

**DOG LOGIC** by Thomas Strellich.

A dark comedy with profound insights into the mind of a man unaffected by the obsession with wealth, acquisition or urban sprawl, confronted by his grasping mother, his tender yet desperate ex-wife and an unscrupulous real estate broker, all eager to acquire his land, a rundown pet cemetery. The setting of this fascinating play is a run down pet cemetery in the California desert. An intoxicating mix of the sublime and surreal, this dark comedy is a hilarious but disturbing study of devotion to ideals in the face of urban sprawl. Hertel Daggett is the physical and spiritual caretaker of the pet cemetery he inherited from his father. His solitude is intruded upon by an aspiring real estate magnate (a janitor who took a cable television real estate seminar) who enlists Hertel's ex wife (a jaded deputy sheriff who wants to move to Vermont or Australia) and his long lost mother (presumed dead but actually living in Sacramento) to turn the property into a shopping mall. Hertel's fight to protect the forty dried up, burnt out acres of dead pets from the forces of real estate and reality weaves dinosaurs, cave men, Egyptians, amoebas, television evangelists, Godzilla, and gospel music, answering the primal question: what makes man different than all the other animals?

"Shaggy sense of humor is the driving force." - *N.Y. Times*.

"Dog gone it's good." - *N.Y. Post*.

"Witty and crisp." - *St. Louis Post Dispatch*.  
*Sun*.

"A daring and intriguing play." - *St. Louis*

**CHARACTER BREAKDOWN:**

**Hertel:** male, 30s-early 40s, lots of mileage on him, an idealist and a dreamer.

**Kaye:** female, mid to 30s, Hertel's ex-wife, a cop, strong yet tender.

**Anita:** female, late 50s-60s, Hertel's mother, a realist without much of a maternal side.

**Dale:** male, late 20s – early 40s, real estate broker with a short fuse, anxious and profane.

**AUDITION SIDES:**

**DALE & HERTEL**

Start pg. 14 DALE: "Hey ..."

End pg. 18 DALE: "Doesn't that sound like a wonderful way of life? Hertel?"

**KAYE & HERTEL**

Start pg. 23 KAYE: "Hertel!"

End pg. 26 HERTEL: "Yeah. Still. It's my heritage."

**ANITA & HERTEL**

Start pg. 51 ANITA: "Where is he anyway?"

End pg. 53 ANITA: "Bullshit."

- **All roles open. All actors reading for HERTEL be prepared to read all three scenes.**  
\* **Copy of the script is available to be read at the Hi-Desert Cultural Center.**

# Dog Logic

A Play in Two Acts

by Thomas Strelch<sup>s</sup>

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

 **SAMUEL  
FRENCH**  
FOUNDED 1850  
SAMUELFRENCH.COM

*(HE continues playing for a moment. Something simple like "This Old Man." A young MAN enters from the side. HE is very well dressed, three-piece suit, expensive leather briefcase, etc. But something about him is slightly off—perhaps the tie is a little too wide or loud, the shoes don't go with the rest.)*

DALE. Hey ...

HERTEL.. *(Startled.)* Now that's a good way to get shot. Sneaking around ...

DALE. I've been knocking on the front door for like the last ten minutes. What am I supposed to do? I hear you out here, I come back.

HERTEL. You see this thing *(the accordion.)*? You are very lucky I was wearing this—this probably saved your life.

DALE. Yeah. *(Dismissing.)* You the janitor?

HERTEL. Security.

DALE. *(Pause.)* Yeah I can see how you'd need that around here.

HERTEL. *(Taking off the accordion.)* This's part of my job description too. I'm what you call a factotum, I provide a wide variety of services here, security, sanitation, physical plant, recreation coordinator, ombudsman ...

DALE. This was the pet cemetery though, right?

HERTEL. Yeah, you could look at it that way.

DALE. Then I'm looking for a Mr. Daggett.

HERTEL. *(Pause staring at him.)* Who?

DALE. Daggett, Hertel Daggett.

HERTEL. Junior or senior?

DALE. I don't know, probably senior.

HERTEL. Out there. *(Pointing into the distance.)*

DALE. What, out on the grounds?

HERTEL. I don't know. It would depend on your philosophical viewpoint.

DALE. *(Pause.)* Lemme give you a data-point here. Now I might be your boss in a few hours, ok, that's bottom line. And I do not suffer fools easily, that's another bottom line, so I don't appreciate your wasting my time and dickng me around like this when I'm trying to conduct some important business transactions, ok. So, with that in mind, where, specifically is he?

HERTEL. *(Pointing into the cemetery.)* You see the grieving angel out there? And then the light post? Then that little pyramid type thing? And between 'em is that little white thingey?

DALE. *(Looking.)* Yeah,

HERTEL. There.

DALE. Thanks ... *(Starting to move off. Steps.)* So that white thing is a tombstone I guess, right?

HERTEL. Affirmative.

DALE. So he's dead then?

HERTEL. In the traditional sense.

DALE. Shit. When'd he die?

HERTEL. September. Almost all of it.

DALE. *(Cursing his fate.)* Sonovabitch, sonovagoddamnabitch ...

HERTEL. It's ok, you don't need to feel too bad, I mean he had a pretty good life, except for the very last part there, but you know viewed as a whole it was ... living.

DALE. Now they'll get it through probate---I'll tell you something man, there is a lesson in this. Never, NEVER, hesitate, about anything. Strike while the iron is hot. When you have a thought, act, don't reflect, ACT. This whole idea came to me like ... a long time ago. But

did I act, did I make it happen? Fuck no. I farked around, saving up to buy this shit (*The suit and briefcase*). If I acted when I first thought it up, I'd be set for life right now. The big score, set for goddamn life! Set for my sorry goddamn pointless piece a shit life. (*Spent, despondent, HE sits down.*)

HERTEL. (*Pause.*) Yeah, that's how I got this job. I thought about it, and I acted. Made this whole thing happen. (*Holding his hair out of the way, showing the top of his head*) Ya see this?

DALE. But the sonovabitch is dead.

HERTEL. Yeah.

DALE. (*Snapping out of it, pointing out toward the cemetery.*) Is that legal?

HERTEL. (*Puzzled.*) Well, sure, I mean, what they gonna do?

DALE. No, for a human person to be buried out there in a pet cemetery like that.

HERTEL. Oh, (*Thinking.*) well I don't think the little dead animals care about it. Although we used to separate the dogs from the cats out there. Dogs over on the east, (*Pointing.*) cats over on the west. But we no longer implement that policy.

DALE. (*Staring blankly into the distance.*) Sonovabitch.

HERTEL. But you know, it used to be that back like in the olden days, like in the sixties, in the regular, you know, non-pet cemeteries, they'd bury the black people—which they called Negroes at that time—in a separate part of a cemetery from where they'd bury the white people 'cause they didn't want the white bones getting mixed in with the black bones. I guess in case there was like a

earthquake or some other earth movement like a volcano or nuclear bombs or something. Well, no, technically I don't think that's what it was so much, I'm sure there was a plethora of social forces at work there, but I think mainly what the problem was, was that they didn't want all the black and white souls getting all mixed up during the rapture and Ascension, and everybody floating up to heaven at once, with big long lines, like Disneyland, snaking around the clouds. (*Takes a step, turns right, waits, takes a step, turns right again in an imaginary Disneyland line.*) Be a real logistical nightmare, I mean what you gonna do? Take a number?

DALE. Wait a minute ... (*Sitting up.*) there's a Herte! junior right?

HERTEL. Yeah.

DALE. Is he still alive?

HERTEL. In the traditional sense.

DALE. Does he live around here, how do I connect with him?

HERTEL. What do you want to do that for?

DALE. Look numbnuts, just answer the question. I'm trying to establish my career before somebody else dies. Now where's Junior?

HERTEL. Here. Me.

DALE. Thank-you, now was that so hard ... (*Traits off. Pauses gathering his wits, then smiles warmly, and begins a painstakingly rehearsed sales pitch, marching confidently up to Hertel, energetically shaking his hand.*) Pleased to meet you Hertel, my name is Dale Meadows, and I'd like to ask you a question, just one question. Hertel. Would you like financial independence? The freedom to do whatever you want, wherever you want, anytime you want?

Doesn't that sound like a wonderful way of life? Hertel.

HERTEL. Well, yeah, sure, but I pretty much already have that ...

DALE. If you could have anything you wanted, and don't think about how much it costs, what would it be?

HERTEL. Peace on earth, good will toward man?

DALE. (Pause.) No I meant more normal things, car, boat, airplane ...

HERTEL. Oh normal things, ok. A Jeep. With a roll bar.

DALE. Great! That's a great choice. (Noting it down on a piece of paper, HERTEL watches.) What else?

HERTEL. A dog. To ride around in the back of the jeep.

DALE. (Noting it down.) Perfect, ok ...

HERTEL. And I'd like to get married again. Same one as before. If that's ok?

DALE. Mmmm Hmmm (Writing.) How about a yacht? Would you like a yacht?

HERTEL. Yeah, I've always wanted to water ski.

HERTEL. Sure, a Beechcraft Bonanza, V-Tail.

DALE. What about a mansion? Want a mansion somewhere?

HERTEL. Aw hell, put me down for one of those too.

DALE. Ok ... (Reviewing his notes.) A jeep, dog, wife, yacht, airplane, and mansion. Now it looks like you want a lot of things Hertel, how do think you can get these things, how do you think you can achieve these goals?

HERTEL. Well, I don't want to be a pig about it, I'd settle for the dog.

DALE. I'll make you a promise, Hertel. I'll help you

get the things you want. And you know Hertel, I am very much like you. I too want things for myself. I too have goals, just like you do. Together, I believe we can meet this challenge and achieve these goals. Would you like to know how?

HERTEL. (Pause.) Sure. Fine.

DALE. Now, look out there (Into the cemetery.) and imagine—you are the heir to the estate aren't you?

HERTEL. (Pause.) Yeah, I'm responsible for all of this now.

DALE. Well then imagine out there to the west, a Sears. Out to the east, a Neiman-Marcus. In the middle, a Macy's, a multi-cinema, a full spectrum of retail sales opportunities. Hertel, may I be honest with you?

HERTEL. Sure.

DALE. I represent a group of foreign investors ... Japanese, Arabs—good Arabs, pro-American—who are interested in developing commercial properties as investment vehicles. Our projections indicate that you, as a full but limited partner, would stand to gross, let me emphasize that, gross, at the very least, a million dollars. Now these investors are willing to commit substantial financial backing to this project, provided they get some kind of show of good faith from you. (Opening his briefcase.) I have some papers here I'd like to show you ...

HERTEL. I watch TV you know, I've seen the shows.

DALE. What?

HERTEL. The real estate shows, "Making A Fortune Through Foreclosures," "The Millionaire Maker," I watch 'em all, know the lingo now—use O-P-M, Other People's Money, to buy from motivated sellers, all that stuff. Did you actually take the seminar or just buy the books and

his briefcase.) It's your loss buddy, your funeral. (DALE exits muttering about amoebas that don't fuck.)

HERTEL. (Pause.) Yeah, well, I'm used to those. (HE walks back into the darkness of the cave.)

### BLACKOUT

### Scene 3

Early evening, a Lava lamp glows from the back of the garage. HERTEL sits beside it. HE quietly smokes a cigarette and stares into the light.

HERTEL. It's important to stay in touch with your roots. These guys are very useful for this. Lava Lamp. Reminds us of what we used to watch back when we were all still dinosaurs. Before TV. This is what we used to watch. Volcanoes. We didn't understand 'em though. Dinosaur brain is very small, functional, but simple. Couldn't comprehend what was happening—the earth was melting, coming out of itself, spilling over itself, burying itself. Dinosaur stands there watching this, he doesn't know what the hell's going on. It's just pretty lights, hypnotic. And then it's on top of him, burning him alive and smothering him all at the same time. That's why it's important for us to look at these things, reactivate the old dinosaur thought patterns, remind us how easy it is not to understand, and what happens to you when you don't.

(A POLICE RADIO hisses and crackles in the distance.)

KAYE. (Off.) Hertel! (HERTEL retreats into the darkness of the cave.)

KAYE. (Closer.) Hertel! Are you out here? (KAYE comes through the back door. SHE's wearing the uniform of a Deputy Sheriff—gun, nightstick, cuffs, the works. SHE holds a flashlight, shining it around as SHE looks for Hertel. SHE has a very professional demeanor.) Hertel? (SHE shines the light into the cave—nothing. SHE looks off into the cemetery. Cups her hands around her mouth, yelling.) Hertel!

HERTEL. (From the darkness.) I'm right here Kaye, you don't gotta yell.

KAYE. (Startled, spinning around.) Goddamnit Hertel, that's a good way to get shot.

HERTEL. Oh, why, you working tonight?

KAYE. No. Yeah, I'm still on duty. You know your phone's been disconnected?

HERTEL. (Emerging from the darkness.) You come all the way out here to tell me that? You been trying to call me? (Laughs in delight.) 'Cause hell, I can have 'em hook up the goddamn phone again if you been trying to call me.

KAYE. (Overlapping.) Well, I just been trying to call you for the past couple days, I just needed to talk to you about some things ...

HERTEL. (Unable to stop himself.) I miss you ... (Mad at himself.)

(A long silence, the words hanging in the air. KAYE doesn't acknowledge it.)

KAYE. I heard that your dad passed away.

HERTEL. *(Pause.)* You mean he died. Yes he did. Hell I knew that a long time ago Kaye, I hope you didn't come all the way out here just to tell me that old news.

KAYE. Why didn't you tell me? When it happened.

HERTEL. Phone was disconnected.

KAYE. Oh. *(Pause.)* I'm sorry about your dad. I was sorry to hear about that. You could've called me though, told me about it. It's not like I'm a different person or something.

HERTEL. I just figured you had a new life and stuff, and didn't want to be bothered with the old one.

KAYE. *(Pause.)* How you been?

HERTEL. Good. Whole place to myself, now. Just me and forty acres of dead pets. Trying to get it organized, get it back into shape, get into a positive cash-flow situation. Start watering again.

KAYE. Yeah, I was wondering about that, it looked kind of, desiccated out there, in the headlights, driving in.

HERTEL. Used to be ... verdant, an arboreal dell, a goddamn oasis, grass that thick, trees, little fountains—hell you remember it, first time we did it was out there ... *(Trailing off.)*

KAYE. Better cut the weeds back thirty feet from the house in case a grass fire comes through here. Or worse, a fire inspector, you don't want to get cited and fined. I couldn't help you on that.

HERTEL. Goddamn county rezoned us for commercial, now we can't buy water at agricultural rates, can't afford to water out there anymore.

KAYE. You got a spark arrestor on that little Cushman you drive around here?

HERTEL. It was so perfect here once, green, cool. Look at it now. *(The cemetery.)* Goddamn wasteland. Who'd want to bury their beloved pets in a goddamn desert like that.

KAYE. *(Pause.)* When was the last time you had, you know ... a customer?

HERTEL. Been a while. Before Bush anyway. Things really fell off around here after he took over.

KAYE. Well, you know, with the economy and stuff, people are operating under a different set of priorities now.

HERTEL. Yeah. I'm setting up a more aggressive business plan, marketing strategies, cost-benefit analysis, all that stuff. I'm looking into telemarketing, I think that's the way to go for today's contemporary lifestyles. *(Looking into the garage.)* I gotta get all this stuff squared away first though. But I can't seem to throw anything away. *(HERTEL begins moving some old TV's, restacking them.)*

KAYE. Why don't you just have somebody else do it for you. Just pay somebody to come in and clear it all out?

HERTEL. Nah, there's a lot of important stuff in here, I wouldn't trust anybody else picking through it.

KAYE. I don't see why you just don't sell the place ...

*(HERTEL stops dead in his tracks.)*

KAYE. Keep all the important stuff, but just sell the place, get a little apple orchard up in Tehachapi. You could get a lot of money for it. I bet.

*(HERTEL looks at her.)*

KAYE. (*Pause.*) I mean you were always talking about growing apples up in Tachapapi, it's something to think about, you should look into it ...

HERTEL. There's nothing to think about, it's not an option—is this what you came here for? Is career counseling part of your job too?

KAYE. I just wanted to make sure you were ok.

HERTEL. Well, as you can see for yourself (*Indicating his surroundings.*).

KAYE. Yeah, I can see that. (*Pause.*) Who were you talking to?

HERTEL. When?

KAYE. Just now, before I came back here. I was out front, I heard you back here talking. You don't have a phone, is somebody else here, were you talking to somebody?

HERTEL. Yeah.

KAYE. Who?

HERTEL. Who the hell you think? I was talking to all the little dead pets out there that nobody talks to anymore.

KAYE. Still doing that huh?

HERTEL. Yeah. Still. It's my heritage.

KAYE. People ever stop by out here?

HERTEL. Who specifically?

KAYE. I don't know, friends and stuff I guess, I don't know, just people.

HERTEL. Why you asking? Is there somebody who's come out here that I should talk to?

KAYE. How should I know?

HERTEL. What're you getting at? What is this line of questioning about?

KAYE. It's not a line of questioning. Look, you live

out here alone, I just want to know if people ever come out here, so that if one of those TV's falls on your head or something when you're poking around in there, that you don't lay on the floor for like a month turning into ant food. Now if nobody comes around, I can have a deputy drive by once in a while.

HERTEL. I got things under control out here, I'm not some retard.

KAYE. Goddamnit I hate when you do that. I did not call you a retard.

HERTEL. It was an implicit underlying assumption.

KAYE. Horseshit. You are not a retard.

HERTEL. Ok, brain damaged, get technical.

KAYE. There's nothing wrong with you.

HERTEL. Why'd you leave me then?

KAYE. (*Pause.*) You did the leaving part.

HERTEL. (*Confused.*) I did?

KAYE. Yes. You did.

HERTEL. You sure that was me?

KAYE. Yes, we were before the brain damage, we were history by then. Remember?

HERTEL. You just said I wasn't brain damaged.

KAYE. (*Flashing over, but then swallowing her anger.*)

Look I gotta get going ...

HERTEL. That's right. We were before. We were history. Ok.

KAYE. (*Professional.*) I'm just saying that you don't have a phone—and incidentally, you really should have that hooked up again, no frills, you don't need call-waiting or anything like that, just basic Lifeline Service, 911—it's just good common sense, you're alone out here ...

HERTEL. I'm not alone. Not in the classical sense.



you two buzzards only show up when there's something to pick over, acting real hurt and put out, 'cause I didn't call you first thing and tell you, "hey, the old man died, and left you a piece of the pie, a one-third share of forty dried-up, burnt-out acres fulla little dead pets." You think it was an act of generosity on his part, his way of saying that everything's ok from the grave? All is forgiven? It was a joke! It was his one last swipe at you, both of you. Only it was supposed to stay worthless. So I guess the joke's on him, huh Mom? Fair's fair.

ANITA. *(Pause.)* Are you done?

HERTEL. No ... *(Thinks.)* Yeah.

ANITA. I came back here today 'cause I wanted you to know that I've reevaluated the situation, and ... I'm not going to go along with selling the estate. So, you can stay here, you know as long as you want now, nothing's gonna happen, nothing's gonna change. I called Kaye this morning, told her to count me out.

*(No response. HERTEL just looks at her.)*

ANITA. I didn't want to hurt you, again.

HERTEL. *(Pause.)* Oh, is this where I'm supposed to respond now? What would you prefer? Me to fall down at your feet, hugging you by the knees and blubbering about what a wonderful, generous, compassionate person you are for not stealing what doesn't belong to you in the first place? Or would you prefer something more dignified?

ANITA. Goddammit, stop being smart with me boy! You think you got me on the run don't you? That you can keep being a smart ass, tripping me up, putting words in my mouth, lay your bullshit guilt-trip on me, play the

martyr, the abandoned little boy. Well fuck you, you little shit!

HERTEL. *(Laughs.)* So ... how's things in Sacramento?

## BLACKOUT

### Scene 2

*Afternoon. The garage is quiet. The sound of an ACCORDION. A woman's piercing SCREAM comes from the dark cave. Silence, movement in the darkness. ANITA emerges from the darkness wearing the accordion. SHE starts playing. "This old man, he played one," shrieks in delight once again.*

ANITA. *(Calling toward the house.)* Where is he anyway?

HERTEL. *(Off.)* Who?

ANITA. Your dad.

HERTEL. *(Off.)* Out there. With the rest of 'em.

ANITA. *(Scanning the cemetery.)* Can you be more specific?

HERTEL. *(Off.)* See the pyramid thingey out there?

ANITA. Yeah.

HERTEL. *(Off.)* Dad's the first one to the left.

ANITA. Oh, ok. *(Pause, plays the accordion some more, stops.)* Is that ...

HERTEL. *(Off.)* Yes, it's legal.

ANITA. *(Nods, satisfied.)* He was a lot older than me, you knew that didn't you?

HERTEL. (*Off.*) Yeah. In round numbers.

ANITA. I was only seventeen. He was fifty, and some change. Told me he was thirty-nine. How the hell would I know the difference? Thirty-nine, forty-nine, fifty-nine, all the same to me—over twenty-one, that was my frame of reference. Besides, this was right after Bacall married Bogart so the whole thing had a certain ... cachet. He ever tell you how we met?

HERTEL. (*Off.*) Nope. Just said you met in Bakersfield.

ANITA. Yeah, the Christmas parade. I was a majorette, the little white boots with the tassel in the front, hat, baton—the whole shot. Marched next to his Cadillac. He was the grand Marshall you know. He just stared at me the whole parade. He waved at everybody like he was supposed to, but he never took his eyes off me. Of course, I was flattered as hell, a man of such stature in the community showing an interest.

HERTEL. (*Standing in the doorway mopping, hoists and laughs.*) Stature? (*Goes back inside.*)

ANITA. I was from Boron, I was easily impressed—he had his teeth and he didn't blow his nose with his thumb. So anyway, he starts flying out to the desert all the time, to see me, in his own personal airplane, a Beechcraft Bonanza, V-tail. Take me out flying, fly us over to Palmdale for dinner, things like that. Flew me over here to see this place once. It was beautiful out here back then, trees, grass, water—I was a desert rat, it was green, that was enough for me. Then for my eighteenth birthday, he flew us to Vegas and we got married. And then he sold the airplane. (*Pause.*) What's the pyramid for?

HERTEL. (*Off.*) Yappy.

ANITA. Oh. (*Pause.*) So anyway, and then I'm living here, in this place, with him, which is why I got this thing (*The accordion.*), for all the good it did. Turn around and I'm twenty-nine, living with a little boy and an old man, and I couldn't breathe anymore—asthma, from all the grass and trees—and nothing is like I thought it would be, and so I just left. My dad left us when I was little, so I guess it's a genetic thing. It was nothing personal. Nothing against you. (*Pause. Calling inside.*) How'd he die?

HERTEL. Heartworm. (*Entering with some cold drinks.*)

ANITA. Your father?

HERTEL. No, for hell's sake, Yappy.

ANITA. Oh. That's too bad. How'd your father die then?

HERTEL. Well ... (*Thinks.*) ... he died of a broken heart, Mom.

ANITA. Oh give me a break ...

HERTEL. Took him, you know, like twenty years, but he did, he died of a broken heart.

ANITA. Bullshit.

HERTEL. I'm not saying there weren't complications—emphysema, kidney failure, liver disease, I mean these were certainly contributing factors. But primarily it was a circulatory problem ... you, I waited outside the door, to your room, for the first few months, I guess thinking you'd show up somehow if I waited long enough. I mean the room was still full of you, you just weren't there to be seen, anymore. Pissed Dad off, (*Imitating.*) "She's dead, ya dumb sonovabitch, she's dead, she ain't coming back."