

The Best American Short Plays 2007–2008

edited with an introduction by
Barbara Parisi

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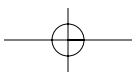
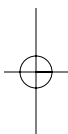
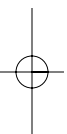
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To William and Gloria Parisi,
Rochelle Martinsen,
and my husband—
Michael Ronald Pasternack



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Daniel Gallant

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foreword

all the things

you are

by John Guare

I entered a one-act play contest my freshman year in college and won second prize. It was a spoof called *She Conks to Stupor*. Hey, it was a start. It gave me the experience of working with actors and hearing actual live-audience response.

The one-act play as skit.

I kept writing one-act sketches for the yearly musical and one-acts for the contest but kept dreaming of the elusive, grown-up Holy Grail of writing the full-length play.

In 1960, I saw Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*. I walked around for hours after seeing it, trying to decipher its power. What was this one-act saying to me?

How could a one-act have so much power?

I knew about one-acts like Strindberg's *The Stronger* or Pirandello's *Man with a Flower in His Mouth* or Arrabal's *Picnic on the Battlefield*, even Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, which shared the bill with Albee's, but those plays were European. Part of the terror of *The Zoo Story* for me was it had been written by an American only ten years older than me.

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I went to Yale School of Drama to learn how to write the three-act play.

In my second year, I discovered Thornton Wilder's one-act plays. *The Happy Journey from Trenton to Camden* so knocked me out that I wrote my version of it and called it *The Happy Journey from 58th Street and Ninth Avenue to 59th Street and Eighth Avenue*. It was an incident in the life of an old man and woman as he walked her from their tenement in Manhattan to the hospital on the next block. We would realize this would be the last time they would be together. Our professor said I had written a believable relationship with real emotional impact. The Nobel Prize!

I expanded that playlet into a one-act called *Something I'll Tell You Tuesday*, which we performed at Yale to great response. I played one of the parts myself and had the exhilarating experience of walking around within the mechanics of my own play.

When I was twenty-five, I got into the Air Force Reserves, a six-month gig, a few days before being drafted into the Army for two years. Safe! Here I was in Texas, a wise guy New Yorker with a masters from Yale. Everybody else was in their teens from the South and had barely finished high school.

The drill sergeant screamed at me during some exercise: "You! What do you do when you're not taking up my time?"

"I am a playwright, *Sir!*"

"What's that?" he sneered at top volume.

"I write plays. *Sir!*"

"Like what?" He screamed.

I said, proudly, "*Something I'll Tell You Tuesday.*"

He screamed, "I want to know *now!*"

I screamed the title back at him.

And it went on.

If he didn't like me before, he really hated me now.

I had to repeat a week of basic training.

The one-act play as suffering for one's art.

I got back to New York. Edward Albee had started a playwrights unit in a theatre on Van Dam Street. I expanded *Something I'll Tell You Tuesday* into a one-act called *To Wally Pantoni, We Leave a Credenza* and presented it there.

The one-act play as workhorse/stopgap until you figure out how to write that full-length play.

Wally Pantoni was done on an NBC Sunday afternoon program called *Experiment in Television*.

One act-play as TV drama.

But I ached to write the full-length play. I wrote the first act of *House of Blue Leaves* for the 1966 Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, which went over well. Except that everyone asked where's the second act? I knew what the events should be, but I didn't have the craft to write a second and third act with lots of people onstage. I only had the craft to write that first act.

I kept writing one-acts.

In 1971, I had finally finished my three-act play (act two was in two scenes); *House of Blue Leaves* was in rehearsal.

I realized in previews that Bananas, the female lead, needed a scene in the second act in order to complete the play. What could it be? I remembered a moment in *Wally Pantoni* in which the wife told her husband since she could no longer feel, she needed to be in a place where she could remember feeling. It fit.

The one-act play as safety deposit box for a rainy day.

The years went by. I only wrote one-acts when asked to by groups like the Acting Company to adapt a Chekhov short story, "A Joke," into *The Talking Dog*, a Shakespeare sonnet into *The General of Hot Desire*.

The Signature Theater is a New York theatre that devotes a season to the work of one playwright by presenting two or three revivals of that playwright's work plus one new play.

In 1998–1999, I was the lucky recipient. The last slot would be two parts of a trilogy I had written called *Lydie Breeze* in rotating rep. (I was now writing trilogies!)

A couple of months before opening, the theatre realized it did not have the resources to pull off this adventurous undertaking. Did I have a new play I could substitute?

I had been thinking of *Wally Pantoni* and that old couple on their last day together, and wondering what they were like when they were young and on their first outing?

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I wrote a one-act based on painful family lore: the time my mother brought my father to New Hampshire to meet her family. She asked my father one favor: not to give her uncle Martin a drink. My father did and uncle Martin was dead by Sunday. My imagining of that event would be act one. I edited *Wally Pantoni* into its act two.

Young actors would play the couple in act one, old actors in act two.

I called the play *Lake Hollywood*.

We opened in time.

The one-act play as lifesaver.

The Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis then produced *Lake Hollywood*. My exhilaration at having this sudden new play inspired me to do rewrites, allowing the same actors to play the young couple as well as the old. I had a field day.

Dramatists Play Service published that version. In 2008, Amy Wright, a remarkably gifted actress and director who had been in the original Signature production, told me she felt my exuberant Minneapolis rewrites had disfigured my play. The only thing she liked was that the same actors played both the young and old couple. She asked my permission to present the Signature version of *Lake Hollywood* at the HB Studio for a brief run. I said yes. The evening had a real effect. Was she right? Had I disfigured my play?

The one-act play—keeping it simple?

Or did I have two versions of the same play? Take your pick? I still don't know the answer to this question.

I wanted to show you the many faces of a single one-act play and raise a question: What is a one-act? Is the one-act play only a stepchild to the superior adult two-, three-act/full-length play?

Weren't the first Greek plays one-acts? Doesn't a one-act mean one action? How will Oedipus find out who is the cause of the plague? How will Medea revenge herself on her husband who has abandoned her?

The one-act as the original soul of tragedy?

Edward Albee said a full-length play is simply the correct length the play must be to do its job. His play *The Sandbox* takes less than fifteen minutes to achieve its task of being an emotional knockout.

Something has proliferated in the last few decades—the ten-minute play. Beware of that: it can be a form (a form-let?) designed to give producers the illusion they're producing new work. At Yale, where I now teach playwriting, Paula Vogel, head of the playwriting program, encourages the playwrights to write as much material as they can—work only ten minutes in length—to discover what interests them, to generate and amass as much new material for themselves as they can to develop in the future.

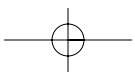
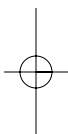
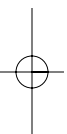
The only poison in today's world of the one-act is the model of the sitcom. The playwright writes twenty-two minutes of snappy wisecracks and dialogue and calls that a one-act play.

No.

Go to Thornton Wilder's one-acts and learn from his experimentations in style. Look at one-acts of Tennessee Williams, such as *Lady of Larkspur Lotion*, and see Blanche DuBois struggling to be born. Look at Sophocles.

The one-act play as bottomless well.

John Guare was awarded the Gold Medal in Drama by the American Academy of Arts and Letters for his Obie, New York Drama Critics' Circle, and Tony-winning plays which include *House of Blue Leaves*, *Six Degrees of Separation*, *Landscape of the Body*, *A Few Stout Individuals*, and *Lydie Breeze*. His screenplay for *Atlantic City* received an Oscar nomination. He teaches playwriting at the Yale School of Drama.



introduction

by Barbara Parisi

This is my fourth edition as editor of Best American Short Plays, which has been annual since 1937. As in the past, it has been a complex and rewarding journey for me selecting the plays that are part of this edition. Previously in my introductions, I have explored the concept of writing one-act plays and themes and plots of one-act plays. In this edition, I have decided to focus on the importance of characterization and the development of character in the process of creating a one-act play.

What is character? In his textbook *Playwriting in Process*, written in 1997, Michael Wright asks:

Why should you look at character before plot? Partly because it's my opinion that we're writing weakish characters these days, and partly because character is at the center of theatre. . . . A play without any characters—a piece with vacuum cleaners as characters, for example—is still defined by character because we understand it by measuring the absence of humans.

Characterization is a process that reveals the personality of the character. The book *Playwright's Process—Learning the Craft from Today's Leading Dramatists*, written in 1997 by Buzz McLaughlin, quotes playwright Terrance McNally: “If you're not really interested in those people, then it's a play no one's going to be very interested in.”

To create characters that an audience can relate to, you must make sure that each character has a distinct voice, that their speech patterns and language reflect their backgrounds and personalities, that their dialogue sounds natural, and that their behavior reveals thoughts, motivations, and attitudes in refined and subtle ways. An audience does not always recognize realistic characterizations immediately. Audiences relate to characters they can see themselves in and can sympathize with. Characters need to have the same problems the rest of us experience. Heroes, heroines, and villains need to have recognizable attitudes. A character's name can mean a lot to telling a strong story. To understand characters you look at their backgrounds, their physical and mental qualities, their dress, hobbies and occupations, and their relationships with other characters.

In the *Playwright's Process*, quoted playwright Edward Albee believes the writer of a play who is developing characters “must invent the life of their characters before the play and after the play, and they should know how a character is going to respond in a situation that will not be in the play.” To create characters you must know their past and future lives. As a playwright, you enter the characters' world and make the audience understand it.

In an Internet article written in 1991, entitled “You and Your Characters,” James Patrick Kelly states:

It seems there are all kinds of characters: developing characters, static characters, round characters, flat characters, cardboard characters (oh, are there cardboard characters!), viewpoint characters, sympathetic characters, unsympathetic characters, stock characters, confidantes, foils, spear-carriers, narrators, protagonists, antagonists.

Kelly goes on to say, “A short story is not a play. The playwright can enter the consciousness of his characters only with great difficulty.” A playwright must enter the consciousness of their characters.

In *The Playwriting Seminars, 1995–2007*, Internet articles by Richard Toscan explore the playwright's craft in depth. In “Taking Characters Seriously,” Toscan states:

If you can't take your characters seriously, you'll end up making fun of them or creating little more than stick-figures. When that happens, subtext (motivation and thoughts underneath the spoken dialogue) vanishes and the forward movement of the play feels like molasses on a cold day.

If you take characterization seriously, you develop complex characters through their spoken language. Richard Toscan believes:

Most playwrights rely on their characters to tell them who they are through what they say in dialogue on the page. They're willing to risk having to write most of a draft before understanding the backgrounds, secrets and mental baggage of their creations. But when they start over again, they have rich and complex characters who have revealed themselves rather than having been mechanically constructed.

I believe this is the way to develop real characters that audiences will connect to. Characterizations need to be real for an audience to relate.

In the Toscan Internet article "Subtext . . . What Characters Don't Tell Us," playwright David Mamet is quoted as saying:

There's nothing there except lines of dialogue. If they're sketched correctly and minimally, they will give the audience the illusion that these are "real people," especially if the lines are spoken by real people—the actors are going to fill a lot in. So a large part of the technique of playwriting is to leave a lot out.

And in his Internet article "Dramatic Conflict," Toscan states that "dramatic conflict draws from a much deeper vein, rooted in the subtext of your central characters driven by opposing desires." Playwright John Guare is quoted as saying: "Is there a good argument going on? It all starts with a fight . . . a disagreement." Strong characterization always builds dramatic conflict.

A play's point of view is determined by the playwright's primary character. Through one or many characters, your story is revealed. Playwrights know the importance of the development of strong characterizations to tell their theatrical stories.

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For the introduction, I asked all the playwrights to express their theme, plot, and inspiration for writing their one-act play. As you can see from this edition, it is the characters who tell the stories in the one-act plays.

The Hysterical Misogynist

by Murray Schisgal

It was a balmy, star-studded spring evening in East Hampton. My wife . . . let's call her Esmeralda. Esmeralda and I were at Nick and Tony's restaurant on North Main Street, sitting opposite our oldest and dearest friends. Let's call them Skyler and Angelina. We had ordered dinner and were enjoying our first round of cocktails. I nursed my martini—a regular Bombay, dry, with a single olive, stirred, not shaken—with the punctilious reverence that it justly deserved. I recall having said something humorous when in a rather strain, incomprehensible voice, I heard Angelina say something like: "That's because you're a misogynist." Shocked, stunned, and partially paralyzed, I managed to emit, in the voice of an enfeebled castrato: "I'm sorry. I'm not sure I heard you correctly. Will you please say that again?" And, oddly, this time around, Angelina chose a tone of voice that was both clear and comprehensible: "You are a misogynist. You always were a misogynist and you will always be a misogynist." And with that Angelina clamped her lips shut and tacked her eyes to mine. I'm certain I responded, but the fact is I can't recall what I said. Nor what my wife, Esmeralda, said. She, too, appeared utterly bewildered by Angelina's venomous outburst. I do recall that when my soft-shell crab arrived on a bed of mixed greens, I sent it back, ordered a third martini, and said very little for the rest of the evening. Skyler spoke on my behalf, politely and, I thought, convincingly. He said that in all the years he had known me, he had never, not once, seen me abuse my wife, a waitress, a receptionist, or any of my former girlfriends. I thanked him the following day and he reminded me that I forgot to pick up half the bill.

Was I a misogynist? Me, the unabashed idolater of all things even remotely feminine? Me, a man dedicated since birth to the absolute equality of the sexes? We'll see about that, my dear, malevolent Angelina!

Since the four of us frequently play tennis together, it was easy conjuring time and place.

And hocus-pocus Jiminy crocus, theme, plot, and inspiration fall amiably into place.

Elvis of Nazareth

by Jay Huling

The theme reflects my feelings to have audiences gain a more personal understanding of Jesus' words when he said, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Much of the action in *Elvis of Nazareth* is symbolic of man's relationship with God. Our rebellion is depicted in the absolute zaniness of the characters—Marion thinks Jesus' living water is Gatorade... Moses thinks Jesus' middle initial is "H."... the Centurion's response to hearing that Jesus fed 5,000 with mere loaves and fishes responds, "You can never get large portions nowadays." And yet, Jesus' response to all of this is, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." None of these characters do anything to earn it. Yet Jesus freely gives. He forgave us; therefore, we should in turn forgive others.

My inspiration for this play came from thinking about the idea of how we've all played the game in our minds of asking ourselves, "If I could go back and do it again, knowing what I know now, what would I do differently?" I wanted to explore that possibility. And I thought by taking the life of Elvis Presley and putting him in that position, I could depict what he might do. Would he really choose to be the king of rock and roll? Or would he—as we all might—choose to do something greater with his life? And what else is greater than getting to know and serve the creator of the universe? (If we only had a second chance.) But I did not want to explore this in a heavy-handed, dogmatic way. I wanted to create a group of crazy characters and put them in a crazy situation and slay a lot of sacred cows. And yet, at the same time, I wanted to preserve the spiritual message. I believe that is exactly what *Elvis of Nazareth* does.

A Roz by Any Other Name

by B. T. Ryback

My inspiration for *Roz* came as part of an assignment for a playwriting class at UCLA. My interest in writing the piece began with my desire to "toy" with Shakespeare's language. For a while I'd been playing with the idea of

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telling Rosalind's story—a character that Shakespeare gives hardly any notice to, yet acts as the inciting incident for why Mercutio takes Romeo to the Capulet gala, without which Romeo and Juliet would never have met. As I began to imagine what kind of character could break Romeo's heart, I thought about how anyone could become close to such a person and sort of inadvertently stumbled on an exploration of the friendships between teenage girls. I think Rosalind and Vera's journey as friends is truly the heart and theme of the play.

The lesson they learn from each other is that you have to look beyond what you get on the surface to find the real value that any person has to offer.

The plot finds Romeo's ex-lover, Rosalind, just arriving home from the infamous Capulet gala where Romeo meets his new flame, Juliet. Enraged that she was trumped by a Capulet, Rosalind plots with her best friend Vera to win Romeo back. The unexpected appearance of an innocent young poet named Stefano, who has a great admiration for Rosalind, suddenly creates the opportunity for her to get her revenge. Despite the protestations of Vera and Rosalind's nurse, Cordonna, Rosalind invites the man to her chambers to begin the seduction. In a humorous turn of events, Rosalind finds that the young man is not exactly who she thought he was. She is forced to confront the rash decisions she has made and comes to realize the value of true affection.

Weird

by B. T. Ryback

The plot of *Weird* comes from the three *Weird* sisters from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and takes place on the lam in Denmark. Warned by the "signs," the eldest sister, Torrence, and the youngest sister, Harper, fear that the awful deeds they committed in Scotland have finally caught up with them, and once again they make plans to flee. One thing, however, stands in their way: their middle sister, Linn. Tired of life on the run, she disavows her sisters, pledging to do anything, even turn them in, if it meant they would no longer have to run away from their past. A knock on the door brings a mysterious traveler into their home, and with him the opportunity for Linn to lead a normal life at the cost of leaving her family. Ultimately she must decide

between a newfound hope for life and love, and the family who cares for her more than anything else.

My inspiration for *Weird* came from wanting to write a companion piece to my play *A Roz by Any Other Name*. The conceit for both pieces is the exploration of a minor Shakespearean character's story. With *Weird*, I wanted to explore something deeper and darker about humanity. In the story, Linn tries to rise above her family's status of "witch." And for a moment, she is able to, as Douglas sees her for who she is, and not just what society and circumstance has deemed her. But then, as the truth comes out, his reaction to her forces Linn to become, and indeed embrace, what it was she fought not to be. The poignancy of the theme is the fact that whether we like it or not, we will always belong to the family from which we came.

Bricklayers Poet

by Joe Maruzzo

I was inspired to write *Bricklayers Poet* in one sitting, and it came out of me without any forethought or structure to write. I was living alone, broke and lonely. It was *New Year's Eve* and I walked to a bar. It was packed with happy people. I was standing at the bar and had this intense feeling inside myself; it said, "*I wish I could turn around here at the bar, and there would be my woman. We'd hold each other and everything would be all right.*" That's what I wished for. Before I knew it, I was staying at a friend's apartment that night; he was out of town and I was lying on the floor with pad and pencil and it wrote itself. No structure, rewrites, nothing. It was my first finished play. It won me Best Playwright in the Turnip Short Festival in 2007. My father was a bricklayer, and in retrospect, this is a love letter to my father. The theme of the play is longing for love.

Laundry and Lies

by Adam Kraar

In a society that has the habit of lying, are we crazy to tell the truth? How can we balance our need to honestly connect with other people with the necessity of navigating an ocean of deception, denial, and downright flakiness? Isn't making things up sometimes dangerous—and sometimes a lot of fun?

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In *Laundry and Lies*, a man obsessed with the truth encounters a woman who is unable to tell the bald truth. Patsy doesn't lie out of maliciousness or laziness; she lies in order to overcome the sad circumstances of her existence. George's need to get at the truth so consumes him that it almost drives him crazy. The manic sparring of these two people leads each of them to a better understanding of how to reconcile their obsessions with their need for a hug.

The play was inspired by a series of questions: Why are candor and sincerity so unfashionable? Why do people lie so much? Are there occasions when lying is a virtue? Aren't I, as a playwright, inventing things in order to reveal a deeper truth? *Laundry and Lies* was written in hopes of provoking an audience to laughter and questions.

Light

by Jeni Mahoney

Thematically, I hope that the audience will take away some questions: How do I let go of my past without letting go of myself? How do I remember my past without being held captive by it?

As strange as Helena's religion may seem at first, there is something attractive in its ambition to create a whole new person, free of the past and living in a constant state of happiness. But at what cost?

The plot explores a spiritual rebirth, under the guidance of a mysterious, self-proclaimed guru: Helena's motivation for reconnecting with her childhood friend, and recent divorcee, Abby. But the joyous reunion is short-lived when Abby discovers that Helena's new path requires her to forget her past . . . including Abby.

My inspiration for this play came from a friend who immersed herself in a belief system that I would call cult-like. Although we were not as close as these two characters, I somehow ended up as one of a small circle of folks who tried to keep her connected to the outside world—even as this other group was pulling her more closely into its fold. Although I found the group's beliefs alternately ridiculous and troubling, I sometimes envied her happiness, and struggled to find a way to make difficult, mundane reality seem a more attractive choice. All that being said, "giving light" is probably the only part of the play that is based on my actual experience with this

person. Eventually she disappeared into the group. I have no idea what happened to her. I hope she is happy.

House of the Holy Moment

by Cary Pepper

The plot of *House of the Holy Moment* takes place in the town of Appleton, which has no property taxes on houses of worship. So Appleton, which has a population of 3,000, now has 300 churches. Including the Second Coming Car Service, and Messiah Mike's House of Stereo. With the town's tax base eroding, Henry Billings, of the City Assessor's Office, is visiting every church in town to determine that each is a legitimate house of worship. This Sunday, he walks into the House of the Holy Moment, which is run by Butch Haggerty, whose idea of a church is *very different* from what the city fathers had in mind when they enacted the bylaws that brought Butch to Appleton.

But what is a church? What makes a religion?

As Butch tells Henry, "This isn't *your* idea of a church. But it's *exactly* what *I* think a church should be." Minutes after Henry storms out in frustration, in walks Charlie, an Everyman depressed by the shape the world is in. Charlie is going to every church in town, looking for answers. And Butch has 'em. Even if they are unlike any Charlie's heard in any other church. By the time he leaves, Charlie has found religion. Or Butch's version of it, anyway. In the House of the Holy Moment.

Two things inspired me to write this play. The first was my ongoing examination of spirituality. The second was learning about a town that had done what the city fathers of Appleton did—made religion their number-one priority, with unexpected results.

My theme and the message I want audience to take away from my piece is this: what's holy to one person isn't necessarily holy to another. What helps a person spiritually is dependent on his or her inner world and external circumstances. And that's okay. Everyone's entitled to their belief system. No one should be judged or punished for it; no one should try to force their beliefs on others, or hurt anyone in the name of those beliefs. I'll show you mine . . . you show me yours . . . and then let's forget about it.

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The Disruptive, Discursive Delusions of Donald

by Michael Roderick

The theme reflects that moments of indecision can breed the wackiest occurrences. The plot finds Donald having a lot of trouble making decisions in his life, but when Bo and Dayna (two middlemen between heaven and hell) step into the picture, he'll have to make quick decisions as he's thrust into a world with a dead lover, time travel, and a dominatrix obsessed with squeaky toys. As time ticks backwards Donald must decide what's most important, or lose it all. My inspiration for the play began when I was asked to write a companion piece for Christopher Durang's *'Dentity Crisis* during my undergrad, and after reading that play, I tried to think of the craziest scenario possible. Having worked in a costume studio for a good portion of my undergrad, I found a lot of my costume knowledge applied to the strange situations I was creating in this play and I had a really good time. Next thing I knew, I had developed this world that was making me laugh, and I hope it does the same for others.

The Perfect Relationship

by Jill Elaine Hughes

I originally wrote *The Perfect Relationship* as part of Chicago's Boxer Rebellion Theatre's annual Martin de Maat New Works Festival. In this annual festival, playwrights are assigned three actors at random who then "audition" for the playwright to display their range and characterization abilities. The playwrights are then assigned a topic at random to serve as inspiration for writing a script for the three assigned actors. I was assigned three quirky young women performers who all had unique comedic abilities, and was assigned "A Lover Spurned" as my topic. The result was this play, *The Perfect Relationship*, in which three young women gradually discover that they are all romantically involved with the same man. The piece is always a big hit with audiences, since it seems most people today know at least one New Age wacko type (Orchid), as well as are quite familiar the type of young unlucky-at-love urban single woman that both Mary Ann and Christine

represent. The comedy becomes more and more outrageous as the women begin to discover that they've all been tricked and deceived—by their mutual love interest, by Orchid's fraudulent New Age “healing,” and by each other.

The theme of the piece is that when it comes to love and relationships, things are almost never what they seem on the surface. It's received several productions around the U.S., most recently at Seattle's 2006 Mae West Fest.

The Perfect Medium

by Eileen Fischer

The Perfect Medium presents scenes from the lives of two historical characters: Hester Dowden (1868–1949) and Oscar Wilde (1854–1900). Hester Dowden was an Irish journalist and psychic medium who conducted séances and automatic writing sessions. In *The Perfect Medium*, set in London, 1923, Oscar Wilde sends psychic messages to Hester Dowden. Mysteries abound—especially so since Oscar Wilde died in 1900. Original music for the play has been composed by Charles Porter. *The Perfect Medium* is very loosely based—which is also to say suggested by—Hester Dowden's pamphlet of essays, *Oscar Wilde from Purgatory*.

Interests in spiritualism and theatricality converge here. *The Perfect Medium* invites audiences to consider questions of faith, fame, life after death, and the authenticity of psychic investigations.

Outsourced

by Laura Shaine

I wrote *Outsourced* as an act of rebellion—against credit card-o-crazy, the evil empire of 29.99% debt. How many of us suffer similar crises because of insane interest rates charged by the major credit cards? I think this causes the new nervous breakdown—inability to deal with unseen electronic possible beings that control our financial lives.

What message? I always heard—if you want to send a message, use Western Union.

The theme is apparent—human beings are heat-seeking and will somehow prevail against this hideous computer and credit card culture that is sapping our souls.

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The inspiration for *Outsourced* is a *cri du coeur*, cry of the heart, against the awful way we are forced to live today. I wrote *Outsourced* for us all, as we are pitted against the outsourced bank operatives who may or may not be living, breathing humans on the other side of the world. I wrote the play for everyone who is awake at 3 a.m., and might be watching an infomercial on strengthening “Abs! Abs! Abs!” while struggling with credit cards. I wrote *Outsourced* for love as an antidote to debt.

The plot finds Max, a New York man, suffering a midnight financial crisis—he reaches out to an unseen but possibly gorgeous, potentially warm human being on the subcontinent. Is she Kimberley, an automated voice in South Dakota, the capitol of credit? Or is she Sonali, the yearning temptress in India? He must find out, or die of debt.

Dead Trees

by Rick Pulos

Dead Trees tells the story of a Malawian carpenter turned coffin maker. The idea for the story was inspired by an article that appeared via Reuters in 2004, entitled “Malawi Coffin Makers Cash in on AIDS Pandemic.” I became interested in writing a story about the social impact of AIDS without actually including a single character who suffers from the disease. This concept then led me to examine how the business of this disease is lining the pockets of many people, from CEOs at pharmaceutical companies to makers of coffins and headstones. Who are these people that are getting rich from the suffering of others?

Citseko, the main character in *Dead Trees*, was once the designer of items for the living (chairs, tables, beds, etc.). He abandons this work for the more lucrative business of making coffins, much to the chagrin of his son. He feels deeply that by creating a profitable and sustainable business for his son (and his son’s future family) that he is providing the love and security required of a father. Unfortunately, his son sees the business as something that has come between them and created a distance too great to overcome.

In exploring these particular ideas and characters, I discovered that a person in pursuit of one thing often inevitably undermines the very reason that they ever sought that thing out in the first place. We seek shelter by

building homes, all the while destroying the forest that breathes life into our planet, our only true home in the universe.

G.C.

by Theodore Mann

What I wanted to convey in writing *G.C.* was the delight of working in the theatre while you are walking on cracked egg shells to hopefully overcome the numerous obstacles that are presented in a production. The play deals with high tensions that exist in producing a play anywhere, but with even higher tensions when the play is about to open on Broadway with a great, but explosive, leading actor and a beautifully simple but complex Chekhov play entitled *Uncle Vanya*.

Putting on a play, from my point of view as a director and producer, is to present it as truthfully as possible in accordance with what I believe was the author's intention. In this case, since I wrote the play and one of the characters is myself, I had complete insight into every moment of my character's thinking and the playwright's intentions.

This is the first play that I have ever written, and until I was presented with an opportunity to enter a one-act festival in Los Angeles, the idea had never occurred to me. But then the gauntlet had been thrown down, and it rankled in my head. I went to visit my son in France, and on the second night after my arrival, as I was sleeping, the complete play came into my head. The next morning, I got on the phone to New York and dictated the play to my assistant. While I was directing the play, adjustments were made to the script. It was then produced in L.A. in a one-act festival and was received very favorably. Since that time, there have been several other productions across the country.

Five Story Walkup

compiled and directed by Daniel Gallant

Thematically focused on the idea of home, *Five Story Walkup* is a collection of short plays and monologues about the places we call home. The characters in these works—mismatched lovers, a Webcam provocateur, small-town philosophers, and urban pioneers—are united by a conflicting need to

preserve and yet escape from their domestic situations. These works cover wide narrative territory, exploring cityscapes and rural settings, but are tied together by an intimate focus on the bond between identity and home.

In Laura Shaine's *Web Cam Woman*, a cagey exhibitionist explores the ups and downs of online voyeurism. In Daniel Frederick Levin's *A Glorious Evening*, a nervous man rehearses for a momentous first date. Quincy Long's *Aux / Cops* follows an excitable police recruit as he is vetted by a buttoned-down lieutenant. Clay McLeod Chapman's *birdfeeder* details the romantic cause and aftermath of a rural tragedy. In Daniel Gallant's *Tripartite*, two vacationing brothers compete over a woman who has dual personalities. In Neil LaBute's *Love at Twenty*, a resourceful college student grapples with a star-crossed love affair. And in John Guare's *Blue Monologue*, a man reminisces about the dreams that brought him to New York City, as well as the realities of urban life that held him back.

I was very inspired to create *Five Story Walkup*. The works that constitute this piece were contributed by seven different authors; the show was originally conceived and staged as a benefit to save the Thirteenth Street Repertory Theatre. As small theatres and performance spaces around Manhattan closed their doors, the Thirteenth Street Repertory Theatre was engaged in a struggle against real estate developers. With the future of this historic arts organization in danger, the artists featured in *Five Story Walkup* donated their time and effort to benefit the Thirteenth Street Rep's legal fund. It is fitting that a production mounted to save a theatrical home features plays and monologues.