your mind off it. Do some healthy outdoor pursuits.
 4: All you do is talk about the Wall. Wall, Wall, Wall, that's all I get from you.
 2: Leave wall alone, I mean leave well alone, that's my advice.
 1: Ignorance was good enough for your father and it ought to be good enough for you.
 4: Who do you think you are anyway? God or somebody?
 3: I want to know what's on the other side!!
 5: Next please. Well, now, what seems to be the matter with you?
 3: I'm having a bit of trouble, doctor.
 5: What sort of trouble? Stick out your tongue.
 3: It's about the Wall. All I want to know . . .
 5: Put your tongue in.
 3: It's about the Wall. All I want to know . . .
 5: Bowel movements* all right?

- 3: Yes, thanks. All I want to know is what's on the other side, that seems reasonable enough to me, only —
- 5: Sleeping all right, are you? Getting the old* beauty sleep?
- 3: I dream about walls. Only no one else seems to be bothered, only me, so I —
- 5: How's your sex-life? Sex-life all right, is it? The old nudge nudge wink wink?*
- 3: I'm not bothered, thanks. So I wondered if there's something wrong with me, or if in fact —
- 5: Eating all right, are you? Getting the old nosh* down?
- 3: Yes, I'm eating. Or if in fact it's that there's something wrong with everybody else. And it's turning into a bit of —
- 5: How's the pains in the leg? Pains in the leg all right?
- 3: They're fine. Into a bit of an obsession. Because, I mean, you don't just ignore something like that, I mean I'm not a mere mortal I'm a rational human being and it could be important, I mean, *look* at the flaming* thing, I mean *look* at it, there it is, look, there!
- 5: Any neuralgia,* headache, backache, loss of breath, vomiting, congenital idiocy, piles, trouble with the waterworks, spots before the eyes, dizzy spells?
- 3: D — I — Z — Z —
- 5: Falling hair, loss of weight, gain of weight, tenseness, got a drink problem have you, smoking too much, hallucinations, palpitations, eructations, on drugs are you, can you read the top line, overdoing it at work perhaps, worrying about the work, about the spouse, about where to go for your holiday, about the mortgage, about the value of the pound, about the political situation, about your old mother, about the kids, kids playing you up are they, not doing well at school, got a drink problem have they, smoking, on drugs are they, suffering from loss of weight, falling hair, got any worries have you?
- 3: Yes!
- 5: Have you seen a priest?
- 3: Yes. She didn't know either.
- 5: Didn't know what? They're not supposed to know, they're supposed to give comfort. Seen a psychiatrist, have you, consulted a shrink?*
- 3: He said it was my mother.
- 5: Well there you are. Here's a prescription. Take some four

- times a day, and if there's any left over rub it on your chest. Or your mother's chest. I don't care.
- 3: What's wrong with me, doctor?
- 5: You're a nut.* Get out, you're wasting my time.
- N: So out he got, this nut, taking his obsession with him, and the doctor turned thankfully to the next patient, a nice simple case who'd put his thumb out trying to plant beans in hard ground.
- 5: Put your thumb out, have you? How's your bowel movements? Sleeping all right?
- 3: I'm going to start an Association for Investigating The Wall In Order To See What's On The Other Side. The AFIT-WIOTSWOTOS. Catchy title. They'll flock to join. Then we'll get somewhere.
- N: But they didn't. And after a while he disbanded the association, with the full agreement of the members — himself. But he didn't give up.
- 3: All right. I'm on my own. So be it. But I'm going to find out what's on the other side of That Wall. If it kills me.
- N: And for the next thirty or forty years he did nothing but think about the Wall. He read books, consulted sages,* took measurements, drew diagrams, worked out theories, studied history, biology, theology, psychology, astrology, cogitated, meditated and did a bit of yoga on the side. He lost his friends of course.
- 6: Oh, don't invite *him*. He'll only talk about the Wall.
- N: His marriage went for a Burton.*
- 4: Wall, Wall, Wall, nothing but Wall! I'm sick of Wall! And I'm sick of you too! I'm going home to father!
- N: Slam. His kids turned delinquent.*
- 7: What are you doing tonight?
- 8: Thought I'd cripple a few fuzz.*
- 7: We did that last night.
- N: Until finally, old, alone and penniless, he decided on the direct approach, and built his great invention: a sort of a catapult, quite novel in those times, which could hurl an object, or a person, up to an enormous height. He tried it on a rock, which disappeared into the blue, and then, one day, surrounded by curious bystanders, sat his own skinny, threadbare* old body where the rock had been.
- 3: Wind it up, then.

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- N: They did.
3: When I say three, pull the lever. One ... two ... thr ...
ooww!
N: They did, only too glad to get rid of this nut, this disruptive*
influence, so they could get back to watching their goldfish
and planting their beans.
9: There he goes!
1: Look at his rags flapping!
2: Bald head glinting in the sun!
4: Better than fireworks!
5: Coo!
N: Up he went, up, up, up, until looking down ... we surmise*
... he saw the whole gold of that sunny day, the whole
spread of the earth and seas, saw the tiny moving figures of
people and the infinite distances of space. And it looked
good.
3: I'm up! I'm over! I can see! I can see over! It's ... It's ...
It's ... Aaah!
N: A heart attack — we surmise. But in any case he was too far
away for those on the ground to hear him. And as he
dwindled into what seemed like a mathematical point, and
disappeared, those on the ground shook their heads, or
giggled, and went back to their beans, and their goldfish.

Glossary

The meanings given below are those which the words and phrases have as they occur in the play.

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55 *stuffing themselves*: eating more than they needed.
motto: saying that guides me in the way I behave and live.
count our blessings: remember the good things in our lives.
56 *Nuff said (coll.)*: enough said (there is no need to say anything more).
Lor, Jarge, yon Wall goos roit rained the oisland: Lord, George, that wall goes right round the island (suggestive of dialectal speech in country areas of the south west of England).
Oi knoos thaat, Taam. Tis a well-knoon faact: I know that, Tom. It's a well-known fact.
impregnable: could not be crossed over or broken down.
Neo-plasticene: invented word suggesting a geological era in the distant past. (Plasticene is a type of coloured modelling clay used by children!)
grove: a group of trees forming a centre of worship.
marauding: attacking.
57 *phenomenomenom*: the speaker wishes to say 'phenomenon', but either does not know the word, or cannot pronounce it properly.
figment: invention.
It stands to reason: it is logical or obvious.
bambis: deer (after Walt Disney's film *Bambi*).
ooze: soft, runny mud.
fifth dimension: two steps beyond ordinary experience.
Ethereal vibrations: heavenly sounds.
rolypoly pudding: a heavy jam pudding, popular in Britain.
58 *wash your mouth out with soapy water*: said to children who use bad language.
ferret out of my trousers: a traditional sport in some country districts of Britain is to see how long you can keep a ferret (a small rabbit-catching animal) inside your trousers!
joint: a large piece of meat.
59 *splitting hairs*: worrying about unimportant differences.
in a nutshell: briefly.

David Campton

David Campton was born in 1924 in Leicester, where he still lives. He became a full-time dramatist in 1956 and, like James Saunders and Alan Ayckbourn, developed as a playwright with the Theatre in the Round at Scarborough, a seaside town in the north of England. Since *The Lunatic View*, performed in 1957, he has written something for this theatre each year, and has also acted with the company both at Scarborough and on tour from 1957-63. He has written a large number of plays, nearly all one-act, ranging, in his own words, from 'domestic comedy, through costume melodrama to comedy of menace'. Campton's plays have rarely appeared in London, with the result that he is not as well-known as he deserves to be. A talented dramatist with a gift for 'serious comedy', Campton is particularly aware of the threat of the Bomb and his vision of people as helpless puppets trapped in frightening situations is a dominant image in his work. Among his better-known plays are *The Laboratory* (1955), *Mutatis Mutandis* (1960) and *The Life and Death of Almost Everybody* (1970). *Us and Them* was first published in 1977.

THE PLAY

Under the eyes of an all-seeing Recorder, two groups meet. They divide the land, first with a line, then with a wall. From there on the trouble begins.

CHARACTERS

RECORDER
SPOKESMAN A
SPOKESMAN B
OTHER As
OTHER Bs

PRODUCTION NOTE

This play was written to be performed by a company of almost any size, of any age, and of either sex. The number against a character (A1, B2) is intended to indicate who makes a statement, asks a question, replies, or interjects, but the dialogue should be shared among the whole company. That is to say, although an A1 character should not speak B2 lines, there can be any number of A1 characters.

However, because the lines have been shorn of characterizing devices, the characters should not be treated as featureless machines. They are people. Character should be projected on to the lines (which is a reversal of the usual process).

The effect to aim at is of one conversation, emphasizing the fact that there is no difference between the people on either side of the wall. They are really part of one group.

US AND THEM

A bare stage. The RECORDER enters with a large book and pen. He looks around.

RECORDER: How odd. I felt sure there was someone here. Just a minute ago. There's still the trace of an echo. I could have been mistaken, though. They come and go. . . . Well, it's my job to wait and see. (*He makes himself comfortable.*) I may have to wait some time. . . . But there's nothing I can do about that. Time passes. (*Pause.*) Listen. Footsteps coming from this direction. And more footsteps coming from that direction. Something is about to happen. I must make a note.

Parties A and B enter from opposite sides. They pause wearily.

'Party A from the East. Party B from the West. Worn out* with travelling they come to rest.' (*He ponders* over the last note.*) Verse in an official record? (*He crosses out the last words.*) 'At first they are too exhausted for words.' . . . That's better. 'Gradually they look around them, at first critically, then with growing admiration and delight. But too taken with* their own concerns to notice the other group.'

A1: Here?

B1: Here.

A1: It's a good place.

B1: Yes, it's a good place.

A2: Better than any other place we've seen.

B2: It's a good place all right.

A1: To pause at.

B1: To stay at.

A2: To make our own.

B2: For ever and ever.

A1: This is our place.

B1: Ours.

A2: Ours.

B2: We took long enough to find it.

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A3: It was a long journey.
B3: But it was worth every day we searched.
A1: It was worth every mile we tramped.*
B1: Look at it.
A2: Just look.
B2: Look here.
A3: Look there.
B3: Look.
A1: Look.

They point out things that please them.

RECORDER: Of course, they could have commented on the natural advantages of the place — such as the average hours of sunshine, the mean* rainfall, the geological structure, the chemistry of the topsoil, and the lush pasturage.* They'll find the words in time. But next they notice each other.

From pointing out the delights of the place, the parties point to each other.

A1: Look.
B1: Look.
A2: Look!
B2: Look!!

The groups chatter excitedly among themselves.

RECORDER: Party A goes into a huddle,* looking warily* at Party B. Party B goes into a huddle, looking warily at Party A. Nothing to comment on there. It's the usual pattern. Any minute now the Spokesmen will face up to each other.

A SPOKESMAN from Party B steps forward.

SPOKESMAN B: Who are you?

A SPOKESMAN from Party A steps forward.

SPOKESMAN A: Who are you?

SPOKESMAN B: We've come a long way.

SPOKESMAN A: We've come a long way.

The SPOKESMEN return to their groups for quick conferences. After a few seconds they face each other again.

SPOKESMAN A: We want to live here.

SPOKESMAN B: We want to live here.

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The SPOKESMEN return to their groups for quick conferences. After a few seconds they face each other again.

SPOKESMAN B: We won't let you drive us away.

SPOKESMAN A: We don't want to drive you away.

The SPOKESMEN return to their groups for conferences.

RECORDER: One man, one vote. It takes time, but that's Democracy. There's no guarantee that they'll come to the right decision in the end, but that's Democracy, too. Not that I'm complaining about Democracy. It encourages a sense of responsibility. In theory, anyway.

The SPOKESMEN turn and face each other.

SPOKESMAN A: Isn't there enough room for all of us?

SPOKESMAN B: There's enough room for everybody.

SPOKESMAN A: You could have all you see from there to here.

SPOKESMAN B: You could have all you see from here to there.

SPOKESMAN A: Agreed?

SPOKESMAN B: Agreed.

The As and Bs shout 'Agreed'. The SPOKESMEN shake hands.

SPOKESMAN A: Do you mind if we pause in negotiations?*

SPOKESMAN B: For a conference?

SPOKESMAN A: Agreed.

They go into conference again.

RECORDER: Proposals,* counter-proposals, resolutions, amendments, points of order, appeals to the chair, motions, votes, polls, divisions, objections, and recounts. Everybody has a say. It can become tedious, but it has one advantage — if anything goes wrong, everyone is to blame.

SPOKESMAN A: We have come to a conclusion.

SPOKESMAN B: A conclusion is a good thing to come to. We have reached an agreement.

SPOKESMAN A: It's always as well to reach an agreement.

SPOKESMAN B: That you take that stretch of country with all its natural amenities,* grazing rights,* water rights, hunting rights, fishing rights, arable land, and mineral deposits.

SPOKESMAN A: And that you take that stretch of land with all its natural amenities, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

SPOKESMAN B: Furthermore . . .

SPOKESMAN A: Furthermore?

SPOKESMAN B: Yes, furthermore. For the benefit of all concerned . . .

SPOKESMAN A: Does that include us?

SPOKESMAN B: It includes everybody. That a line be drawn.

RECORDER (*musings* aloud*): A line?

SPOKESMAN B: A line. That a line be drawn to mark the place where your land ends and ours begins.

SPOKESMAN A: Ah, yes. I was just about to add that a line be drawn to mark the place where our land ends and yours begins.

SPOKESMAN B: Good fences make good neighbours.*

SPOKESMAN A: Good neighbours make good fences.

SPOKESMAN B: Shall we mark it now?

SPOKESMAN A: Why not?

SPOKESMAN B: Chalk?

SPOKESMAN A: String.

SPOKESMAN A produces a length of string and the two groups join forces in surveying the ground, and pegging out the string in a straight line. Everyone has his own idea how the job should be done, but eventually it is finished.*

RECORDER: I don't know who gave me this job. I seem to have been doing it as long as I can remember. Not that I'm complaining — someone has to do it. The record has to be kept. Who knows — one day someone may learn from it.

The groups stand back and admire their handiwork.

SPOKESMAN A: It's a good line.

SPOKESMAN B: Though I say it myself.

A1: I don't know.

SPOKESMAN A: Are you criticizing this line?

SPOKESMAN B: Perhaps you could make a better line.

SPOKESMAN A: We're all listening. What have you got against this line?

A1: Chickens.

As AND Bs: Chickens? What have chickens got to do with it? Take no notice. Got chickens on the brain.

A1: I know something about chickens, I do. There's not much you can tell me about chickens. I was brought up with

chickens. And I'll tell you this: chickens can't read.

SPOKESMAN B: Chickens can't read?

SPOKESMAN A: What difference does that make to this line?

A1: None at all to your line.

SPOKESMAN B: Or to your chickens for that matter.

A1: No use putting up your 'Beware of the Bull' signs. No use sticking up your 'Trespassers will be Prosecuted'* notices. And you might as well forget your 'One-Way Streets', your 'Diversions', and your 'Roads Closed'. The chickens go where they want to go. No use drawing a line, and expecting the chickens to stay on this side of it. Or on that side of it for that matter.

As AND Bs: True. That's a point. I never saw a chicken reading. Or taking any notice of a line.

SPOKESMAN B: But what does it matter where the chickens go?

A1: Oh, if it doesn't matter there's no more to be said.

SPOKESMAN A: Good. Now we can get on with . . .

A2: But suppose it should be sheep.

B1: Sheep?

A2: Sheep can't read either. At least I never saw a sheep reading. Ignorant animals really.

B1: A line won't keep a sheep from straying.

B2: Especially if they can't read.

A3: Or cows from wandering.

B3: Or horses from getting lost.

A2: And as for rabbits . . .

SPOKESMAN B: All right. What do you want?

SPOKESMAN A: Schools for animals?

A1: What we need are fences.

B1: Walls.

A2: Thick enough to stop cows from breaking through.

B2: High enough to stop chickens from flying over.

A3: Good walls make good neighbours.

B3: Good neighbours make good walls.

SPOKESMAN A: You want walls?

SPOKESMAN B: Shall we build walls?

A1: Before we do anything else.

SPOKESMAN A and SPOKESMAN B take opposite ends of the piece of string, and raise it about six inches off the ground.

SPOKESMAN A: This high?

B1: Higher. Think of the cows.

The string is raised waist high.

SPOKESMAN B: This high?

A2: Higher. Think of the horses.

The string is raised shoulder high.

SPOKESMAN A: This high?

B2: Higher. Think of the chickens.

The string is held as high as the SPOKESMEN can reach, standing on tiptoe.

SPOKESMAN B: I think that should do.

B1: Yes, that should do.

SPOKESMAN A: It had better do. Now make it fast.

The ends of the string are tied to posts.

SPOKESMAN B: And build the wall.

The wall is built. This can be done in a number of ways. Blocks could be built up to the height of the string, or more string could be tied between the posts, or material could be draped over the string. At all events it is achieved after a great deal of activity. Meanwhile, the RECORDER looks on, and takes notes.

RECORDER: I won't say they're right. I won't say they're wrong. It's my job merely to record events. Events speak for themselves. They wanted a wall: they've got a wall. Neither side can see over, or through, or round. That's a wall.

Now all the As are on one side of the wall, and all the Bs are on the other side.

SPOKESMAN A: That's a wall. That ought to last.

SPOKESMAN B: Nothing we need to learn about making a wall.

RECORDER: Except how to make a way over, or through, or round.

SPOKESMAN A: Are you there?

SPOKESMAN B: We're here. Are you all satisfied?

SPOKESMAN A: Everything went according to plan. What now?

SPOKESMAN B: We settle down.* And you?

SPOKESMAN A: We settle down, too. It's good land.

SPOKESMAN B: It's very good land. We're lucky. We've got good neighbours.

SPOKESMAN A: We've got good neighbours, too. It's a good wall.

SPOKESMAN B: Good walls make good neighbours.

SPOKESMAN A: Good neighbours make good walls.

SPOKESMAN B: Good-bye, then. There's work to be done.

SPOKESMAN A: Good-bye. Must get down to work.

Shouting 'Good-bye' the two groups pick up their belongings, and move away. The 'Good-byes' die away in the distance.

RECORDER: Nothing left but the wall. And the chickens on each side of the wall. And the sheep on each side of the wall. And the cows on each side of the wall. And the horses on each side of the wall. And the people on each side of the wall . . .

The groups re-appear on each side of the wall. They are all working.

It's a busy life — and the great advantage with being busy is that it occupies the mind. Working keeps thoughts under control. Thoughts are more apt to* run wild than any sheep. Thoughts can fly higher than any chickens. In fact walls make thoughts fly even higher. But as long as thoughts are kept under control there's no harm done. Except that there comes a time when all the chickens have been fed; all the cows have been milked; all the sheep have been rounded up in the fold* — and thoughts are free to stray.

Gradually the groups give up work, and make themselves comfortable.

A1: I wonder what they're doing over there.

A2: Over there?

B1: Over there. What do you think they're doing?

A2: Why?

A1: Why not?

A2: Why do you wonder what they're doing over there?

B1: We can't see them, can we?

B2: They can't see us.

A1: I just wondered.

B1: Anybody can wonder.

- A1: Just a thought — like do spring and summer come before autumn and winter, or do autumn and winter come first?
- B1: Like — can a worm think?
- A1: Like — what are they doing over there?
- A2: The usual things, I suppose.
- B2: They'll be doing the usual things.
- A1: What do you mean — the usual things?
- A2: Things that you usually do.
- B2: Things that we usually do.
- B1: Not the things that *they* usually do?
- A2: The things that they usually do.
- B1: You said the things that *we* usually do.
- A2: They're the same things.
- B1: Are they the same?
- A2: Why shouldn't they be the same?
- B2: Why should they be the same?
- A1: They're not like us.
- A2: Aren't they?
- B1: It stands to reason.*
- A1: Work it out for yourself.*
- B1: Just work it out.
- A1: For instance — you're not like me, are you?
- A2: Not much.
- B1: You're not a bit like me.
- A2: So they're not like us.
- B2: So they're not a bit like us.
- A2: We're on this side of the wall.
- B2: They're on the other side of the wall.
- A1: Fancy* living on the other side of the wall.
- B1: Fancy wanting to live on the other side of the wall.
- A2: When you could be living here.
- B2: Fancy not wanting to live here.
- A1: Funny.
- B1: They've got some funny ways.
- A1: Yes, they've got some funny ways.
- B2: Have they?
- A2: Of course. You've got some funny ways, too.
- B1: They look funny to me all right.
- A2: We've all got funny ways.
- B2: But their ways are funnier. Over there.
- B1: We don't even know what ways they've got.

- A2: If they've got ways we don't know about, they must be funny ways.
- A1: Still, as long as they're on the other side of the wall, it doesn't matter.
- B1: It doesn't matter as long as they're on that side, and we're on this.
- A2: I'm not so sure.
- A1: What do you mean?
- B1: I've been thinking. They're very quiet.
- B2: We're quiet.
- B1: We've got nothing to make a noise about.
- A2: What about them, eh?
- A1: What about them?
- A2: What have they got to be so quiet about?
- B1: It's unnatural.
- A1: It's unusual.
- B2: It's disturbing.
- A2: It's disquieting.*
- B1: It's abnormal.
- A1: It's uncomfortable.
- B2: It's sinister.*
- A2: It's not as it should be.
- B1: It's enough to send cold shivers* down your back.
- A1: It's enough to make your hair stand on end.
- B2: Just thinking about it.
- A2: Just wondering.
- B1: What are they up to?
- A2: What are they doing behind that wall?
- B2: They could be doing anything behind that wall:
- B1: Like what?
- A2: Just think.
- B1: Ah!
- B2: Oh!
- A1: They wouldn't.
- B2: Not that!
- A2: I wouldn't put it past 'em.*
- B2: Not them!
- A1: Not that!
- A2: Not what?
- A1: Not what you're thinking.

- B2: Oh, would they really?
 B1: They're not to be relied on.
 A1: You're exaggerating.
 A2: Exaggerating?
 A1: You wouldn't expect anybody to do that.
 B2: We wouldn't do it.
 B1: We're not like them.
 A2: They're not like us.
 B2: But they wouldn't. Not ...
 B1: Like ...
 A2: For instance ...
 B1: Or even ...
 A1: Not to mention ...
 A2: Just you wait.
 A1: Wait for what?
 B1: You'll see. You'll believe me then.
 A2: Just you wait till you see it happening.
 B2: I don't believe it.
 A1: Oh!
 A2: You will.
 B1: If you ask me, they're wicked.
 B2: Stands to reason. They're a wicked lot.
 A1: They wouldn't get up to that sort of thing if they weren't wicked.
 A2: Well, as long as they're wicked on their side of the wall ...
 A1: Wickedness spreads.
 B1: Wickedness creeps.
 A2: How long will they go on being wicked on their side of the wall?
 B2: It's a high wall.
 A1: It's a thick wall.
 B3: Let them do what they like on their side of the wall.
 A3: They can't interfere with us.
 A1: Can't they?
 B1: What can they do to us?
 A2: They could be making plans now.
 B2: Think. Just think.
 A1: They could be spying on us now.
 B3: Don't be silly.
 A3: That's absurd.
 A1: Is it?

- B1: Perhaps we ought to check.
 A2: It wouldn't do any harm to look.
 A3: You can look if you like.
 B3: I'm not making a fool of myself.
 A3: I'll tell you what they're doing on the other side.
 A2: What?
 B3: I know what they're doing.
 B2: Tell us.
 A3: They're lying down in the sun like sensible people, maybe chewing long bits of grass.
 B3: They're looking up at the sky, and working out tomorrow's weather.
 A3: Or they're counting chickens.
 B3: Or counting sheep.
 A3: They're doing what we're doing.
 B3: They're doing exactly what we're doing.
 A1: I knew they weren't to be trusted.
 B1: Have a look quickly.
 A2: Look at them.
 B2: Look.
 A1: Look.
 B1: How?
 A2: Climb up.
 B2: Look over the top.

They prepare to climb the wall with whatever means are at hand — blocks, furniture, or each other.

RECORDER: At this point there is always the temptation to shout 'stop'. But a Recorder mustn't. It's a Recorder's job to record: no more, no less. And, my goodness the fuss that's made about handwriting and spelling! As if spelling mattered after ... they've taken the first steps, you see. And after the first steps the others follow naturally. All a Recorder can do is to record. They climb to the top of the wall, and ...

The As, who have now reached the top of the wall, come face to face with the Bs. They all shriek, and clamber down again.

- A1: It's all true.
 B1: They were.
 A1: Looking over.

B1: Spying.
 A1: On us.
 B1: On us.
 A1: It's a good job we looked.
 B1: We caught them at it.
 A1: And were they surprised!
 B1: They never expected that.
 A1: They were fairly caught.
 B1: Caught in the act.
 A2: But why were they doing it?
 B2: Why would they want to do it?
 A2: Why?
 B2: Why?
 A1: Ah-ha.
 B1: We can guess.
 A1: That's only half the story.
 B1: That's only the tip of the iceberg.*
 A1: They're up to no good.
 B1: They're ready for something.
 A1: We must be ready for them.
 B2: Ready for what?
 A1: Ready for anything.
 B1: Anything might happen.
 A1: They're not like us.
 B1: They're a bad lot.
 A1: They're cruel.
 B1: They're ruthless.*
 A1: Devilish.
 B1: Fiendish.*
 A1: Wild.
 B1: Savages.
 A1: Peeping Toms.*
 B1: Sneaks.*
 A3: But let's consider.
 B3: Let's think carefully.
 A3: We looked over the wall, too.
 B3: We'd never have seen them if we hadn't peeped.
 A1: It's as well that we did.
 B1: Where should we be now if we hadn't?
 A3: Wait, though. Couldn't we forget that it happened?
 B3: Couldn't we make allowances?

A1: Oh, yes, indeed.
 B1: Why not, indeed?
 A1: If we *want* to be made into mince.*
 B1: If we want to wake up with our throats cut.
 A2: But what can we do?
 B2: What's to be done?
 A1: One thing's certain.
 B1: There's no doubt at all.
 A1: We can't live here any longer with them just there.
 B1: We'll either have to fight or move on.
 A1: Either they go, or we'll have to go.
 B1: It's them or us.
 As AND Bs: Them.
 A3: But we've got the wall.
 B3: There's always the wall.
 As AND Bs: Pull it down. Pull it down.

Both sides attack the wall.

RECORDER: It's odd: even sensible actions that would never be taken in the cause of peace are taken in the name of war. Like all pulling together. Like breaking down walls. But the result isn't the same. As for instance . . .

The wall falls. For a second the two sides stare at each other. Then, with a cry, they rush at each other. They fight.

Some are forced off-stage. Some run off-stage and are pursued. Some fall and are dragged away by friends.

They fight. No, I'm not recording all the details. Any battle is just like any other battle. There are some acts of chivalry,* some deeds of treachery,* a hint of courage, a touch of cowardice. But the heroes, and the cowards, and the patriots, and the traitors have one thing in common: they all end up as dead as each other. This is nothing. I've seen battles that make this look like a squabble between sticklebacks.* Not that I'm offering any prizes for the best battle. Every battle ends in the same way. One side thinks it has won; the other side thinks it ought to have won. Someone cleans up the mess, and the ground is left clean and tidy — ready for someone else to fight over another time. I could moralize.* I could draw conclusions. But the conclusion is so

obvious. The facts speak for themselves. They fight until . . .
Oh, is it over already?

The stage is clear.

Now, is there anything to add before I draw the line?* No? I had a feeling that there might be. Like the last spark in a dying fire. Like the last syllable of a fading echo. Ah, I thought as much.

An A and a B limp on to the stage from opposite sides. They come face to face where the wall once stood.

- A: Going?
B: Going.
A: You could stay — now.
B: No, we can't stay — now.
A: It's good land.
B: It was good land.
A: We — we didn't want to — to . . .
B: If only we hadn't . . .
A: But you . . .
B: We?
A: We, too.
B: It was the wall, you know.
A: The wall was to blame.
B: The wall.
A: The wall.
B: We should have made it stronger.
A: Thicker.
B: Higher.
A: Longer.
B: It was the wall.

They go out on opposite sides.

The RECORDER slams the book shut, and jumps up angrily.

RECORDER: I don't want to know any more. It's all down here. Over and over again. History. The record is kept because someday someone may learn from it. Now I'm required elsewhere. Oh, this all becomes so monotonous.* (*He starts to walk away, but pauses*) Someday. Somewhere. Someone. Is it possible? Hah!

He goes. BLACKOUT.

Glossary

The meanings given below are those which the words and phrases have as they occur in the play.

- Page
- 71 *Worn out*: very tired.
ponders: thinks.
taken with: interested in.
- 72 *tramped*: walked over long distances.
mean: average.
lush pasturage: thickly-growing grassland.
goes into a huddle: crowds closely together.
warily: cautiously, suspecting danger.
- 73 *negotiations*: discussions in order to reach an agreement on something.
Proposals etc.: all the many bureaucratic arrangements made in order to reach a democratic political decision.
natural amenities: natural advantages and resources.
grazing rights: a person's right to let his/her cattle feed (graze) in a particular place.
- 74 *musings*: thinking to himself.
Good fences make good neighbours: a well-known quotation from "Mending Wall", a poem by the American poet, Robert Frost.
- 75 *pegging out*: marking out lines on the ground.
'Trespassers will be Prosecuted': a sign that shows it is illegal to walk on a certain piece of land.
- 76 *settle down*: start living in a regular way.
- 77 *apt to*: likely to.
rounded up in the fold: collected together behind fences.
- 78 *It stands to reason*: it is obvious.
Work it out for yourself: come to your own conclusions.
Fancy: imagine.
- 79 *disquieting*: makes one feel uneasy.
sinister: evil.
shivers: the shaking caused by fear.
I wouldn't put it past 'em (coll.): it is possible they would do that (something bad).
- 82 *tip of the iceberg*: a small part of the whole truth.
ruthless: without pity, cruel.
Fiendish: devilish, cruel.
Peeping Toms: people who spy on others when they think they are alone.
Sneaks: cowards, people who tell stories about others.