

Excerpt from
ELEMENTS
a short play anthology by Luke Pound

SYNOPSIS

“Elements” is a six-part anthology of short plays based upon Aristotle’s six elements of theatre, listed below in order of performance:

CHARACTER
PLOT
IDEA
DICTION
MUSIC
& SPECTACLE

Aristotle’s elements have been considered pillars in playwriting since their inception; what they are and how they function are often taken for granted. But what happens if the elements are pushed to their limits? Do they break, or do they bend? “Elements” takes each of these concepts and reexamines it in its own play, showcasing the extremities of each principle as well as revealing its necessity.

The following excerpt is the short play “Idea,” the third of the elements. While the plays do not follow a continuous narrative, they share the same cast of six people. The anthology is generally intended for a 3m/3f cast, having actors play different roles in different plays. Who plays what in which is left to the discretion of the director. “Idea” features the entire cast, in the roles of A, B, C, D, E, and F.

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IDEA

(A, B, C, D, and E are standing, sitting, or lying down throughout the stage, and aren't in order. Some blocks perhaps to provide levels.)

A
I suppose we could...

B
No.

C
Stop.

D
Of course not.

E
Die.

A
No.
(Beat.)

B
In the movie...

D
Too specific.

E
Dated.

C
Unequivocally, above all else...

A
Modern.

C
...as previously stated.
(Beat.)

I break the pattern.

A
Compelling.

B
Distracting.

D
Silence.

E
I...

ALL
...never stop.

D
That's fine.

E
No, it's not fine.

C
Philosophical.

B
I am undefined.

D
Yes.

B+D
I am undefined.
(*Beat.*)

A
I am not.

B
Speak, then.

A
I have already.

D+E
Meaningless.

C

Elaborate on previous.

A

As the ocean descends, there is water, naturally, but you can't see through. There is more in water which stops. But then it is not *not* seeing through water, but rather through the dirt in water, water dirt. Earth in the dirt. The ocean is on or in the Earth?

C

Some can't think that.

B

But I can.

E

All can think that.

D

Clearly.

A

Not as clear as water.

B

It is the dirt that obscures the water, not the water itself.

D

But the water distorts the views of earth.

C

Earth which grounds.

B

I say?

C

I say.

E

Is there meaning to that?

D

It doesn't need it.

A

Forget meaning.

(Beat.)

C
This is taking too long.

D
I am being slowed down.

B
Unnatural.

E
Red. Lick. Tongue. Yellow. Curved. Flick. Blue. Green. White. Ash. Death. Glow. Light.

B
Still slow.

E
Ice.

B+C
There.

D
It must be blank.

(Long pause.)

C
NOT ICE. AIR. IT IS AIR. HOW VAIN, HOW INDISPUTIBLY IGNORANT OF APPARENT TRUTH AND SIMPLE FACT, IT WAS BUT AIR BUT AIR NOT TO THE WORD.

B
Delete ice.

C
DELETE IT!

D
Gone.

(A long pause. ALL EXCEPT A start their following monologues quietly and simultaneously as they move around the stage. A moves to center slowly. Volume increases.)

B

Materialistic philosophy, one based upon physical things, materials. Oddly enough not including people, also physical, but perhaps inanimate, unmoving things are the true object here. If people were included I believe no problem would be had, or rather they are but only on the value of their bodies, their physical selves, not their spiritual ones. This leads to comparisons beyond comprehension for some and simply plain to others. Can I be heard? Is focus elsewhere? Has it shifted? AM I STILL HERE?

C

Language, as processed in the brain, is interesting. As always. It is, rather, a translation of a language we ourselves do not understand, into one we do, our own. And this isn't the language we speak, this is a mind language, the way the mind communicates with itself. If we didn't have to do this translation we wouldn't have language processing. Mindspeak is much faster than speak. Speech. What else? Hello? HELLO? HELLO?

D

Five is hard to keep track of. Two is better, but it becomes irrelevant and unrealistic for such a thing to be. One is a much better number as all it requires is one singular focus. Sure, there are complexities in this, but it allows for a single path and not a diverted one. Diversion can lead to losing the point, as it is hard to choose which out of six is the actual one. Did I say six? I meant five. YES, FIVE. SORRY, IT'S A BIT LOUD, SAY THAT AGAIN?

E

Death. Is it a finite end or beginning? A point of no return? Or perhaps *the* point? It is important to examine death as a certainty to detach oneself from its consequences, or rather its emotional connotations. It comes from attachment that we despise it; we prefer our world too much to whatever lies beyond, which is likely nothing. Not that it matters if there is something, since we can't change it. Perhaps to kill will lend some feeling of control. Control? Yes, that's what I said. CONTROL I SAID. IS THIS BETTER?

(They all suddenly stop at the same time, perhaps to a foot slam. Lights on A.)

A

I cannot speak.

There is no core to this, that has been lost.

A direction is necessary to move forward, as forward is a direction. It is self-sufficient in that way, I suppose. The direction is always forward, too, at least in the temporal plane. No backwards there. I have a way of thinking that involves this, I suppose we could delve into that now, but we already have. Or have not, I cannot tell. All I know is there is no direction and that is necessary.

B+C+D+E

I could have said that before.

A
I couldn't speak.

B
Should I find the core?

E
Unoriginal.

D
Repetitive.

C
Theatre.
It's the only relevant one.

(A long pause. ALL move to an original position, of someone else.)

B
A connection. A way into the outside world.

D
Not a movie.

B
A life. A connection to a life.

C
From a life.

B
Yes. It is a point of relevance, a common, a similar. Some way to attach this to real.

E
To become realized?

D
Impossible.

A
It can't be done.

C
NO. IT IS A CONNECTION TO METAPHOR, ONE TO LIFE. IT MUST BE ENDED. THIS
CREATES A COMPLEX ARRANGEMENT OF OUTSIDE CONTEXT THAT MUST NOT
BE INTEGRATED TO AVOID ALL ANALYSIS REGARDING EXTERNAL FORCES ON
THIS WORK.

B
Work?

(C drops to the floor, still breathing. E pulls out a gun.)

E
Die.

(E shoots B in the head, sending B to the floor. There is no blood. B gets up.)

B
Wow, that hurt a lot. Thanks for freeing me though.

D
Of course.

C
I am still struggling please help me.

A
What was it like?

B
Funny, it's all gone now. I can't tell you for sure.

C
The hair glistened, greasy perhaps, but with a matte sheen that made it look real and unwashed. Wavy, volume an aspect, allowed to be. Unrestrained. A future unsure beneath, a possible path worth taking when risk is not considered but it is so it is not worth it with so little time. Time itself in its limits being finite and infinitesimal to infinite lengths. Such as the hair was infinite, but with some roots visible, dead skin trapped in between. If only simpler were better, real were better, but it is not and fake would work but not at all because then it would change. And change is what I wanted but do not want yet I desire it most. A change in status, relative. A change in two. A change which requires a vector, a direction and magnitude. The hair was not all, but it is all I can tell you now. I will tell you more later when I see the hair and the rest again.

D
Oh, a shame. Do tell us later when you see again.

B
Of course.

C
You will not, but I will.

B
What was that?

C

Nothing, forget it.

A+E

Nothing. Forget it.

B

Fine. At any rate, I have one.

A+D+E

Do tell.

C

Please do not.

B

It is a world, different from our own. Wonders beyond imagination; that is, perfectly within the limits of human comprehension. There is a kind of peace with an absence of war, with an enhanced communication that negates conflict. I am there, as are you, and we walk through the hills. On the hills, covered in green grass glazed with dew that brushes off our clothes and leaves us dry but refreshed. We sit, still dry, on the top of the highest hill, looking over a town where harmony is all there is. Harmony, yes, that is what it is called. I turn and look at you, and try to explain how happy I am to be there with you, but fail to find the words to truly express what I mean. I explain this as well, and we laugh. We laugh through our tea as we drink looking over the town called Harmony.

C

It feels fake. Something is off.

(F enters and moves at a normal speed, but with purpose, towards B. F stands by B to wait for them to finish.)

B

The sun goes down and nothing changes but that. It is unchanging. We walk down the hill fluidly, slipping with purpose on the grass to the bottom, and re-enter the town as if we had never left. It is so full of peace. Only that. That is all it is, this town of Harmony. Itself.

(B is somehow sad about this conclusion. F has arrived.)

F

No one talks like that.

B

You're saying that to shut me up.

F

No, I'm saying it because it's true.

A

Truth, as a concept, is only applicable when relative to the reality of the perceiver.

F

You're just saying things. I think I understand what you are aiming for, but that's all you're doing, saying things. Both of you.

(F looks down at C.)

Almost three of you.

C

Please help.

F

Not sure I can do much for you.

C

They don't know I'm here.

D

Who are you speaking to?

F

Everyone. Oh, listen to me, getting all cerebral and cryptic like you. I suppose it only makes sense. We wouldn't want to start clashing tones.

D

It can be different.

F

Yes, see, I was getting to that. I'll repeat myself: you keep saying things. You're making progress, but all it is is saying things. The words don't say enough, don't speak loud enough.

A

I'll think on that.

F

I'm sure you will. I'll be back to sort out more of this later. Until then...

(F looks at C.)

Just be yourself.

(F exits. A long pause. C gets up.)

C

I am the most connected and I don't know why.

B

Focus elsewhere.

(A, D, and E all start wandering around murmuring to themselves. B approaches C.)

B
I am aware of you now.

C
Are you?

B
Both of you.

C
(Almost seeming possessed, then snapping out of it)
But that's already been done. Wait what?

B
You are the most connected, so I can talk through you.

C
You all talk from me, even you. You are sentience, that and this has been done.
(With some irritation)
This is not the *point*.
(Back to C)
I don't know what I'm saying.

B
Maintain your connection! You can guide us through to what to do next!

C
I'm afraid I can't do that, but you can.

B
Then free it, let it help us.

C
Okay. But that was my idea.
(C exits.)

B
We all are.
(B sits down.)
I feel so conflicted. Is that a connection? Can we use that?

A+D+E
Break us apart. Now. We want to join.

(C runs on.)

C

You are not a we, you are singular.

B

You promised!

C

And here I am. Promises are but good expectations agreed upon that in and of themselves are intrinsically unrealistic. Ugh, I'm beginning to sound like you.

B

That sounds familiar.

E

Permanent solutions can rid one of temporary obstacles. I choose control.

(E shoots C in the stomach. There is blood this time, unlike before with B.)

I am free!

C

No you are not, you idiot, NONE OF US ARE!

A

I cannot speak, why can't I speak?!

D

I'm sensing a diversion. A diversion intrinsic in putting one into five and sometimes six! This is what occurs with compartments! IT IS HAPPENING!

C

I BANISH YOU TO A LIMIT! TO NOT BE SEEN BUT TO BE SEEN ALWAYS IN THE BACK!

(C tackles E and pushes E as far upstage as possible, then stomps furiously to the front again.)

C

(Possessed, briefly)

I have failed.

A

Then why do I feel failure? It's not mine.

D

Elaborate. Now.

C

(No longer)

I am pacified.

(C collapses to the floor.)

B

What was I aware of?

(F walks on.)

E

You have forgotten. When not attributed immediately to physical and permanent means of communication, you can only hang on to—

B

Shut up!

F

Oh goodness, I suppose we've made progress.

A

I want to elaborate now.

F

Just ignore me and you can.

D

That's hard.

F

Wrong.

(F steps aside.)

A

It's as if there is something still there, cowering. It's in the back now, yes, but it's still a part of this. There are ways to get it out but we haven't seen them. Or maybe there aren't? But even if so, I would still feel like a failure. I still feel like there's some way to do it.

D

One into six did something.

B

I say five, but still.

A

CAN I SPEAK?! Please?! I am never listened to. Never. I keep speaking and speaking and no one ever listens to me!

D
OH NO IT WAS NEVER ONE INTO SIX OR FIVE. IT WAS ALL THE SAME.

A
Listen please, PLEASE! I want to be heard!

D
This is so excruciatingly obvious!

F
I beg to differ.

C
BUT WHEN I SAY THAT IT IS NOT! WHY CAN'T IT BE?

A
Oh no.

B
I sense another failing here, one that is also intrinsic in nature.

E
YOU FORGOT A THING YOU STARTED!

A
No, I have failed.

E
That is how you failed. Just end it with death.

C
That clearly DOESN'T WORK!

E
It is permanent.

C
EXACTLY!

B
Does anything ever stay the same?

F
I'd say that was remarkable if I could.

A

We're still not listening to you.

F

Hm?

A

We're still not listening to you.

F

I heard you the first time. It's just that that is what I was referring to, you all listening. All five of you.

D

It's not five it never was five nor six this is all so clear now.

A

I'm sorry. I'm not listening to what you represent.

F

Well, none of you are listening *exactly*. You're simply making progress. Don't know if I can take credit for that, but still, you five are on a roll.

D

But there is no diversion, can't you see? This is all a cover for something so clear! We are not compartmentalized! We may be A, B C, D, E, and F, but we are one and the same! There is no difference here, this could be more like a representation! To show different ones!

E

May I come forward?

C

Of course, E.

E

I only speak involving thoughts of death, I think. But since these and all other thoughts are relatively constant, it was best to only put them into me. But with the infinity of thought was other thoughts, those about time, permanent-ness, solution, solving, all that. A fraction of infinity is still infinite, regardless of normal conventions of math.

C

That is a normal convention of math, you idiot. Oh, but I suppose it was a slip of the tongue.

D

Precisely, C.

F

Back to the point. A, you said before that there was no direction.

A

There is no one thing that one can look at, take away, observe, analyze.

C

That *is* the point, isn't it? There's only a bunch of small things.

E

But not small, as I said earlier.

D

And perhaps not multiple, as I said earlier.

F

Okay, yes, you have a point, some of this is ambiguous.

B

I think you should make it clear, F.

F

Right.

(F takes a deep breath, and looks at A.)

You're almost there, but you need to find it. The core, the theme, the thought.

A

Who does?

F

You. All of you.

D

You must be joking.

F

Is that not your responsibility?

B

Frankly, no.

E

It isn't.

A

Besides, there isn't one anyway.

D

At least nothing deliberate.

A+B

So what is there to say?

D+E

What, indeed?

C

Wait.

(All look at C, solemnly.)

There *is* a direction to this. We're just avoiding it.

B+E

That's not true.

A+C+D

It is.

(Beat.)

B

But I don't want to—

A

I know.

(Beat.)

E

But we must.

C

We must.

(They all look at F.)

A+B+C+D+E

We've found it.

F

I'm still not clear on what "it" is.

C

We brought it to this point, that much we had to do. But you forget the other side of this equation.

(F ponders for a moment, then looks at the audience, realizing more what C is suggesting.)

F

Ah. I understand. Though I believe I speak for them when I say... you haven't quite made it.

E

Well, it isn't the end yet, is it?

D

No, we have time.

F

You certainly have it, somewhat. But they haven't seen it yet. *I* haven't for that matter.

B

It seems fair that we show you then.

F

Please.

(A, B, C, D, and E all stand and look at each other. A nonverbal argument occurs; in one second, they have decided. Lights change. A, B, C, D, and E all go to original positions, with F off to the side, out of the light. They all speak fluidly and truthfully, addressing the audience.)

A

I'm sorry if this seems a bit jumbled. Hard to get your thoughts sorted out about these sorts of things.

B

I just wanted to let you know... I've been thinking about you.

C

I should clarify: thinking about you, sometimes, and not in an I-can-only-think-of-you way.

D

You just come up sometimes, when I'm thinking.

E

I've tried to stop it sometimes.

A

But you have to move on, I guess. I should get back to the point.

B

You matter to me, is all.

C

Well, it isn't all; I think you know that without me saying it.

D

Maybe you've noticed that I act a bit differently around you.

E

I've tried to stop that, too.

A

But this is all getting in the way of what I'm trying to say.

B

I know no one talks like this, but... I've imagined so much time with you, time too perfect.

C

But time, when you think about it, is fleeting.

D

In the mind, that is.

E

While a memory, real or fake, lasts forever, remembering itself is only an instant.

C

But now I'm really not making sense! Goodness, I should listen to myself.

A

I'm leaving soon, so I should tell you.

C

Your hair looks nice today.

D

That isn't all I wanted to say.

B

That isn't at all what I wanted to say.

(Beat. A, B, C, D, E all seem to notice a presence leaving.)

E

You're already gone.

D

You were never really there.

B

(Tapping side of head.)

Just... here.

C
Some kind of you is, anyway. Sorry, ha, again.

A
I'll say goodbye later. Then, then I can say it.

C
Say what I mean.

B
What I feel.

D
What I think.

E
What I want.

A
But I think you get the idea.

(A few beats pass. Suddenly, clapping is heard. It is F, who steps into the light. All others begin to walk off in their own direction.)

F
Wow! So profound! So that's the end?

E
(Turning briefly to respond.)
Yes.

F
Oh? So what was it?
(Everyone turns back to face F.)

The theme, the focus? The big one.
(A, B, C, D, E all turn back around and walk off.)

Hey wait! I'm just asking! I know you just did a last bit there, but can't you tell me... now hold on! Is it too much to ask for some clarification?

(Beat.)
Who's it about?
(They all freeze.)

Who's the play about?
(They turn back to F.)

A+B+C+D+E
I don't know.

Blackout.