

*MESMERIC REVELATION...*  
*Before Edgar Allan Poe*

*By*  
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*A Central Works Method Play*  
*Developed In Collaboration with Theo Black, Gary Graves, Joe Jordan,*  
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*Cast of Characters:*

*Antoine Lavoisier - Director of France's Royal Academy of Science.  
A Chemist.  
Gave Oxygen its name.*

*Anton Mesmer - Founder of the Mesmeric System.  
A physician.  
Coined the term, "Animal Magnetism."*

*Time:  
The eve of the French Revolution.*

*Place:  
Paris. The Royal Academy of Science.*

*Author's Notes:*

*There are books on the mantle. They are gilded and weighty.  
These are bookended by two candles.*

*A portrait of Marie Antoinette hangs above the fireplace, looking down on the proceedings.*

*When we enter the Mesmeric treatment sequence, the movements might become expressionistic, an outward representation of the inner life. During this section, Mesmer's relationship to the chair, even when Lavoisier has moved away from it, could also indicate that a body still sits there.*

*"The sweetest and most inoffensive path of life leads through the avenues of science and learning; and whoever can either remove any obstruction in this way, or open up any new prospect, ought, so far, to be esteemed a benefactor to mankind" – David Hume*

*The stage is dark, lit only by two candles. Spot on a man, dressed in an extravagant wig and a flowing robe. The style of the day, but heightened. We will come to know him as ANTON MESMER.*

*He sits in a chair, waiting. He looks about the room, at the audience, taking in his surroundings and then lets his gaze settle in the center. He takes a deep breath in. Then out.*

*Another light comes up on the entrance to the room. A man enters, wearing a fitted coat and a powdered wig. Conservative and impeccable in its styling. He too looks about the room, his gaze finally falling on MESMER. They both smile, tightly.*

*Suddenly, lights shift to full, illuminating the entire space.*

LAVOISIER

Members of France's Royal Academy of Science. Thank you for gathering here this day.

I know that it might have taken some time to arrive, given the usual state of activity in our streets. So many peddlers and servants on their way to market and...beggars. Your commitment to our cause is greatly appreciated.

I must remind you to place any apparatus which you currently possess in a position that will discourage use at this time, thus eliminating any distraction for you or your fellow Academy members.

(he waits and encourages them if needed, "Correct, that piece of equipment")

Please also note that this inquiry will occur without a respite and with an expectation that you will not exit until the proceedings have concluded.

If, however, an unforeseen act, perhaps of God or perhaps of Man, occurs and you must leave, kindly do so through the same doors which you entered, allowing the others the room to progress in as much safety as you.

No need to crush each other.

You are colleagues, after all.

(beat)

Herr Mesmer.

MESMER

Academy Director Lavoisier.

*MESMER stands, perhaps nods/bows his head. A beat.*

LAVOISIER

You may be seated.

MESMER

Thank you. I would prefer to stand in order to make my presentation.

LAVOISIER

I am afraid that you have misunderstood the procedure.

You are not to present. We are to inquire, Herr Mesmer.

(he gestures to the chair once again)

*MESMER looks at the academy members. Pause.*

*He sits.*

MESMER  
Doctor.

LAVOISIER  
Pardon?

MESMER  
*Doctor Mesmer.*

...

LAVOISIER  
Esteemed colleagues, as you well know, we have taken it upon ourselves this day to evaluate the *Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer's* practices. At his clinic on our very own Rue Charlemagne, the Austrian physician is visited by an increasing number of subjects of the crown, from stations both high and low, who wish to experience his process and its as yet untested promises of healing most any ailment.

As we are the sole body authorized by the monarchy to evaluate such systems, it is our duty to prepare and make public a report of our determinations. Once our words reach those in the streets they will know that which is true and anything false

anything that cannot be supported by evidence

anything that cannot be known, unless by supposition and conjecture

anything tainted by a personal desire,

to control those who are vulnerable, for example

or for riches

and therefore, anything devoid of the impartiality that true scientific inquiry requires,

shall be discredited

and anyone who promotes such practices

shall be

banished

from our enlightened land.

True, our Academy does not share in the King and Queen's power and cannot issue such a decree. A casting out, however, would certainly still occur.

Since our country is the center upon which Europe, and thus the world, spins, France's subjects will not allow our reputation to be sullied by illusions, when true knowledge is what has secured our enviable place.

(beat)

But I do get ahead of myself, for we have not yet heard from the visitor. He will answer questions today of his system and explain its basis in the observation of empirical evidence. From this, we shall make our final and unassailable judgment and put it down on paper for all of France to read.

(beat)

*Doctor Mesmer, you have spoken of the fact that your system Animal Magnetism has--*

MESMER  
Also know idiomatically and by those who understand its origin, namely me, as Mesmerism—

LAVOISIER  
Very well. That *Mesmerism's* invisible fluid--

MESMER  
--The *universal* fluid.

LAVOISIER

Fine. Your universal fluid--

MESMER

--The fluid that is universal for it flows in each of us and binds us together, causing illness when it is out of balance or dis-ease when it is blocked from areas of the body.

LAVOISIER

Yes. That fluid which--

MESMER

The fluid which may be returned to its natural free flowing state by laying my hands upon a patient in targeted areas. Thus, I relieve all suffering.

LAVOISIER

It--

MESMER

It has always existed in all *animate* beings, never created or destroyed, containing the same *magnetic* qualities as the eternal cosmic bodies, hence the name *Animal Magnetism*--

LAVOISIER

--It has no properties.

MESMER

What?

LAVOISIER

Your universal magnetic fluid contains nothing that can be detected by sight nor evaluated by smell.

MESMER

Very good! The absence of properties is its most definable property. If you would allow me to demonstrate--

LAVOISIER

Demonstration is not needed.

In order to determine how best to evaluate your system, we already relied on a series of logical steps, the scientific method, to plan these proceedings: First, we observe a phenomenon: There is a system put forth by one Franz Anton Mesmer that has attracted many to his home, etc...

Next, we ask a question: Does this system, based on the existence of a fluid which cannot be observed---

MESMER

--The fluid can be observed.

LAVOISIER

You have said many times that the senses detect nothing of the fluid's movement.

MESMER

You flatter me. You must have read my informational pamphlets very carefully.

Tell me, do you have a favorite?

(pause, there is no response)

I suppose you are correct, we are here to do business, not to continue the building of our society of admiring mutually.

(beat)

Yes, the senses detect nothing.

LAVOISIER

Since the Academy's principles state that observation is necessary to evaluate--

MESMER

They detect nothing because the senses are the fluid.

LAVOISIER

Excuse me?

MESMER

The universal fluid is nothing more than the entire range of matter.

It fills the space of all spaces within that space.

LAVOISIER

We cannot be observers of the fluid because we are the fluid itself?

MESMER

Bravo! The fluid exists where observation and experience are inseparable. I knew that a mind such as yours would open wide to the implications.

LAVOISIER

Sir, if there are no means to test your claims

based on our existing principles

we are at a loss.

MESMER

Is this not a body that celebrates discovery?

LAVOISIER

Our principles have brought us discoveries unlike anything ever known.

There is a vapor, hydrogen, that when combined with Oxygen, creates water.

We have separated it from its liquid state and discovered that it can cause balloons to rise in the air and now, thanks to us, humans have touched the sky.

MESMER

A dream.

LAVOISIER

A reality.

MESMER

The idea of flight began as a dream and what is a dream but a wish as yet unfulfilled.  
And so, human flight was real before we observed it, just in another form.

LAVOISIER

Science is not dreams.

MESMER

Of course it is! Dreams keep us up at night even though we are sleeping and then we arise in the morning and set forth upon our endeavors, with the dream still pulsing through our every motion.

LAVOISIER

Ah, this fondness for dreams must be why you've designed a procedure which requires a subject to sleep?

MESMER

Indeed! The Mesmeric state, similar to slumber, allows the body to become supple and the mind porous.

LAVOISIER

And how, specifically, do you induce such a state?

MESMER

First, I perfume the air with incense--

LAVOISIER

Much like in our cathedrals?

MESMER

I have seen people entering into a kind of sleep when standing beneath God's vaults. If one is a good scientist, he observes and then applies his observations in practical ways.

LAVOISIER

And while the incense burns, you play music as well?

MESMER

My patients do love the glass harmonica. When one's hands touch its spinning glass disks and notes are produced, the whole world's hopes are held there. Is he here? The instrument's inventor and one of your of your Academy's most electric international members.

Benjamin Franklin, where are you seated? I do so wish to express my admiration for your discovery of *one* of the invisible forces that moves in each of us and has changed our world.

*MESMER has stood and is looking about the room.*

LAVOISIER

He is at his lodging, with gout.

MESMER

Pity.

*LAVOISIER indicates the chair. MESMER sits.*

MESMER

Perhaps I will pay him a visit for such a man need not suffer.

LAVOISIER

And in this perfumed chamber  
with soft music playing,  
you hover close to your subjects, often young women, "laying hands" upon them as you move them into  
"slumber". Is such closeness common in Austria?  
Here in France, you see, we respect distance.

MESMER

It is neither common nor uncommon. It is a treatment.

LAVOISIER

You treated one Mademoiselle Paradis, the young pianist, did you not?

MESMER

Of course. One of my greatest triumphs.  
To have been blind and then to gain sight.  
To witness the world going from black, a blank slate upon which nothing can be written, to a rainbow of colors.

LAVOISIER

Does she still have sight?

MESMER

I know not. She left my care some time ago.

LAVOISIER

Then let me inform you.  
She does not.

MESMER

You do not know that.

LAVOISIER

She was here in Paris just this year. I am surprised you did not go to see her perform.

MESMER

I do not frequent private salons where only consorts of the King and Queen are welcome.  
It does sound lovely.

LAVOISIER

It was and she a woman even lovelier than the event. She is, after all, grown now, no longer a girl.  
I shall tell you the specifics.

MESMER

That is not necessary.

LAVOISIER

Oh, it most certainly is. How can we evaluate something unless we look most carefully at every last detail?

(beat)

We were gathered in a communal configuration, much like we are today. In the center was a grand piano.

Burnished a dark mahogany color that shone in the candlelight. Glorious really.

An objectively attractive woman entered through the door, wearing a dress made of many layers but with loose fabric around the arms allowing for an ease of movement.

But her arms were not yet moving for they were held by a girl, the daughter of the family of the house I believe. She was kind enough to lead this woman to her seat at the instrument. The woman, who I am sure it is obvious was Mademoiselle Paradis, sat down and let her fingers play upon the keys, coaxing a melody through her hands.

She never once looked down at the ivory

nor forward at the shining wood

nor out at all of us

for there was nothing she could see

but the notes

against the black blank slate.

MESMER

As I said, you do not know that she is blind.

LAVOISIER

Do you call her a liar?

MESMER

I know not her heart.

LAVOISIER

If she does not feign blindness and she is no liar than the evidence suggests that your treatment did not succeed.

MESMER

It is possible that she believes herself blind and in that belief, she has rendered herself so. The ailment may have been healed but the desire for darkness had not.

LAVOISIER

Why would anyone desire darkness, doctor?

MESMER

Perhaps she had grown so accustomed to living only by a certain limited group of senses that when exposed to the full range of human experience, she rejected it because she could not make sense of it. Better to live in darkness than to die in the light.

(beat)

Merely a hypothesis, I admit.

LAVOISIER

She has a physical ailment, not a hysteria of the mind.

MESMER

Are you sitting atop her head and peering in? I thought that such a view was reserved for God.

LAVOISIER

In this hall, our observations alone are God.

MESMER

Don't we, above all else, stand beneath God's gaze, as embodied by his divinely appointed King and Queen?

LAVOISIER

Since we, so far below, cannot know God as they do, we must believe in him, and thus them, without knowledge.

MESMER

You *must* believe?

LAVOISIER

I do believe.

MESMER

But you do not know?

LAVOISIER

I know that I believe.

(beat)

Facts and beliefs are two separate things with a different set of parameters for containing them. As I can acknowledge that I have beliefs, I need not investigate them and thus put them to the test of science. If you are asking us to *believe* in something unknowable, the fluid, as the foundation for your system, then I fear that this Academy of *Science* might not be Mesmerism's most appropriate supporter. And since our "divinely appointed" monarchs have not offered to proclaim Animal Magnetism's virtues, perhaps the church could advocate for your system, where it would stand proudly beneath what did you call them...ah yes, "God's vaults".

MESMER

This is not a religious issue. It is a scientific one.

LAVOISIER

The religions have a great hold on the people and offer them solace.

If you wish to serve them, then what does it matter?

MESMER

It matters for I wish to offer the solace that comes from knowing truth.

LAVOISIER

Religion is not true?

Is the word of God a lie, sir?

MESMER

I know not the word of God.

I only know--

LAVOISIER

You do not know that the fluid is of God?

MESMER

I only know that it exists.

LAVOISIER

Then it could be of the devil.

And if it is of the devil, then the people may think that it benefits them when in fact it is doing them harm, for the devil is tricky that way

If the academy published an approving report, we could be condoning witchcraft in the streets of France and once such forces are unleashed, it logically follows that the country would find itself on the way to damnation.

*MESMER rises to his feet.*

MESMER

I am surely not so powerful as to fundamentally influence the direction of our state.

LAVOISIER

Agreed. You, however, seem to have cultivated quite a following who would have it otherwise.

MESMER

If I could discourage their enthusiasm for my methods, *that* would be the peak of power and I do not need to rise so high.

LAVOISIER

It must be difficult to experience the powerlessness that comes when so many of our country's subjects gather outside your clinic's doors and utter, like prayers, "Heal me, Doctor Mesmer" "Cure me, Doctor Mesmer" "Save me, Doctor Mesmer" "Doctor Mesmer, Doctor Mesmer, Doctor Mesmer!" Such a burden. For it is not only your methods, but you, in which they seem to have faith.

MESMER

I wish only to stand, like you, amongst my peers.

LAVOISIER

Amongst *my* peers, science is celebrated, not the scientist.

*A beat.*

MESMER

I see.

When your report states that my system has merit, "Franz Anton Mesmer" need not be anywhere in its pages.

...

LAVOISIER

Even *if* our report extols the system's virtues, you would be satisfied with the exclusion of your name?

MESMER

Yes. For Mesmerism is more important--

LAVOISIER

--Ah, that is where the candle lights when exposed to oxygen!

*A beat. What is LAVOISIER talking about?*

LAVOISIER

"Mesmer" ism.

...

MESMER

It shall be called Animal Magnetism and nothing more.

(beat)

But I would be admitted to the academy.

LAVOISIER

Oh no, that cannot be.

MESMER

If you find my process worthy of approval, then why should I be refused a place?

LAVOISIER

To be accepted here, where seats are few, requires more than a single achievement. As your path is exceedingly narrow, you do not qualify.

MESMER

Narrow! My path is not narrow. It is as wide as the world. If you acknowledge the truth of my system, then you acknowledge its universality and as the one who discovered that which is universal--

LAVOISIER

In actuality, it was Newton's discovery of gravity which accounts for the universal cosmic effects to which your system refers.

MESMER

As we are pulled by gravity in spite of our push towards the stars, it is obvious that these opposing forces attract one another.

(beat)

As magnets do.

LAVOISIER

You do not push towards the stars, Doctor. You *pull* on them, but as our Earth's pull is so great, it renders yours insignificant.

Perhaps we should use the name Newton already gave and abandon the term "animal magnetism" altogether.

MESMER

Newton's theories, while impressive, did not account for every force the universe offers.

LAVOISIER

True. His experience, after all, was limited.

LAVOISIER

(cont'd)

To this planet.

(beat)

*You* must have been to another planet and can provide proof of its magnetic influence on our own.

MESMER

You mock me.

LAVOISIER

I am showing you respect by taking what your assertion implies to its fullest conclusion.

If you are to be a member, you must expect such challenges.

...

MESMER

I have been to another planet.

LAVOISIER

There we have it! Was it, perhaps, made of roquefort?

*He laughs, enjoying the moment.*

MESMER

It was.

The cheese you ate at lunch

And the buttons on your coat

and the wool your stockings are woven from

and the calf's leather of your shoes

and the stone beneath your feet

and the candles that light this room

and the air we breathe

and dust

LAVOISIER

Why, it sounds remarkably like here!

MESMER

If the system we are in is closed, and all we can do is exchange what we have amongst ourselves, then by extension, we have been to another planet by staying right where we are.

LAVOISIER

You have misunderstood my law.

MESMER

*Your* law! I thought it was nature's law.

LAVOISIER

I was using a shorthand so you'd know of what I spoke.

MESMER

So the law of the conservation of matter, which it does not matter that you put forth, does not state that everything is the same even if it appears different?

LAVOISIER

No.

It states that while nothing can be created nor destroyed, for you were correct that our system is closed, there exists inherent differences between us. Should we exchange those elements that make us varied we would not find that we are the same, we would find only that our differences have changed.

MESMER

So no one, not even your colleagues in this hall, could be your equal?

...

LAVOISIER

There is no such thing as equal.

Equality requires similarity and while some elements may share properties they are fundamentally varied in their makeup, otherwise they would be identical.

MESMER

We are in agreement

that equality is an impossibility, according to standard standards.

Animal Magnetism offers only its closest approximation.

(to the audience)

In this country, where so many suffer from lack of nourishment or lack of funds, I deny no one treatment. This is your opportunity to show all the people of France--

LAVOISIER

--You do not perform your services for money?

MESMER

I do, where it is appropriate.

LAVOISIER

And you would not turn a single subject away who could not afford the fee?

MESMER

Not a single soul.

LAVOISIER

And these poor people have access to your baths which are filled with magnetized water?

MESMER

The Aquae Sulis. Latin for "waters of the sun." I have specially designed these vessels--

LAVOISIER

--These poor have access to the Aquae Sulis?

MESMER

Of course. All patients must place their feet into the magnetized water so that their bodies' internal fluid aligns with the external fluid so readily available in the world.

LAVOISIER

And these poverty stricken  
disease ridden  
*equal* persons sit shoulder to shoulder  
foot to foot  
with...  
the Countess of Champagne and her attendants?

MESMER

Not foot to foot, but in separate, identically appointed, quarters just adjacent to the one where the privileged gather.

LAVOISIER

Ah, I see. Things may be equal, in your eyes, but should still be kept separate.

MESMER

Not as separate as our society demands. The great secret of the process is that the close proximity of all, a mere curtain between them, easily pushed aside, increases the likelihood of bodily reconciliation. In most of our land, stand stone walls which would need be torn down to accomplish the same.

The wealthy, gathered around the Aquae Sulis, link fingers and form a chain.

Before much time passes, the magnetized water's energy makes its way from their toes, up their ankles, through their torsos and down their arms, until it reaches their joined hands.

(puts his hands together)

Because the water's motion is ever rising and falling, the patients--

(he starts to sway/rock back and forth)

May I?

(indicates getting up and then he does so)

The patients find themselves swaying

in unison,

Back and forth

Back and forth

Back and forth,

the universal fluid inside them, fairly rigid upon entering my clinic, growing more liquid with each connected movement.

There are great inhalations and exhalations as the patients increase their capacity, accommodating the fluid's expanding presence.

(beat)

As these privileged sway and breathe loudly, the less fortunate in the adjoining space do as well. The two groups can hear each other breathing and there is no difference between them. They form one breath, one fluid and then--

LAVOISIER

These actions are only the precursor to even more extreme contortions, yes?

MESMER

Yes, the final step before healing is achieved, the crisis!

LAVOISIER

And this crisis requires a violent response from their bodies.

MESMER

Indeed. Much like nature's nature, violence is an integral part of the process.

LAVOISIER

Violence! Please do go on.

MESMER

Now that the group has increased the fluid's ability to flow, the physician will work individually with the patients. One by one, he loosens the restrictions on a man's-

LAVOISIER

--Or a woman's.

MESMER

Or a woman's fluid, by first focusing his attentions on the area most commonly associated with blockages, the head, isolating it from the rest of the body. As the separation grows near, the fluid comes rushing forth in a vibration which leads to shaking which becomes quaking there is sweat flying from the neck and spit sailing from the mouth and screaming for understanding or screaming for justice or screaming, and this is what happens most often, for a revolution.

That is what the body needs, to revolt against its own unnecessary restrictions and thus, bring itself to a natural state!

(having reached a peak, he speaks more calmly now)

And lastly, when the body is free, tears will flow, a final release borne of the process.

*MESMER, spent, finally sits.*

LAVOISIER

The process seems awfully, well, messy.

MESMER

Yes, messy!

LAVOISIER

The Royal Academy requires that every aspect can be measured, recorded and studied. Given such messiness, how do you do so?

MESMER

Observation.

LAVOISIER

Are there instruments that detect layers of heat as the body goes through this compromising operation?

MESMER

There are not. If I were to stop to measure the patient's responses in such a fashion I would be ignoring my duty as a physician, whose first concern is the well-being of a human, not the state of a specimen.

LAVOISIER

We are not physicians here at the Academy; please forgive us our ignorance. We do not, after all, plunge spikes into the skull to alleviate pressure nor do we inject powders made from the essence of a ram's anus to cure pains--

MESMER

--Some of my colleagues do perform such monstrous procedures. *My patients' healing occurs without invasive techniques. Their own minds and hearts do much of the work --*

LAVOISIER

Their minds, you say! You engage the imagination, then, allowing it to run free until the body catches up?

MESMER

Yes!

LAVOISIER

If that is the case, you have admitted that it is the patient's hope for an outcome which activates the crisis, not your influence upon the universal fluid.

MESMER

If the fluid is blocked, then the imagination, which is where hopes are stored, is blocked as well. To allow freedom for that which is fundamental in the body allows liberty for all else.

LAVOISIER

Members of the Academy, have we not heard quite enough?

Since the good doctor's work is based in hope and not in fact and hope is given only by God and his divine emissaries, the King and Queen, there is no need for further inquiry of this charlatan. Charlatan is generally defined as one who puts forth falsities, of any kind, for the purpose of meeting his own desires. I prefer, in the interest of rigor, to make its definition more specific: A Charlatan is one whose desire to wield God's power give lie to his claims of truth.

(beat)

Now, *Herr* Mesmer, you may leave so that we can fairly evaluate your answers.

MESMER

Will you tell me your scientific method?

I recognize that I interrupted you when you were explaining it earlier and I do not wish to leave with all of you thinking me crude.

(beat)

Please, one small favor before you facilitate my demise.

LAVOISIER

First, we observe a phenomenon: There is a system put forth by one Franz Anton Mesmer that has attracted many to his home, etc...

Next, we ask a question: Does this system, based on the existence of a fluid which cannot be observed, adhere to natural laws?

We then form a hypothesis: Since the fluid itself cannot be known, Animal Magnetism's *principles* are the sole means by which we can evaluate the system's nature. If the principles are made clear, the system will be as well.

It is then possible to design a test: The system's founder shall attend an inquiry at the Royal Academy of Science.

This testing of the hypothesis occurs: The good doctor is questioned.

The results are noted: At every turn the answers lack rigor and clarity.

We analyze that data: While nature is precise in its operations, Animal Magnetism's principles are not.

Finally, we reach a conclusion: Mesmerism does not adhere to natural laws.

This conclusion serves as a foundation for the prediction of future events: Since our country is governed by laws, natural in their origin, the system, and its founder, shall have no place in France.

MESMER

Do you truly believe in this method?

LAVOISIER

I do not believe in it.

It has demonstrated its effectiveness time and time again and, as such, does not require faith.

MESMER

Good. Your hypothesis, the basis for this test, was flawed.

LAVOISIER

Flawed?

MESMER

You stated that the system's principles are the sole means by which it can be evaluated.

LAVOISIER

Yes.

MESMER

I can provide observable proof of the universal fluid's existence.

...

LAVOISIER

How?

MESMER

Here and now, a patient will achieve crisis.

He will shake and spit and scream and cry and know nothing but the twisting and churning of the fluid coursing inside him and then he will awaken.

LAVOISIER

This will prove nothing other than the possibility that the body may be manipulated.

MESMER

The patient will observe from the inside, where the body does not reign, and tell us of the fluid's motions. Those in the room will observe from the outside. It will be in the meeting of these two perspectives that Animal Magnetism will be most fully revealed.

LAVOISIER

You have brought a subject with you?

MESMER

No.

LAVOISIER

Then this is a fruitless conversation. Please sir--

MESMER

I would prefer that *you* serve as the patient.

LAVOISIER

Ridiculous!

The scientist does not participate in the experiment. He remains separate from it.

MESMER

Exactly! This particular experiment requires a patient most skilled at separation, such as yourself, who can thoroughly observe his experiences in spite of the closeness the process encourages.

LAVOISIER

But the treatment's supposed purpose is to heal and I am not sick.

MESMER

There is nothing causing you pain?

LAVOISIER

No.

MESMER

There is nothing causing you distress?

LAVOISIER

No.

MESMER

There is nothing which you wish you could resolve and thus live more peacefully?

LAVOISIER

No-thing.

MESMER

All the better! This can be a true experiment, not attached to outcomes, for surely in this hall where inquiry and divinity are one and the same, outcomes, the impacts on people and their diseases, are nothing.

LAVOISIER

Experiments have graspable results. If there is nothing to be healed, then there is no way to evaluate your failure or success.

MESMER

(as though quoting/intoning)

"In the progress of investigation, we should proceed from known facts to what is unknown."

LAVOISIER

How educational for you to have studied my works, but my own words are not weapons to be thrown at my chest so that they might pierce my heart.

MESMER

Of course not. I simply admire your use of language.

LAVOISIER

Yes, you do admire...simply.

(talking to him as though a student)

In order to reach the unknown we must first study what we know.

As you offer us neither, we cannot have both.

Good day.

MESMER

Your conclusion was that animal magnetism does not adhere to natural laws.

As you surely do, the treatment should have no effect on you at all.

LAVOISIER

That is the point.

MESMER

I would be *proven* false.

Incontrovertible evidence.

Irrefutable even by those who proclaim my system true.

LAVOISIER

(realizing the opportunity)

And open to no interpretation.

MESMER

None, other than your own.

(beat, indicates the audience)

And of course, those of your colleagues.

LAVOISIER

Of course.

(beat)

An encounter then. It shall be brief.

MESMER

Wonderful! Why don't you take a seat?

LAVOISIER

I would be happy to.

(pause, he sits)

I fear that you are at a disadvantage without your tubs,

excuse me, *Aquae Sulis*, and your glass harmonica.

How ever will you proceed?

MESMER

A confession to you, learned academy members. Those items are for lesser minds.

As you are already in touch with nature's fundamentals, all that is necessary is you and me.

LAVOISIER

I am fortunate then.

MESMER

You are fortunate indeed.

*MESMER shakes out his hands, stretches his limbs, gathers the energy around him; he is getting ready to start the induction into the trance. When this is completed, he turns his attentions to LAVOISIER.*

MESMER

Monsieur, of what is the world made?

LAVOISIER

A rather broad question.

MESMER

It is, so that you might make the world narrow for us.

LAVOISIER

The world is made of indivisible molecules.

MESMER

Of what are these molecules composed?

LAVOISIER

They are composed of themselves.

MESMER

I am but a poor physician and in such complex chemistry I am your student.

LAVOISIER

The molecules are not separated and thus, they are simple substances, and we must not suppose them compounded unless experiment and observation have proved them to be so.

MESMER

At some point then we may learn that these "simple substances" may also be divisible?

LAVOISIER

We may and then my compendium of the elements will achieve an even greater state of completion.

MESMER

How do we know if something is complete?

LAVOISIER

We know because over time we have tested it and determined that state to be so.

MESMER

I ask again then, according to your determination, of what is the world made?

*MESMER takes both candles and holds them before LAVOISIER.*

LAVOISIER

Light, that which is, illuminated.

Caloric, the matter of fire.

Oxygen, the pure air.

Hydrogen, flammable Gas.

Phosphorous, an incendiary

Charcoal, a combustible body

Azote, lifeless vapor.

*MESMER slowly brings the candles together, so that they look like a single flame, as LAVOISIER speaks.*

LAVOISIER

Antimony

Argill

Arsenic

Barytes

Bismuth

Boracic Radical

Cobalt

Copper

Flouric Radical

Gold

Iron

Lead

Lime

Magnesia

Manganese

LAVOISIER

(cont'd)

Mercury

Molybdena

Muriatic Radical

Nickel

Platina

Silex

Silver

Sulphur

Tin

Tungstein

Zinc

MESMER

And of what are we made?

LAVOISIER

As we are of the world, we are made of or influenced by the same.

MESMER

Then please repeat so that we may know ourselves.

*MESMER hands LAVOISIER one candle, which he now holds and blows out the other. Very dramatic.*

*He crosses behind LAVOISIER and starts manipulating the "fluid" in his head.*

LAVOISIER

Light

Caloric

Oxygen

Hydrogen

Phosphorous

Charcoal

Azote

Antimony

Argill

Arsenic

Barytes

Bismuth

Boracic Radical

Cobalt

Copper

Flouric Radical

Gold

Iron

Lead

LAVOISIER

(cont'd)

Lime

Magnesia

Manganese

Mercury

Molybdena

Muriatic Radical

Nickel

Platina

Silex

Silver

Sulphur

Tin

Tungstein

Zinc

MESMER

Once more.

LAVOISIER

Zinc Tungstein Tin Sulphur Silver Silex Platina Nickel Muriatic Radical Molybdena

MESMER

The life in the world is but one.

LAVOISIER

Mercury Manganese Magnesia Lime Lead Iron Gold

MESMER

The individual man is a particle

LAVOISIER

Flouric Radical Copper Cobalt Boracic Radical Bismuth Barytes

MESMER

The action of the fluid is definite

LAVOISIER

Arsenic Argill Antimony

MESMER

The source of all life's motions.

LAVOISIER

Azote Charcoal Phosphorus Oxygen Caloric Light Light Light

*Lights shift. The audience is in darkness and the scene seems to be lit by the single candle only.*

LAVOISIER

Light, that which is, illuminated.

*LAVOISIER looks about, clearly not seeing the audience any longer.*

LAVOISIER

Where are my colleagues?

*MESMER, standing behind LAVOISIER and thus, unseen by him, slowly removes his wig, revealing a completely bald head.*

MESMER

Do not be alarmed.

LAVOISIER

I am not alarmed.

(pause)

I have encountered such a phenomenon previously. When the appearance of the circumstance has changed, even though there has been no opportunity for it to do so in actuality, I am in sleep. This most often occurs when my exhaustion has taken hold or I have been lulled into a state of boredom. Whatever the case, I am here.

*MESMER, with his bald head, reveals himself to LAVOISIER.*

LAVOISIER

And now I have strange dreams.

MESMER

May I call you Antoine?

LAVOISIER

I would prefer not.

MESMER

As we are here alone, I thought perhaps it would be more enjoyable if we were so acquainted, for dreams only pass peacefully if one does not war with them along the way.

(beat)

And you may call me Anton, as my friends do when the situation is encouraging of such familiarity and allows for--

LAVOISIER

--Fine, Anton.

MESMER

Danke, Antoine.

MESMER

Would you care for some music?

*MESMER starts moving his hands about.*

LAVOISIER

What are you doing?

MESMER

I am playing the glass harmonica. Although I said it was unnecessary, most patients do find its tones soothing.

LAVOISIER

There is no harmonica.

MESMER

That which is invisible is not impossible. Breathe deep

(he does so, taking in air)

and you will be reminded that it is so.

LAVOISIER

Properties are the basis for the definition of matter. The air to which you refer has properties even though it cannot be seen. If there are no properties, then there is no matter and if there is no matter there is no substance and if there is no substance there is nothing.

MESMER

The mesmeric process requires that the patient surrender to its power, with no hesitation, or he will fail to commune with the invisible substance until he, as is inevitable, dies--

LAVOISIER

If death is inevitable, then there *is* something which your universal system cannot cure.

MESMER

But the suffering that comes before it *can* be cured. You are correct, however, that I cannot relieve life's ending because death is, in fact, the beginning of creation.

LAVOISIER

When one affirms that death is creation, one reveals a hope and *hope* gives *belief* a reason to exist. And as I said, belief does not belong in this Academy.

MESMER

But if you believe

that a glass harmonica is already playing

you will *hear* the evidence

and it will become a fact

and then we can move on

for a scientist commits to every part of a process

in order to know the complete truth.

*Then, we hear it. The glass harmonica's tones in the air.  
We listen for a brief time.*

*MESMER takes the candle from LAVOISIER's hand and places it back in its original spot.*

MESMER  
Why are you here?

LAVOISIER  
To lead an inquiry of your system.

MESMER  
And who has given you this charge?

LAVOISIER  
The Academy.

MESMER  
The members have directed you to enact these proceedings?

LAVOISIER  
I am, as we all are, here on the Queen's behalf for she is science's patron.

MESMER  
She...and her husband...do not care for me.  
Do not care for the passions I arouse in their subjects.

LAVOISIER  
The King and Queen do not share with me their cares. But rest assured, I care only for facts.

MESMER  
Proof.

LAVOISIER  
Proof?

MESMER  
Prove that your direction of this investigation is not beholden to their wishes.

LAVOISIER  
It is not something that can be proven because their wishes are France's wishes. As I am a child of this country, I am a child of them and my wishes are surely their own.

MESMER  
Do children never differ with their parents?

*LAVOISIER gathers his hands around his legs, reminiscent of a fetal position, trying to shut MESMER's inquiry down.*

MESMER

Antoine, since you are dreaming, you are free to tell me, and thus yourself, the truth. The monarchy has greater hold on your heart than fact... Unburden yourself and the fluid can begin to flow without obstruction.

LAVOISIER

My heart's contents have no bearing on the proceedings. It is my mind which directs the inquiry.

(beat)

And, it is a treasonous proposal.

*LAVOISIER thrusts his hands out as though pushing MESMER away.*

MESMER

Treasonous?

*MESMER is sent backward by the thrust of the hands and the force of LAVOISIER's following words:*

LAVOISIER

If the King and Queen were unburdened by one heart at a time, our closed system would collapse and we would all need to begin again.

And beginnings are painful. I have never witnessed a birth but we all know of the screaming which accompanies it. Besides, the monarchs are of God, and so, his beginning, which led to theirs, is the only one which matters to this academy.

*LAVOISIER sits straight up. MESMER recovers from being pushed away.*

MESMER

I thought that this was not a religious institution.

LAVOISIER

I speak not of religion. If God is the beginning of all, then he is in all matter. Those who observe matter, such as myself, can see God.

*MESMER crosses back to the books.*

MESMER

If those who observe matter see God, then you must stand as close to him as our divinely appointed royalty. If we follow your logic.

LAVOISIER

It is your logic that fails. Since we know that everything contains God because everything is made of matter it follows that life's natural descending order is also divine.

MESMER

I was not aware that life descends.

*MESMER grabs the largest book off the shelf. As he does so, LAVOISIER is pulled from the chair, as though influenced by this action.*

MESMER

(cont'd)

I thought it moved from a lower state, the elements you, through careful *observation*, discovered, to a higher one, namely animate life.

LAVOISIER

The elements begin with God, who is above all else. He is able to see everything and enact his will, while standing in the firmament--

*MESMER crosses downstage with the book.  
LAVOISIER, echoing MESMER's movements, slowly comes fully to his feet.*

MESMER

As you see that which begins with God most clearly  
and God is in the firmament,  
you are not as close to God as the King and Queen,  
you are even closer,  
standing above them.

LAVOISIER

But God is not only in the firmament  
He is in all things--

MESMER

--And so are you.

(beat, he opens the book)

The Elements of Chemistry in a New and Systematic Order, Containing All Modern discoveries to which they pertain.

By Antoine Laurent-Lavoisier

*LAVOISIER starts to rise up even further, to his toes.*

MESMER

(beat, he flips the page and reads)

Preface! To those who will consider it, this work offers frequent proof of as yet unidentified truths.

*LAVOISIER starts speaking, joining MESMER in his reading, continually going higher onto his toes.*

MESMER and LAVOISIER

The rigorous law from which I have never deviated,

*LAVOISIER continues speaking while MESMER "reads" mouthing the words.*

LAVOISIER

of forming no conclusions which are not fully warranted by experiment, allows me to reveal these truths without reservation.

*MESMER flips the page and suddenly, LAVOISIER is shot into the air. MESMER follows his ascent with his eyes.*

LAVOISIER

Chapter One.

A solid body may appear indivisible when, in fact, it can be fractured.

Heat this body and its particles will separate.

Allow it to cool and these particles rejoin.

The world is one system, whose order can be clearly seen, when one knows how to look.

*LAVOISIER is in the air, looking down. The sound of wind and void.*

MESMER

Do you see the King up there?

LAVOISIER

No King!

MESMER

What about the Queen?

...

LAVOISIER

I am alone.

MESMER

So you stand alone, closest to God, sharing his view?

(beat)

Don't worry Antoine, you are so far above that no one will hear you.

*LAVOISIER turns his gaze from looking down at the space to slowly looking at his own outstretched hand.*

LAVOISIER

Yes,

I alone see God's elements.

I alone see God's beginnings.

I alone

see

everything.

And since the ability to see everything logically requires eternal sight, my view must be never ending, just like God.

*A beat while LAVOISIER stands looking at himself, as God. MESMER watches him for a moment and then: RIPS a page out of the book.*

*Rip. Rip.*

*LAVOISIER "sinks" back to the ground, pulled by the ripping.*

LAVOISIER

What are you doing!

MESMER

I am taking a document with your name and liberating it of its current state.

*Rip.*

LAVOISIER

That is Academy property. Put it down.

MESMER

Are there not many more copies throughout our land?

*Rip.*

LAVOISIER

This is the original.

MESMER

What a pity that an original, once destroyed, can't be replaced.

*He rips another page out.*

*LAVOISIER "pushes" him and grabs the book from his hands.*

MESMER

Such violence, Antoine.

LAVOISIER

Nature is violent, Anton.

But it is up to man to be civil.

*He turns away and holds his book close.*

MESMER

Civil, yes.

(indicating the book)

I apologize.

*LAVOISIER just looks at him, the book held to his chest.*

MESMER

Your name embossed in gold leaf on the cover; my envy got the better of me. I do wish to read it.

...

LAVOISIER

Perhaps you will learn something.

*He cautiously hands it over.*

MESMER

(flips opens to a chapter)

A new theory of the calcination of metallic substances.

(flips to another part)

The process by which combustion occurs.

(does the same once again)

The elemental benefits of taxation on the common welfare.

*He crosses, snaps his fingers and suddenly there appears a flame and the sound of a crackling fire. He starts to toss the book into the flames.*

LAVOISIER  
My words!

*In slow motion, LAVOISIER runs to him and grabs the book. The following is a struggle between them.*

MESMER  
Let go, Antoine.

LAVOISIER  
I cannot allow you to take such liberties with my work.

MESMER  
I can do nothing to your work.

LAVOISIER  
You are attempting to do something right now.

MESMER  
Ah, if something *appears* to be real then there is no doubt that it is so.

*A moment.  
LAVOISIER stops fighting and holds onto the book, as MESMER continues fighting.  
As LAVOISIER reads, MESMER realizes that his hands are empty and he is being ignored.*

LAVOISIER  
There is true combustion, evolution of flame and light, only in so far as the body is surrounded by Pure Air, which I have named Oxygen. Oxygen can give life and some of the life it serves to form is acid. Oxus means sharp and Genos is birth. Oxy-Genes.

MESMER  
Although you gave it its name, that pure air was first found by another  
Brilliant  
Innovative  
*Englishman*  
Joseph Priestley.

*This challenge starts to affect LAVOISIER physically, but he tries to push it away.*

LAVOISIER  
(reading aloud)  
In all things, correct nomenclature is necessary.

MESMER  
Hydrogen is another of the names you put forth, yes? Wasn't it Cavendish who first discovered this inflammable element?

*LAVOISIER's body is starting to contort, as though the weight of the book is dragging his body around.*

LAVOISIER

Discovery is mere conjecture until *named* properly.

MESMER

You have found it necessary to reject many names other men gave to the world. They were all improper?

*The contortion grows.*

LAVOISIER

Some, in an attempt to distract from imprecise calculations—

MESMER

Carl Wilhelm Scheele called Tungstein by its proper name and yet you saw fit to claim that too.

*He is almost all twisted up.*

LAVOISIER

Some, in an attempt to distract from imprecise calculations, will offer an apparatus of argument that makes us lose sight of the facts themselves--

MESMER

--The fact is that you have been distracted by others' achievements and so, you have made their calculations your own--

*All twisted up, the weight of the book starts to send him to the floor, but he is still trying to fight it.*

LAVOISIER

(still reading, very forcefully now)

--makes us lose sight of the facts themselves in such a way that science in their hands is no more than a fabric woven by desire. And desire is not science.

MESMER

Your desires, Antoine have led you to take particles of this man's philosophy and molecules of that man's findings and now--

LAVOISIER

Desire is—

MESMER

Now, you find yourself standing atop these men, Director of the Royal Academy--

LAVOISIER

Desire is self-aggrandizement disguised as true inquiry.

*He is now on the floor, trying to push the book from his chest. Perhaps, he is starting to vibrate, shaken and crushed by MESMER's words.*

MESMER

If one were to inquire truly, one would see what you have done. And then it would be known that you did not first observe the elements of matter and you would no longer matter.

True, it may take some time for this knowledge to take hold

Right now, it is nothing more than a spatial anomaly, existing on the margins of perception,

like a particle of dust in the eye, so small yet so irritating

but this irritation can turn into an infection,

that will grow into an illness

which shall become a disease for which there is no cure--

*He throws the book from him, which brings him to his feet and MESMER catches it.*

LAVOISIER

--I am in my laboratory!

MESMER

And when a man is so sick, he might very well be contagious and your fellow scientists--

LAVOISIER

My laboratory...where it is quiet.

MESMER

Your fellow scientists, like Franklin, whose thoughts are original and whose glories are earned, will turn from you--

LAVOISIER

My calorimeter is on my right.

*LAVOISIER gestures that way as though looking at something.*

MESMER

They will turn from you, their backs to your face and their feet tracking a path out the door. They must protect their health, after all.

LAVOISIER

And a flamingo flask, with mercury cooking in the bottom chamber is to my left.

*He gestures that way, trying to work, to block out MESMER.*

MESMER

And then you will be left alone, no longer standing, but lying down because you are weak and dying and there is nothing to be done.

LAVOISIER

I am checking on the mercury's progress--

MESMER  
Nothing to be done.

LAVOISIER  
--checking on the mercury to see—

MESMER  
Nothing.

LAVOISIER  
--to see what still remains.

MESMER  
Once you are dead and your books, because they bear your disgraced name, become not fuel for thought but only for fire--

LAVOISIER  
Silence!

MESMER  
--it will be as though you never were at all and if that is the case, your life was not a fact, but a hope, unrealized and--

LAVOISIER  
I'm working!

*Suddenly, MESMER is silenced. He keeps speaking, but no sound comes out. The sounds of the laboratory take over. LAVOISIER moves as though doing an experiment. These movements evolve until they are practically a dance filled with precise gestures, some of curiosity and others of caring for his experiments. Quite beautiful. MESMER has stopped attempting to speak and watches LAVOISIER, trying to figure out what to do next.*

MESMER  
I am your wife Marie and I approach you and begin stroking your hair.

LAVOISIER  
Not now. I have work to do.

MESMER  
But Antoine, my breasts are pressed against your lips waiting for you to take a bite.

LAVOISIER  
Work!

MESMER  
Is work more important than my nipples?

LAVOISIER

You know it is for what are a woman's nipples but vessels for milk and, as I am not thirsty, why would that be of any interest?

MESMER

You do not like my breasts just for their own sake?

LAVOISIER

No, for everything has a purpose and if it is without purpose it might as well not exist.

MESMER

I see.

*LAVOISIER tries continuing his work dance, but  
MESMER keeps close by, appealing to him.*

LAVOISIER

Anne-Marie, you should go.

MESMER

But I do so wish to remain.

LAVOISIER

Your wishes are irrelevant.

MESMER

You desire me.

LAVOISIER

You...are a distraction.

MESMER

Distraction?

LAVOISIER

From the task at hand.

MESMER

And what task would that be presently?

LAVOISIER

The Decomposition of Oxygen by Sulphur, Phosphorous and Charcoal.

MESMER

You do not wish to be distracted from decomposition?

LAVOISIER

No. Decomposition results in formation of something new, even if that new state is corrosive in nature. This is what truly matters.

MESMER

I do not matter then?

LAVOISIER

Oh, of course you do. You are a container for elements combined in a unique formation.

MESMER

I only matter as a container and nothing more?

LAVOISIER

Nothing more? That is plenty.

MESMER

I am more than a container for substances.

I am a vessel, *filled* with desires and the memories borne of them.

(beat)

Tell me, Antoine, what are your memories?

LAVOISIER

My darling, that is an unnecessary question.

Memories cannot be tested. They are not repeatable and thus they cannot be known.

And if they cannot be known and studied with precise methodology, they are meaningless.

MESMER

You must have some and as we are spouses, who better to tell?

(he stands close to LAVOISIER, his hands reaching out, but not quite touching)

What do you remember? Tell me something early because you know how I like the beginnings of things.

*LAVOISIER shuts him down with his words.*

LAVOISIER

The fetal head is in the transverse position. And it is facing across the pelvis at one of the mother's hips.

It then descends, followed by an internal rotation of 90 degrees to the occipito-anterior position so that the face is towards the mother's rectum.

Shortly thereafter, the head passes out of the birth canal. It is tilted forwards so that the crown leads the way.

Then—

MESMER

Why do we not have one?

LAVOISIER

One?

MESMER

A child.

LAVOISIER

Who needs a child when we have our work?

MESMER

*Your* work cannot look to you, expectantly, for answers.

LAVOISIER

I beg to differ. It does so all the time.

MESMER

Not with any blood and warmth.

LAVOISIER

Children, Anne-Marie, are temporary. They have a life span unpredictable in its length, but definite in its ending. The knowledge that comes from my work is eternal and as you are my wife you have given birth to this eternity.

MESMER

I do not fear my child's death. I fear his lack of life.

LAVOISIER

Absence where there has been nothing previously cannot exist.

In a system, such as ours, where nothing can be destroyed, the only means by which there can be a "lack" of something is when a transformation into another state results in it no longer being recognizable. And such unrecognizability renders it "dead" to anyone who knew its previous incarnation and so, it will appear that there is an absence where there is none, but that will be of no matter to the observer unless he is savvy and children are not!

...

MESMER

It is not the *child's* death you fear. It is your wife's.

LAVOISIER

I do not fear death at all, for I know it is a fiction rendered real by our limited sensory perceptions. Luckily, we have our advanced equipment to find out the truth!

*He tries turning back to his work.*

*MESMER gestures at his back; it pulls him around.*

MESMER

If death is a fiction, then I cannot go anywhere.

(beat, he reaches out to LAVOISIER)

I am not going anywhere, Antoine.

LAVOISIER

That is correct. You are not.

(beat, he guides MESMER's hand away)

Hand me that glass receptacle.

MESMER

My husband, in the description of your birth, there was the term "mother", so indifferently expressed as "*the* mother", not "*My* mother". Now--

LAVOISIER

--Mother is an individual of the kind that produces ova or eggs. Her particular makeup allows for a reaction to take place which results in a transformation of these objects, followed by the process I described to you earlier. She is only a cause and a child an effect.

(beat)

I'll get the receptacle myself.

*LAVOISIER turns away and returns to his  
"work"*

MESMER

You are right, Antoine. Mother *is* a cause, also called a parent, and what does a parent do but affect her child by offering order when the world is nothing but chaos? Much like God.

LAVOISIER

The world is not chaos, Anne-Marie! There is order everywhere if one just knows how to look. Inside this previously dry beaker water appears, the smallest of drops collecting on the interior. Chaos, some would say! Moisture everywhere we turn, appearing out of nothing and returning to nothing just as suddenly. Mysterious, unknowable. But I do know! When inflammable and pure air are exploded in proper proportions, they lose their elasticity and condense and such an action results in the formation of what...water!

MESMER

There is enough water on this Earth surely to drown us all. It is mere luck that, even with the rising of the tides, we survive. You see, chaos need not be bad, but how would a child know that? It takes a guide, soft and strong all at once, to help him--

LAVOISIER

--I do not need help!

*He slaps the air. MESMER turns his head as though hit.*

LAVOISIER

I do not need soft and strong  
I do not need a guide  
I do not need God  
I do not need a parent  
I do not need a mother  
I do not need  
I do not need  
I do not need  
for everything is in  
order!

*He returns to his work, but he is practically vibrating.*

...

LAVOISIER

To extract oxygen from the air

(focuses on the task more intently)

I first heat the mercury in a swan neck container over a charcoal furnace—

*MESMER drops the "Anne-Marie" persona and simply speaks.*

MESMER

Head is in the transverse position. And it is facing across the pelvis at one of the mother's hips.

LAVOISIER

Look carefully and I see that a red oxide is formed on the surface of the mercury  
(he "measures" for a moment, still vibrating and gesturing)

The oxygen has been used to foster this transformation--

MESMER

--It then descends, followed by an internal rotation of 90 degrees to the occipito-anterior position so that the face is towards the mother's rectum--

LAVOISIER

--the oxygen has been used up and the gas that remains  
(vibrating becomes a small shaking)

can not support

*MESMER stands in front of LAVOISIER, and gestures as though holding candles. A repeat of his movements from the induction into the trance.*

LAVOISIER

flame.

*LAVOISIER now starts a movement sequence where he repeats moments and gestures we have seen throughout the treatment. MESMER too repeats much of his movement vocabulary, but this time he focuses his attentions on the chair, as though LAVOISIER is still seated there.*

MESMER

Mother is an individual--

LAVOISIER

--can not support breath--

MESMER

Her particular makeup allows for a reaction--

LAVOISIER

--This element needs a proper name.

A, in the Greek, means without.

MESMER

She is a cause

LAVOISIER  
And Zote means life.

MESMER  
And a child—

LAVOISIER  
Azote, without life.

MESMER  
A child--

LAVOISIER  
(as though speaking to the element, trying to figure it out)  
That is your name. But of what are you made?

MESMER  
A child is an effect.

LAVOISIER  
What are you if you cannot sustain?  
What are you if all you can do is extinguish?

MESMER  
As a child is affected by his birth, he grows.

LAVOISIER  
What aaarrre yooooou?

MESMER  
You are a child.  
You are the child.  
You are this child.

LAVOISIER  
This child  
is

(as though looking at the beaker, as he did when he was discussing “chaos” and “order”)  
interested in the way that matter that looks heavy can be light and vice versa. Playing with tortoise shells, so stone like in their appearance but so like air when handled. He hears something. Looks up. It might be a cry or even a scream but as he is so far away, still with his light matter, the sound is nothing more than a whisper. He returns to peeling the shell's layers until he can get to the root of what makes it a thing.

MESMER  
But what is this child?

LAVOISIER

This child

is

(as though moving through his “laboratory” vocabulary)

a boy with a nanny who comes into the garden. Not his father, which is just as well, for he has rough hands and this nanny, Ernestine is her name, asks the boy if he would like some supper. He does not answer her for the investigation of the shell is all the nourishment he needs.

MESMER

But what is he?

LAVOISIER

He is

He is

He is...

(moving through his “dance” sequence, his movements recalling the beauty of that)

Antoine, who is scooped up by Ernestine. He throws a tantrum, shifting his weight in her arms, but he is just a boy and she a woman and women *can* be quite strong.

And then Antoine is inside. He falls silent for something is not right.

Yes, the air smells of wild hare in butter sauce and madelines still baking but underneath that smell is something rotten, like a piece of apple grown soft. And he asks the nanny, “where is my mother?” and she smiles and says she is in the other room, now eat.

He sits down, places his nose up against the dead rabbit and she says, “go on, master Antoine” and what choice does he have, so he shovels the little beast into his mouth, its stringy limbs catching on his teeth, but that smell will not go away and it and the butter are one and he wants to let his insides come pouring out,

*MESMER uses his hands at the chair as though manipulating the fluid of the body that is “seated” there. Perhaps, his movements suggest that he is freeing the person of blockages. LAVOISIER’s ripping out of the sky sequence, from earlier, runs backward.*

LAVOISIER

(backward rip)

pouring out

(backward rip)

pouuuurrring out

(backward rip)

but he does not

and then

(backward rip)

and then

(backward rip)

and then

(backward rip)

it is done.

“May I get up,” he says?

MESMER  
What is he?

LAVOISIER  
(his movements recall the "God" sequence, in the firmament)

He is  
He is  
He is

(he returns to the chair)

I...do get up but the nanny says I musn't go to mother's quarters and I run from the room as though anxious to play and I run down the corridor and I run past the pantry and past the ballroom and past the statue with the penis far larger than my own and then I am at her door and I push it open.

There is a candle by the bed.

So much light from such a small flame.

So much illuminated.

I see her

lying here

and she is still

and she is covered in blood

and she is nothing

(breathes in deep)

but rot.

*LAVOISIER is now fully seated in the chair and returns to the fetal position, reminiscent of how he sat near the beginning of the sequence. He begins rocking back and forth. By the end, he is quaking and shaking in the chair. MESMER is near him, "helping" him and pushing him forward. His movements also remind us of the actions he performed during the "Why are you here?" section at the top of the treatment.*

LAVOISIER  
I climb onto the bed,  
I open her shirt and suckle at her breasts,  
I nuzzle close, the sickly stench bathing my young skin, for she is still my mother and I would rather smell of her than of anything else.  
And then, there are rough hands at my back and I am never to touch her again.  
Never to touch her again  
Never to touch again  
Never again  
Again Never  
Never Again again Never againNeveragainagaiNeverNeverNeverNEEEVEERRRRR!

*LAVOISIER's wig has fallen to the side.  
His quaking, which has reached a peak, subsides.  
The space slowly returns to only the light of the candle.  
Simultaneous with the lights, the trance sound too fades slowly.*

*MESMER kneels close to LAVOISIER, returning the lit candle to his hands.*

MESMER  
What are you?

LAVOISIER  
I am  
I am

*MESMER puts his hand on LAVOISIER's chest. The first time they touch in the entire play.*

LAVOISIER  
I am...sad.

MESMER  
Is everything sad?

LAVOISIER  
I would hypothesize that it is so.

MESMER  
Why?

LAVOISIER  
Because everything goes.

MESMER  
If everything goes, then everything is in the same place. So, where has it gone?

LAVOISIER  
I do not know.  
(pause)  
It is without logic.  
(beat)  
I wish to wake up. Please.

MESMER  
You are not sleeping.

*MESMER blows out the candle and the lights return suddenly to full - The "Academy"  
He puts his wig back on and addresses the audience once again.*

MESMER  
Members of the Academy, now that the crisis has been achieved, this session can be concluded. The patient may require a few moments to orient himself. If he did have any ailment, it is one step closer to being cured. A cure can take multiple treatments, but will, without doubt, occur. Like most good science, repetition is needed to achieve our ends.  
As there can be no doubt as to the effects of the system, then it should be proclaimed vigorously, as true, by your body.

LAVOISIER

What has happened?

MESMER

Excellent, he speaks!

Director Lavoisier, you were in the treatment and have just revitalized.

LAVOISIER

Yes, but what was the *cause* of...

(he looks at the fallen wig, the disheveled clothing, perhaps he touches his tears)

this?

MESMER

This *crisis* was due to the unblocking of areas which would not allow the substance that makes up who you are to flow freely.

LAVOISIER

(still confused)

Where is the evidence of such a substance?

MESMER

The evidence is in the outcome.

*LAVOISIER is genuinely trying to figure out what has occurred.*

LAVOISIER

First, Doctor Mesmer observed a phenomenon: I doubted the validity of his system.

Next, he asked a question: How might this system be proven?

He formed a hypothesis: Antoine Lavoisier's internal experience would verify the existence of a universal substance which could be confirmed by his external activities.

A test was designed: I would enter the treatment.

This testing occurs: I sat in that chair for a time. I was given a candle. I spoke of the elements.

The results are noted: My wig fallen to the floor. Tears.

Evidence of motions both external, viewed by the Academy members and internal, viewed by my own self.

We analyze the data: The treatment's parameters, the light close to my eyes and the recitation of familiar facts, is an identifiable precursor to and therefore, a possible cause for, the external effects. While the internal effects...

*He continues his motions, a sense of curiosity there. Perhaps MESMER gestures in a way that reminds us of his movements as Anne-Marie. LAVOISIER, without realizing it, reacts to this gesture, his own actions recalling his responses to her in the trance.*

MESMER

Go on! Follow the method's path until it leads you home.

LAVOISIER

I neither saw nor touched any magnetic substance.

MESMER

What?

LAVOISIER

I experienced no fluid's motion.

MESMER

Of course you did.

LAVOISIER

I experienced the motion of...

MESMER

(looking to the audience)

We all saw it.

LAVOISIER

The motion of...

MESMER

These keen and trained observers--

LAVOISIER

motion of...  
my own self.

MESMER

Yes! You and the fluid are the same!

LAVOISIER

That is not what is evident.

MESMER

Then, what are you?

LAVOISIER

I do not know.

MESMER

You walk through all your days, motioning, and yet you do not usually quake in the manner we all witnessed.  
How else do you explain such a particular phenomenon?

LAVOISIER

It is without logic.

MESMER

Absurd in this hall of science that you should speak of a lack of knowledge where proof, your own rather extreme actions, is plain.

LAVOISIER

Extremity is not proof. It is only...an aspect of the situation. No, we must begin at the beginning.

*LAVOISIER puts his wig back on.*

MESMER

Yes and the beginning is the fluid!

LAVOISIER

The beginning is...no thing.

MESMER

The fluid is not nothing.

LAVOISIER

Where nothing is yet known. That is the beginning. That is where God is.

MESMER

No, the beginning is knowledge. This truth that I know and you, and thus all the world, can now see!

LAVOISIER

We do not *know* truth.

We are not Gods, doctor.

We are scientists and must look for answers precisely because we do not have them.

MESMER

Academy Members, it is clear what has happened here.

Director Lavoisier has been confronted with incontrovertible, and compromising, evidence.

He has no choice but to question the elements of my system since its effectiveness is not in doubt.

LAVOISIER

Yes, I must question.

If you would do the same, you might still have a chance.

MESMER

A chance at what?

LAVOISIER

Truth.

Or at least a particle of it.

MESMER

Would that then gain this body's approval?

LAVOISIER

We cannot approve of a system that does not yet exist.

MESMER

You are a clever one. If I now affirm the fluid, then I am a fraud, not adhering to *your* scientific method.

MESMER

(cont'd)

If I proclaim there is no fluid and the cause for Mesmerism is not yet known, then I have no system at all. Either way, your position, threatened by what occurred here, remains secure and mine destroyed.

LAVOISIER

Your position cannot be destroyed, Anton--

MESMER

*Doctor Mesmer.*

I earned that title, as *the* healer of all that brings people pain, and will be addressed as such.

(beat, to the audience)

Esteemed colleagues, as I speak and walk about this room, something moves in you that you may label as dismay or frustration or, perhaps if you are so inclined and I am fortunate, as empathy. But these are just words and words are only inadequate vessels for explaining the elemental foundation of the feelings, which I have called the universal fluid.

LAVOISIER

Doctor Mesmer--

MESMER

And Academy members, if you feel, all the people of France do as well. They may not have bread nor meat nor dry floors under their feet, but they do know that they have

(he is swaying now)

*this.*

(beat)

Deny them even the existence of their feelings and who knows what chaos might result.

But if you offer them my cure for their suffering, a cure which is simply the treatment of their feelings' origin, you will show them that you and they can be a part of the same system.

LAVOISIER

We are already part of that system for we too suffer. True, I have come to know the elements that are the foundation for this life on this Earth, but what lies under that foundation and beyond this life?

I suffer

with such questions.

(beat)

To be relieved, however, of this suffering would relieve me of that which I have no desire to lose - A hope for understanding, eternally unfulfilled. If I were "cured", then hope would die and I might as well do so with it.

That is why we have gathered. To study this world, so that our suffering might have some purpose.

MESMER

I do not speak of theoretical suffering, Director Lavoisier.

I speak of real suffering. Illness and dis-ease.

Hysterias of the mind and ailments of the heart.

Gangrenous limbs and stomachs that cannot hold food.

LAVOISIER

We cannot help by offering false guarantees of relief.

(beat)

Members of the Academy, I think it is plain what our report must make clear so that our country may be freed from systems that enchain learning in favor of belief. I am sorry, Doctor Mesmer, but your time in this land, where enlightenment requires true inquiry, is at its end.

MESMER

Where would you have me go?

LAVOISIER

To your home. Austria.

MESMER

My countrymen too have narrow views. I do not fit in their sights

LAVOISIER

Surely no one can stop you from returning to the place where you began.

MESMER

But I am here now!

*Light shift. MESMER is in a spotlight, a recall of the trance state. He slowly sits while saying the entire next section.*

*LAVOISIER is also in a spot, his hand rising as though whatever gesture he is making has been slowed down.*

MESMER

I cannot go

Home

and if I cannot stay

here

I will be

nowhere

and if I am

nowhere

then what?

Will I have ceased to exist because I was not knowable by those who know?

Will all my pamphlets turn into kindling because there are no proper shelves to hold them?

Will all those I have cured turn ill once again because they have forgotten what made them well?

Will my name become just a series of sounds that fall off the tongue and get carried away by the air until "Mesmer" is no different than inhalation and exhalation, finished

finished

FINISHED

as quickly as it started?

Will I

Will all

Will all

Will my

MESMER

(cont'd)

Will I

Will I

III

IIIIIIIIII....

*Lights shift back to normal. MESMER is fully seated now and LAVOISIER's gesture has reached its conclusion.*

MESMER

am not going anywhere!

(beat)

All the people that I have healed, *they* know that I matter.

*They* will not force me to leave this land.

LAVOISIER

Even the most desperate need no longer to a cure when it ceases to bring satisfaction.

MESMER

These desperate, as you call them

these *poor*

will look

to me

for answers

And I will tell them that the Academy asserts that commoners' experiences are meaningless. The Academy's director you see, has himself been directed by his and her highness, for he is merely their child and cannot risk the loss of their divine guidance.

LAVOISIER

I am directed by nothing but the need to work towards truth.

MESMER

And if your method needed to work for only truth and not patronage, what we witnessed here could not be denied.

LAVOISIER

The issue is not what we witnessed, but what you state it means. That is why your system, and thus you, must be denied a place.

MESMER

Yes, you have been given the power only a god should be able to wield. And you desire to use it. That is what makes you the charlatan.

LAVOISIER

Doctor Mesmer, as you have so many answers, this particular *inquiry* need not continue. Academy Members, thank you for your curiosity and dedication.

LAVOISIER

(cont'd)

I will not demand that you leave with me for I do not have the power, nor the desire, to give such an order.

(beat)

We do, however, have work to do.

*He exits through the doorway. The same place he entered.*

*MESMER stands, calling after LAVOISIER.*

MESMER

"Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains.

Do not let anyone tell you that there are no answers.

Let them not tell you that you can never be happy for it is your right."

That is what I will say to my patients, my *people*.

For they are not just *subjects*, Director Lavoisier!

(he turns back to the audience)

And then this fraternity of persons  
will come here.

"Those in that hall," one man with holes in his shoes will say, "they are comfortable, are they not?"

And another, with a mark on his left cheek, putrid and oozing, will speak up,

"If they do suffer, such suffering continues in the most lavish of surroundings and so it is not suffering at all; it is the luxury of the wealthy to have unhappiness while eating the best pheasant and sitting on the most comfortable couches."

And another whose skin has become nothing but a blanket for ribs will cry out,

"They make good use of our taxes too, ensuring that every last bit of coin is applied to fulfill their curiosity. But we do not have time to ask questions for we must work."

But they know, by heart, the cure for their unhappiness:

"Memoir on the Discovery of Animal Magnetism. By Doctor Franz Anton Mesmer:

Every

Body

contains something powerful and unseen.

This force may be communicated between bodies through touch or speech or simply by sharing the same small space

until all distance disappears and a single body is formed.

Its magnetic power is as great as the push of the planets on the tides."

And this mass shall turn to

the giant ocean that is your *closed* system

where those who receive "divine" blessings rise so high,

and realize it has the power to make you fall

These doors will be torn from their frames

And these walls will crumble to the Earth

And you will find yourself

far above

where the wind blows about

your heads

as they are separated

from your bodies. Fluid, not invisible, but red and smelling of iron comes rushing forth.

It will be a crisis.

It will be...a revolution!

MESMER

(cont'd)

Only then, shall *my* people's universal substance  
finally flow without restriction and bring us all to a natural state!

*MESMER sits in the chair.*

*A sound, like that which accompanied LAVOISIER's  
crisis, grows in the distance. MESMER looks about, at  
the audience, then brings his gaze center.*

*He breathes in.*

*Blackout.*

*The crisis sound concludes swiftly,  
like the fall of a guillotine's blade.*

*END OF PLAY*