

# **THE AGONY OF COLIN POWELL**

A DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE IN ONE ACT

c

William A. Cook

(Copyright 9/30/04)

This one act play is a work of fiction. The Protagonist and the characters he presents on screen are fictional characters as well even though they are named after living persons currently holding positions in the government of the United States. No attempt has been made to accurately penetrate the inner thoughts or feelings of the living man, Colin Powell. Indeed, Colin Powell may not be able to do that although he is in a much better position than I to attempt such a feat. The Colin Powell in this play is a representative character, not unlike Everyman, who must face his inner self, having lived a life contrary to the values, principles, and morals that had governed his behavior before his ascent to the pinnacles of power. The Colin Powell in the Bush administration has appeared at times to openly confront the decisions that drive this administration, yet has always backed down, accepted the necessity of the acts, or remained silent in acquiescence of them. That behavior gave rise to the intent of the play as it seemed to eloquently represent an individual in crisis -- duty versus self. The play is a fictitious portrayal of a person in spiritual and emotional agony confronting his dark night of the soul.

## The Agony of Colin Powell

### A Dramatic Monologue in One Act

William A. Cook

Scene: A five star hotel suite close to the UN building in NYC. The room opens from the main double doors at the rear of the stage. The entrance offers a crescent table to the right of the entrance and a door to the bedroom on the left. A few steps from the door there is a step into the main room. It offers a large “L” shaped couch set, end tables with elegant lamps, a credenza with appropriate liquor bottle and glasses and a lounge chair. There is a desk of some size to the left with a desk chair, a computer, phone, etc. A huge TV screen is visible on the sidewall. A full length mirror hangs next to the entrance doors facing the audience. Faint elevator music can be heard riding quietly over the set.

The lights come up on the closed entrance to Secretary Colin Powell’s hotel suite. Muffled voices can be heard outside; the door opens and Powell enters carrying his brief case as he seems to dismiss someone with a rapid gesture of his free arm. He’s dressed in a winter overcoat, silk scarf visible around his neck, and fedora hat. He closes the door firmly, turns toward the room with his back resting on the door; he scours the room before moving toward the entrance tree stand where he removes his hat, places the brief case on the floor, removes his coat and scarf, picks up the brief case and moves toward the desk. He places the brief case on the desk and bends over it in silent meditation. He’s quiet, deep in thought, even disturbed. He turns to survey the room eyeing a full length mirror a few feet away. He turns abruptly to the door he just entered and says in muffled tones the following.)

[Revised opening in script.]

*POWELL:*

*Oh God...my God, won't this ever end?  
What madness am I mired in? What slough (slow) is this?  
What lures me to this swamp, this pit of despond?  
Where I drown in hopeless depression?  
Alone! Oh, so alone!*

*What did that obsequious clown just say,  
“That could have been a thorny news briefing, Sir,  
but you handled it with grace and diplomacy.  
Most impressive, Sir. Good night Mr. Secretary.”  
A thorny briefing indeed! Obsequious fool!  
Reminded me of me years ago  
When I attended the general’s dinners,  
Bowling and saluting, never thinking.*

*Always, always the fawning fool,  
The better to grease the next step.*

*How gracefully I avoided the truth  
This night. With what diplomacy I lied  
As I described the kidnapping of an elected  
President out of his own country,  
For his own good, of course.  
After all, he wasn't obedient to his masters;  
He hadn't learned to do their bidding  
As I have learned to do.*

*He remained  
A black man, rebellious by nature,  
A thorn, you clown, in the side of this administration;  
Did you intend that irony, or are you clueless?  
A black man, President Aristide of Haiti  
Standing toe to toe against our bumbling fool?  
How convenient that **this** black man  
(He pounds on his chest to make his point)  
Announces to the world that Big Brother  
To the north trumped the citizens of Haiti  
By removing their elected President.*

*How despicable, how amoral,  
How without grace or compassion or honesty.*

*Would that I could slough (sluf) off this role  
That smothers me, hides me from me,  
And I become a buffoon, a comic player  
Mouthing the words of idiots, fools,  
That mock those they claim to serve.*

*[He turns to face the mirror as he brushes the coat lapels and speaks the following.]*

*Then do I become but another fool!  
Dressed in navy pin stripe,  
The costume of this [pointing to self] civilian clown,  
To cloak my transformation from dutiful general  
To obedient servant of the people.*

*Ah, it was so easy then, "Yes, Sir!" "Done, Sir!"*

*[He salutes the mirror, turns with the stiffness of the trained soldier as these words are spoken.]*

*A salute, an about face, a march out of the place,  
A decision made by another, my superior,  
Orders obeyed without question, without doubt,  
My mind but a soldier behind medals  
And epaulets, and glistening clusters of rank!*

*But now, now I speak for the people,  
I act in their name, I serve no other!*

*[He tears off his tie, rips at the buttons on his shirt, throws off his suit jacket as though it were  
the uniform of the slave.]*

*Oh, how I wish that were true!  
God, what offal do I coddle here,  
What cretin guides this ship of state,  
Whose voice I hear and have come to hate!*

*[He suddenly grabs at his chest as a real pain hits. He stops talking and lets the moment pass.  
Then he speaks the following lines in a subdued meditative reflection.]*

*Where have I buried everything I longed to be?  
What road led me to this barren place?  
Why do I do what I do when I can see  
That it has blackened my soul and whitened my face?  
Have I succumbed to such hypocrisy  
That I can no longer trace  
The roots that hungered to be free,  
That gave purpose to my being and to my race?  
It was not always so years ago  
When I first realized how silently  
I had risen beyond the lackeys  
Who attended those in power,  
Whose spittle shined their words of praise  
As eloquently as it glistened on their patron's shoes.*

*I remember the dank and musty halls  
Of the city's projects where living things  
Scattered beneath the feet, scurrying  
Under the stove and into the cracks,  
Hordes of living throbbing things  
Unseen, unheard, like the crews that attend  
This Cabal of Chicken Hawks;  
That's what I called them years ago,  
And I was right; God, how right I was!*

*Why then should I who came from nothing  
Feel the guilt of savage indifference  
While the pampered privileged wake  
Oblivious to their acts of savagery?*

*I listen to that voice and hear  
It echo inside of me, mocking  
The man I yearned to be.  
Would that I could smother  
That voice and speak to the inner soul  
Buried these many years beneath  
Graceful bows and obsequious drivel.*

*Would that I could find  
When this proud black man  
Lost his way, lost himself  
Shedding his inner being  
Bit by bit as the years passed,  
And stands here now an empty  
Vessel, a hollow man that tolls  
With every word he speaks  
The emptiness that trumpets  
The greatness of this administration  
As it dismantles the only words  
That gave it greatness-  
"All are created equal."*

That alone gave cause to me  
When I was young and believed.  
But now I drag this carcass  
In the dead of night to this hotel,  
To face the darkness alone,  
And hear my own voice ring  
From inside where the void resides,  
Where no heart beats and no soul sings.

That it has come to this:  
Mouthing the words of idiots; the fool  
That plays his part, then departs to play  
The fool again to the plaudits of the powers  
That pull the strings that make me twitch!

[He suddenly grabs at his chest as a real pain hits. He stops talking and lets the moment pass.]

He grabs the remote and turns on the TV to find the evening news. He watches in silence as the anchorman turns to the UN story of the flight of Aristide out of Haiti. No one seems to know where he has gone or why, just a desperate flight to safety done with American aid. The cameraman turns to his interview with Powell, the administration's spokesman on the issue. He explains how Aristide's life and those of his family were in danger and the US offered him a flight out of the country. He explains that Aristide had signed a letter of resignation and the US was acting in a true humanitarian spirit to help the beleaguered President. He shuts off the TV and tosses the remote on the couch]

[Mocking himself.]

That is the most influential "Oreo" in the Nation!  
Colin, "Oreo," Powell! Black  
On the inside, white on the outside,  
The inside-out cookie, baked in a white oven!

[He reverts to dialect as he responds to his own image on the screen.]

'Who is dat man? How come he look like me?  
He sound like me, but he not be me!'

Oh, how I wish that were so,  
That I might rest in the black night  
Knowing I had deserved the sleep  
That crowns those who fought the good fight.

But sleep eludes me, escapes my grasp  
As though it were a convict on the loose,  
And I the Pink Panther's stumbling fool  
That follows the rule to its inevitable end,  
An ironic ridicule of reason and civility.  
The face before the camera, quiet, assured,  
The very cadence of civilized man  
Explaining the unexplainable in measured  
Tones that none would dare to question  
Lest they appear the fool!

[He moves to the desk, opens the attaché case and rummages inside pulling papers and disks from its innards. He appears to be searching for a specific disk. He locates it, turns to the computer and inserts the disk. The images come on the big screen. He lands in the desk chair. It has wheels so he can move around on the upper floor and he enjoys this mobility.]

Ah! Got it! Fools caught in the act!

*Let me prick my anger  
By starring them in the face.*

[He gleefully points the remote at the screen.  
But a strange thing happens: an image of the three stooges appears. He reacts in laughter  
recalling how he had played with these clowns in jest and sarcasm]

Thank God, a moment of levity  
Before I enter Dante's Hell.

[He points the remote again and Cheney's face appears.]

Here, here's the Iago with infernal sneer,  
Tilted head, and varnished voice;  
The asp in the ear of the mannequin,  
That slips its hateful venom  
Into that vapid space, unknown  
To a mind grown dull in time,  
Doltish from drugs and drink.

What demonic demands does  
He inject into that dummy?  
What mind possesses such scorn  
For the common man called to slaughter?  
What evil ego glows so deep  
In the cauldron of his soul  
That he can send the innocent  
To their death without remorse  
Even as he slides guiltlessly  
Beyond the killing fields he creates?

[He wheels up to the screen and faces Cheney, rises up from the chair and gives a mock salute,  
saying "Yes, Sir!" "Yes, Sir!"]

This! This face must I face  
Each day, feign joy  
In its presence, bestow my obsequiousness  
Like some sheepish lapdog  
On this grotesquerie that leers  
At the world from behind its  
Sadistic mind, sick with desire  
To control, aye control – not  
Just a man, but the Goddamn world!

[He falls back into the chair.]

To this I bow, the house nigger  
That ties his fortune to white power  
Cause he knows the whip's sting  
Awaits should he turn against  
Those who gave him entrance  
To the hollowed halls that control all!

How high do I rise!  
Ah, so far, the cries of those in chains  
So long ago are but whispers now,  
No longer the lingering lamentations  
Of kindred souls searching for one  
To right the wrongs they endured.

That was me when I was young,  
Full of vinegar pulsing through my veins,  
Afraid of none, hero to all!  
I lived the Goddamned dream!  
Naive perhaps? No! No! Ignorant!  
Stupidly believing it was there for me;  
A dream for whitey only,  
Dressed in lies, wearing a black face,  
Mocking my every step as I crept  
Up the ladder, rung by agonizing  
Rung, and lost my soul!

[He lurches for the remote and desperately points to the screen for another picture. Cheney disappears and the screen goes blank.]

Enough of this gargoyle  
Whose slimy thoughts drip  
Over his protruding tongue  
And fall like acid drops below.  
Another, I'll have another  
To sooth my smoldering anger.

But first, I need an elixir  
To drown this gnawing pain  
That strains at my gut  
Like some knife of shame,  
A two edged blade bloodied

By deeds done in silence  
And lies told to hide the truth.  
It twists inside cutting honor  
As deeply as it does my heart.

[He lifts himself from the rolling chair, and as he does so he instinctively grabs his gut as if in pain, and makes his way to the decanter where he pours a tall glass into which he tosses a couple of ice cubes. He takes a long drink letting the liquor slide smoothly down his throat. He moves silently and dejectedly to the “L” shaped couch and points the remote.]

Now! Now *here's* a face!

[Wolfowitz' face comes on the screen. He leans forward looking intensely at the face.]

Conceited, conniving, coarse,  
No! More! Warped, obsessed;  
Ah, yes, obsessed and diabolical,  
The Rasputin of our noble court!

(Can we have Wolfowitz' face turn gradually into Rasputin's and slide back as he speaks these lines?)

Out of his pen pours prejudice  
Garbed in learned jargon,  
Absolute in its oblique assertions  
That turns the simple mind  
That rules this misguided nation.

That, too, must I bow before,  
Lest I offend the ass to which  
His nose is hooked, browned  
By years of cowering subservience  
To hold the pants of those in power!  
If I grovel, how much more does he?  
But I know it; he cares not  
For he has no morals, nothing  
But the void beneath that face.

What evil has he perpetrated  
And forced on a beguiled nation!  
What deceit lives behind those eyes,  
A veritable nest of maggots  
That lives on lies,

Yet he greets

The world in fawning smiles,  
The very image of the candy man  
Who brings hope to all,  
When in fact, he is the Iceman!

God, what a bloody crew  
Of blind men leads this country  
Down the path to the ditch of doom.

[He's passing the mirror now and turns to salute himself in a mocking way muttering "Yes, Sir!" "Yes, Sir!" (This act and the following could be done with funny gestures maybe?) He slips back into the chair.]

I grow morose and cynical;  
There must be laughter  
To quell these doldrums  
Or I go mad!

*(Strange how laughter shadows sin.  
Perhaps a dance to lightheadedness!)*

[He gets more and more animated as the following lines are spoken and rises from the chair moving around the room.]

What fool  
Can I beckon to my cause?  
Whose image presents itself?  
I feel like Faust  
In the fullness of his power  
As he summoned Mephistopheles  
To raise the radiant Helen  
Before his eyes.

Here, here is my  
Demon on call, a plastic remote  
That summons the radiance of, Rumsfeld!

[The following passages can be treated lightly with sarcastic overtones to "Minds made infallible by ignorance and ego."]

Now, there is grace, comeliness, charm!  
A smile to bedevil the gods,  
Eyes squinting in the glare,  
Of his own brilliance that shines  
Forth from his eloquent mouth

In phrases picked from the Tree of Knowledge  
Before the gates of heaven slammed shut.  
Or so he believes in his gut.  
So sad how an ego can pluck  
Sense from the mind of men.

How he beguiles the press,  
Who prance before his podium  
Like homeless waifs in old England,  
Awaiting the proffered pence  
From the hands of the blessed chosen.  
He regales them with known knowns,  
Known unknowns, and unknown unknowns  
And they scribble these pearls of wisdom  
Onto their notepads like obedient children,  
Ignorant of their sense while he  
Loses the horror of war and terror  
In jazzy riffs of obfuscation,  
And they, befuddled by his merriment,  
Forget the death and destruction  
He came to announce to the nation.

Oh, how many talking fools bob  
Before the multitudes on fluid screens,  
Chortling with glee this clown's  
Distortions of truth,

Fed things  
That haven't happened, could not  
Have happened had they sense.  
They have mesmerized the people,  
Who sit in silent acceptance  
Of fallacies only an O'Reilly or Rush  
Could conjure as certitude,  
Minds made infallible by ignorance  
And ego.

To think I knew them,  
Knew them all before, yet yielded  
To their feigned entreaties to join  
The team to make "America great."  
And, "Yes!" "Yes," I would have  
Total control of State, free  
To assert a direction and design;  
The fulfillment of a dream deferred,

The mark of the oppressed visible  
To all at last as I guided the ship of State.  
What a joke! What ignorance propelled me?  
What made me think power  
Would be handed to a nigger?  
Did I think the true thought  
Evaporated when the word was expunged?  
Have I joined the Hollow men:  
Heartless, cruel, vengeful, cursed?  
Shall I ride this frightful hearse  
To its ineluctable end,  
Or shall I pluck myself free,  
And pray I can salvage eternity?

If there is one face that epitomizes  
This ship of fools, it is this!

[He points the remote and Rumsfeld disappears. In a moment, Karl Rove's face covers the screen. He moves close to the screen drinking in the features of this man. Now subdued by some hidden force, grasping his temples as if in pain, he turns toward the audience and mutters the following.]

This, this is not a face of flesh.  
*There is no humor here.*  
There is no person here,  
No form that grew in time  
From the mewling child;  
Rather this is the face of heaven cursed  
To wander the earth forever;  
Lucifer incarnate in our shape,  
Vengeance made palpable,  
Searching the destruction of God's creation;  
The Mariner damned to repeat his crime  
Day after day, to live its horror  
Before all mankind, alone and barren,  
Bereft of human kindness and love,  
A pitiless wandering form without substance  
Without conscience, without compassion, without remorse.

Power and control propel this monster;  
Oblivious to pain and suffering  
Since he cannot die again;  
His life is everlasting death.  
Damned to wander through the world's

Byways witness to the weeping  
Mothers and children who cling  
To each other despite the devastation;  
He sees the love that binds, a love  
He cannot share though he knows  
It alone is life's fulfillment.

Such is the power that plays with **this** putty!

[He points the remote to the screen and blanks out Rove; in his place appears that of Bush. As he continues his litany of fools, he changes the picture of Bush to depict the points he's making. Bush in uniform, Bush in a Ranger baseball jacket, Bush with a hard hat, Bush leering, Bush sneering, Bush walking the Texas walk, i.e. like someone walking through a field of corn stalks.]

[Again the sarcastic voice can play here.]

Here is true comedia dell'arte,  
The mask presented to the people,  
And the voice that speaks through the mask,  
Personified evil in the form of Rove.  
America hears the self-mocking fool  
And loves his bumbling manner;  
But neither the fool nor the people  
Know the source of his mindless banter.

This Lucifer ties two threads of fate  
With magnificent dexterity:  
The Deceivers' sugar-coated hate  
And God's gift to humanity,  
As sold by the righteous marketers  
Who coat the hearts and minds  
Of their idolaters with fear and prophecy.

Oh, I should raise the specters  
Of all his evil horde this night,  
To haunt my dreams and drive my despair  
As I grope in blindness to confront  
What comfort I have conferred on this crew,  
That does the bidding of Beelzebub,  
Casting the naive and innocent to their doom.

I can't let them escape this catalogue of hate  
That spreads their images before my mind,  
As they spread their lies and deceit before

The people they vowed to protect,  
Images of hypocrisy garbed in the gowns  
Of God's chosen;

Prophets as real  
As the storied Patriarchs that predicted God's  
Reign of wrath threatening his creatures  
With the sword of fire to destroy those  
He came to save!

Their names  
Must be emblazoned on the forehead of time,  
A monument to their everlasting crime:  
Falwell, Graham, Robertson, and Hagee,  
The Dominionists, End-timers, and Lindsey,  
All who presumed to know the word of God,  
Using fear, not love, to drive their ambitions!

These deceivers drove the frightened  
And afflicted to give aid and comfort  
To terrorists who plagued the poor Palestinians,  
Finding justice in the horror of God's  
Armageddon that gave right to might  
As it blessed the lies of these dissemblers.  
*"So say I Pastor John Hagee."*

[He dons a maroon bathrobe and grabs the Bible from the bedside desk and another book from the table (any book will do), then raises the bible aloft and intones "This, this is the word of God; this (holding the other book up in his other hand) this Quran, this is not the word of God! These are the words of infidels."]

I saw them come and go,  
And met them in their temples of gold,  
But said not a word of dissent;  
What stubborn will kept me silent?  
Why could I not speak, why not cry  
To the very heavens how they betray  
The compassionate Christ they claim to love?  
Where have I buried my sinful soul?

[He turns to point to Bush's image on the screen, flicks to one that shows him humbly bowed in prayer, in church, eyes closed. He turns toward the audience as though to continue his meditation but shows in a grimace the pain inside. After a moment, he begins.]

There bows the born again Christian,  
Self-righteous in his indignation of those

Who question his declaration of who is evil,  
And who is blessed by God to lead his mission  
Of salvation against the infidels that threaten  
His dominion throughout the world!  
In his humble hands lies the fate  
Of humankind. Does he believe these myths?  
Is he an imposter, a fraud, blind, or delusional?  
Does the deception reside in Rove's artifice  
Or do I serve a man of infinite deceit?

*Certainly I am to blame for this.*

[He uses the remote to bring up a picture of Bush in his guard uniform.]

*I chose to serve the chicken hawks,  
The very image of those I once decried,  
Cowards who send the young and poor  
To serve in their staid, whole bodies  
Used as organs to salvage the rich!*

(The next few lines can be played with humor.)

What images come to mind  
Of Cheney's snarl, face to face  
With the sergeants' call to pushups!  
Wolfowitz and Perle bedecked in ribbons  
That flow over their protruding guts,  
While Junior wades through fields of mud  
On his way to the local pub!  
What visions of security they portray!  
Perhaps it's better they not serve,  
But rather salute real men in battle array.

*Yet to him and to them I pay homage,  
To Hollow men come to life;  
No longer the forgotten images  
Of Eliot's barren waste, but  
Bones fleshed in cynicism and hate.*

[He shuts off the remote, and in quiet dejection moves across the room to the full-length mirror. His face reflects the pain that flares up from time to time throughout the monologue. He turns to look at himself in the mirror, back now to the audience, though they can see his front in the reflection. He begins to speak in a quiet but deeply meditative manner.]

*Eyes I would not dare to meet  
In death's dream kingdom,  
I greet in full obeisance,  
Like some Mas'rs of old,  
With shifting feet and eyes to the ground,  
The invisible man shuffling around  
Lest I be flung from these citadels  
That I breached these many years ago.*

*Why do they do what they do?  
What gain is there? For whom?  
Dare we think of the vanquished?  
Dare we accept that we destroy  
The only true purpose of life?  
What perversity drives our  
End to self-destruction and our doom?*

*Oh, God, what years I have devoted  
To duty and dedication that it should  
Come to this night of reparation,  
Where I confront myself, defeated  
And alone, like some aged penitent  
That shambles toward the confessional,  
Trembling and terrified that absolution  
Will be denied and death will not come;  
But morning will, and every store window  
Will tell of deeds done in silence,  
Truths not told, defiance put on hold.*

*I stand here before the only face  
That must confront the faces it has met,  
That must judge itself, not them,  
For they are but ghosts of my own decisions  
Or indecisions that have wrought the chaos  
That plagues me this night.*

*Am I but a slave to impulse,  
To a perversity that offers no pleasure,  
Just the irrational drive that slays self-preservation?  
Or is this but a defense against the truth?*

*Now must I play priest and penitent,  
Conjure up points in time that  
Pricked my soul as I capitulated*

To those who held my future  
By a tether, like Edward's spider over the flame,  
Ready to drop me into the perdition  
Of lost opportunity and advancement,  
To breach the walls of whitey's fortress,  
After four hundred years of sweat,  
Of humiliation and defeat, to subvert  
From within the very system that controlled  
The oppressed and determined their fate.  
That was the dream that turned to nightmare.

[He wanders before the mirror, weaving back and forth as he unfurls these lines, stopping to look at himself, sometimes with an expression of deep depression, sometimes pain, physical pain that finds visibility in his breast or temples. It is as though he is mirroring his emotional state in the deterioration of his body.]

I know the day and hour of my defeat!  
It was a sin of omission, of known  
Horror untold, of cold bodies  
Buried beneath the clay of My Lai.  
I knew and said nothing, and learned  
That silence has its own rewards  
For those in power, who control others  
By controlling what they know.  
That omission earned me stars,  
And forged the first link in my chain  
That grew like Marley's day by day  
Until I was fettered as solidly as any  
Of my forebears who served as chattel  
For that civil society that shackled the slave.

[He stands before the mirror and buttons up his shirt, straightens his collar. He stands at attention, shirt tucked in, belly pulled in, looking at himself and imagining his early years in uniform. He salutes once again, but grabs his hand as it goes to his forehead crying out ...]

Stop it, you fool!  
Orders are but masks of conscience  
That delude the soul and hide  
Their evil as duty due the state.  
There was a time when I obeyed  
And knew how I was used.

I cut a pretty picture then,  
A useful tint to present to the public,

Carefully manicured in my ribbons and stars,  
The perfect image for the Party of the people.

Used, used as only Patricians use the slave:  
I dressed out their dining hall,  
I stood, impassive and pressed, beside  
Their elegantly dressed wives bedecked  
With pearls and diamonds ... and gleaming smiles.  
I knew my place and kept it well,  
Adding, day by day, a new link  
To the chain that choked my conscience,  
Shutting out the air of reason and right,  
As I crawled home each night  
To seek solace in darkness,  
Ah, yes, to crawl out of the light!

[He slumps down on his knees, head bowed like the penitent.]

How corrupt have I become?  
Do I act now without regard  
For right or wrong?

Do I  
Instill my desires on my own kin?  
Do I link them to my chain, prisoners  
Of my foibles, victims of "duty's" excuse  
That releases me from judgment to acquiesce  
To those who pull my chain?

Oh, I am not Prince Hamlet, in deed,  
A pun as corpulent as my dejected mood;  
I'm not even Lord Procrastinator,  
Who has at least the prospect of becoming;  
I have forgone all, lost the chance to act.  
I have become the victim of Cheney's venom,  
Just another mannequin to be placed  
In his window, dressed to do his bidding,

[He rises from his knees and goes for another drink. As he stands at the credenza, his hand begins to shake and the liquor spills. He grabs at his breast. Puts the glass down hurriedly, and stumbles to the couch edge. A little time passes and then he begins the following gaining momentum as he speaks.]

Why, if I am content to be his lackey,  
Do I suffer so?

I tried, I tried to stop  
The first slaughter that ended  
In the Highway of Death, that graveyard  
Of bleached skulls and seared skin,  
Our everlasting memorial  
To that glorious little war,  
That made me a household name.

*But once started, I did nothing to stop it.  
No, that's not true, I did do something;  
I supported it, lying to myself  
That duty required I obey;  
The pitiful lie all must use  
Who follow the bloody trail  
Their master takes.*

*Therein lies the fault!  
For I am the cause of sin  
And knowing the lie, I damned myself.  
That lie they knew  
I would tell myself,  
And so I became both Master and slave!  
What irony rules a life  
That turns the whip upon itself.  
That corrosive evil seals my fate!  
Shackled to duty I abhor,  
Champion of slaughters demanded  
By those I hate, the loathsome horde  
That guides this benumbed state!*

That time passed, and I pushed  
My guilt deep inside that I might hide  
It from myself.

But it festered there;  
It haunts me now; it grows a cancer  
In my breast and taunts my being.  
It metastasizes, for God's sake,  
Because it multiplies each day I  
Live in this den of vipers who  
Entwine their lies like serpents in a nest,  
Strangling my will, my desires, my soul.

[He is circling the stage at this point as though tracked by some unseen fury. He grasps his temples at times, desperate to flee the torment he is recalling.]

How I gagged when Rumsfeld shoved  
Those sheets of deception before me;  
Page upon page of distortion and invention,  
Equivocation and evasion, presented as truth  
To beguile the world by this Charlatan,  
Who coquettishly delivered the Judas kiss  
To those he admired, the very diplomats  
That cried out against the Machiavellian  
Antics of this Satanic crew!

Then, too, I objected when I threw  
Those sheets against the wall,  
Demanding they give me evidence,  
Not concoctions hatched by sick minds,  
That, once delivered, makes me their Pharisee.  
Yet Pharisee I became,  
Presenting their law before  
The world's court, mouthing their lies  
As truth, while my innards burned!

*Had I then stood against their will,  
The very heavens would have given thanks!  
And the chains, the chains that bind  
Even now would have fallen  
From my heart and sunk like lead  
Into the swollen sea.*

*And, blessed God,  
I would be free!*

But now I walk the world a clown,  
Bush's buffoon, believed by none!  
Pushed around the globe to justify  
Cheney hypocrisy, a roving dummy  
Doomed to drive an agenda of destruction.

Ah, what self-hate sits like ice in my breast,  
Freezing my heart against the pain  
I witnessed in Jenin, as Sharon's siege  
Laid waste the destitute and helpless;  
People oppressed, damned by indifference  
And deceit to suffer in the sun's glare  
The cruel savagery of these fiends.  
I, I live their pain, captive of these same

Demons, and I suffer with my brother.

Yet I did a dastardly thing  
When I circled their plight,  
Taking unnecessary flight to Egypt,  
That Sharon have time to ravage their homes,  
And massacre the mothers and children  
Who could not flee the terror of his wrath.  
The whole world cried in despair  
As I crawled slowly to the carnage  
That I let happen for their sake,  
Adding still more dead to the links  
That I drag weeping into eternity.

*Why can I not act?  
What makes me cow to those I loath?  
What force drives this shame?  
For force it is that compels me to live  
In a cauldron of self-hate, yet go forth  
Each day to build another crime  
More hideous than the last,  
To approve the wall that stands  
A monument to racist hate, encircling  
Those held captive by murderers and thieves;  
To cry foul when the world court  
Condemns the ethnic imprisonment of people  
Unable to defend themselves against oppression;  
To proclaim as justified the stealing  
Of Palestinian land negating by my act  
The declared will of nations united in voice  
Against this insidious betrayal.*

*Good God, what reparations must I make?  
To whom do I make them now?  
Have I a soul to save?*

*I have lived this dark night  
In fear and dread having cast  
My lot this day with tragic irony  
As I stood alone, the bumbling Patsy  
For this pathetic crew, escorting  
Democracy out of Haiti!  
Kidnaping it  
In the dead of night, a tragicomic Knight,*

*Destined to be mocked and derided,  
A figure of infinite ridicule and scorn!*

*How fitting this end to this ignoble career.  
What message does it send?  
Am I at least an example that can teach  
The folly of impregnable duty,  
Of deeds done in silence that corrupt,  
Of deceit made truth that corrodes  
The decency we've been taught,  
Of dreams deferred and lost?*

*Have I suffered this terrible night  
That others may know how arrogance  
Lashes the soul crucifying the hope  
That alone brings rest and contentment;  
Am I destined to tell this tale  
Year after year until its message  
Rings like the voice of ancient prophets  
Foretelling the death knell of the love  
That binds unless we find solace together.*

*When pride rides its phantasm steed,  
Seeking the golden apple of greed  
And gain, and power, believing it  
The elixir of life, time intrudes  
To erase the mirage, leaving only  
A residue of lost hope and desire,  
[A residue I must relive,  
Night after night in darkness  
As Prometheus must sustain his agony,  
A never ending nightmare of nothingness.  
Oh, God, I would I were dead!]*

*Note: [ ] include lost end stanza found by Tyrone and emailed to me. We had added it in November meeting 9<sup>th</sup>, when Tyrone visited with me at Kent's to review entire play.*

[He collapses on the lounge chair, arms spread, head on chest as the curtain closes.]

## ***The Agony of Colin Powell Notes***

**Line 3-** “this pit of despond” -refers to the “Slough of Despond” in Pilgrim’s Progress by John Bunyan. The story is an allegory about the protagonist Christian’s journey from the “City of Destruction” to the “Celestial City”. To complete this journey he must overcome sin in many forms including the “Slough of Despond” which is a deep bog which Christian sinks into under the weight of his sins and guilt. In the play Powell refers to the whole Bush administration that he has fallen into and is now trying to work his way out of, but is pulled down by the guilt of his actions as a part of this regime.

**Line 78 and 409-** “chicken hawks”- political term to describe a person who strongly supports war and other military action (a War Hawk), yet actively avoided military service when of age. A hypocrite. *Fortunate Sons*.

**Line 130-** “Pink Panther’s stumbling fool” - refers to Inspector Jacques Clouseau the clumsy and incompetent French detective. Powell refers to Clouseau because he feels incompetent in his position and feels that everyone is laughing at him behind his back.

**Line 142-** “Dante’s Hell”- the many levels of hell that Dante explained and characterized in the *Inferno*. Powell implies that he will be going on his own journey down through the circles of hell. [Removed In rehearsal]

**Line 141-** “Iago” - Shakespeare’s villain in *Othello*, a manipulative, vindictive, and callous man. Powell uses this to refer to Dick Cheney.

**Line 143-** “The asp in the ear of the mannequin”- An Asp is a venomous snake and like the snake in the Garden of Eden it represents the temptation of evil and a fall from grace. Still referring to Dick Cheney, Powell states that Bush is the mannequin that is controlled by the slick words and temptations of Dick Cheney.

**Line 167-** “the house nigger”- a derogatory term for an African American which compares them to a house slave, who works to please his white master even if it means disowning his own racial identity. Powell feels that he has done everything in the name of pleasing Bush and Cheney even though it has been against his instincts.

**Line 209-** “Rasputin”- Grigori Rasputin was a Russian mystic healer and advisor to the Romanovs. He was invited into the inner circle, but the other aristocrats hated having a peasant with so much power. He convinced the Tzar to lead the army himself in WWI while Rasputin stayed behind and exerted immense power over the Tzarina. Powell compares Paul Wolfowitz to Rasputin.

**Line 233-** “Iceman” - *The Iceman Cometh* by Eugene O’Neil- This play tells the story of a group of men who have all hit rock bottom and drift from one meaningless thing to another. The men are obsessed with their glory days and their pledges to return to them

tomorrow; their Pipe Dreams. They seem to only get excited when a man named Hickey comes to town. Hickey tells the men that they must give up their pipe dreams and “kill their tomorrows” in order to make peace with themselves. He seems to be the only man who is actually living his life, but in reality he is just as delusional as the rest of them. The men are all waiting for a savior, the “iceman,” but instead of salvation he brings death. In Powell’s narrative Wolfowitz is the Iceman who everyone thinks will solve all their problems, but he really brings death and more empty promises.

**Line 244-** “Faust” - The story of Faust is a German legend about a man who feels dissatisfied with his life so he makes a pact with the Devil: his soul in exchange for unlimited knowledge and worldly pleasures. This tale has been told in many cultures but most famously by Marlowe and Goethe. Powell feels like Faust who wanted to know more than he should have and has now gotten himself in too deep with the Devils he surrounds himself with.

**Line 246-** “Mephistopheles” - In both Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus and Goeth’s Faust, Faustus uses the demon Mephistopheles as a messenger between himself and the Devil. He has later become a stock character version of the Devil. Powell states that his Mephistopheles is a “plastic remote” with which he can summon anything.

**Line 247-** “the radiant Helen” - As a part of the Faust metaphor Goethe’s Faust decided to summon Helen of Troy and falls in love with her. In Powell’s life Rumsfeld is Helen of Troy because he has gotten so much praise and has fooled everyone into thinking he is a radiant and charming man with all the answers.

**Line 257-** “Tree of Knowledge”- Short for the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.” Powell sarcastically uses this to refer to Rumsfeld as a born again Christian.

**Line 267-276-** “known knows,/ Known unknowns, and unknown unknowns”- This refers to a statement that Donald Rumsfeld made at a press briefing in 2002 about the absence of evidence linking Iraq to weapons of mass destruction. The full quote reads “There are known knows. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. These are things we don't know we don't know.” Powell makes fun of the American people’s willingness to accept such convoluted thought as fact.

**Line 286-** “O'Reilly or Rush”- Bill O'Reilly and Rush Limbaugh are both conservative political commentators with their own TV show and radio program respectively. Powell refers to the way that these men twist news to support the conservative platform and the immense pull that they have over their large audiences.

**Line 298-** “The fulfillment of a dream deferred” - This refers to the Langston Hughes poem “Harlem.” The poem is from the Harlem Renaissance and talks about what

happens to African Americans as their dreams of freedom and equality are continually postponed. Powell says he was sucked into the Bush inner circle with the promise that, through him, the dreams of African Americans in politics would no longer be deferred but instead fulfilled.

**Line 98, 306 and again 425-** “A hollow man,” “Hollow Men”- “The Hollow Men” by T.S. Eliot is a poem written after WWI showing the hopelessness that many people felt in the post war era. Powell uses it to describe his feelings about becoming a man who is “filled with straw” (Eliot) without any life or meaning and part of the problem in the American government.

**Line 321 and 350-** “Lucifer” - The Devil himself, the fallen angel who now feeds on the sins of the world and lures good people into sin. Powell highlights Karl Rove as the Lucifer in the Bush administration, the man who pulls all the strings.

**Line 324-** “The Mariner damned to repeat his crime”- “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This epic poem tells the story of a sailor who is cursed to tell people the tale of his misfortune so that they may learn from his mistakes, but he is forever alone and unable to move on from the past. Powell connects Rove to The Mariner as a killer of innocents who is doomed to be a lonely pitiless man.

**Line 342-** “Comedia dell’arte”- Comedia is a form of theatre that relies on masks and stock character like the lovers, the miserly merchant, the devious servant, and the foolish old man to improvise comic scenes. Rove is a comedia expert because he uses the character of George Bush to hide his involvement. Bush is only a mask and a puppet to Rove who is the real voice behind the bumbling persona.

**Line 352-** “Deceivers”- Refers to the Neoconservatives who rely on three main agendas to achieve their ends: the use of religious morals and thought, the use of military force as a first option, and an increased concern with the Middle East and Islam. Powell is amazed at Rove’s ability to use the neoconservatives’ hateful agenda to further his plan to dominate the American people.

**Line 362-** “Beelzebub”- translates to “the Lord of the Flies” and later became a general term for the Devil. Powell states that Bush does the bidding of the Devil or in this case Karl Rove. (See Rove and “Bush’s Brain”)

**Line 378-** “Falwell, Graham, Robertson, and Hagee”- Jerry Falwell, Billy Graham, Pat Robertson, and John Hagee are all Christian evangelical preachers. They have become “religious celebrities” because of their televangelism and conservative political preaching. They can be seen as the foundation of the religious right. Powell uses these men to relate the immense influence that the religious right had on George Bush.

**Line 379-** “The Dominionists, End-timers, and Lindsey”- Dominionists believe that Christians should dominate the world and rule over non-Christians. The End-timers are born-again Christians who believe passionately in the rapture. Lindsey refers to Hal Lindsey a Christian Zionist, who believes that the creation of a Jewish homeland in the state of Israel is in accordance with biblical prophecy that foretells the second coming of Jesus. This makes reference to Bush’s status as a Born-again Christian and again the influence of the religious right.

**Line 427-** “Eliot’s barren waste”- “The Waste Land” is another poem by T.S. Eliot and like “The Hollow Men” it is a modernist poem written in post WWI America. It draws on a vast knowledge of literature and antiquity. Powell plays on the obscurity of Eliot’s references saying that the men he works with are not forgotten symbols of evil, like Elliot uses in his poem, but flesh and blood devils.

**Line 429-431-** “Eyes I would not dare to meet / In death’s dream kingdom” - This is a direct quote from T.S. Eliot’s “The Hollow Men” and refers to the fact that Powell would not look these men in the eyes if he were in heaven being judged, but on Earth he must be subservient and respectful to them in order to remain in the inner circle.

**Line 453-** “deeds done in silence” - Qui dedit beneficium taceat; narret qui accepit - “Let him who has done a good deed be silent; let him who has received it tell it” (Seneca). This is a reversal of Seneca’s intention because he hopes that good deeds will be kept silent so that people do not do good for the notoriety, but Powell has kept important things from the American people and he is worried that it is all coming out and unraveling the world around him. He has done bad deeds and kept silent.

**Line 469-** “Edward’s spider over the flame”- Powell refers to Jonathan Edwards’ Great Awakening sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” which tells of a ruthless God who is the only thing standing between sinners and their fate in hell. Edwards reasons that at any time God could revoke his protection and send the sinner straight to a life of damnation. Powell feels like the spider that is held by Bush over the flame in constant fear of being dropped.

**Line 481-** “My Lai” is a city in South Vietnam where a massacre of 347-504 civilians in occurred on March 16, 1968. The soldiers of Charlie Company burned the town, blew up buildings, and finally raped and murdered the men, women, and children in the village. This horrific act was made even worse because it was covered up by many high ranking Army officials. During this time Powell was a Major in the US Army and assigned to help investigate the My Lai massacre. He gave a report that seemed to refute any wrong doing and insisted that relations between the Vietnamese and Americans were excellent. This was later proved wrong, but Powell escaped the Army unscathed by the massive cover up operation. The cover up gave Powell experience in sweeping unpleasant events under the rug, which would come in handy during the Bush administration.

**Line 487-488**- “first link in my chain / That grew like Marley’s day by day”- Jacob Marley from “A Christmas Carol” carries chains which represent his sins during life. “The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail; and it was made (for Scrooge observed it closely) of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. . . ‘I wear the chain I forged in life,” replied the Ghost. “I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it” (*A Christmas Carol*). Powell also has a chain that he has forged from staying silent as he heard about atrocities of war and chose to do nothing about them. He was able to move up the ranks because of his obedience and sense of duty so now he is so entrenched in the lies that they are suffocating him and weighing him down.

**Line 523**- “I am not Prince Hamlet”- Powell states that he is not Prince Hamlet meaning that he is not a man looking for proof and being cautious about acting out against injustice as Hamlet was when his father’s ghost told him that he was murdered and Hamlet needed to avenge his death. Instead Powell has no chance of acting out at all and will be forever frozen in inaction.

**Line 535**- “Highway of Death” -This refers to the road between Kuwait and Iraq which was barricaded in February of 1991. Iraqi soldiers had been ordered out of Kuwait and were trying to retreat to Baghdad. American soldiers let them get out of Kuwait but then began an aerial barrage of anti-armor mines across the road making it impossible to move forward. The Iraqi soldiers were trapped on the highway with no way forwards or backwards, creating a miles-long traffic jam. The United States then sent troops and aircraft to bomb the highway and kill the retreating Iraqi soldiers. Powell sarcastically refers to this highway as an everlasting memorial to the Gulf War which put his name on the map.

**Line 538**- “glorious little war”- This is a play on Ambassador John Hay’s description of the Spanish American War “a splendid little war” though Powell uses it to describe the Gulf War (1990-1991).

**Line 576**- “Judas kiss”- Judas betrayed Jesus to the Romans by identifying him with a kiss on the cheek. Powell states that Rumsfeld was the Judas to anyone who dared to question him.

**Line 578**- “Machiavellian” - Niccolò Machiavelli was an Italian writer during the Renaissance. He wrote the book *The Prince* which detailed the ruthless ways that a ruler must use to control his people and keep power. His major idea is that the end always justifies the means. Rumsfeld was the Machiavellian mind behind the Bush administration.

**Line 584-** “Pharisee”- The Pharisees were a Jewish sect that vehemently defended Jewish law and punished those who did not obey it, but were less strict about following the laws themselves. Pharisee has come to mean a hypocritically religious person. Powell identifies himself as a Pharisee because he spouted the laws of engagement but did not follow them himself.

**Line 604-** “Jenin” - Jenin is a Palestinian refugee camp in the West Bank. Israeli soldiers supposedly went into the city to clear out terrorists, but once the soldiers were inside they sealed off the city and began demolishing homes and killing citizens. The United States then sent Powell on an “urgent mission of peace” to the Middle East and demanded that Ariel Sharon withdraw his troops from the West bank. Though throughout this trip Powell worked his way around Jenin, never visited the city itself, and gave Sharon enough time to cover up his crimes in Jenin. Powell in the play feels guilty for allowing the massacre to continue while he toured around the Middle East deliberately turning a blind eye.

**Line 646-647-** “escorting / Democracy out of Haiti”- This refers to President Jean-Bernard Aristide of Haiti. He was president in 2004 but when a coup threatened his presidency the United States took him out of Haiti and placed him in exile. Aristide states that the U.S. kidnapped him while the U.S. maintains that he resigned.

**Line 674-** “A residue of lost hope and desire,” - This refers back to *The Iceman Cometh*. Powell has finally realized that the whole Bush administration was only using him and once things started to fall apart he was able to see them for what they really were, lies and deceptions.

**[Removed in rehearsal] Line 677-** “Prometheus”- Prometheus was a titan from Greek mythology who stole fire from the gods and gave it to the humans even though the gods forbid it. As punishment, Prometheus was tied to a rock and every day an eagle would eat his liver which would then grow back so it could be eaten again. Powell is the Prometheus who must live with his punishment, pain, and guilt every day.

**Additional Reference:**

*Dark Night of the Soul*- This idea comes from a poem written by a Saint John of the Cross. He writes about a night that he spent in deep thought, purifying his senses and his spirit. It has come to mean, in Christian tradition, a spiritual crisis in a journey towards a union with God or a collapse of one’s perceived meaning in life causing a feeling of meaninglessness. The process is described as a painful purge and self-examination where all is revealed.

## **Important People**

**Colin Powell-** the 65th Secretary of State (2001-2005), a retired four-star general, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (1989-1993). He served in Vietnam, and Korea and was involved in the early days of the Iraq war.

**George W. Bush-** (Line 10)- 43rd President of the United States (2001-2008), Governor of Texas (1995-2000).

**Jean-Bertrand Aristide-** (Line 14) Haiti's first democratically elected President (February 1991) until removed in a September 1991 military coup. Aristide then was returned to power in 1994-1996 and 2001-2004 when he was overthrown by another coup that he accused the American government of orchestrating.

**Dick Cheney-** (Line 53) 46th Vice President (2001-2008), 17th Secretary of Defense (1989-1993), also Member of the House of Representatives, and White House Chief of Staff, very influential in the "War on Terror," NSA wiretapping, and interrogation techniques during the Iraq War.

**Paul Wolfowitz-** (Line 117)- Government official who was the leading architect of the Iraq War. Became Deputy Secretary of Defense in 2001-2005. Also 10th President of the World Bank Group.

**Donald Rumsfeld-** (Line 160)- Secretary of Defense (1975-1977) and (2001-2006), White House Chief of Staff (1974-1975), and US Ambassador to NATO. He oversaw the attacks on Afghanistan and though he first earned much praise he resigned in 2007 because of increasing criticism.

**Karl Rove-** (Line 220)- Deputy Chief of Staff (2005-2007) and Senior Advisor (2001-2007). Helped Bush win his governorship and both Presidential elections. There is a book written by James Moore and Wayne Slater titled "Bush's Brain: How Karl Rove Made George W. Bush President." There is also a documentary based on the book.

**Richard Perle-** (Line 318)- Chairman of the Defense Policy Board Advisory Committee (2001-2003), 1st Assistant Secretary of Defense for Global Strategic Affairs (1981-1987), political advisor, lobbyist, and member of the Neoconservative movement.

**Ariel Sharon-** (Line 480)- 11th Prime Minister of Israel 2001-2006

## **A Devil by Any Other Name**

Mephistopheles- pg. 238, line 155

Lucifer- pg. 240, line 225

Lucifer- pg. 241, line 254

Beelzebub- pg. 242, line 266

