

# atplay

## ROUND TABLE with JOHN PATRICK SHANLEY, POLLY PEN, and LYNN NOTTAGE

BY PETER HAGAN, PRESIDENT

Dramatists Play Service is very fortunate not just to publish and license the best American playwrights, but also to have four of them sit on our Board of Directors.

The founding charter of the Play Service, back in 1936, called for the Board to be split evenly between playwrights (all members of the Dramatists Guild) and agents. Back then, the star playwrights included Howard Lindsay, George Abbott, and Sidney Howard. Today our stars are Donald Margulies, Polly Pen, Lynn Nottage, and John Patrick Shanley, who have been members of the board ranging from five years (Nottage) to over 20 (Shanley). I asked three of them some questions recently about their experience serving on the Board. (Donald Margulies was away promoting his new movie at the Sundance Festival.)

**What do you see as your role as a playwright member of the Board?**

**Polly Pen:** I hope to be a voice for my fellow writers and colleagues at the Dramatists Guild. I particularly try to bring the perspective of a musical theatre writer whose work lives mostly Off-Broadway and in repertory theatres.

**Lynn Nottage:** [My role is] to ensure that the playwright's voice is an active and engaged part of

the publishing conversation. As a woman of color, I also see my role as one of advocacy; I want to make sure that there's a diversity of voices being published by DPS.

**As time has gone by, have you seen your position as a playwright member change?**

**John Patrick Shanley:** When I first served on the Board, I was skeptical and challenging and, frankly, young. But over time I morphed from opponent to colleague.

**PP:** Ways of thinking about how theatrical work is best accessed are changing rapidly. I've found myself increasingly invigorated by my fellow Board members' pleas to try to stay ahead of things rather than playing catch-up.

**Do you think that the agent members of the Board have a different agenda than the playwrights?**

**PP:** I've always felt that the Board has a unified agenda — but it has often taken a binary approach to realize goals, with agents and playwrights taking turns looking through both telescope and microscope.

**LN:** I do feel that our investment as playwrights is

always going to be slightly different from that of the agents. Our plays are creative extensions of ourselves — we live with them for long periods of time; we keep them close and protected until we

release them into the world. Then we entrust our plays to others for safekeeping; initially agents, and eventually publishing companies like DPS. For better or worse, agents can approach the business of publishing with a certain level of objectivity and distance; however, it's always hard for the playwright to remove passion from the equation. The advantage of having a Board made up of playwrights and agents is that it ensures that the governance consists of equal measures business and passion.

**JPS:** The thing that's struck me over the years about the agents I've served with is

how much they love the theatre and how much bad behavior they've seen. The theatre is a rough beast,



Top-Bottom: Lynn Nottage, Polly Pen, John Patrick Shanley, and Donald Margulies

and these agents have a certain combat-weary look and death-row humor. They also have an almost rabbinical zeal for disputing the fine points of various deals. (When this aspect comes to the fore, the playwrights on the board look quietly bewildered.)

### What would be your advice to aspiring playwrights who want to get their plays published?

**LN:** Play publishing is essential to the life of the play. Look for a publisher that has a roster of playwrights that [you] admire, a commitment to representing new voices, and a strong record of licensing plays to a variety of venues — professional and nonprofessional. Young playwrights often forget that a play can have a vibrant and prosperous life at high schools and colleges.

**PP:** Once you have your work in production, things move so quickly — don't be shy, make sure you remember to invite theatrical publishing companies [to see it].

## EDITOR'S PICKS

By Haleh Roshan Stilwell



**I'M GONNA PRAY FOR YOU SO HARD**  
by Halley Feiffer

Halley Feiffer, daughter of Pulitzer- and Oscar-winning playwright, cartoonist, and screenwriter Jules Feiffer, has written a play about an actress preoccupied with pleasing her famous playwright father. Preconceptions about such a plot from a daughter with a famous father are easily made, but the immensely skilled Halley Feiffer uses those easy judgments for her own hilarious, vicious ends, to turn *I'M GONNA PRAY FOR YOU SO HARD* into something wholly unexpected.

### THE INVISIBLE HAND by Ayad Akhtar

Ayad Akhtar, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for his drama *DISGRACED*, premiered this thriller Off-Broadway to sensational response. As the title suggests,

### Do you have a play which you are particularly happy is published by the Play Service?

**PP:** I remain amazed and cheered that DPS published my musical *EMBARRASMENTS*. This work, written with Laurence Klavan, tells the tale of the novelist Henry James' disastrous and humiliating experience as a playwright. The play has only managed to have one production, but it's a deep favorite of mine, and there it sits in the Catalogue, waiting for someone to discover it.

**LN:** I must say that I was happy when DPS decided to publish my more obscure works

*THE INVISIBLE HAND* examines the power behind global capitalism to create, manipulate, and destroy societies. Nick Bright, an American Citibank employee working for the corporation's



Pakistan arm, is kidnapped by Islamic militants and held for ransom. What seems like a straight forward good-guy/bad-guy dynamic is thrown, though, as Nick

begins to manipulate his kidnapper's intentions, promising them far more lucrative solutions than a one-time flush of cash. The market's hand may not be so invisible after all, and its effects can be far more invasive than the simple exchange of currencies.



**SENSE AND SENSIBILITY**  
adapted by  
Kate Hamill,  
based on  
the novel  
by Jane Austen

Bedlam Company is renowned for taking staid classics and transforming them into a visceral, utterly theatrical experience. *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY*, Jane Austen's Georgian comedy of manners, breathes new life in this invigorating adaptation. Kate Hamill takes Austen's razor social commentary from 1811 and endows her adaptation

such as *LAS MENINAS* and *ONE MORE RIVER TO CROSS*. Hopefully, those plays will have a life beyond the page.

**JPS:** The first play of mine which DPS published was *DANNY AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA*, back in 1984. It's a big day in a playwright's life when his first play is published. F. Andrew Leslie, who was the president of the Play Service back then, asked me if I would like the book jacket to be blue, since the word "blue" was in the title. I said yes, and the jacket has always remained blue. I'm proud to serve this organization.

with a contemporary feminism, sparkling energy, and athletic momentum. *SENSE AND SENSIBILITY* remains a classic for a reason, and Hamill's fresh adaptation encapsulates what makes Austen's novel resonate more than two centuries later.



**PUNK ROCK**  
by Simon Stephens

With his smash Broadway hit *THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME*, Simon Stephens proved adept at narrating the complex inner life of adolescence. *PUNK ROCK*, an earlier play inspired by Stephens' time as a secondary-school teacher, similarly explores the minds of teenagers — to the ultimate, nightmareish end. High school can feel, for the teens inside, like a hermetically-sealed ecosystem, in which private dramas fueled by academic pressure, parental absence or overbearance, and erotic desire can skew daily life into the surreal. The commonplace bullying play is subverted in *PUNK ROCK*, where power dynamics are constantly shifting and every moment is endowed with tense, terrifying potential as to which of these teens will snap first.

*Want more recommendations? Look for our Staff Picks feature on our Facebook page!*

# WILLIAM INGE: REDISCOVERED

BY CRAIG POSPISIL

**Dramatists Play Service is proud to announce that we will be publishing two volumes of previously unpublished short plays by iconic American playwright William Inge: THE APARTMENT COMPLEX and SOMEWHERE IN AMERICA. Here is an excerpt from editor Craig Pospisil's introduction to the upcoming collections.**

In the fall of 2013, I was looking for plays to include in a second volume of Dramatists' Outstanding Short Plays. The agent for the William Inge estate sent me a short play by the late author called THE LOVE DEATH and mentioned that he had more. "Can you send me all of them," I asked. And soon nine more arrived.

Ten unpublished, largely unknown short plays by one of the pillars of 20th century American theater was definitely something exciting to discover, and I became more excited as I read the plays. These are raw works, and I mean that both in terms of the tone of the writing and in terms of the roughness of the plays. But what they may lack in polish, they make up for with the naked emotions Inge brings to the page.

To be completely honest, I wasn't overly familiar with William Inge's plays. I'd seen the movie version of BUS STOP many years ago, and I saw the recent Broadway revival of PICNIC, but I only had a passing familiarity with much of his work. To move forward with editing an anthology of his works, I felt I needed to learn a lot more about Inge and his work. I dipped into the library here at Dramatists Play Service, read through his plays, got a copy of Ralph F. Voss' biography A Life of William Inge: The Strains of Triumph, and gained a much greater appreciation for the man and his writing.

Any wildly successful artist has a period of time when their work is not just well received or popular, but when they seem to tap into something in the zeitgeist so their work transcends the "merely" good and becomes something more. In the 1950s Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and William Inge had each clearly accomplished that in his own way. Inge's successes in this time were enormous. He only really started writing plays in the late 1940s, but four of his first five full-length plays were major Broadway hits. In 1950, COME BACK, LITTLE SHEBA was the first of his plays to be produced on Broadway, and it was only the second play he'd written. SHEBA was followed on Broadway in 1953 by the even more successful PICNIC, which also won Inge the Pulitzer Prize. Two years later, Inge was back on Broadway with BUS STOP, and two years after that came DARK AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS, which was

actually a revised version of his first play, FARTHER OFF FROM HEAVEN. So, really the first four plays he wrote all became hit Broadway plays. That's an amazing run.

But Inge was unable to enjoy his success. He was a gay man in a time when it was virtually impossible to be himself openly. He struggled with depression and alcoholism, spending years in psychoanalysis and at A.A. He clashed with a number of his directors, and a poor review would send him into a tailspin. If Inge couldn't truly be happy when his plays were popular, he was even less able to find peace when the times changed and his run of hits ended. In

reading his play THE LOVE DEATH, I sensed a real truth in the words and the emotions. After learning that he'd killed himself, it's clear that THE LOVE DEATH — and

away many of the emotional barriers and stigmas that went along with them. Inge's plays, therefore, can feel "old-fashioned" or quaint to contemporary audiences. But I think that's a disservice to them and to Inge. These are rich works, and Inge was rarely less than brutally honest in how he wrote about the world as he saw it.

As I considered the unpublished works and four other short plays of Inge's we once published but which were

now out of print, an immediate division was apparent. Many were set in a dark, impersonal apartment complex in large city; others took place in small towns, more reminiscent of the settings of PICNIC or DARK AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS. I

collected seven of the plays together under the title THE APARTMENT COMPLEX, which is an acknowledgement of an unfinished collection called COMPLEX that Inge was

**"These are raw works ... But what they may lack in polish, they make up for with the naked emotions Inge brings to the page."**



indeed several of the short plays he wrote in the mid- and late 1960s — amount to Inge's suicide note.

Arthur Miller's giant themes and Tennessee Williams' delicate, lyrical dialogue have, perhaps, kept their work seen as more vital to our contemporary eyes and ears. Inge's characters live in a world of repressed emotions, especially surrounding sex. They feel things just as deeply, their lives are just as destroyed as the characters in Miller's or Williams' plays, but part of their tragedy is the inability to show it. The social revolutions of the 1960s and the decades since have done a lot to wipe

writing before his death, as well as a grouping of plays which have a strong connection in setting and theme. The second collection I have titled SOMEWHERE IN AMERICA, which feels apropos for a quintessentially Midwestern American playwright, who lived in Independence, St. Louis, New York, and Los Angeles, but who couldn't seem to find a permanent home anywhere.

I hope many of you will read these plays with a new appreciation of William Inge, as I did, and I hope that you will be moved to produce these plays and give them a home.



**DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE**

440 Park Avenue South  
New York, NY 10016

Phone 212-683-8960  
Fax 212-213-1539

www.dramatists.com  
postmaster@dramatists.com

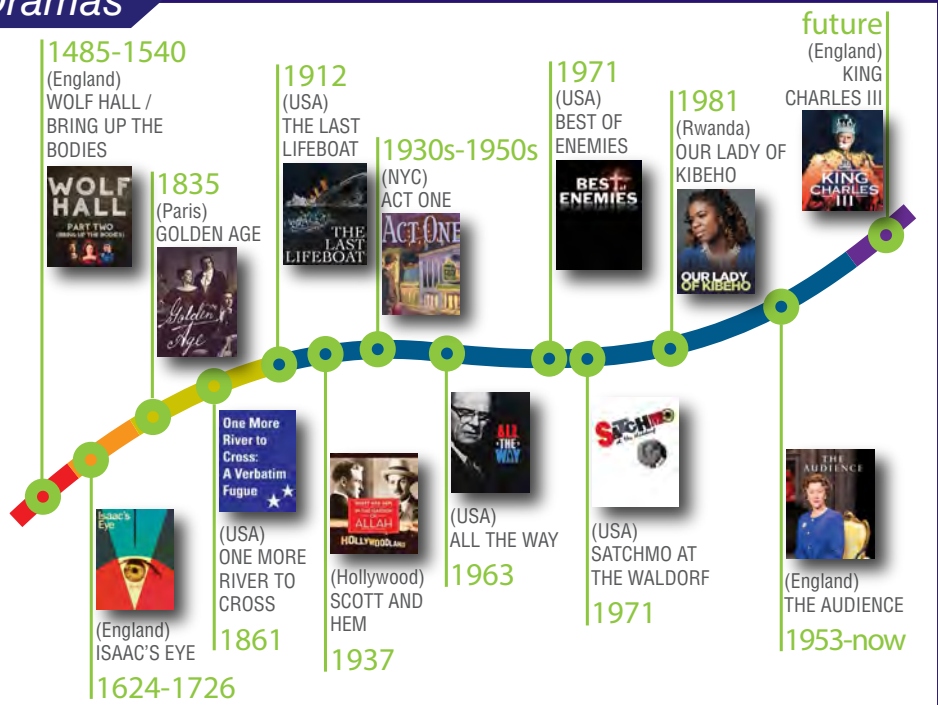
## Place & Time: Historical Dramas

History makes great drama, and the stage is the perfect place to revive history. These new DPS titles present true (or mostly true ...) stories in fascinating, theatrical, and sometimes irreverent ways. If you read them, you just might learn something new, or reconsider what you thought you knew about historical moments and momentous historical figures.

These plays are stories about the rulers of the world — kings and queens of England, presidents of the United States — and about people who changed arts and culture completely — Isaac Newton, Louis Armstrong, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, Moss Hart.

But they also focus on people you've never heard of. History is made by citizens striving for change as much as by heads of state; a member of the KKK and a black civil rights activist can find common ground and change a Southern town's experience of race. Three schoolgirls in Africa can have a vision of beauty and of bloodbath that enraptures the world. Slaves telling their stories in their own words lends a voice to American history long absent from textbooks.

Each of these plays is a new perspective on triumphant, violent, chaotic, joyous moments in history, the ultimate celebration of humanity's progress.



## DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.

### OFFICERS:

PETER HAGAN, President  
MARY HARDEN, Vice President  
PATRICK HEROLD, Secretary  
DAVID MOORE, Treasurer

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

PETER HAGAN	DONALD MARGULIES
MARY HARDEN	LYNN NOTTAGE
PATRICK HEROLD	POLLY PEN
JOYCE KETAY	JOHN PATRICK SHANLEY
JONATHAN LOMMA	

### DPS STAFF:

**PRESIDENT'S OFFICE**  
Peter Hagan — President  
Melissa Jean Cooper

**CUSTOMER SERVICE**  
Jessica Gist — Customer Service Manager  
Alec Barniskis, Cathalena Bogle, Alexa Criscitiello, Hong Dang, Mai Perez

**EDITORIAL**  
Emily Kadish — Managing Editor  
Haleh Roshan Stilwell — Managing Editor

**FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION**  
David Moore — VP, Finance and Administration  
George Amar, Thuy Nguyen, Clare Patterson, Bianca Rodriguez

**IT AND DESIGN**  
Timothy Mutzel — Director  
Britannie Bond, Alexandra Lau

**NONPROFESSIONAL RIGHTS**  
Craig Pospisil — Director  
Danna Call, Jackie Cookfair

**PROFESSIONAL RIGHTS**  
Robert Lewis Vaughan — Director  
Michael Bloom, Kevin Hale

**ROYALTIES AND OPERATIONS**  
Tamra Feifer — Director  
Joel Rudzinski, Siu Samantha Yuen

ATPLAY © 2015 Dramatists Play Service, Inc.  
Britannie Bond, Alexandra Lau, Timothy Mutzel,  
Haleh Roshan Stilwell



Switch to the digital edition of the  
DPS Newsletter & Catalogue  
Email us: subscribe@dramatists.com