Of his arrival. And so it goes. Although Eno’s writing is commanding, his narrator is not. Man shows himself to be fragile, uncomfortable, full of deft apology for his tentative being. “Don’t hate me, if you wouldn’t mind,” he says gently, adding, “Don’t walk out on me, or, if you do, try to walk out quietly. Keep the screaming to yourself.”

The narrator tries to find points of contact with his unfamiliar audience, which allows Eno obliquely to tease the notions of place and of home (“where the hat’s hanging and the placenta’s buried”). “I’m just very far from the comforting things, as you may be,” Man confides. “All of us marching out of the ocean, breathing and breathing and breathing, and then dropping dead on land, on some land we like to mistakenly think of as ours.” He is between cultures, “trying to draw my blurry homeland into a little more focus”; in other words, he is nowhere, “not homeless, per se, necessarily, but unhomed.” Eno’s play is an exploration of this liminal psychic space; his story is all quandary and no conclusions. Sometimes even trying to end a sentence is impossible for Man; words just disappear on his tongue. “I don’t know how to finish that,” he says, in the middle of an anecdote about earlier high times. He pauses, and then, with a small flourish, adds, “Olé!”

This perfectly judged monologue is a demonstration of not knowing, of the slapstick tragedy of uncertainty. By the end of the evening, what have we learned about Man? He has difficulty with his breathing, his swallowing, his jaw. His parents have died (“They brought me into this world, of course, and taught me the difference between right and left”). He wasn’t breast-fed (“So I really didn’t know what to reach for or something”). And during his travels he briefly hooked up with Lisa (“She would’ve been a good person to tremble with”). Eno is a practitioner of the slow take; he mesmerizes the audience by seemingly not allowing his story to go anywhere. Neither the narrator nor his tale has a dramatic trajectory—a word that implies direction and resolution, notions that the play sends
As channelled through Lovett’s nuanced and canny presence, “Title and Deed” does the theatrical business: it is daring within its masquerade of the mundane, spectacular within its minimalism, and hilarious within its display of po-faced bewilderment. It is a clown play that capers at the edge of the abyss. “The fucking world. I’m sorry, but the fucking earth. Time, place, happiness. A person should be able to figure it out. It’s only three things,” Man says. Eno’s joking seems to me a great act of courage: a way of facing lostness and learning to live with it. His voice is unique; his play is stage poetry of a high order. You can’t see the ideas coming in “Title and Deed.” When they arrive—riptide in with a quiet yet startling energy—you don’t quite know how they got there. In this tale’s brilliant telling, it is not the narrator who proves unreliable but life itself. The unspoken message of Eno’s smart, bleak musings seems to be: enjoy the nothingness while you can.

Bisexuality, according to Woody Allen, “immediately doubles your chances for a date on Saturday night.” But, as the British playwright Mike Bartlett’s robust and rollicking “Cock” (vivaciously directed by James Macdonald, at the Duke on 42nd Street) demonstrates, it also doubles your trouble. From bleachers looking down on Miriam Buether’s well-designed small green arena, and with a buzzer sounding at the end of each punishing round, we watch a cockfight of sorts, a seesawing between M and Deed. “Commitment.” John is left isolated in a moment. I just want to appreciate it,” she says, of his eponymous memoir. It’s only three things,” Man says. Eno’s smart, bleak musings seems to be: enjoy the nothingness while you can.

up. “That’s an odd euphemism for the life span, trajectory, but it has the right connotations, the human–cannonball feel at the beginning, the sickening thump at the end,” Man says. “Good morning, world; maybe I should be a veterinarian or an oceanographer; maybe I’ll marry a princess; thump.”

In the course of the evening, the narrator, in his faux-naïf way, talks a lot about language. “Words are all right,” he says. “You say what you want—at the end of the day, they somehow work their magic.” Then, as if to prove the point, he says to the spellbound audience, “Please be seated.” He stares out into the auditorium. No one moves. “See? Thank you,” he says. It’s good vaudeville stuff. Later, producing a metal lunchbox from his satchel as “a little breather,” he says, “Now, this object tells an interesting story.” For a full fifty seconds, he holds the lunchbox in front of him. “Not in words, I guess,” he says finally. Then he opens the lunchbox to show off its emptiness. “Ah. The universe provides,” he concludes. So does Eno, who can make words sink or curve away like a slider. “I have these things, these words I return to,” the narrator says. “The world, women, animals, men, heart defects, disabilities, trying. My themes. The syllables I return and return to. ‘So, you like repeating yourself,’ you say. ‘I like repeating myself,’ I say. Because, you know, who else is going to do it?”

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As with Og in “Finian’s Rainbow,” John’s “heart’s in a pickle, it’s constantly fickle.” He insists on bringing W to a dinner that M cooks and to which M invites his father (Cotter Smith), as a wild card. There is a battle royal; there is also a winner. However, even as the prize is claimed, Bartlett continues to probe his hero’s chronic fear of the word “commitment.” John is left isolated in the center of the arena, hunkered down with one hand on his head, the other over his ear, in a kind of fetal position. Knowing how to choose and how to lose is a prerequisite of adulthood; John, it seems, is doomed to a perpetual adolescence. With its exhilarating contest, “Cock” elevates John into a totem of today’s sexual merry-go-round. He’s not spoiled for choice; he’s spoiled by it.