

WINNER: International Ernest Hemingway Playwriting Contet

THE TOTAL IMMERSION OF MADELEINE FAVORINI

**A Play
By Frank Gagliano**

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The International Ernest Hemingway Writing competition is held each year at Sanibel Island, Florida, in the United States--in honor of the great American writer, Ernest Hemingway. Awards are given for novel, short story, poetry, essay —and play categories.

The 1999 award for playwriting went to Frank Gagliano for his play:

“THE TOTAL IMMERSION OF MADELEINE FAVORINI”

THE TOTAL IMMERSION OF MADELEINE FAVORINI is a surreal 3-performer piece (some have called it a dramatic poem) in which thirty-eight year old Madeleine Favorini journeys from dutifulness to rebellion on a gynecological examining table that takes wing.

When the play begins Madeleine Favorini, in her slip, has been waiting for her doctor, her feet in the stirrups of a gynecological examining table — for two weeks! Madeleine is a dutiful woman who, all her life, has denied any rebelliousness in her nature.

Today, Madeleine’s exhausted body rebels and the gynecological table—the play’s only prop—becomes a kind of magic carpet that takes Madeleine through a series of encounters; with her Italian-American family, her philandering former husband — and out into the realm of mythology, where she meets and falls in love with a Sicilian bandit, El Bandido Grandido — actually a God who, like an earth-bound Flying Dutchman, is doomed to roam the earth, until a specific woman can release his despairing spirit. Madeleine Favorini is that woman and she must destroy El Bandido Grandido, her first grand love, in order to give him his “full out rest;” and in order for her to face an eternity that has frightened her all her life.

THE TOTAL IMMERSION OF MADELEINE FAVORINI is noted for long spoken arias (including the soaring “vacuum vagina” speech) filled with lyricism and images; and for its outrageous humor, painful discoveries and theatrical encounters.

The role of Madeleine Favorini is very demanding and the other two performers must play the many characters who confront Madeleine on her journey.

This version of THE TOTAL IMMERSION OF MADELEINE FAVORINI
 was revised at the 2nd FESTIVAL OF NEW WORKS Ann Arbor, Michigan
 and had a rehearsed, sit-down, reading on June 16 and 17, 2000
 with the following cast of Equity actors:

MADELEINE	JANET MAYLE
THE MEN	JOHN SEIBERT
THE WOMEN	MICHELLE MOUNTAIN

Directed by SARA-BEY CHENG

AND, with further revisions,
 was read by the Epic Repertory Theatre
 on December 3, 2001
 at the Josè Quintero Theatre
 534 W. 42nd Street,
 NYC, NY 10036
 with the following cast:

MADELEINE	CAANAN ERGUDER
THE MEN	DAVID WAGNER
THE WOMEN	ALICIA REGAN

Directed by CARRIE STROUD

(During the 1998 SHOWCASE OF NEW PLAYS Season, Robin Walsh, Tony McKay
 and Natalie Baker read the play, during a retrospective week of Gagliano plays)

CHARACTERS

One actress play
Madeleine Favorini

One actor plays
Dr. Rathjib
Nonno Pazzotesto
Jonathan
Palsied Papa
Captain Marvel
El Bandido Grandido

One actress plays
Nurse Ida Wendling
Niece Cassandra
Yiddish, Irish, Southern Mamas
La Bandida
The Dwarf Prometheus
Giant Koala Bear

Note: The Voice of Amalia, mentioned throughout, is the voice of the late Portuguese Fado singer, Amalia Rodrigues.

THE TOTAL IMMERSION OF MADELEINE FAVORINI

**is a full-evening's production that
 has a playing time of about 80 minutes
 ,and is played without an intermission break.**

Scene: A black space.

In center hot-white light, a
gynecological examining table.
MADELEINE FAVORINI on it. In
the stirrups. She wears a slip.

Madeleine discovers the
audience when the audience
discovers Madeleine.

MADELEINE

O !!

(Trying to pull down her slip
and close her knees; all the while keeping her
feet in the stirrups. TO THE AUDIENCE)

Well. . . *I'm very dutiful*. See? . . . You don't see. . . I've been waiting here—as I was
told to do? —for Doctor Rathjib? . . . I've been waiting for Doctor Rathjib, in *this* slip, in
these stirrups . . . FOR TWO WEEKS! . . . —O! you may think that's funny! But
throughout—these last two weeks—late at night? —young interns would come in—with
flashlights! —say they'd lost something--drop below my knees—and the rays of the
flashlight would sway up—then OUT OF SIGHT! —OmyGod! Like shooting stars! COMETS!
And shooting stars and COMETS remind me of SPACE and space reminds me of INFINITY
and infinity terrifies me and makes me want to THROW UP!

(Pause)

God, I'm hungry. . . . Cold, too. And stiff. . . . Whole body's fallen asleep. Especially—
. . . yes, feels like I'm sitting bare-bunned on raw rice. . . .

(She has a body spasm)

O my! My body. . . wants to. . .

(Slowly, torturously, Madeleine begins
to get out of the stirrups)

get out of. . . these stirrups *and*. . . O God! I am *dutiful*. . . but my *body* keeps *trying* to
. . . to—

WOMAN'S VOICE

(Over. Amplified. Coming from everywhere)

Don't you *dare* get out of those stirrups, *Madeleine Favorini*!

(Madeleine jams her feet back
into the stirrups)

With what *you've* probably got, *Madeleine Favorini*, getting out of those stirrups will *kill*
you.

MADELEINE

"Probably got?" What do you mean —"*PROBABLY GOT?!!*"

(Dr. Rathjib materializes)

DOCTOR RATHJIB

(Kindly; always kindly)

Questions?

(To Loudspeaker Voice)

Are we allowing questions from patients, Nurse Wendling? Since when?

NURSE WENDLING

(Voice over)

Not "allowing," Doctor Rathjib. She just

MADELEINE

--Doctor Rathjib! —*Himself?! —Finally!* Have you come to tell me what I've —"probably got?"

NURSE WENDLING

(Voice over)

She started to *destirrup*, Doctor Rathjib!

DOCTOR RATHJIB

(Kindly. Making sure Madeleine's feet
are secure in the stirrups)

Patient Favorini! We don't *destirrup* in this hospital. Not until told.

MADELEINE

But, perhaps in this case, you could—

DOCTOR RATHJIB

(Kindly)

Now, *I* must do as *I'm* told or *I* get into serious trouble. I'm sure you don't want that.

MADELEINE

Of course not. I just want—

DOCTOR RATHJIB

(Kindly)

And Nurse Wendling must do as *she's* told; namely, to see that you stay stirrupped—or *she* gets into serious trouble.

WENDLING

(Voice over)

And I'm sure you don't want *that*, *MA*deleine Favorini.

MADELEINE

No no! The last thing in the world I want is to get anyone into trouble. And I *want* to follow all your rules, I do; but. . . —two weeks!. . .well, you must admit

DOCTOR RATHJIB

(Kindly)

—I *admit* *NO*thing to patients, Patient Favorini.

MADELEINE

And if there's some terrible thing I've *probably got*, don't you think—?

DOCTOR RATHJIB

(Kindly)

Thinking is frowned upon in this institution, Patient Favorini.

MADELEINE

But couldn't you make an exception and—?

DOCTOR RATHJIB

(Kindly)

Now it's all right. I noted on your chart—and the charts never lie—I noted that you are a 46-year-old depressed and discarded Wop-American lady and I know you'll live up to that profile and do the dutiful thing. Now please excuse me. . . .Nurse Wendling, see to *your* duty.

(He quickly dematerializes)

MADELEINE

(Her feet dutifully in the stirrups)

Doctor Rathjib! Wait!

(Nurse Wendling quickly materializes.

Checks out Madeleine's feet)

NURSE WENDLING

Did you catch that threat, *Madeleine Favorini*? Against me?

MADELEINE

O, I'm sure he didn't mean anything dras—You! You're Nurse Wendling!

NURSE WENDLING

Yes, I am and yes; it was a threat! And I can't afford to lose this job. Since working for doctor Rathjib I've lost all of my nursing skills. Now, one of my duties is to turn on "The Music To Numb The Brain." So please behave yourself and stay stirrupped, while I plug "The Music To Numb The Brain" into the environment. There's a good girl.

(Nurse Wendling dematerializes)

MADELEINE

(Her feet dutifully in the stirrups)

No! Wait! I came here for help and my body really does ache and—

(She turns to the audience)

Look. Two weeks ago I got a mailgram. After all these years my mother was seen. In Greece. On one of the Islands. So! I was mulling that over, over my usual lunch of beef bourguignon and yogurt mixed with pure bran, when I suddenly got this feeling that—something wasn't quite right. Internally. That something was missing. Inside. Down below. . . .It frightened me. . . .So, two weeks ago—after lunch, after bourguignon and bran—on my way back to work? I stopped by this Emergency Room. I thought that what I felt was missing in me had to do with my mother; her being found. But that didn't make sense. I mean, she's been out of my life for too many years. Anyway, the people who spotted her said she looked all right so—

DOCTOR RATHJIB

(Head materializes. Kindly)

Wrong, Patient Favorini. Your mother's dead. We got a mailgram.

(Rathjib's head dematerializes)

MADELEINE

(Her feet dutifully in the stirrups)

Dead.

(Pause)

Why can't I dutifully cry.

(Pause)

Well, I can't. So there's the proof. That feeling; something missing? inside? down below? Nothing to do with my mother. She doesn't affect me. Something else. Physiological. . . ."probably got". . . I was right to come here for two weeks and I don't know if I'm fired from my job or what

DOCTOR RATHJIB

(Head materializes. Kindly)

—No "what" about it. You *have* been fired. We got a mailgram.

(Doctor Rathjib's head dematerializes)

MADELEINE

(Her feet dutifully in the stirrups)

Fired?

(Holding back tears)

That's terrible. I work. . . worked

(She cries)

at The Museum of Natural Wonders. Telephone Reference. Perfect job for me. I didn't have to deal, face to face, with people, you see. And, to boot, I was surrounded by the Gods! —O! I mean, dioramas of stuffed mythological Gods. Always loved them, those

MADELEINE

(Continued)

tales. Especially there. Because there, in The Museum of Natural Wonders, a lot of the pain of those tales was . . .—finessed. . . .I can't stand pain. . . .But there, even the Prometheus legend—with his liver being plucked out and eaten? —even that was shown without pain—a kind of Walt Disney cast of mannequins —so that even the pain was cute—and "cute" pain I can take. . . .Fired.

(Music: The Voice of Amalia is heard.
It is very Muzak sounding)

O! That must be the "Music To Numb The Brain" and—

(She has a body spasm)

O my God! It's happening again! My body. . .acting up. . .wants to get out of . . .these—

DOCTOR RATHJIB

(Materializing)

Goodheavens!

(Grabs Madeleine's feet; tries
to keep them in the stirrups)

Nurse Wendling! Mayday! MAYDAY! The wop-lady is deSTIRrupping!

WENDLING

(Head materializing)

Can't leave! The "Music To Numb The Brain" is going all funny!

(The "Music To Numb The Brain" goes all funny)

MADELEINE

Doctor Rathjib!--a five minute stretch! Please!

DOCTOR RATHJIB

Nurse Wendling! One foot is out!

WENDLING

I'm coming!

DOCTOR RATHJIB

Quick! I'M DEALING WITH AN ELEMENTAL FORCE!

(Wendling joins Rathjib and they wrestle with
Madeleine's anarchic feet)

MADELEINE

O! O! That voice—all FUNny! —and what. . .what exCRUCiating conflict! —My MIND wants to. . .to be DUTiful. . .BUT my legs. . .keep WANTing to JERK—jerk *FREE!!!*

(She *kicks* Doctor Rathjib and Nurse Wendling into the shadows.

"Music To Numb The Brain"—*out!*
"Journey Music"—*in* and under)

MADELEINE

(Continued)

And *suddenly* I'm on the move! . . . to god-knows-where. . .because the table's not a table anymore. . .it looks like. . .like one of those. . . —Yes! —Disney World wagons! That's right; those little carts that scoot you through the robot worlds?. . .and moves and moves AND PICKS UP SPEED and more speed. . .and even more speed and LOOKASIFWEWILLHITAWALL! but don't. . . Instead, we barely squeeze through a thin, thankgod, fissure slit into an O! O! black cave. And lose sight of the up-front carts in the wall's folds; *real* walls. Not like the dioramas in the Museum of Natural Wonders. *Real* walls; walls that sweat; that smell like. . .cucumber skins. . .and move and *jerk* past . . . omy! —grotesque exhibitions in the apses of the walls. Like. . .cartoon stations of the cross. Of. . .Bozo The Clown?! —Yes! Bozo, the clown. Mostly. Being crucified. . . But instead of a spear in *his* side; they're honking his red horn nose!

PAZZOTESTO

(Off)

Honk! Honk!

(Journey Music--OUT!)

MADELEINE

OGODLOOK! That Bozo—that Bozo is getting down from the cross and—see! —picks up a tattered valise and . . . --and a bouquet, I think, and WHY—why that's not Bozo, the clown. That's. . . —othankgod that's NONNO! Nonno Pazzotesto!

PAZZOTESTO

(Very stereotypical Italian))

Maddalena! Cara! Is that'a you! Good.

(Shift to perfect English)

Do you know how to get out of this goddamned maze?

(Next Excerpt)

PAZZOTESTO

Ah. I knew I had a flashlight in this tattered valise. Click! Ah. Maybe down that tunnel. . .

(He dematerializes)

MADELEINE

No! Don't leave me alone! Nonno! Nonno! Light the way for meeeeeeeee!

(She gets back onto the examining table)

Go! Go! Follow Nonno Pazzotesto! Follow him to—YES! Sicily. Sicily! There! There! This table is moving me there. To the end of this magical tunnel! And there! . . .there it is. I see it! —Sicily! My land of roots and ruts and riverdercis! Singing couples, singing in Piazzas on the holy days; pinning molti, molti Euro to statues of the blue Madonna, bobbing on the young men's shoulders, through the crowded square. My family's there! See?!! See!! In and on a painted cart pulled by our family donkey! And everyone protects me. And everyone is proud of me. Because on *this* feast day, I play. . . —the Holy Ghost. A tongue. A dove. A presence. And I need my family. They're the only ones who care for me. No one else would give a roast for the Holy Ghost. After all, what's he do? After all, what's she do? But my family, they knew and cheer me on. So , I choose to play the tongue and lick my way over every head that's bowed before the bobbing blue Madonna. And so I *do*, but am not *seen*; and maybe that's the best way? —No! *It is not!* Not being seen is death, is rot! So all I've got is my family, who *do* see and dote on me. And Papa gets angry and takes his whip and lashes every guinea ass in sight! "See my daughter!" he screams. "Grab onto each holy rung and climb and mount that holy tongue! *See my daughter* or this lash will burn your lower cheeks to ash!" And that's how Papa does for me. . .IN SICILY!

(Laughter is heard off)Ω

That laughter! Around the bend! Whose is it? . . .It's--o God, it's *his* laughter. It's—

(Jonathan and Cassandra materialize)

JONATHAN

Madeleine, it's me. Your husband. Jonathan. I hope you've made a nice big pot of beef bourguignon. Because I've brought home my niece, Cassandra, to stay with us a bit. You've never met Cassandra, I know. But that's all right. Cassandra just got off the train from Chicago and so is freezing. Say "Hi" to wife Madeleine, niece Cassandra.

CASSANDRA

(Shivering)

Hi-hi-hi, A-A-Aunt Ma-Madeleine.

(Next excerpt)

MADELEINE

And he beats me.

MAMA

With what you have, is it any wonder.

MADELEINE

What do I have, Mama?

MAMA

Listen, Madeleine. Your mother is exhausted. Your vegetable father exhausted me. The roles I have had to play: The rages I have had to sit on: Not having money—having to "make do"—exhausted me. And trying to mother *you*, make sense out of what you are or could be, really exhausted me. From the time you were born, you wore me out. An almost impossible delivery. You nearly killed me. And not long after, the hysterectomy. Oh, they said there was no connection, but I don't know: A Sicilian lady with just one child—a girl child at that. "Vergogna." Shame. "Vergogna." That's the only Sicilian word I've not been able to forget. "Vergogna," your grandmother would spit at me —"Vergogna," for a Sicilian lady to have just one girl child. All right. Then I'll not *be* a Sicilian lady. I'll be an American lady. And, like every American lady, I'll work to be totally free. So that no one could ever "vergogna" me again. Well, now I am free; of your poor father; there's some money trickling in; I am totally assimilated—with not one trace of Sicilian peasant in me any longer, thank God—and I want to be free of you. Unencumbered. To be unencumbered. What you have can drag me down again. And now I want "up." Up. *Up!*

(Next Excerpt)

MADELEINE

NO NONNO! DON'T GO! NOT WITHOUT ME! I'M A 36-YEAR-OLD DISCARDED WOMAN AND SOMETHING IS SLIPPING AWAY! PLEASE NONNO!
Deodorants make me nauseous and don't work on me anymore—though I dutifully use them. . . .Mindlessness scares me—always has—but here I am in a mindless age and I don't know how to act—except to shiver. I shiver a lot now, Nonno. And I'm afraid to jog for fear my breasts will fall off. . . .Since Jonathan ran out on me I've wanted desperately to have my ears pierced like every Sicilian child has, but every time I pierce them, the skin grows back. . . .I went to college and I feel so dumb. I majored in Literature and so was good for nothing. And laughed at, of course. But at least I could thrill to the audacity and awesome language of the Masters. Could quote them from memory, in fact. But now—those great words frighten me—make me dizzy, sick. And every time I need to use the "facility"—I mean, the *toilet*—I have this fear that I won't be able to *go* because all of my orifices will have been sewn up. . . .I look at babies and old people and I imagine infinity. Which scares me and makes me want to throw up. The only foods that have any taste for me are fast foods. But fast foods nauseate me. And make me fat—though I dutifully eat them and hold them down. The really awful thing, though. . . .is that I can't look people in the shoulder anymore. Only in the back. And so I always walk behind. Even when I'm in front. . . .The only thing I seem to get close to—immerse myself in, I guess, are motel bed sheets reeking with stale smoke. But stale smoke makes me sick now. So does loud talk and trendy things and giant portable stereos growing out of the heads of walking young men and—

(Next excerpt)

MADELEINE

. . .On a Mediterranean Cruise. Abandoned. Single lady once again, using up her savings, to cruise her bruised self back together again. Long days and nights, with silk scarf headkerchief breezing about her face, she leans on a rail and looks at the sea omylook. O my, look; a silver school of silver fish moving past. Like an oil slick omy. O My! They're whatchamacallits! Rubbers! Condoms! A school of condoms in the Mediterranean?! No! I don't want to see that! I want to see—. . .him. HIM! Captain Marvel! There. In the ballroom. Through the porthole. See? Captain Marvel. That's his name. Really. The Captain of this Cruise. There; dancing the tango with his white even teeth, and even more even crease in his pressed uniform; and Lady Buxom in his six-foot-two-arms, pressed against the two thousand ribbons on his chest, because tradition demands he service the top-deck ladies first—*until* he works his way to below-deck me.

(coily)

He kissed my hand, you know, when I came aboard. —Well, it is true he kissed all the ladies' hands. But mine he lingered over; and I could see he wanted to lick my knuckles. I pulled my hand away. I didn't want him to get into trouble. But, it's clear, throughout the cruise, his darting tongue's been making thrusts at me. Even now

(She tangos)

As—he—tangos
[he knows I'm out here]
and—he—sees—me
[his eyes keep darting]
out—the—port—hole
[I know he wants me]
in—his—arms—too
[his chest is massive]
and—I'm—fainting
[especially when we DIP]

(She dips.

Captain Marvel materializes,
keeping a Distance)

(Next Excerpt)

MADELEINE

No. I want you here immersed in me.

DEEDO

ooooooooooooooooOOOOOOOO

MADELEINE

—Listen, Deedo: Before—a journey ago—I felt all sewn up. But becoming all those others has—. . .yes!—it has cut the thread; opened me up! Totally. Has made me feel one long tunnel; from my pasta pit up to my mouth! Now—if I want--I can mount telephone poles. Skyscrapers. Giant Sequoias. Capitol domes. The entire Italian Alps! YES! I recline and my openness is as powerful as a million Hoovers. And a humongous procession can be sucked in. Truck fleets. Giant discarded D.C. 10s. A thousand teenage boys on skateboards. The Boston Marathon. Hundreds of illegal aliens streaming into me, the juice of me. And I suck it all in, yes. . . .yes. . . .Yes! YES! I, Madeleine Favorini, am now the Vacuum Vagina of the World! I suck in all the world's debris, redundancies, fads and pain. And when I've anointed them all with my life's fluid, and my belly skin is stretched to transparent—THEN I push them all out in one great Lamaze effort; flush them out of me in one cleansing tidal wave. And because they've all been part of me, I can be part of them. But you. . . .you I'll keep forever—warm behind some secret fold in me until. . . .until I die. But you won't. Because my death contraction will push you out for you to journey on and on and on and on and—

DEEDO

(In Sicilian)

—Maddalena! Dimmi comu possu muriri, e ti odiu pi sempre!

(Pause)

MADELEINE

I understand! . . . I understand your Sicilian! . .