



THE NEW SINCERITY

BY **ALENA SMITH**



DRAMATISTS
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To Christine

The world premiere of THE NEW SINCERITY was presented by Bay Street Theater (Scott Schwartz, Artistic Director; Tracy Mitchell, Executive Director), on May 26, 2015. It was directed by Bob Balaban; the set design was by Beowulf Boritt and Alexis Distler; the lighting design was by Mike Billings; the costume design was by Maria Hooper; the sound design was by Brandon Wolcott; and the production stage manager was Jennifer Wheeler Kahn. The cast was as follows:

ROSE Justine Lupe
BENJAMIN Teddy Bergman
DJANGO Peter Mark Kendall
NATASHA Elvy Yost

CHARACTERS

ROSE, 29. An idealist.

BENJAMIN, 32. A cynic.

DJANGO, 23. An anarchist.

NATASHA, 22. An intern.

PLACE

New York, present day.

TIME

Fall to winter.

As time passes, the scene headings are projected onstage
("September"; "The Next Day").

The movement imagined in this play is similar, but not identical, to the activities known as Occupy Wall Street that took place in New York City in 2011.

*“She’d mistaken us for figures of import, radicals of influence,
though we knew we were not.”*

— Sarah Resnick
“Rumors,” *n+1*, *Occupy!* #2

THE NEW SINCERITY

September

In the office of the literary journal Asymptote, where a party to celebrate the release of the newest issue of the journal has just wrapped up. Minutes ago the space was full of people; now there are only two left. The music is still playing.

Rose, a freelance writer, in dark jeans and a tank top, leans halfway out into the hallway, waving some goodbyes to the dregs of the gathering.

Benjamin, the editor, lazes on the couch in a t-shirt, nursing an expensive bottle of whiskey.

Rose dances a little, then turns off the music.

ROSE. Oh my gosh. That was a *great party!*

BENJAMIN. “Oh my gosh”? Do you really say that?

ROSE. I can’t believe how many people showed up.

BENJAMIN. Yeah, I had to turn away some of the interns.

ROSE. You did not.

BENJAMIN. Yeah I did. Natasha and them. Nobody under twenty-five, I said. No little hipsters.

ROSE. Ha. Like *you’d* turn away a cute girl.

BENJAMIN. Rose, what are you implying? Remember, I’m engaged to be married.

ROSE. Oh, yes, I know. (*Beat.*) Well — congratulations.

BENJAMIN. On what?

ROSE. On the new *issue*, of the journal. I think it’s really great. And it’s such an honor for me, to be included.

BENJAMIN. Oh, give me a break. Your essay was the only good thing in this issue. People are raving about it.

ROSE. People are raving about my ten-thousand-word analysis of the Triangle Shirtwaist fire?

BENJAMIN. At least your piece was *serious*. Everything else was total fluff.

ROSE. I don't know if that's true ...

BENJAMIN. This is a literary journal, Rose. Not a fashion magazine. Not a blog. We shouldn't even have *pictures* in our journal — it should be pure, serious writing from cover to cover. The whole intention when we started this thing was to create the next *Dissent*, the next *Harper's*, a *Partisan Review* for the post-millennium. But *unfortunately*, I wasn't born with a trust fund, so I had to partner up with a guy who carries a two-thousand-dollar handbag and thinks the best kind of article involves a line-by-line analysis of the new Rihanna.

ROSE. I don't have a problem with populism.

BENJAMIN. Gideon is not a populist, Rose. Gideon bought a townhouse in London tonight. Through an *app*. On his *phone*.

ROSE. Oh my gosh.

BENJAMIN. As long as Gideon's in charge of this journal, it will be silly and decadent. An essay about *Gossip Girl*?! I never okayed that! I'm completely anti-writing about television.

ROSE. But you wrote that thing about *The Wire*.

BENJAMIN. Rose. *The Wire* is different.

ROSE. I still haven't seen it.

BENJAMIN. Are you *kidding* me? What have you been doing with your life?!

ROSE. Well, let's see. Getting a PhD at Columbia? Writing a dissertation on romantic irony in Stendhal?

BENJAMIN. You need to go home and watch all five seasons tonight.

ROSE. Okay, I'll do that. Speaking of — I should go face the subway.

BENJAMIN. Don't leave.

ROSE. Okay.

BENJAMIN. Come sit on the couch with me.

ROSE. Oh — okay. (*She sits.*)

BENJAMIN. I'm drunk.

ROSE. I can see that.

BENJAMIN. I'm drunk and my fiancée's in Berlin. (*Beat.*)

ROSE. When does Sadie come back?

BENJAMIN. Christmas.

ROSE. Oh. That's a while.

BENJAMIN. Yeah. Fulbrights last a year.

ROSE. And when she comes back —

BENJAMIN. Well, we're on Sadie's clock here. Sadie wants to get married. Sadie wants to have a baby. And we're the same age, thirty-two, but see — for a woman, that means panic. Me, however, I have time. I could break up with Sadie in two, three years; start dating some girl in her twenties, then hell, break up with that one, start again. One of the interns. Whatever. So, you see, we're the same age? But she's too old for me. Don't you think that's fucked up?

ROSE. That's — horrifying.

BENJAMIN. That's why she's so insecure. I hold all the cards, basically.

ROSE. But — are you in love with her?

BENJAMIN. "In love"? Jesus. Look — I'm skeptical about love. At a certain point, you just have to face it — "falling in love" is not what relationships are about.

ROSE. I don't believe that!

BENJAMIN. What do you know? You're single.

ROSE. Yeah — because I haven't found the right person yet!

BENJAMIN. Oh my god, the "right person"? You really believe in that?

ROSE. I believe I can meet someone and feel something really — deep.

BENJAMIN. Deep. Okay.

ROSE. Like — passionate. Like I can't live without this person. Like everything about me becomes *more* real and *more* alive — with them.

BENJAMIN. That sounds slightly exhausting. (*Beat.*) Anyway, that must be hard.

ROSE. What's hard?

BENJAMIN. Being single. As a woman. In New York.

ROSE. Oh, yes. Yes of course. I cry myself to sleep every night.

BENJAMIN. How old are you?

ROSE. Twenty-nine.

BENJAMIN. Okay. You have time. Just barely.

ROSE. Phew! What a relief, to hear you say that.

BENJAMIN. Well, I wouldn't get too relaxed. But you have a little bit of time.

ROSE. It must be hard for *you*. Being engaged.

BENJAMIN. How so?

ROSE. No more hookups. No more one-night-stands.

BENJAMIN. Oh, I get around.

ROSE. Benjamin — you should be careful.

BENJAMIN. What are you talking about?

ROSE. I mean I *saw* you tonight. You were flirting with all those interns.

BENJAMIN. Sadie knows I flirt with interns. She doesn't care.

ROSE. She doesn't?

BENJAMIN. Anyway — this is exactly the problem I have with the atmosphere around here. Why are people gossiping about me and Sadie? Don't we have better things to talk about? Shouldn't we be talking about — oh, I don't know — a *living wage*? Structural inequality? Even a discussion of Derrida would be preferable. That's why I like you, Rose.

ROSE. Me? I never talk about Derrida —

BENJAMIN. No. But you're serious. You're completely sincere.

ROSE. Well — gosh. Thanks. (*Beat.*) I'm sorry you had a bad time tonight.

BENJAMIN. Oh, who cares. It's all temporary. As soon as Sadie gets back from Berlin, we're moving out of this office. And we're taking Gideon's name off the masthead.

ROSE. But Gideon is your co-founder — and he pays for everything —

BENJAMIN. Yeah, but we won't need him anymore. Not when we have the apartment.

ROSE. What apartment?

BENJAMIN. Sadie's great-uncle, Herman. May he rest in peace.

ROSE. You guys are like — *inheriting* an apartment?

BENJAMIN. Yup. Soon as Sadie gets back from Berlin, and we make this shit legal, it's ours. Herman said so in his will. Man, his grandkids were pissed — but Sadie's his favorite, you know. Or if she wasn't the favorite before, she sure shot right up in the rankings once she wrote a whole book about how good old Herm was her hero. If only he could have lived to see the book published. But he did get a look at the galleys, before he departed. Sadie made sure of that.

ROSE. Smart.

BENJAMIN. Yeah, so, that's the plan. City Hall, then pack up our shit, move to West Tenth Street. Take all this with us. Hopefully have the new office set up by next issue.

ROSE. Wow. It's a real uprising.

BENJAMIN. More like a velvet divorce. Gideon can go off and start a rap dictionary or whatever the hell he wants. Meanwhile,

we'll rebrand this journal. Again. Everything we publish will be thoughtful. Deep. Political. And serious.

ROSE. Well — I hope I can still write things for you. At that point.

BENJAMIN. Why wouldn't you? You're very serious. The whole reason I published your essay in this issue is that your writing embodies the quality I want for *Asymptote*.

ROSE. Yeah, but. I think Sadie hates me.

BENJAMIN. Hates you? That's absurd. Sadie likes everyone.

ROSE. Yeah, but Natasha said — oh, forget it.

BENJAMIN. Natasha? My intern, Natasha?

ROSE. Yeah, the intern. Never mind.

BENJAMIN. No, please — tell me what the twenty-somethings are tweeting behind my back.

ROSE. Okay, fine. It's ridiculous — but Natasha said that Sadie — is jealous. Of me.

BENJAMIN. Oh — well, yeah. She is.

ROSE. But *why*?! She's the one who got a hundred-*thousand* dollar book deal — not to mention a Fulbright! I'm barely scraping by!

BENJAMIN. Yeah, but you have something she doesn't.

ROSE. What do I have?

BENJAMIN. You're a good writer.

ROSE. You — Benjamin! That's awful!

BENJAMIN. Speaking as a man who has edited you both, it's just a fact. You're better.

ROSE. You just — you shouldn't *say things like that*. About your fiancée.

BENJAMIN. I know, right? What's this town coming to.

ROSE. And besides — I heard her book is *amazing*. Everybody who's read drafts of it says that it's great.

BENJAMIN. Yeah, well. She had help with that.

ROSE. What do you mean?

BENJAMIN. I pretty much ghost-wrote it for her.

ROSE. Stop.

BENJAMIN. It's true. Sadie can't write. She can self-promote. She can *operate*. But her actual voice is just — mediocre.

ROSE. Benjamin —

BENJAMIN. What, Rose.

ROSE. I just — I can't believe the stuff you say to me sometimes. (*An awkward pause.*) Anyway — I should say thank you.

BENJAMIN. For what?

THE NEW SINCERITY

by Alena Smith

2M, 2W

Rose Spencer has just achieved the ultimate young-intellectual's dream: becoming a staff writer for a prestigious New York literary/criticism journal. And her editor, the smart and attractively cynical Benjamin, is definitely flirting with her — while also respecting her writing. With the sudden rise of an Occupy-style political movement in a public park right outside the journal's offices, Rose sees a way to participate in what may be the defining activist movement for her generation, but too quickly she must learn to recognize the difference between sincere action and skillful self-promotion.

"Splendid ... Both entertaining and thought-provoking, this 85-minute zinger about millennials — a group loosely defined as those born after 1980 — trying to find meaning in their lives is ... a comedy with a poignant edge."

—**The New York Times**

"Clever and edgy, Smith's satiric dialogue, with references to our Internet-altered ethos, evokes movements of the past, making the '60s anti-war protests look antique, its ideals meeting just as hollow an end."

—**The Huffington Post**

"A biting, brutally honest comedy about the blurred line between believing in something and jumping on the bandwagon, THE NEW SINCERITY is a daring new work ..."

—**DansPapers.com**

Also by Alena Smith
THE BAD GUYS

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