

The Memorandum

- Vaclav Havel

E-content by

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Introduction:

The Memorandum (Vyrozumeni) is one of the best known and most popular plays by Czechoslovakia's (later Czech Republic's) best known playwrights Vaclav Havel. Inspired by the absurdities of life in Eastern Europe under Communism, Havel began writing the satirical play as early as 1960. Rewritten many times over the next few years, *The Memorandum* became the second of Havel's plays produced at Prague's Theatre of the Balustrade, where he was then literary manager. The play made its American debut in 1968 at the Shakespeare Festival's Public Theatre. This production of *The Memorandum* won an Obie Award for best foreign play. *The Memorandum* was first produced in London in 1977, and has been revived regularly around the world.

Like much of Havel's writing, *The Memorandum* is political, at least implicitly. The play concerns the tribulations of Josef Gross, the managing director of an organization encumbered by a bureaucracy that is out of control. The introduction of an artificial language, Ptydepe, is supposed to streamline office communications, but only makes it worse. Havel's satire is full of irony about the kind of jobs created by communism as well as the constant surveillance by office spies. Though Havel's vision was informed by his observations, many critics have noted that the office politics depicted can be found around the world. The importance of conformity to keep one's job is seen as relatively common. As Michael Billington of *The Guardian* wrote, "The play may have grown out of experience of Czech communism; its application, however, is universal."

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Vaclav Havel was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, on October 5, 1936, the son of Vaclav M. and Bozena (nee Vavreckova) Havel. His family was wealthy and well-connected in the arts and business. Havel's father was a restaurateur and real estate developer. In 1948, the Communists took over Czechoslovakia and the Havel's property was taken away. Havel was denied a high school education. He got around this by working as a lab technician at a school for five years. This allowed him to attend night school, from which he graduated in 1954. Involved in Prague's literary scene, Havel was already writing, primarily poetry and essays.

PLOT SUMMARY

Scene I

The Memorandum opens in the office of Josef Gross, the managing director of an office. He is reading his mail when he comes across an important memorandum written in what seems like an incomprehensible language. His secretary, Hana, informs him that it is written in Ptydepe, a new language that is supposed to be more efficient for communication. Gross learns that his deputy director, Jan Ballas, has ordered its introduction without his knowledge. Gross asks him to cancel its introduction, and while Ballas agrees at first, he later convinces Gross that the use of Ptydepe would be best for everyone. This is endemic of the growing power struggle between Gross and Ballas. While Gross wants to work on a humanist principle, Ballas is ready for a conflict and believes he has everyone in the organization on his side.

Scene II

In the classroom where Ptydepe is being taught, the teacher, Lear, explains the background of the language to four clerks/students. The language is supposed to be more reliable because it is more redundant.

Scene III

Gross takes the memo to the Ptydepe Translation center. He meets with Otto Stroll, the head of the section, in hopes someone will translate the memo. Stroll tells him that he needs authorization, and that those who work in the center are not experts in the language. Gross must get authorization from Alex Savant, the Graduate Ptydepist. Stroll and Savant go to lunch, while Gross waits, talking to others including the secretary, Maria. When they return, Savant tells Gross he cannot give him the authorization. He must get it from Helena, the chairman.

A birthday party is going on next door, to which all but Gross go to. He is left alone with classified materials, though Helena tells him that he will be watched by the staff watcher, George. George watches everything in these offices through cracks in the wall. When Maria returns, Gross asks her to translate the memo for him. She will not risk her job. Gross is verbally abused by George when he asks for a cigarette, and returns to his office.

Scene IV

In Gross's office, Ballas, accompanied by his ever present but always silent associate Ferdinand Pillar, awaits. Gross still insists that Ptydepe be eliminated from the workplace. Ballas tries to blackmail him into submission on this point. Gross finally agrees to sign an order allowing the introduction of the language. Ballas then insists that he become the managing director, and Gross the deputy. Gross sees the logic in this move and steps down.

Scene V

In the Ptydepe classroom, Lear continues to lecture on the background of the language. Gross interrupts, asking him to translate the memo. Lear agrees, but only if Gross shows genuine interest in the class. Lear drills the students on specifics of the language. Gross gets frustrated and leaves.

Scene VI

Gross returns to the Translation center, where most of the employees are still at the birthday party. As the employees start to return, Gross tries to get Helena to give him authorization to get the memo translated. Helena will give it to him, but only if he has not yet received a memo in Ptydepe. Gross asks her to translate the memo, but she will not. Gross becomes frustrated as it proves impossible to get the memorandum translated according to the paradoxical rules set out. Gross's outburst is heard by Ballas and Pillar, who have snuck in behind him. Ballas fires Gross, and hires George, the staff watcher, as his new deputy. Gross is to report the next day to tidy up the details of his firing.

Scene VII

The next day, Ballas and Pillar come to work. Ballas chides Pillar for not learning Ptydepe. When Hana appears, Ballas is appalled to learn she has stopped taking Ptydepe classes because they were too hard. Even Ballas has stopped taking the classes, though he claims it is because of the demands of work. It seems only Lear and those who work in the Translation center know the language. Ballas is also annoyed that Pillar keeps leaving with members of the Translation center staff. When Gross enters for a third time, Ballas offers him the position of staff watcher. Gross takes it. Hana reports that everyone, except Ballas, is unhappy with Ptydepe. Ballas does not like this news.

Scene VIII

In the Ptydepe classroom, Lear is now teaching only one student, Thumb. He explains interjections to Thumb. Lear is disappointed by Thumb's progress in learning the language. Lear throws Thumb out of class for holding up the other students.

Scene IX

In the Translation center, Maria reports for work. Gross scares her when he compliments her clothes through the chink in the wall used by the staff watcher. Maria tells him that she had found a job for him in the theater. After she leaves, Ballas appears and questions Gross on what he has observed, especially about the staff's reception to Ptydepe. Ballas asks those who work in the translation center about their work. The translation work is slow and Ptydepe is taking on emotional overtones, which is not supposed to happen. Ballas asks Helena if the language is not doing what it should, and she confirms that is so.

Ballas gives Gross the Deputy Directorship again, and demotes George back to staff watcher. Ballas wants Gross to help him get to where they were originally: enthusiastic about the use of the language. After Gross leaves, Ballas further questions the staff of the Translation center. He learns about the paradoxical situation concerning authorizations of translation of documents. Helena, Stroll, and Savant accuse him of thinking up this vicious circle of bureaucracy. Ballas gives orders that should clarify the situation, and has them translated into a document for him. It is a protest that makes him look bad, making Ballas even more angry. He leaves.

Gross appears in the office again, startling Maria. Gross is self-critical about his previous actions. His insight moves Maria, and she offers to translate his memo for him. It praises him for being a good managing director and humane decision maker. It also agrees that Ptydepe is not good for the organization. After Gross leaves, George informs Maria that he heard the whole exchange.

Scene X

Gross returns to the managing director's office, and reclaims his job. He tells Ballas that his tenure is over and that Ptydepe will have to be removed. Ballas agrees with him and graciously steps aside. While Gross intended that Ballas be fired, Ballas blackmails him so that he can remain deputy director. Gross wants them both to resign, but realizing the futility of such a move, allows Ballas to have his way. The translation center staff appears, demanding to know who insisted they work with Ptydepe. When it becomes obvious that Ballas is accusing Pillar, he finally speaks and declares his support for natural speech before exiting. A man, Column, appears at the back door, and quickly replaces Pillar.

Scene XI

In the Ptydepe classroom, Lear is lecturing to his four original students on the problems with Ptydepe. He reveals that the office will use a new artificial language: Chorukor. It is based on similarity of words.

Scene XII

In the translation center, most of the staff is at another party. Gross bursts in, angry that another artificial language will be used. Ballas criticizes him for not being with the program. After Ballas leaves, Maria tells Gross that she is upset because George overheard her translating the memorandum. She was fired by Ballas, and asks Gross to overturn his decision. Gross declines, telling her to work with the theater in the job she found for him. Maria is invigorated by his words, and leaves.

CHARACTERS

Jan Ballas

Jan Ballas is the deputy director of the organization, under managing director Josef Gross. With silent constant companion Ferdinand Pillar (later replaced by Mr. Column), Ballas undermines the authority of his superior. Ballas is cold and calculating, always trying to increase his power. It is Ballas who orders the introduction of Ptydepe, and overrules Gross's objections by blackmail. Such moves get Ballas the managing directorship. However, once he is in the position of power, Pillar begins to betray him and Ballas grows paranoid. Ballas also gets stuck in the bureaucratic mire surrounding the translation of documents in Ptydepe. After Gross forces his way back into his original job, Ballas again survives because of his calculated earlier move. Gross would have him leave entirely, but Ballas's blackmail gets him the deputy directorship back.

Mr. Column

Mr. Column replaces Pillar as Ballas's constant companion and silent supporter in scene 10 after Pillar's outburst.

George

George is the staff watcher for the office. He sits in the space between the offices and watches everyone's actions. George can interact with staff members via a chink in the wall. When Gross is fired by Ballas, George is temporarily hired as deputy director. Gross temporarily becomes the staff watcher for a while as well. When Gross becomes managing director again, George returns to the staff watcher position. It is he who catches Maria translating the memorandum for Gross, leading to her termination as an employee.

Josef Gross

Josef Gross is the central character in *The Memorandum*. He is the managing director for the organization, though his power seems limited and is often challenged. Gross receives a memorandum written in a new artificial language, Ptydepe, and becomes frustrated when he cannot get the document translated due to organizational bureaucracy and staff indifference. Gross's power is also undermined by his deputy director, Ballas. Ballas ordered the introduction of the language without Gross's knowledge. Gross agrees to step down to the deputy position, and then is fired because of Ballas. Gross later retakes the managing directorship after he convinces Maria to translate the memorandum for him. The memorandum praises Gross's human touch in the office. At the end of the play, Gross will not reconsider Ballas's firing of Maria, letting her lose her job though she helped him regain his. Gross's power is firmly entrenched.

Hana

Hana is the secretary to the managing director. She does little actual work. Hana spends most of her time brushing her hair and running to the shops to get food items. She does provide Gross, and later Ballas, with information on occasion, but does not do much else.

Helena

Helena works in the translation center as a chairman of something unspecified. Like Stroll and Savant, Helena is an indifferent part of the bureaucracy. She follows the rules and goes along with what will allow her to keep her job. Helena is often concerned with sending Maria to get food items, as well attending birthday parties and flirting with her co-workers. She refuses to help Gross translate his memorandum.

Mark Lear

Mark Lear is the Ptydepe teacher in the Ptydepe classroom. He goes on and on about the background of the language in an attempt to teach it to his clerk-students. While he offers to translate Gross's memorandum for him as a classroom exercise if Gross shows himself to be a sincere student. Lear believes that Gross fails to, and refuses to translate the document.

Maria

Maria is the secretary in the translation center. She is often sent on errands to get food items by Helena. While Maria wants to hold on to her job, she is more sympathetic and human than most other characters. When Gross loses his job, she arranges for him to work at a theater company. Though Gross does not take the job, this gesture is a prime example of her generosity. Empathetic of Gross's situation, Maria finally translates the memorandum for him, though it is against the rules and George, the staff watcher, overhears. After he regains his post as managing director, Gross declines to overturn Ballas's firing of Maria for translating the document. Heartened by Gross's "nice" words of encouragement, Maria happily leaves the organization.

Ferdinand Pillar

Ferdinand Pillar is the silent constant companion of Ballas. They seem to be co-conspirators, with Pillar being Ballas's loyal employee. After Ballas gets the managing directorship, Pillar leaves with various employees of the translation center in what seems like scheme to undermine Ballas. This seeming betrayal unnerves Ballas. After Gross regains the managing director position, and Ballas is about to reveal Pillar's treachery concerning Ptydepe's fall from grace, the silent man speaks for the first time in support of natural human speech. Pillar then leaves and does not return. Mr. Column replaces him as Ballas's silent partner.

Alex Savant

Alex Savant is the graduate Ptydepist, part of the translation office. Like Stroll and Helena, Savant is an indifferent part of the bureaucracy. He follows the rules and goes along with what is best for his continued employment. He likes to eat lunch, go to office parties, and talk about women. Savant refuses to translate Gross's memorandum without the proper authorization. Savant often speaks in Ptydepe, but at one point admits that no one knows the language really well.

Otto Stroll

Otto Stroll is the head of the organization's translation center. Like Savant and Helena, he is an indifferent bureaucrat, who follows the rules and goes along with what is best for his survival in the

office. Stroll does nothing to help Gross's efforts to get the memorandum translated, save relating the regulations involved. He also will not share his cigars with Gross. Stroll is more concerned with eating lunch, going to office birthday parties, and talking about women.

Peter Thumb

Peter Thumb is the eager clerk/student in Lear's language classroom. Thumb constantly asks questions, and at one point, gets thrown out of the class for interfering with the education of the other students. By that time, he is the last one left. Thumb is not particularly bright, but very enthusiastic.

THEMES

Absurdity

The Memorandum is a play full of absurdities, most related to Gross's problematic memorandum. The language that the memorandum is written in is at the core of the absurdity. Ptydepe is an artificial language that is supposed to be more efficient for office communication. Yet the language is cumbersome, repetitive, and hard to learn. Only a few at the office actually know it. The absurdity grows as Gross tries to get the memorandum translated. A catch-22 of bureaucracy prevents anyone in the organization's translation center from actually translating the document for him. Anyone who receives a memo in Ptydepe can only get a Ptydepe text translated after the memorandum has been translated, an absurd paradox. A similarly contradictory circle exists in getting authorization for the translation from the bureaucrats. Gross tries to get around this situation by going to Lear's Ptydepe class to get the memorandum translated. But he is thrown out of the class for being doubtful about the language, closing another means of getting the document translated. In the end, Gross gets the memorandum translated by Maria. She only does it out of pity for him, and ends up losing her job in the process. The play's absurdities are Havel's comment on the economic structure of life under communism in Czechoslovakia and the rest of the Eastern Bloc, where everyone was employed but the jobs were often meaningless.

Betrayal and Deception

Several characters in *The Memorandum* engage in betrayal and deception, adding to the absurdity of the play. Ballas continually works to undermine his superior, Gross, betraying and deceiving him at every turn. Ballas uses the fact that Gross brought the bank endorsement rubber stamp home to do work as blackmail to get him to sign one document. Ballas also does not tell Gross that he ordered the introduction of Ptydepe straight out in the beginning, behind Gross's back. Ballas also ordered the introduction of a translation center, moved the accounts department to the basement, and instructed all staff member, save Gross, to take Ptydepe classes, bypassing Gross entirely. Ballas blackmails him again, getting him to sign a supplementary order for the introduction of Ptydepe. This is used in another blackmail scheme of Ballas's. All of Ballas's deceptions pay off in the end, to some degree. Though he gains, then loses, the managing directorship, he uses the advantage gained by his numerous betrayals to keep his job when Gross wants to get rid of him.

Other characters engage in similar betrayals and deceptions. Pillar conspires with those in the translation center against Ballas, before Ballas accuses Pillar of being against Ptydepe from the

beginning. Everyone's actions are monitored by George, the staff watcher, who does his work from an office located between the walls of everyone else's work space. It is George's observations that leads to Gross's only major deception of the play. George catches Maria translating Gross's memorandum, and reports the action to Ballas. Ballas orders her firing, and Gross does not overturn it, despite the fact that her translation led to his regaining the managing director's job. Betrayal and deception are a fundamental part of the life depicted in *The Memorandum*. The bureaucracy seems to function on it.

Individual versus Machine

Gross is a man caught in the wheels of the bureaucratic machine. No matter what he does, he cannot escape its teeth. If it is not Ballas and Pillar using the details of bureaucratic paperwork to manipulate Gross into doing their will, the demands of getting approval so that the translation center will translate his memorandum ensnare him. For a time, Gross loses his job, until Pillar begins to conspire against Ballas. Ballas also becomes caught in the bureaucratic machine, and is as frustrated as Gross.

The only way that Gross can succeed in his goal to get the memorandum is to go outside of the machine. Maria, the translation center secretary, finally feels sorry for him and does the translation. The memorandum praises Gross for his human touch as a bureaucrat. This tiny rebellion against the machine leads to Maria's firing, but Gross will not save her job. He sends her off with human-like words of support. His position relatively secure, Gross seems to accept that he is a cog in the machine at the end of *The Memorandum*.

STYLE

Setting

An absurdist play, *The Memorandum* takes place in a group of offices in Havel's contemporary place and time. That is, Czechoslovakia in the mid-1960s, when the country was under the rule of Soviet-aligned communists. Under this system, everyone was employed in jobs that were sometimes meaningless and redundant. Each of the three offices is essentially the same, with the furniture arranged differently. Unseen at the conjunction of the offices is the space of the staff watcher, George. His job is to spy on everyone else and make sure they are following the rules. This setting emphasizes oppressive atmosphere and the uniformity of attitudes among those who work in the offices.

Language

At the center of *The Memorandum* is an artificial language, Ptydepe. This language is supposed to be more efficient and accurate than common vernacular in office communications. Lear tells his students that Ptydepe is scientific, rational, and precise, yet difficult, complex, and redundant. Words in Ptydepe are so long, they must be broken up into subwords. Common words, however, are the shortest of all. Only a few in the office even understand a little Ptydepe, and most drop out of the language classes because it was too hard to learn. Even Stroll, the head of the translation center, says that while they are in charge of translating documents, they are "no experts." Thus, translations, like the one that Gross so desperately seeks, are hard to come by.

Thus in the play, language is used as means of control. Since there are a limited number of speakers/translators and authorization for translations are hard to come by, power is held by those who know Ptydepe. This is Gross's central problem. Ptydepe is used all around, but he has no idea what is being said. Though he is managing director for most of the play, he does not have much real authority. Also, when Maria breaks the rules and translates Gross's memorandum for him, she ends up losing her job, for the breach of the rules concerning language is unacceptable. Though Ptydepe's flaws are seen by

TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Research how artificial languages are created and function. Discuss Ptydepe, the artificial language in *The Memorandum*, in these terms.
- Research the economic implications of Soviet-style communism on Eastern Europe. Why did this economic system create such an expansive bureaucracy? What were the psychological effects on the people who worked?
- Research the ideas behind the Theater of the Absurd, perhaps through the writings of Albert Camus or Martin Esslin. Is *The Memorandum* a true example of Absurdist theater? Discuss your theory in detail.
- Compare and contrast Maria, the secretary in *The Memorandum* with her counterpart in Havel's earlier play, *The Garden Party*. How does Havel depict these women? How do they react to their similar situations?

the end of the play, another artificial language will take its place: Chorukor.

The Memorandum

Ptydepe as a device to accentuate how language is used for power.

or

Is The Memorandum a true example of Absurdist theatre?

Like much of Havel's writings, *The Memorandum* is political, at least implicitly. It was first staged in Communist Prague. The play concerns the tribulations of Josef Gross, the managing director of an organization encumbered by a bureaucracy that is out of control. The introduction of an artificial language, Ptydepe, is supposed to streamline office communications, but only makes it worse. Havel's satire is full of irony about the kind of jobs created by communism as well as the constant surveillance by office spies. Though Havel's vision was informed by his observations, many critics have noted that the office politics depicted can be found around the world. The importance of conformity to keep one's job is seen as relatively common. As **Michael Billington** of *The Guardian* wrote, "The play may have grown out of experience of Czech communism; its application, however, is universal."

The play is also very much in the tradition of the Theatre of the Absurd, alongside the works of Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, John Osborne and many European writers. In this style of theatre, anything can happen, often without any rhyme or reason. As so often with chaos there's an underlining message, or essential truth. The play is said to be inspired by the absurdities of life in communist Eastern Europe. In scene twelve, the main character, Gross, exclaims "We're living in a strange, complex epoch. As Hamlet says, 'our time is out of joint.' *The Memorandum* is a play full of absurdities, most related to Gross's problematic memorandum. The language that the memorandum is written in is at the core of the absurdity. Ptydepe is an artificial language that is supposed to be more efficient for office communication. Yet the language is cumbersome, repetitive, and hard to learn. Only a few at the office actually know it. The absurdity grows as Gross tries to get the memorandum translated. A system of bureaucracy prevents anyone in the organization's translation center from actually translating the document for him. Anyone who receives a memo in Ptydepe can only get a Ptydepe text translated after the memorandum has been translated, an absurd paradox. Gross' anger against this type of system is evident here:

"As I've just discovered, any staff member who has recently received a memorandum in Ptydepe can only be granted a translation of Ptydepe text after his memorandum has been translated...In other words, the only way to learn what is in one's memo, is to know it already. An extraordinary paradox, when you come to think of it...I ask you, what must an employee of our organisation- whoever he may be- do in order to escape this vicious, vicious circle?"

A similarly contradictory circle exists in getting authorization for the translation from the bureaucrats. Gross tries to get around this situation by going to Lear's Ptydepe class to get the memorandum translated. But he is thrown out of the class for being doubtful about the language, closing another means of getting the document translated. In the end, Gross gets the memorandum

translated by Maria. She only does it out of pity for him, and ends up losing her job in the process. The play's absurdities are Havel's comment on the economic structure of life under communism in Czechoslovakia and the rest of the Eastern Bloc, where everyone was employed but the jobs were often meaningless.

The Memorandum opens in the office of Josef Gross, the managing director of an organisation. He discovers that all office communications are suddenly being written in "Ptydepe," a new and impossibly complicated language. In the opening scene, Gross is seen reading his mail when he comes across an important memorandum written in what seems "like a hotch-potch of entirely haphazard groups of letters." His secretary, Hana, informs him that it is written in Ptydepe, a new language that is supposed to be more efficient for communication. Gross learns that his deputy director, Jan Ballas, has ordered its introduction without his knowledge. Gross asks him to cancel its introduction, and while Ballas agrees at first, he later convinces Gross that the use of Ptydepe would be best for everyone. The introduction of new language is endemic of the growing power struggle between Gross and Ballas. While Gross wants to work on a humanist principle, Ballas is ready for a conflict and believes he has everyone in the organization on his side.

Gross takes the memo to the Ptydepe Translation center in hopes that someone will translate it. Stroll tells him that he needs authorization, and that those who work in the center are not experts in the language. Gross must get authorization from Alex Savant, the Graduate Ptydepist. But Savant tells Gross that he cannot give him the authorization. He must get it from Helena, the chairman. Gross tries to convince Helena to give him authorization to get the memo translated. Helena will give it to him, but only if he has not yet received a memo in Ptydepe. Gross asks her to translate the memo, but she will not. Gross becomes frustrated as it proves impossible to get the memorandum translated according to the paradoxical rules set out. He is watched by the staff watcher, George. George watches everything in these offices through cracks in the wall. When Maria returns, Gross asks her to translate the memo for him but he will not risk her job. Gross is verbally abused by George when he asks for a cigarette, and returns to his office.

Gross insists that Ptydepe be eliminated from the workplace. Ballas tries to blackmail him into submission on this point. The following dialogue between the two makes their position clear:

Ballas: "As you may have noticed, the introduction of Ptydepe into our organisation successfully proceeds. What do you propose to do about it?"

Gross: "Put a stop to it."

Gross finally agrees to sign an order allowing the introduction of the language. Ballas then insists that he become the managing director, and Gross the deputy. Gross sees the logic in this move and steps down.

Ballas seems to be a winner at this stage but he soon discovers that the members of his organisation have stopped taking interest in Ptydepe. He chides his close associate Pillar for not learning Ptydepe. Then Ballas is surprised to learn that Hana has also stopped taking Ptydepe classes because they were too hard. Even Ballas himself has stopped taking the classes, though he claims it

is because of the demands of work. It seems only Lear and those who work in the Translation center know the language. Ballas is a cunning fellow and understands that the things are turning against him.

Finally, Maria offers to translate the memo for him. It praises him for being a good managing director and humane decision maker. It also agrees that Ptydepe is not good for the organization. After Gross leaves, George informs Maria that he heard the whole exchange. Gross returns to the managing director's office, and reclaims his job. He tells Ballas:

“ Mr. Ballas your era is over! My memorandum has just been translated to me and its contents make perfectly clear that... I am the only legitimate director of this organisation. Furthermore, I'm requested by this memorandum to make an end of Ptydepe with the greatest possible resolution and speed.”

Thus, Gross makes it clear to Ballas that his tenure is over and that Ptydepe will have to be removed.

Ballas agrees with him and graciously steps aside. While Gross intended that Ballas be fired, Ballas blackmails him so that he can remain deputy director. Gross wants them both to resign, but realizing the futility of such a move, allows Ballas to have his way. The translation center staff appears, demanding to know who insisted they work with Ptydepe. When it becomes obvious that Ballas is accusing Pillar, he finally speaks and declares his support for natural speech. At the end of the play, Lear is lecturing to his four original students on the problems with Ptydepe. He reveals that the office will use a new artificial language: Chorukor. It is based on similarity of words. Gross bursts in anger that another artificial language will be used. Maria tells Gross that she is upset because George overheard her translating the memorandum. She was fired by Ballas, and asks Gross to overturn his decision. Gross declines, telling her to work with the theater in the job she found for him. Maria is invigorated by his words, and leaves.

But there is no escape, and even the rebellion against Ptydepe amounts to nothing because Ballas finds a new way to nullify the discontent. He again defies Gross and introduces yet another gobbledegook language, "chorukor," that will replace Ptydepe. Annette Petruso says: “By the end of the play, nothing has really changed for Gross. All his “moral” words and empty rhetoric return him to the status quo at the beginning of the play. He is still merely the managing director at the mercy of Ballas.” The scientists and language experts have proposed a new and improved version guaranteed to succeed this time. Science has been hijacked by shrewd manipulators and "experts" who impose their pseudo-science and propaganda on mankind. It seems that politics and vicious circle of paradoxes will never end in offices. When Maria begs Gross to reverse her dismissal, he refuses, not for the lack of civil courage; rather to save her by allowing her to escape the fate of the never-ending circular evil of the system full of depressing paradoxes--her release and freedom is to be found in theatre where her brother is involved. Gross' paradoxical Shakespearean monologue which concludes the play, with the background party noise of the careless mob of clerks and officials, summarizes the Sisyphean futility of his effort, but Gross, a modern Hamlet, must sacrifice himself and he joins the rest of them marching out of the party straight into a funeral procession, each holding a threatening fork and knife in preparation for the final dinner. What this sinister funeral meal is, Havel leaves to our imagination.