

atplay

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EDUCATION ISSUE

Professor Paula Vogel

an interview by Robert Lewis Vaughan

ROBERT VAUGHAN. You're widely considered one of the finest teachers of playwriting in the country, Paula, and we publish a number of your former students.

PAULA VOGEL. Let's see: Nilo Cruz, John C. Russell, Sarah Ruhl and Deborah Baley Brevoort soon, Alice Tuan, and undergraduate writers I've worked with include Lynn Nottage and many many more at theatres near you.

ROBERT. And we have a number of other distinguished Brown playwrights in our catalogue — Alfred Uhry, Kia Corthron, Tom McCormack, Tim Blake Nelson, Christopher Shinn, Gina Gionfriddo and John Belluso. I'm sure I'm leaving somebody out, and if so, I apologize. Can you tell us what the boot camp and the bake-off are?

PAULA. The bake-off I do every year at Brown and also around the world — in Brazil with a translator; in Prague; in London with RSC, Bush and National writers; in Los Angeles at A.S.K. Foundation. Basically, we collect a group of writers and assign "rules" — e.g., you must write a play with a front porch, kitchen sink and a withheld secret. Or you must write a neoclassical play: unity of time, place and action, and a conflict between love and honor. (I love

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NEWPLAYS

99 HISTORIES by Julia Cho

An unplanned pregnancy leads Eunice to confront the ghosts of a difficult past in this lyrical exploration of memory and the unbreakable bond between mother and child.

ADAM BAUM AND THE JEW MOVIE

by Daniel Goldfarb

In 1946, on the night of his son's bar mitzvah, movie mogul Sam Baum is forced to confront both Hollywood notions of Jewish identity and his own.

AN ALMOST HOLY PICTURE

by Heather McDonald, freely drawn from Pamela Ward's story "The Hairy Little Girl"

Samuel Gentle has heard God's call three times, but he struggles to comprehend its mystery and his own rage and bewilderment at loss.

ANNA IN THE TROPICS by Nilo Cruz

Winner of the 2003 Pulitzer Prize. Tolstoy, the tropics and the American dream prove a volatile combination in a 1929 Cuban-American cigar factory when a new lector arrives with *Anna Karenina* to entertain the female workers.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF LOSS by Julia Cho

In this meditation on loss and the abiding power of the unknowable, a family recounts their memories of the summer when one of their own — a young boy — disappeared.

BEAUTIFUL CHILD by Nicky Silver

A cynically married couple is drawn together when their son, an art teacher, confesses that he has fallen in love with one of his eight-year-old male students.

BOY by Julia Jordan

A teenage boy with a gift for storytelling preys upon an urban family, seducing them with his yarns, one of which is horrific and true.

BRIGHT IDEAS by Eric Coble

Genevra and Joshua's son is next on the waiting list to get into the Bright Ideas Early Childhood Development Academy, and they are only one dinner party away from the ultimate success as parents — the right pre-school.

BROOKLYN BOY by Donald Margulies

The rich, funny and moving story of a novelist who's finally hit the big time with a bestselling book. But when his father's health brings him back to the Brooklyn of his childhood, he's forced to reconcile the boy he was with the man he has become.

BUG by Tracy Letts

The relationship between a divorced waitress with a fondness for cocaine and isolation and a soft-spoken Gulf War drifter festers into paranoia, conspiracy theories and twisted psychological motives in a squalid Oklahoma City motel room.

CAVEDWELLER by Kate Moira Ryan, based on the novel by Dorothy Allison

When her rock-star boyfriend is killed, Delia quits as lead singer of Mud Dog to return to rural Georgia, where she must face the husband and daughters she abandoned fourteen years earlier.

THE EINSTEIN PROJECT

by Paul D'Andrea and Jon Klein

A marvelous theatrical journey into one of the most fascinating minds of the twentieth century.

to envision Corneille and Racine meeting for a late night espresso in a small Parisian cafe and double-daring each other: If you write *Phedre*, I'll write *Phedre*.) Often, I ask writers to tell me what it is really like to live in London or Los Angeles. And then we vote, and the three elements with the most votes must go into the play. (The London bake-off: street toughs, fog and a moment of shame. The Prague bake-off: nightmares, bridges and a scene in which three languages are spoken simultaneously. The LA bake-off: motels, traffic jams and synthetic body parts.) After the "rules" are designed, then all writers must write the play within forty-eight hours. No exceptions. Sleep and meals and walking the dog come out of the allotted time. Then we get together, and read



the bake-offs in a marathon, with food and wine. It doesn't matter about page length; it's not about completing the play. Nilo Cruz came in with 110 pages, which became *Dancing on Her Knees*; Debbie Baley Brevoort did a brilliant ten pages in the same bake-off. The boot camp I do at Brown and elsewhere. We gather, hopefully for a week, sometimes just for a day, and each day we do short plays on different theatrical elements: plot, character, language and plasticity. Then after we've "limbered up," we end with a bake-off. I do them because I think playwriting is a collective writing; I do them because we have to give ourselves permission to play; I do them to create a circle of writers rather than have us write in isolation. I do them because I believe that circles rise faster. And they're fun, and I do them because, selfishly, I learn something new each time I do them.

ROBERT. You and I had a conversation some years ago about one of your students. He was conflicted about his life/career choice — wanted to write but was heading for law school. If I remember correctly, you persuaded him to give the writing career a go. It seems to me that you have a very strong opinion about people going after what they truly desire. Can you tell us why that's important at the high school/college age?

PAULA. Ah, you're asking me for a short version of my two-bottle-of-wine talk. In brief, I think we have to follow our love, follow our joy. What's the worst that can happen? You spend ten years pursuing writing, sharing cheap bottles of wine and all-night talks with struggling artists. In ten or twenty years, you realize you've spent all-night talks with the leading great artists of your day, and you can afford a better bottle of wine. You might go back to law school in your thirties. But you will never regret those all-night talks. I also

tell young writers that they are the only ones who can write the particular playworlds that they carry inside their heads. If they write the plays, it may transform the way I look at the world. But only they can write those plays. And those writers who feel that they must go to law school or medical school will always be artists, and we need to remember the doctor who wrote by the name of Chekhov; we never stop being artists, and it's simply a matter of restructuring our participation in the arts.

ROBERT. Some people say you can't teach writing. Is a writer born or made and where do you fit in?

PAULA. We are all writers. We are all born writers. Writing is innate; being an artist is human. Those who become artists overcome self-censorship and follow their pleasure through sheer force of will. The question as a workshop guide is how might I help in reducing censorship and increasing the pleasure in the craft? And I guess I feel I don't teach; I learn. I share my pleasure in the exploration of the voices around me; I strive to help the conversation. But I know that my graduate workshops are actually taught by the participants, and I facilitate the conversation.

ROBERT. You've said that you are seriously depressed by the almost nonexistent support the government is giving to the arts these days. As a playwright, an educator and an arts advocate, you're very vocal about building support. Tell our readers what they need to be doing in their own schools and lives to help.

PAULA. Every child is given a baseball, a football, a basketball at a very early age in every school. And so we learn as Americans that each time we watch sports, athletes like Manny Ramirez or Michael Jordan or Tom Brady "speak" for us. We are virtual athletes through the imagination; our bodies remember. If we can make sure that all children are given paint brushes, a space for movement and rehearsal, improv, acting, guitars, the arts will speak for us again and will become a spiritual daily bread. The arts budgets are the first thing cut from K-12 curriculum as if the arts are luxuries. We must, as adults in our communities, insist that the arts are essential. They give children personal skills, community building skills, group skills and teach empathy. The arts teach conflict resolution. The arts teach us about what it feels like to be in someone else's skin. The arts are crucial in any democracy.

ROBERT. When you're sending your "chicks" out of the "nest," what do you tell them to expect, and what words of encouragement do you send them away with?

PAULA. First, I ask them if we remembered to sign the contract where I get ten percent ... just kidding. I am right now sending out yet another incredible group of writers: Kristin Newbom, Jennifer Haley and Jonathan Cenicerio. I tell them it's not over and that our dialogue will last another twenty years. I tell them to keep in touch with me and each other. And, in fact, I will this week be meeting with ex-students who graduated a year ago, three years ago and twenty years ago. We're in the same circle.

ROBERT. You've worked with countless theatre companies across the country and around the world. I know also that you've

Nature vs. Nurture: Are Playwrights Born or Matriculated?

by Craig Pospisil

New York University's Department of Dramatic Writing turns out perhaps more than its fair share of notable playwrights, from last year's Pulitzer Prize winner, Doug Wright, to Kenneth Lonergan and Neil LaBute, plus many more who may not yet be widely known but are pursuing successful careers in the theatre and in film. I received my master's degree from NYU as well, and as the Play Service was getting the point of view of two well-known playwright-teachers for this newsletter, I thought it would be interesting to get reactions from the other end of the spectrum.

I carried out an online roundtable with Julia Cho (99 Histories, The Architecture of Loss) Jessica Goldberg (Refuge, Stuck), Daniel Goldfarb (Modern Orthodox, Sarah, Sarah), David Grimm (Kit Marlowe, Sheridan or, Schooled in Scandal) and Doug Wright (I am My Own Wife, Quills), five DPS authors who attended NYU, and asked for their thoughts on the program and studying playwriting.

CRAIG POSPISIL. About a year out of college, I realized that I was a writer, not an actor, and decided I wanted to learn more about the craft of writing. I knew I'd write more if I had a professor saying, "Turn in the next scene by Monday." What made you decide to attend a graduate program in playwriting, and what about NYU appealed to you?

DOUG WRIGHT. I knew if I went to graduate school, I would get housing in the heart of Manhattan. So that provided potent incentive.

DAVID GRIMM. For several years after completing my undergraduate education, I was working a full-time job and writing at night. I decided that I had to make a commitment to my writing and that going to grad school would be the first serious step in that direction.

JESSICA GOLDBERG. I wanted to live in the city so I went to NYU for undergrad. I thought I wanted to write fiction, but when I discovered dramatic writing I didn't want to leave. At the time NYU offered a one-year master's for students who had been in their undergraduate program. I leapt at the opportunity. A few years later I was working full time in all sorts of jobs. I was desperate to get back into an environment where I could focus on my writing again. I was very lucky to get into Juilliard.

DANIEL GOLDFARB. Well, I had gone to NYU Dramatic Writing as an undergraduate and loved it. I also loved New York. I wanted to stay and keep writing and learning and having deadlines and surrounding myself with writers.

JULIA CHO. I had been an English major in college and had very little experience in theatre and knew almost no theatre artists. A graduate writing program seemed like a good way to get a handle on the basics of writing plays as well as to gain an instant theatre community. I applied to NYU because of its location. I was

so new to theatre that I didn't realize there was such a thing as regional theatres. At the time, I just figured if I wanted to do theatre, then New York was where I had to go.

CRAIG. I liked the fact that NYU had as many classes in screenwriting as playwriting. I looked at Yale, which seemed more focused on plays, and UCLA, which was more about screenplays. NYU's dual focus appealed to me. What did you like, or not like, about your experience at NYU?

JESSICA. Access! Access to plays, to writers, to discussion. We had all kinds of inspiring guests at NYU — Larry Kramer, Anna Deavere Smith, Arthur Miller, to name a few.

DANIEL. I did my graduate year at NYU simultaneously with my second year at the Playwrights Program at Juilliard. They are both wonderful programs and very different. What's great about NYU is that you have an opportunity to study with a wide range of instructors that have different teaching styles and approaches to drama.

DOUG. I loved selfishly devoting two years of my life to a very rarefied craft, in the happy company of people who fervently believed that the theatre is a life-or-death affair. When you suffer from delusions like that, it's nice to have them buttressed by the folks around you.

CRAIG. Was there any area you found particularly strong, or not, at the program?

DAVID. When I attended NYU, the program was still relatively young and had not yet gone through the major changes it has in the past few years. Focus then was very much on the page, without any real concern for the performative or practical aspect of plays as living, breathing theatre. The strongest aspect of the program lay in its screenwriting component, an aspect which has benefited me greatly over the years.

JULIA. I thought one strength was that there was a good deal of flexibility. I was able to take classes outside of the department to round out my theatre education, and I loved the energy on the floor. There was always so much going on. The flip side of that, though, is that it was possible to get lost in the shuffle. Some students who were really talented seemed to slip through the cracks or just fly completely under the department's radar. But I guess that's the truth of any graduate program: You have to be focused and get out of it what you want. No one's going to hold your hand.

DANIEL. I think the fact that you have to study playwriting and screenwriting is what makes NYU different from any other writing program in the country. It's practical. And it also shows some of the universals in storytelling. It allows screenwriters to maybe explore their voice more than they might have, and playwrights to really examine structure. Ultimately, forcing writers to do both makes them better writers in both mediums.

CRAIG. I found some of my best teachers were those I studied screenwriting with. Maybe because

NEWPLAYS

EXPECTING ISABEL by Lisa Loomer
Miranda and Nick take an "Alice in Wonderland-esque" journey through the booming baby business, negotiating the fertility trade, adoption industry and in-laws as they try to have a baby — by any means necessary.

EXITS AND ENTRANCES by Athol Fugard
The dynamic story of the relationship between a young playwright on the threshold of his career and an aging actor who has reached the end of his.

FRAME 312 by Keith Reddin
With her family gathered for her birthday, a suburban housewife will finally expose a secret of the Kennedy assassination that she has kept buried for thirty years.

HANNAH AND MARTIN by Kate Fodor
A lacerating dramatic portrait of the affair between the philosopher Martin Heidegger and his most famous student, Hannah Arendt.

I AM MY OWN WIFE by Doug Wright
Winner of the 2004 Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award. The fascinating tale of Charlotte von Mahlsdorf, a real-life German transvestite who managed to survive both the Nazi onslaught and the repressive East German Communist regime.

INTIMATE APPAREL by Lynn Nottage
Winner of the 2004 Drama Critics Circle and Outer Critics Circle Awards. A turn-of-the-century-black seamstress uses her gifted hands to fashion her dreams in an era when the cut of one's dress and the color of one's skin determined the course of one's life.

THE JOURNALS OF MIHAIL SEBASTIAN by David Auburn
In the decadent, politically explosive Bucharest of the 1930s and 40s, a young writer struggles to maintain his career, integrity and Jewish identity, even as his closest friends ally themselves with Fascism.

LIVING OUT by Lisa Loomer
The story of the complicated relationship between a Salvadoran nanny and the Anglo lawyer she works for.

THE LEFT HAND SINGING by Barbara Lebow
Amidst the idealism and violence of Freedom Summer in 1964, three college students vanish without a trace.

THE LONG CHRISTMAS RIDE HOME by Paula Vogel
Past, present and future collide on a snowy Christmas Eve for a troubled family of five in this gorgeous "puppet play with actors."

MAN FROM NEBRASKA by Tracy Letts
A luxury sedan, a church pew and visits to a nursing home form the comfortable round of Ken Carpenter's daily life — until he awakens to find that he no longer believes in God.

MATCH by Stephen Belber
An interview with a successful dancer and choreographer leads Mike and Lisa Davis on a journey of self-discovery that will change their lives forever.

NEWPLAYS

THE MISER by Molière, translated and adapted by James Magruder

A bold and accessible translation of this classic French farce, spiced with timeless burlesque and delicious double entendres.

THE MOONLIGHT ROOM by Tristine Skyler

A dark tale of urban adolescence and family life that examines the idea of “at risk” youth and the potential for risk within your own family.

MR. CHARLES, CURRENTLY OF PALM BEACH by Paul Rudnick

Watch as the joyously, fiercely flamboyant, politically incorrect Mr. Charles — with his hunky young “companion,” Shane — confronts every hot-button topic, from gay marriage to the history of gay theater on his late-night cable talk show.

MRS. BOB CRATCHIT’S WILD CHRISTMAS BINGE by Christopher Durang

Dickens’ classic tale of hope and redemption is turned squarely on its head in this uproariously zany and affectionate parody by one of theatre’s great comic masters.

THE MYSTERY PLAYS

by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa

Two interrelated and haunted one acts that wrestle with the mysteries of death, the after-life, religion, faith and forgiveness.

THE NIGHT HERON by Jez Butterworth

A tragicomic fantasy that probes the depths of friendship and the human condition.

THE O’CONNOR GIRLS by Katie Forgette

When the quiet family patriarch, Tom O’Connor, passes away, his family makes some startling discoveries while sifting through his personal effects in this warm and wonderfully old-fashioned play.

THE OLDEST PROFESSION by Paula Vogel

As Reagan enters the White House, five aging practitioners of the oldest profession face a diminishing clientele, increased competition and aching joints.

ORANGE FLOWER WATER by Craig Wright

Depicts the painfully intense real-time unraveling of two marriages, incited by an adulterous affair between long-time platonic friends.

THE PEOPLE’S VIOLIN by Charlie Varon

The discovery of a mysterious violin prompts a documentary filmmaker to delve into his father’s past, where he discovers hidden chapters that assault his notions of identity, tribe and self.

PONIES by Mike Batistick

In a seedy Lower East Side off-track betting establishment, a Croatian and a Nigerian immigrant discover that no matter what part of the world you come from, America can be a dangerous place.

PRIVATE JOKES, PUBLIC PLACES

by Oren Safdie

A hilarious satire on academia, intellectual pretension and the failure of postmodernist culture inside the contemporary world of architecture.

screenwriting was (or is) considered to be so much more about structure and craft than plays. Were there any professors who particularly helped or influenced you?

DANIEL. There are a wide range of instructors at NYU, with different writing styles, teaching styles and aesthetics. Elizabeth Diggs was my first writing instructor and probably the most influential. She’s tough, she honest, she’s amazing. I was lucky to study with Tony Kushner when he was there, and he was warm, brilliant and truly inspiring.

JESSICA. Martin Epstein and Liz Diggs are two teachers that had profound effects on me. Sure, there were teachers I clashed with, but I think that kind of tension is good when you’re just starting to discover your voice. For instance, you get a teacher who says, “Plot, it’s all about plot,” and this forces you to say, “No, actually, you know what? That’s not what it’s about for me.” It forces you to own/identify your aesthetic.

DOUG. Some of the professors were absolutely extraordinary — estimable professional writers like Terrence McNally, Michael Weller and Wendy Wasserstein. I especially enjoyed Martin Epstein; he had a scrupulous sense of structure, and a cunning, dry humor that brought welcome levity to the rigors of his class.

JULIA. It’s a very human faculty. Some were wonderful, some were better at writing than teaching, some were inspiring, some had bad semesters — it was the whole range. The ones who really loved teaching were great, though.

DAVID. The biggest influence in terms of my growth as a writer came from the other students in the program. There were some amazingly gifted writers studying there.

CRAIG. *I felt I learned a lot from fellow students too. There were the classes where we had to critique each other’s work, and that forced you to concentrate on the nuts and bolts and evaluate each script on its own terms. Was there anything that you learned from going to graduate school that you might not have learned if you hadn’t or that might have taken you longer to discover?*

JULIA. The biggest lesson I learned was that not writing is writing. It was the first time in my life that everything I did was oriented around writing, and it almost drove me crazy. I thought I had to be productive 100% of the time. But you quickly learn that it’s actually counterproductive to live for writing. You just have to live — read, go to museums, see friends — and that will feed the writing.

DANIEL. Graduate school puts you in a room with people who share your passion, which is invaluable. I love writers, and getting to spend so much time with them is only a positive thing. It also imposes discipline and structure, which can be heaven for a writer.

DOUG. I think you can learn craft, and classes facilitate that. In a grad school environment, you’re also required to write. Deadlines, I find, can be downright inspirational. When you’re adrift in the world — trying to wedge your writing between temping or waiting tables — it’s far more difficult. And the best way to grow as a writer is by actually sitting down and doing it. I was also forced to read Aristotle’s *Poetics* — still the best “how to book” in our field — and I learned how to

format a screenplay!

CRAIG. *Can you think of a couple specific things you learned in graduate school that stay with you as you write today?*

JESSICA. There are three things I learned from Martin Epstein that I always think about when I’m working on a play — and, of course, I will probably grossly misquote him. 1) The difference between conversation and dialogue. 2) What is the weather doing in your play? And 3) Drama begins when ritual is broken.

JULIA. I think being at NYU was for me about trying to find my voice. I think I learned more about craft at Juilliard because I was more ready for it then; that was when I started to think about things like the mechanics of scenes, developing conflict, following a character’s journey, etc.

CRAIG. *For me, it’s still applying the craft and sense of structure I learned to those first raw, impulsive drafts of a play. To be able to examine my own writing the way I did the writing of my classmates, and see where it’s going right and where I need to keep working. Did studying playwriting change your own writing style or your approach to playwriting?*

JESSICA. I wasn’t exposed to a lot of modern drama as kid, so studying playwriting opened a big door for me. It was exciting to discover how many different forms of theatre there were. Then I go to sit in class and talk about it all with a bunch of talented people who are all full of the same passion.

JULIA. I don’t feel like I “studied” playwriting in grad school. I just wrote more than I had ever written in my entire life, and it was only at the very end of all that writing that I started to understand what my voice might be.

DANIEL. I became drawn to the simplicity of a lot of good writing. My work became more natural, less cinematic. Fewer locations, fewer characters.

CRAIG. *Did going to NYU help you professionally in any way?*

DOUG. While my profs were supportive and challenging in equal measure, no one ever “gave me a leg up” by sending my scripts to theatres or passing my name along to impressive agents. I don’t think it’s fair to expect that; ultimately, you have to make your own way in the world. A compelling and original manuscript is still the only effective way of getting a foothold in the field, and they have a funny way of getting noticed.

JULIA. It did, but in ways that may not seem obvious. It didn’t pluck me from obscurity and give me a production, an agent and a mentor. But what it did do was set a lot of those things in motion; or to put it another way, it provided some of the soil from which those things could spring.

CRAIG. *Any final thoughts?*

DOUG. Graduate writing programs help to give the profession some small measure of credibility. You don’t need a degree to become an interesting or unique playwright, but it’s nice to have something to hang on the wall of your garret. And when you’re at a dinner party or visiting family on the holidays, it’s nice to have a degree. When they ask what you do in the world, and you say “I’m a playwright,” at least you have a little paper work to back up the assertion! ■

Seven Sure-fire Exercises to Lead Your Inner Playwright to Inspiration

by Christopher Durang

Beloved author and Juilliard don Christopher Durang agreed to share with AT PLAY some of his classroom material for playwriting students. For this glimpse into the great teacher's process, AT PLAY expresses its gratitude.

Can writing be taught? No, it can't. Go away. Well, truthfully, it can't be taught, but I do believe it can be "mentored" — that one can assist the beginning writer to strengthen and hone his or her innate talents.

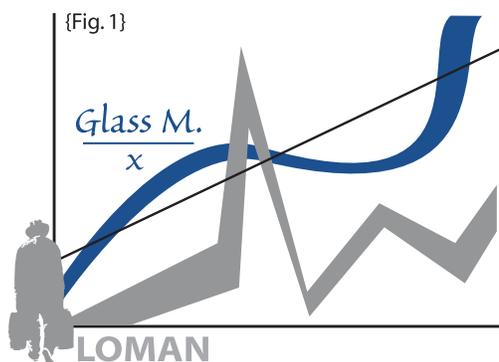
Students seem to love the idea of exercises. Exercises are almost like taking a doctor's prescription and filling it at the pharmacy. They suggest that through games and tricks, you can find out how to write a good play. I find myself distrustful of them; I believe you can learn a lot by analyzing plays you like, and by listening to responses to plays you've written, but at a certain point you have to go with your writer's intuition.

However, I'm willing to believe I could be wrong on this; there is more than one way to skin a cat. (What a terrible phrase. I love animals. There is more than one way to peel a carrot. You can use a carrot peeler, or you can use a screwdriver and keep jabbing at it.)

I was given an exercise my first year at Yale School of Drama from my wonderful playwriting teacher Howard Stein; and I ended up writing a whole play from it. The exercise was to write a scene in which a man and a woman on a train argue about the man's smoking a cigar. My train for a while was simultaneously a train and a boat, and eventually became the *Titanic*, which in my surreal version kept NOT sinking, while all the angry and sick-o characters started to long for it to sink. So I used the exercise as a kind of Rorschach test to unlock my unconscious.

And because I've been teaching for a while (at Juilliard since 1993, co-teaching with my esteemed friend, playwright Marsha Norman), I've decided I should come up with my own exercises, just because students seem to like them. It's self-preservation as a teacher on my part. Here they are:

- ✓ Copy by hand the first scene of Tennessee Williams' *Streetcar Named Desire*. Then copy the second scene. Copy every scene of the play by hand. Then redo, this time leaving out the vowel "o." When this is completed, do the same thing with Tennessee Williams' *Summer and Smoke*. Or if you prefer *Eccentricities of a Nightingale*. Keep doing this exercise with all of Williams' plays. When you become fatigued, give up writing.
- ✓ Write a scene in which two characters exchange dialogue that has literally nothing to do with what the other person has said. Go on and on and on, without the two characters ever relating to anything the other has said. The audience will find this very annoying, but certain theatre companies may like it.
- ✓ Make Quaker's Instant Oatmeal, either the cinnamon brand or perhaps the maple syrup brand. Return phone calls. Take a nap.
- ✓ Choose a play that you like. Analyze what makes it work. Do big graphs, and have lines that represent rising action, and then lines that represent falling action. Come up with a mathematical equation that somehow represents Linda Loman in *Death of a Salesman*. Come up with one to represent Amanda Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie*. Divide the two numbers into each other; have x represent the play you wish to write. Then write that play. Send it out. Wait for a response.
- ✓ Think and think and think and think. All creativity comes from thinking really hard. Choose an important theme. Man's inhumanity to man is usually a good one. Write a play in which several characters torture another character. Have it go on for hours. Make it really painful to sit through. Feel proud of yourself that you've made the world look at cruelty.
- ✓ Choose a famous artist. Make your play seem important by this choice. Picasso might be good. Hemingway, if that's not too passé. Maybe Hemingway and Picasso and an Old Man in a boat in the sea. They go fishing. They discuss the intricacies of bait. A Young Man comes floating out in a little dinghy and says he is collecting for *The Evening Star*. Picasso and Hemingway discover they are homosexual and try to seduce him, but then kill him instead. They use his body for bait. Then Picasso paints a masterpiece, and Hemingway writes *The Sun Also Rises*.
- ✓ Stop doing exercises, and see if you can find out what topics in the world engage you. See if those topics trigger any creative impulses in you. If they do, write that play. When the draft is done, show it to people you trust, get some feedback, and rewrite a couple of times. Have a reading with actors, see how it sounds. With luck, it will be a good play. ■



Christopher Durang's most recent play is the uproarious holiday spectacular *MRS. BOB CRATCHIT'S WILD CHRISTMAS BINGE*, a musical sendup of that perennial December event, Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" onstage. *MRS. BOB* is available from the Play Service at www.dramatists.com.

NEWPLAYS

PRYMATE by Mark Medoff

Two researchers battle over a uniquely gifted gorilla in this provocative drama that begs the ethical question, in the arenas of science and love, who has the right to do what to whom?

RECENT TRAGIC EVENTS by Craig Wright

It is September 12th, 2001, and Waverly and her blind date, Andrew, have discovered that they are connected by a succession of bizarre coincidences.

THE REST OF THE NIGHT

by Robert Lewis Vaughan

A young mother in rural Texas, determined to save her troubled marriage, faces temptation and turmoil when the new man in town comes calling — for her.

THE RETREAT FROM MOSCOW

by William Nicholson

The devastating portrait of a young man struggling to understand both of his parents and to survive the emotional hurricane of the dissolution of their marriage.

ROULETTE by Paul Weitz

Family dysfunction is raised to the nth degree in this black comedy that splits suburbia wide open.

SARAH, SARAH by Daniel Goldfarb

Sarah Grosberg does not think eighteen-year-old Rochelle is good enough for her son, Artie, but then there is a lot Sarah doesn't know about her son and will soon find out.

SAILOR'S SONG by John Patrick Shanley

A cynical man and a true believer battle over beautiful women and the power of love in this extravagantly romantic seaside story decorated with dance.

SAY YOU LOVE SATAN

by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa

When Andrew, an affable graduate student, meets a handsome stranger named Jack, the two immediately start dating. So what if Jack has the mark of the beast — 666 — burned into his forehead?

THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL by Richard Brinsley Sheridan, adapted for contemporary audiences by Lewis John Carlino

This classic of Restoration farce with its fantastically labyrinthine plot has been expertly updated for modern audiences.

SEA OF TRANQUILITY by Howard Korder

The Greens sell the house to start over in the American West but discover that along with clear skies and open spaces come cultural warfare, runaway kids, guests who won't leave and a past that never really disappears.

THE SERVANT OF TWO MASTERS, translated and adapted by Jeffrey Hatcher and Paolo Emilio Landi

Traditional Italian commedia and postmodern vaudeville converge in this new version of Goldoni's classic, which pits the madcap servant Truffaldino against masters, mistresses, lovers, lawyers and twenty-seven plates of meatballs.

THE STENDHAL SYNDROME

by Terrence McNally

Two beautiful and funny short plays about art and humankind that together make for a sensational evening.

NEWPLAYS

THE STORY by Tracey Scott Wilson

An ambitious black newspaper reporter goes against her editor to investigate a murder and finds the best story ... but at what cost?

ST. SCARLET by Julia Jordan

With their mother recently deceased and her body unable to be removed from the house because of a Minnesota blizzard, three siblings declare war.

SUITCASE, OR THOSE THAT RESEMBLE FLIES FROM A DISTANCE

by Melissa James Gibson

The boyfriends of two Ph.D. candidates try to talk their way into the women's apartments. Dissertations go nowhere; objects get found; boyfriends won't get lost — love figures in there somewhere.

TAKE ME OUT by Richard Greenberg

Winner of the 2003 Tony Award. The star center fielder of the New York Empire is so convinced of his popularity that he assumes his casual announcement that he's gay will be readily accepted. It isn't.

TATJANA IN COLOR by Julia Jordan

In 1912, the painter Egon Schiele was accused of raping a twelve-year-old girl whom he never painted. This play tells the story from her point of view.

THICKER THAN WATER: ONE-ACT PLAYS BY THE MEMBERS OF YOUNGBLOOD

A collection of provocative one acts from some of New York's most up-and-coming young playwrights.

THOM PAIN (BASED ON NOTHING) by Will Eno

An ordinary man muses on childhood, yearning, disappointment and loss as he catalogues with wry wit the eternal agonies of the human condition.

TOMMY J & SALLY by Mark Medoff

Thomas Jefferson's relationship with his black slave Sally Hemings is echoed in this contemporary interracial love story.

THE TRICKY PART by Martin Moran

An established New York actor transforms the true story of an affair he had as a child with an older man into a riveting, often funny and always surprising journey through desire and human trespass.

VALHALLA by Paul Rudnick

Hilarity reigns in this epic adventure that connects mad King Ludwig II of Bavaria with a wild Texas teenager of the 1940s in a unified field theory of gayness.

THE VIOLET HOUR by Richard Greenberg

With only enough capital to put out one book, publisher John Pace Seaver finds himself besieged by two authors and a machine of mysterious provenance that is spewing out stacks of typewritten pages.

WHERE DO WE LIVE by Christopher Shinn

A haunting play that probes the lives of young New Yorkers struggling against the darkness of 9/11.

LESSONS FROM THE HEARTLAND:

A Mississippi High School Production of *The Laramie Project*

by Isaac Oliver

I have been on the phone with Mississippi all morning. I am trying to find the city of Hattiesburg, the fourth largest in the state, with a population just slight of 50,000. Hattiesburg is a city that recently produced Moisés Kaufman and The Tectonic Theater Project's play *The Laramie Project*. The play dramatizes the 1998 kidnapping, beating and subsequent death of Matthew Shepard, a gay student at the University of Wyoming. *The Laramie Project* boasts a collection of approximately 500 productions nationwide this year, varying from regional to community theatre to high-school auditoriums.

It was Hattiesburg High School's production that caught my attention because, initially, it seemed an unlikely place for such a progressive production. "We are always on the lookout for new, innovative material," high-school theatre director Michael Marks tells me when I finally reach him. We saw *Laramie* and said, "We have to do this." *Laramie* was first presented by the Hattiesburg High School Forensics Department at the University of Southern Mississippi in 2001. The buzz was so audible that the production went to The Mississippi Theatre Association State Drama Festival in 2002, where it won top honors in the high-school division. Consequently, it went on to represent Mississippi in the same year on a national level at the 53rd Annual Southeastern Theatre Conference, where it was named first runner-up. Performances were requested by local churches and community groups. Afterwards, there were pamphlets in the lobby, enabling further education and discussion.

"Creating an arena for dialogue is the first step to healing," Marks notes. "I didn't imagine the impact it would have. We had students coming up to us in tears, saying, 'No one has ever made it possible to talk about this.' This play is a great teaching tool for the common person who wants to learn more." The local youth were not the only ones being swayed by *Laramie's* message. A committee of parents, administrators, superintendents, alumni and local business people who must give the nod to theatre productions each year unanimously approved *Laramie*. "This is really a different show for us," Marks explains. "We held our collective breath." The nervousness is justified; twenty years earlier, when Hattiesburg wanted to produce *Damn Yankees*, the church threatened boycott over the title. Later, when Marks and company tried to take a production of William Finn's gay-themed musical *Falsettos* to the state competition, the religious right took the production team to court and tried to prove that they were teaching pornography to children.

So does the wave of support for *Laramie* signal an environment in which a production of *Falsettos* would now be possible? "Who knows

what would happen," wonders Marks. "We live in very conservative times now. There is a certain nuance required when doing progressive theatre in small towns. We approached *Laramie* from the avenue of safe schools: No one can argue that schools should be safe for everyone. I think it was the perspective we chose that let the production flourish." Flourish is exactly what this production has done. Now, Hattiesburg High School has been selected by the American High School Theatre Festival to be one of twenty schools to represent the United States at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in Scotland. How fascinating that a production from a place unheard of by many has made such an impact.

Can it be that *Laramie* is at its most realized in a small town? Is it felt more deeply by those who know what the stars must have looked like in Laramie that night, as opposed to those of us who cannot see stars, thanks to the urban blur? Living in New York, we assume that there is something we understand innately about theatre that people living elsewhere do not. But it looks like this assumption has been trumped, and rightly so. In fact, there might even



be something they understand that we do not. Hattiesburg has truly acknowledged its responsibility as a public educator and that theatre is indisputably a public vehicle for change. "We do quality theatre, and we honestly want to explore these avenues," Marks states. "Theatre is about teaching values and dealing with what is. There is still work to do. Has anything changed in Wyoming? Has any hate crime legislation been passed?" It is Hattiesburg, in fact, that sees the direct effects of its efforts — in mourning teenagers suddenly given a voice, in approval committees suddenly raising no objections, in the common person suddenly made uncommon. ■

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Dramatists Play Service licenses hundreds of professional productions each year. For your convenience, here's a schedule of some of them. You can access an even more comprehensive list of professional and select nonprofessional productions by visiting www.dramatists.com and viewing PAGE TO STAGE.

ARKANSAS

STEEL MAGNOLIAS by Robert Harling.
Arkansas Repertory Theatre. Little Rock. September.

CALIFORNIA

DEATHTRAP by Ira Levin. Willows Theatre Company. Concord. September.
INTIMATE APPAREL by Lynn Nottage. TheatreWorks. Palo Alto. August.
INVENTING VAN GOGH by Steven Dietz. PCPA Theaterfest. Santa Maria. July.
THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF NICHOLAS NICKLEBY PARTS I AND II by David Edgar, from the novel by Charles Dickens. California Shakespeare Theater. Berkeley. July and August.
OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS by Joe DiPietro. McCoy Rigby Entertainment. Fullerton. September.
SYLVIA by A.R. Gurney. Sierra Repertory Theatre. Sonora. September.
TWO SISTERS AND A PIANO by Nilo Cruz. Ensemble Theatre. Santa Barbara. September.

COLORADO

INTIMATE APPAREL by Lynn Nottage. Arvada Center. Arvada. September.
LOBBY HERO by Kenneth Lonergan. Lizard Head Theatre Company. Telluride/Aspen. July.
THE SYRINGA TREE by Pamela Gien. Lizard Head Theatre Company. Telluride/Aspen. July.

CONNECTICUT

THE EXONERATED by Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen. Theatreworks. Hartford. September.

DELAWARE

THE NERD by Larry Shue. Delaware Theatre Company. Wilmington. September.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

CROWNS by Regina Taylor. Arena Stage. Washington. July.

FLORIDA

THE EXONERATED by Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen. American Stage Company. St. Petersburg. July.
I AM MY OWN WIFE by Doug Wright. American Stage Company. St. Petersburg. July.
SIGHT UNSEEN by Donald Margulies. Banyan Theatre Company. Sarasota. August.
TWO ROOMS by Lee Blessing. Banyan Theatre Company. Sarasota. July.

GEORGIA

FLYIN' WEST by Pearl Cleage. Alliance Theatre Company. Atlanta. July. True Colors Theatre Company. Atlanta. September.
THE NERD by Larry Shue. Aurora Theatre. Duluth. September.

ILLINOIS

BLUE/ORANGE by Joe Penhall. New American Theater. Rockford. August.
THE GIFTS OF THE MAGI music by Randy Courts, lyrics by Mark St. Germain and Randy Courts. Illinois Theatre Center. Park Forest. September.
SHERLOCK'S LAST CASE by Charles Marowitz. Drury Lane Oakbrook Theatre. Oakbrook Terrace. July.
THE UNEASY CHAIR by Evan Smith. Writers' Theatre. Glencoe. September.

IOWA

VISITING MR. GREEN by Jeff Baron. Old Creamery Theatre Company. Amana. September.

KANSAS

THE FOREIGNER by Larry Shue. Great Plains Theatre Festival. Abilene. August.

KENTUCKY

THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN by Martin McDonagh. Horse Cave Theatre. Horse Cave. July.

MAINE

ALL IN THE TIMING, SIX ONE-ACT COMEDIES by David Ives. Theater at Monmouth. Monmouth. August.
THE GRAPES OF WRATH by Frank Galati, from the novel by John Steinbeck. Theater at Monmouth. Monmouth. July.
THE GUYS by Anne Nelson. Acadia Repertory. Mt. Desert. July.
LA BÊTE by David Hirson. Theater at Monmouth. Monmouth. July.
SCOTLAND ROAD by Jeffrey Hatcher. Acadia Repertory. Mt. Desert. August.

MARYLAND

ONE FOR THE ROAD by Harold Pinter. Potomac Theatre Project. Olney. July.

MASSACHUSETTS

AFTER-PLAY by Anne Meara. Pioneer Valley Summer Theatre. Easthampton. July.
DRIVING MISS DAISY by Alfred Uhry. Pioneer Valley Summer Theatre. Easthampton. July.
THE NERD by Larry Shue. Pioneer Valley Summer Theatre. Easthampton. August.
THE RETREAT FROM MOSCOW by William Nicholson. Miniature Theatre. Chester. July.

MICHIGAN

CROWNS by Regina Taylor. Plowshares Theatre Company. Detroit. July.
MATCH by Stephen Belber. Planet Ant Theatre. Hamtranc. September.
TAKE ME OUT by Richard Greenberg. Performance Network. Ann Arbor. July.

MINNESOTA

AN ALMOST HOLY PICTURE by Heather McDonald, freely drawn from Pamela Ward's story "The Hairy Little Girl." Pillsbury House Theatre. Minneapolis. September.
INTIMATE APPAREL by Lynn Nottage. Guthrie Theater. Minneapolis. September.
LAST TRAIN TO NIBROC by Arlene Hutton. Paul Bunyan Playhouse. Bemidji. July.

MISSOURI

DRIVING MISS DAISY by Alfred Uhry. Arrow Rock Lyceum Theatre. Arrow Rock. September.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

DEATHTRAP by Ira Levin. Winnepesaukee Playhouse. Laconia. July.
THE NERD by Larry Shue. Winnepesaukee Playhouse. Laconia. August.
PROOF by David Auburn. Winnepesaukee Playhouse. Laconia. August.
TARTUFFE by Molière, translated into English verse by Richard Wilbur. Barnstormers Theatre. Tamworth. August.

NEW JERSEY

BETRAYAL by Harold Pinter. Emerge Theater Company. New Brunswick. September.

NEW YORK

THE COCKTAIL HOUR by A.R. Gurney. Kavinoky Theatre. Buffalo. September.
DEBBIE DOES DALLAS adapted by Erica Schmidt, composed by Andrew Sherman, conceived by Susan L. Schwartz. Parker Russel Productions. New York. July.
THE FOREIGNER by Larry Shue. Leatherstocking Theatre Company. Cooperstown. July.
HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH text by John Cameron Mitchell, music and lyrics by Stephen Trask. Our Brother's Keeper. Albany. July.
JESUS HOPPED THE 'A' TRAIN by Stephen Adly Guirgis. StageWorks. Hudson. September.
NICE PEOPLE DANCING TO GOOD COUNTRY MUSIC by Lee Blessing. Bristol Valley Productions. Naples. August.
OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS by Joe DiPietro. Cortland Repertory Theatre. Cortland. August.
SISTER MARY IGNATIUS EXPLAINS IT ALL FOR YOU by Christopher Durang. Leatherstocking Theatre Company. Cooperstown. August.

NORTH CAROLINA

BOSTON MARRIAGE by David Mamet. Highland Repertory Theatre. Asheville. August.
DRIVING MISS DAISY by Alfred Uhry. Highlands Playhouse. Highlands. August.
THE SYRINGA TREE by Pamela Gien. North Carolina Stage Company. Asheville. September.

OHIO

ANNA IN THE TROPICS by Nilo Cruz. Ensemble Theatre. Cleveland Heights. September.
THE BOYS NEXT DOOR by Tom Griffin. Porthouse Theatre Company. Kent. July.
TOPDOG/UNDERDOG by Suzan-Lori Parks. Beck Center for the Arts. Lakewood. September.

OREGON

ENCHANTED APRIL by Matthew Barber, from the novel by Elizabeth von Arnim. Artists Repertory Theatre. Portland. September.

PENNSYLVANIA

'ART' by Yasmina Reza, translated by Christopher Hampton. Centre for the Arts on Main. Quakertown. September.
CRIMES OF THE HEART by Beth Henley. Millbrook Playhouse. Mill Hall. July.
FULLY COMMITTED by Becky Mode. Mountain Playhouse. Jennerstown. September.
I AM MY OWN WIFE by Doug Wright. Philadelphia Theatre Company. Philadelphia. September.
INCORRUPTIBLE by Michael Hollinger. Mountain Playhouse. Jennerstown. July.
MIXED EMOTIONS by Richard Baer. Totem Pole Playhouse. Fayetteville. August.
PROOF by David Auburn. Totem Pole Playhouse. Fayetteville. August.

SOUTH CAROLINA

BOSTON MARRIAGE by David Mamet. Warehouse Theatre. Greenville. September.

TENNESSEE

BLUE/ORANGE by Joe Penhall. Playhouse on the Square. Memphis. July.
CROWNS by Regina Taylor. Playhouse on the Square. Memphis. August.

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THE FOREIGNER by Larry Shue. Gaslight Dinner Theatre. Dickson. August.
HANK WILLIAMS: LOST HIGHWAY by Randal Myler and Mark Harelik. Clarence Brown Theatre Company. Knoxville. August.
THE RETREAT FROM MOSCOW by William Nicholson. Playhouse on the Square. Memphis. September.

TEXAS

BAT BOY: THE MUSICAL story and book by Keythe Farley and Brian Flemming, music and lyrics by Laurence O'Keefe. Magik Theatre. San Antonio. July.
THE BOYS NEXT DOOR by Tom Griffin. Granbury Opera House. Granbury. September.
FABULATION OR THE RE-EDUCATION OF UNDINE by Lynn Nottage. Ensemble Theatre. Houston. September.
KIMBERLY AKIMBO by David Lindsay-Abair. Plano Repertory Theatre. Plano. September.
A LESSON BEFORE DYING by Romulus Linney, based on the novel by Ernest J. Gaines. Ensemble Theatre. Houston. September.

UTAH

THE FOREIGNER by Larry Shue. Utah Shakespearean Festival. Cedar City. September.

WASHINGTON

FULLY COMMITTED by Becky Mode. Merc Playhouse. Twisp. August.
THE GOLDEN AGE by A.R. Gurney. Actors Repertory Theatre. Spokane. August.
THE GRAPES OF WRATH by Frank Galati, from the novel by John Steinbeck. Intiman Theatre Company. Seattle. September.
INTIMATE APPAREL by Lynn Nottage. Intiman Theatre Company. Seattle. August.
THE TRICKY PART by Martin Moran. Intiman Theatre Company. Seattle. July.

WISCONSIN

RED HERRING by Michael Hollinger. Peninsula Players Theatre Foundation. Fish Creek. July. Next Act Theatre Company. Milwaukee. September.
THE UNEASY CHAIR by Evan Smith. Peninsula Players Theatre Foundation. Fish Creek. August.

CANADA

THE ART OF REMEMBERING by Adina L. Ruskin. Winnipeg Jewish Theatre. Winnipeg, Manitoba. July.
FOOL FOR LOVE by Sam Shepard. Soupepper Theatre Company. Toronto, Ontario. August.
FULLY COMMITTED by Becky Mode. Mayfair Productions. Vaughan, Ontario. September.
OLEANNA by David Mamet. Ground Zero Theatre. Calgary, Alberta. August.
OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS by Joe DiPietro. Upper Canada Playhouse. Morrisburg, Ontario. July.
SHERLOCK'S LAST CASE by Charles Marowitz. Showboat Festival Theatre. Port Colborne, Ontario. July.

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been working with the boards of some theatre companies in order to educate them on the importance of nurturing new plays. Can you tell us a little about this?

PAULA. I'm now doing short versions of the boot camp and bake-offs; I want to thank them for the gift of production and give them a "lagniappe" — I love the joy when they discover this other side of each other in our workshop. I think as artists we need to make our process accessible to board members, to funders and to subscribers, and I'd love to see every artist who comes to work at a company offer some form of workshop. The more our audiences and donors think of themselves as participants, the more I think we all flourish.

ROBERT. You're raising money for arts programs at Brown; in fact, you're seriously gung ho about doing this. Are you afraid we're losing young artists?

PAULA. I'm basically teaching because I want to put my time where my mouth is (pardon that malapropism!) ... I am petrified we are losing a new generation. I want to give the Brown writers three years of writing (right now we offer two years of subsidy) so that

they have a bit more time to stockpile their scripts. I want to help young artists outside of Brown know about the resources such as grants and colonies that are there. I wish I got a commission from every copy of *Dramatists Sourcebook* by TCG I've peddled in the past twenty years. I don't want to conceive of living in this country where there are no arts, and we are in danger of that, particularly under the Republican Right's persistent twenty-year attack on the arts, from Reagan to George W. If we don't act, we will be left with studio films and television that basically provide what I call gladiatorial entertainment: a New Rome with entertainment to train gladiators for the Empire.

ROBERT. Did you have a teacher, a mentor — anyone — that you credit for putting you where you are as an artist and a writer?

PAULA. My gods are John Guare, Irene Fornes and Caryl Churchill. I've met two out of three and treasure them all. They've mentored me on the page; they're mentored me by example. My late beloved English teacher at Bryn Mawr College, Adrienne Lockhart, was the first one to really insist that

I become a writer (this was backstage at my second musical, *The Beautiful Quasimodo*, my adaptation of *Hunchback of Notre Dame* that I wrote freshman year). And I give credit to Bert States, who was my graduate advisor at Cornell. And lastly, my late brother, Carl, who fed me a constant diet of books and basically taught me table manners.

ROBERT. I know how supportive you are to young/aspiring writers. As a professor at Brown — or even in the professional world, is there anything a former student or a young writer has said to you that just turned you into a puddle and you'll remember as long as you live? What was it if you can tell us?

PAULA. Oh, too much to tell! But let me tell you of a question I was given at the last playwriting workshop I did at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta for Brown alums and interested board members. A man brought his seven-year-old son, Jason, to participate. And in the midst of the session he asked me, "What's the best way to get people to feel emotional? Books, poems, films or plays?" Seven years old! I want to read his plays in another ten years. ■