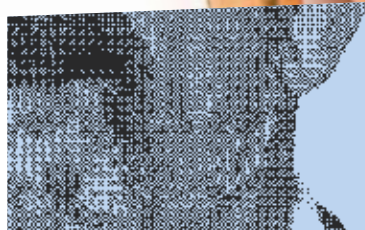


March-June/2009



## Trojan Barbie

*Zero Arrow Theatre, March 28 – April 22*

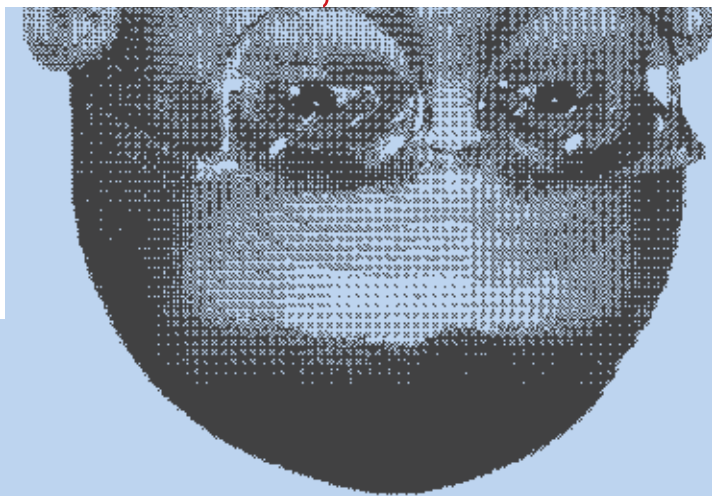


## Sex, Satire, Romance, and Ducks

**A DAVID MAMET CELEBRATION**

*Loeb Drama Center and*

*Zero Arrow Theatre, May 9 – June 28*





DEAR FRIENDS,

This issue of *ARTicles* will introduce you to the world premiere of Christine Evans' *Trojan Barbie*, and *Sex, Satire, Romance, and Ducks: A David Mamet Celebration* – a festival of David Mamet's comedies, with the farce *Romance* at its center.

Evans calls *Trojan Barbie* “a modern car-crash encounter with Euripides' *The Trojan Women*.” Lotte Jones, a lonely middle-aged doll repair expert, books herself on a “cultural holiday for singles” to Turkey. But something mysterious happens: rather than finding herself in the contemporary Middle East, Lotte somehow lands in an ancient war zone among the ruins of Troy. For me, the beauty of Evans' play is that it holds past and present in perfect balance, allowing each to reflect off the other.

The season ends with dessert: a festival of comedies by David Mamet. This may give you pause for thought—Mamet's plays, many of which have been premiered at the A.R.T. (*Oleanna*, *The Cryptogram*, *The Old Neighborhood*, *Boston Marriage*), are famous for their tough characters and clipped dialogue more than their humor. But in recent years Mamet has become something of a chameleon, turning his hand to many styles of film and theatre. Now, in *Romance*, Mamet is writing flat-out farce, and the result is an insanely funny confection.

We're complementing *Romance* with two early comedies that launched Mamet's career—*Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and *The Duck Variations*, to give you three very different tastes of this master playwright's work. Your festival experience will be completed with “Seriously Funny,” an evening of short comedies by Mamet, Shel Silverstein, and Harold Pinter, presented by the graduating class of the A.R.T./MXAT Institute for Advanced Theatre Training.

Best wishes,

Gideon Lester, *Director*, 08/09 Season



# Dolls of War

## GIDEON LESTER TALKS TO PLAYWRIGHT CHRISTINE EVANS ABOUT THE ORIGINS OF *TROJAN BARBIE*

**CHRISTINE EVANS WAS** born in England and raised in Australia and New Zealand. After an early career as a circus performer and musician she started writing plays. In 2000 she won a Fulbright Scholarship to study playwriting with Paula Vogel in Brown University's MFA program, after which she completed a PhD. She now lives in Providence and teaches playwriting at Harvard.

and living are smashed together without any intermediary softening.

**GL:** That clash of past and present makes *Trojan Barbie* funny in surprising ways.

**CE:** Right. The humor comes from the collision of worlds and values that simply don't understand one another. It's about incongruity and juxtaposition. Theatre has

**Gideon Lester:** *Trojan Barbie* tells the story of a British tourist, Lotte, who goes on vacation and finds herself in the middle of the Trojan War. How did you start writing the play?

**Christine Evans:** I was commissioned by the University of San Francisco's Performing Arts and Social Justice Program to adapt Euripides' *The Trojan Women* for their students. That first incarnation was quite different from the play we are staging at the A.R.T. It was called *The Doll Hospital*, and it was enormous and somewhat chaotic, with a cast of twelve. In the process of writing the play, I thought about what adaptation means. I'm not interested in simply taking a play and dressing it in modern clothes without creating a real dialogue between the past and the present. The longer I spent with Euripides' plays the more foreign they seemed to be. The Greeks were obsessed with honor and revenge; their values and emotions were very differently organized than ours. I loved that sense of strangeness, of our distance from the past. I came to realize that this strangeness is contemporary to our own postmodern experience, where different cultures and ways of thinking



I'm not interested in simply taking a play and dressing it in modern clothes without creating a real dialogue between the past and the present.

to entertain—I wanted to write a political play that wasn't earnest, that captured some of the feeling of actual daily life in a media-saturated society where war is on every screen but nowhere you can touch.

**GL:** Lotte repairs dolls for a living. Why did you choose that profession for her?

**CE:** While I was writing the play I became fascinated with the before-and-after





I loved that tension between the doll and the human, between what can be repaired and what cannot, and it gave me a way to show that one person's war is another person's inconvenience.

Christine Evans, photo: K. Mitchell

photographs from doll hospital websites. The images of broken dolls are eerie, like pictures of bodies in a war zone. Then they can be mended perfectly—unlike real humans—with every trace of trauma erased. I loved that tension between the doll and the human, between what can be repaired and what cannot, and it gave me a way to show that one person's war is another person's inconvenience.

**GL:** You're an Australian playwright living in the U.S. Why is the heroine of your play English?

**CE:** It was partly a tactical decision; I didn't want *Trojan Barbie* to be seen as a simple allegory of America at war. I'm more interested in exploring the differences between a modern Western sensibility and other cultural modes as they coexist and collide in the twenty-first century. Also, England has a long literary (and colonial) history of practical, adventurous women who stride boldly off on safari or to the Amazon or through Africa, and I wanted to reference the absurdity and ethnocentrism of such adventures while also paying affectionate homage to the women who undertook them.

**GL:** The play's title, *Trojan Barbie*, refers to a sculpture made from broken dolls. It's a beautiful image; where did it come from?

**CE:** It was invented by my brilliant niece

Ciella when she was eight years old. My mother and I took her to an art museum in Australia, and they were showing a modern sculpture exhibition. There were artifacts made from broken bottles and a broken piano hanging on the wall. In the car on the way home she said, "I'm going to get a big piece of pink cardboard and nail all my broken Barbie dolls around it in the shape of a heart, and I'll call it 'Jurassic Barbie.'" That image, and the story of this little girl creating something from what she'd encountered, have stayed with me for ten years.

**GL:** *Trojan Barbie* is full of these contrasts—the young girl making something both beautiful and violent, a familiar character who's sent into a very foreign environment, the clash of ancient myth and modern news.

**CE:** When I go to the theatre I'm less interested in seeing my own life identifiably reflected on stage than entering a world that is recognizable yet strange at the same time—that reorders the way I see everyday things. The poet Marianne Moore describes poems as "imaginary gardens with real toads in them" and that's what I aspire to create on the stage—a dream with a hard core of truth inside it.

*Gideon Lester is Director of the A.R.T.'s 08/09 Season.*

## TROJAN BARBIE AT A GLANCE

**Written by** Christine Evans

**Directed by** Carmel O'Reilly

**Set and Costume Design**

David Reynoso

**Lighting Design** Justin Townsend

**Sound Design** David Remedios

### Cast

#### The Trojans

**Hecuba** Paula Langton

**Polly X** Kaaron Briscoe

**Cassandra** Nina Kassa

**Andromache** Skye Noel

**Clea** Emily Alpren

**Esme** Lisette Silva

#### The Others

**Helen** Careena Melia

**Lotte** Karen MacDonald

**Mica** Renzo Ampuero

**Talthybius/Max** Carl Foreman

**Jorge, Menalaus, Clive,**

**Officer in Blue** Jim Senti

### Synopsis

**Lonely Lotte Jones, a twenty-first century doll doctor, escapes to modern Troy on a cultural tour for singles. Instead of finding love among the ruins, Lotte meets Andromache, a Trojan woman fleeing the sacking of her city and the destruction of her home. When a Greek soldier recaptures Andromache, Lotte is dragged along, too, forced to wait alongside the women of Troy as their fates are parceled out. Meanwhile, Queen Hecuba's teenage daughter, Polly X, is kidnapped. A detour on the way to her death at Achilles' tomb leaves Polly X partying with two disenchanted soldiers at the Baghdad Zoo. The prison camp burns, the conquered women are enslaved, and Lotte is left to watch as the mythic and the modern collide.**



# And the Myth Goes On

By Katie Mallinson

**EUGENE O'NEILL UPDATED** the myth of Orestes to the American Civil War with *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Tennessee Williams dropped *Orpheus Descending* into the sweltering heat of a small Southern town. Martha Graham, grande dame of modern dance, used Greek myths to explore contemporary feminist conflicts. Richard Schechner's *Dionysus in 69*, a counterculture war cry, turned the ambiguous god into a sadistic hippie. Each generation of American artists returns to the Greek myths to explore contemporary sites of cultural anxiety.

In the mid-nineties, troubled by the war in Bosnia and the flood of refugees, Ellen McLaughlin turned to Euripides' *The Trojan Women*. In the women of ancient Troy, she saw the women of Serbia and Croatia fleeing the chaos of genocide. McLaughlin created a new text from Euripides' play. Her streamlined version was performed not by actors, but by refugees, in staged readings at the Classic Stage Company in New York. Each role was triple cast: Serbs, Croatians, Albanians—men and women from every side of the conflict were represented in each character. No villains remained, only the survivors. Uniting all factions, McLaughlin emphasized losses on all sides. Like the Trojans, these refugees no longer had a country, a city, a family.



A scene from *The Trojan Women* directed by Ellen McLaughlin at the Aurora Theatre Company, photo: David Allen

McLaughlin has since adapted eleven Greek tragedies, including *Ajax in Iraq*, an adaptation of Sophocles' *Ajax* which she created in collaboration with the A.R.T./MXAT Institute for Advanced Training and premiered at the A.R.T. last fall.

To understand where we are now, playwrights dig into the cultural closet.

Turning also to Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, Charles L. Mee wrought a wildly different creation: *Trojan Women: A Love Story*. While McLaughlin's perspective was straightforward, Mee's was kaleidoscopic. Mee wedded Euripides' fifth-century play, Berlioz's romantic opera *Les Troyens*, interviews from survivors of the Holocaust and Hiroshima, and the *Kama Sutra*—all scored to a mélange of music from Billie Holiday to Bow Wow.

Mee's work has been described as a collage: shards of characters, fragments of stories, and clashing emotions. Juxtaposing the blood of war with love songs, Mee examines the complex nature of the pain and violence we inflict on each other.

Mee's bits and pieces of heterogeneous cultures coalesce into a

contemporary portrait. McLaughlin takes the classic text and overlays it with a contemporary perspective.

Christine Evans, in *Trojan Barbie*, creates a world where the mythic and the modern crash. The past intrudes with more and more frequency into the present until they collide in the final moments of the play. Evans utilizes Euripides' classic women, still struggling against male violence, but she creates poetry from contemporary idioms. She breathes life into Hecuba's daughter, Polyxena, barely mentioned in the original. Re-christened Polly X, this punk rock teenager wobbles between childhood and womanhood. She grapples to create something, anything, out of the rubble of war. Waiting to be sacrificed at Achilles' tomb, she attempts to create art from the broken remnants of dolls.

*The Trojan Women* has provided a prism through which playwrights like Ellen McLaughlin, Charles L. Mee, and Christine Evans reflect contemporary cultural anxieties: power and sexuality, war and family. To understand where we are now, playwrights dig into the cultural closet. Their works rattle old skeletons with new stories to tell.

*Katie Mallinson is a second-year dramaturgy student in the A.R.T./MXAT Institute for Advanced Theatre Training.*



## MARCH 27, BARBIE ON A PEDESTAL:

Inspired by our upcoming production of *Trojan Barbie*, local artists have created their own doll-themed art as part of a contest organized by the A.R.T. and our friends at *The Weekly Dig*. Come see the results at an event on Friday, March 27 at the *Dig*'s SPACE 242 gallery. For details, visit [www.weeklydig.com/trojan-barbie](http://www.weeklydig.com/trojan-barbie). And did you know that 2009 is the fiftieth anniversary of Barbie? Happy birthday, girl—you still look great!

## APRIL 22–26, AT THE INSTITUTE:

This spring, the A.R.T. Institute dramaturgy students will be working with Harvard undergraduates in an Advanced Playwriting course co-taught by Christine Evans and Gideon Lester, A.R.T.'s Director of the 08/09 Season. The plays developed in this course will be read by Institute students in the New College Theatre April 22–26. For more details, visit [www.amrep.org](http://www.amrep.org).

top: Carmel O'Reilly's production of Sanctuary Lamp at the Súcán Theatre.  
right: Carmel O'Reilly, photo: K. Mitchell



## Carmel O'Reilly

FROM SÚGÁN TO A.R.T.

By Lynde Rosario

**ENVOY OF THE** Irish drama scene in Boston, Carmel O'Reilly has made her name in the theatre world as a director of Irish plays. She founded the Súcán Theatre Company in Boston, and she was honored with the Elliot Norton award twice for outstanding director and the 2004 Eire Society Gold Medal for her contributions to Irish culture.

O'Reilly's roots in Irish theatre are deep. She remembers how, as a child,

"...duality is integral to the play.... Sometimes we are not sure whether we are experiencing a past or contemporary event."

"touring theatrical companies and amateur drama groups were always part of Irish country life. I recall waiting excitedly on a long bench in the front row of the parochial hall for the curtain to rise." As Artistic Director of the Súcán Theatre Company in Boston, she was able to profile a new generation of young Irish writers, work with young Irish actors, and "engage in creating a new perspective of modern Ireland through theatre." Now at the A.R.T. she tries her accent at Greek tragedy, but Greek tragedy with a twist—Christine Evans' *Trojan Barbie*.

In preparation, O'Reilly, Evans, and set designer David Reynoso visited an Anselm Kiefer exhibition at MASS MoCA.

Kiefer is a German artist, mostly known for his post-war painting and use of interesting textures such as straw, ash, clay, and lead. "So much of Kiefer's work struck a chord with the visual images of the play," she recounts. Through her collaboration on *Trojan Barbie*, O'Reilly gets the sense of a "marriage of opposite



ideas...ruthless cruelty alongside the most transcendent ideas of beauty." This play has, as Evans calls it, "a car crash collision with Euripides." O'Reilly elaborates: it is "classical text juxtaposed against modern idioms. Its title refers us back to *The Trojan Women*, but its inclusion of 'Barbie' pushes us into the present. This duality is integral to the play.... Sometimes we are not sure whether we are experiencing a past or contemporary event."

Lynde Rosario is a second-year dramaturgy student at the A.R.T./MXAT Institute for Advanced Theatre Training.

## Sex, Satire, Romance, and Ducks

A DAVID MAMET CELEBRATION

**IF YOU THINK** you know David Mamet, think again. This famously terse playwright is a master of biting comedy. *Sex, Satire, Romance, and Ducks: A David Mamet Celebration* is a festival of Mamet comedy, a celebration of work spanning his career.

At the center of the festival is *Romance*—a courtroom farce that takes no prisoners in its quest for total political incorrectness. In *Romance*, Mamet creates a world in a micro-cosm in which shameless fawning and sheer caprice hold sway, and the noble apparatus of law and order degenerates into riotous mayhem.

Next up is a double bill of two of Mamet's early comedies—*Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and *The Duck Variations*. Both showcase Mamet's command of lightning-quick comic banter, while skewering the antics of young and old alike.

The A.R.T./MXAT Institute for Advanced Theatre Training contributes to the festival with their presentation of "Seriously Funny," an evening of short comedies by friends and frequent collaborators Mamet, Harold Pinter, and Shel Silverstein.

### ROMANCE AT A GLANCE

**Written by** David Mamet  
**Directed by** Scott Zigler  
**Set Design** J. Michael Griggs  
**Costume Design** Miranda Hoffman  
**Lighting Design** D.M. Wood  
**Sound Design** David Remedios

#### Cast

**The Prosecutor** Thomas Derrah  
**The Defendant** Remo Airaldi  
**The Defense Attorney** Jim True-Frost  
**The Judge** Will LeBow  
**The Bailiff** Jim Senti  
**Bernard** Carl Foreman  
**The Doctor** Doug Chapman

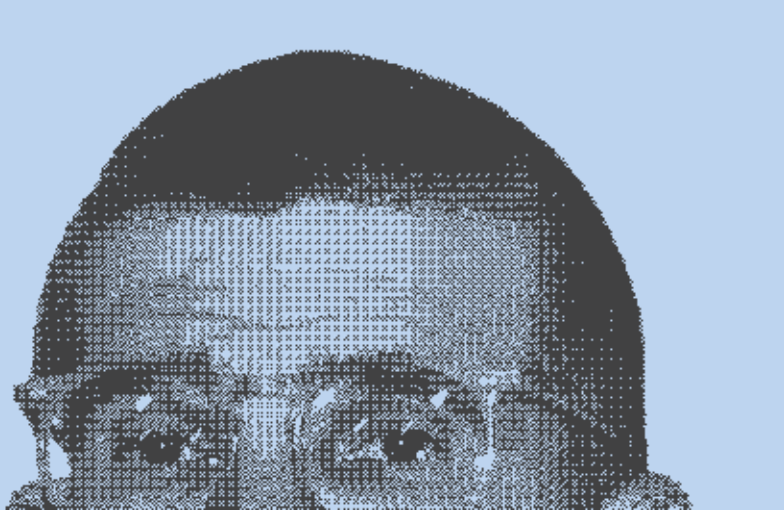
#### Synopsis

Lawyers and judges, Jews and Christians, homosexuals and chiropractors—no one gets off easy in Mamet's madcap skewering of the American legal system. As a Mideast Peace Conference convenes nearby, an elusive court case is persistently interrupted by domestic squabbles, ethnic slur-slinging and a hallucinating judge. The esteemed, noble practice of Law degenerates into sheer comic chaos as Mamet ponders the most fundamental human question: Why can't we all just get along?

*A courtroom farce that takes no prisoners in its quest for total political incorrectness.*







# David Mamet is a Funny Guy

By Brendan Shea

“I talked to Jeremy on the phone, and he told me that he discovered that he had a very high level of mercury,” said Mamet on hearing TV star Jeremy Piven would be leaving the 2008 Broadway revival of *Speed-the-Plow*. “So my understanding is that he is leaving show business to pursue a career as a thermometer.”

David Mamet is a comedian. Nonetheless, critics have been surprised that his recent plays—*Romance* (2005), *November* (2008), and *Keep Your Pantheon* (2008)—have been out-and-out raucous comedies. But a closer look at his oeuvre reveals a provocative sense of humor at work from the outset.

Working as a bus boy at Chicago’s legendary Second City Theatre, Mamet discovered how comedy can provoke thought. Second City’s brand of

comedy—whip-smart and satirical—made an indelible impression on young Mamet. Bernard Sahlins, co-founder of Second City, instilled the comedy troupe with a strategy that could easily describe David Mamet’s approach: “Work from the top of your intelligence, and let the humor come from the relationships, not the shtick.”

The perfect model for a play, Mamet claims, is the dirty joke. In *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* he proves his theory. Here Mamet examines sexual collisions in swiftly moving scenes that rise to a punch line and cut to the next vignette. Much of the humor comes from comparing she-said, he-said conversations about the opposite sex:

**JOAN:** *Men.*

**DEBORAH:** *Yup.*

**JOAN:** *They’re all after only one thing.*

**DEBORAH:** *Yes. I know.*

**JOAN:** *But it’s never the same thing.*

Joan’s joke attacks men for being sex-crazed maniacs with wandering eyes, restless hearts, and roaming dicks. Assuming the role of sexual mentor, Joan wises Deb up about the sleaze she’ll meet in singles bars. Joan, by the way, is dolling herself up to go out and pick up a man. Similarly, Bernie teaches Danny how to score:

**BERNIE:** *The main thing, Dan...*

**DANNY:** *Yes?*

**BERNIE:** *The main thing about broads...*

**DANNY:** *Yes?*

**BERNIE:** *Is two things. One: The Way to Get Laid is to Treat ‘Em Like Shit...*

**DANNY:** *Yeah...*

**BERNIE:** *...and Two: Nothing...nothing makes you so attractive to the opposite sex as getting your rocks off on a regular basis.*

Mamet’s humor in *Sexual Perversity* is coarse, his irony subtle, his satire pointed. His humor makes us laugh. It also makes us think. Is Joan right? Do women want commitment and men sex without strings? Bernie’s pep talk contradicts Joan. He insists that women feel contempt for nice guys. Flaunt your reputation as a Don Juan, treat a woman badly, and she can’t say no. When Bernie meets Joan in a bar and tries to put the make on her, sparks fly.

Although *Sexual Perversity* raised the hackles of feminists, it neither promotes nor wallows in misogyny; rather, it dissects male myths. “My sex life,” the young playwright mused in 1976, “was ruined

by the popular media. It took a lot of getting over.... You have to sleep with every woman you see—sheer utter nonsense.” We laugh at Bernie’s lines, but our laughter is uneasy. As with so many of Mamet’s characters, we must step back and evaluate Bernie’s attitude towards “broad.” But we also have to deal with Joan’s attraction to and revulsion from men.

Crass language peppers Mamet’s work. He makes no apologies for the “Mamet dammit.” Impeccably timed cursing not only constructs the cadence of Mamet’s dialogue, it also serves a comic purpose. Verbal abuse has left audiences in stitches ever since the Greeks started honoring Dionysus with alcohol and satyr plays. We take pleasure in the humiliation of others, and Mamet’s put-downs provide an irresistible cocktail of vitriol, obscenity, and *Schadenfreude*. An exchange from *Glengarry Glen Ross* illustrates this point:

Moss comes out of the interrogation.

**MOSS:** *Fuckin’ asshole.*

**ROMA:** *What, they beat you with a rubber bat?*

**MOSS:** *Cop couldn’t find his dick with two hands and a map.*

Angered by the police intimidation, Moss strikes back behind the cop’s back by castrating him. In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud explains that the pleasure of many jokes comes from allowing us to express hostility toward people who have power over us: “Jokes make criticism possible against persons who claim to exercise authority.” The cop has roughed Moss up, and his wisecrack, Freud would say, “represents a rebellion against that authority, a liberation from its pressure.”

*Romance* spotlights Mamet’s penchant for satire. The play deals with touchy subjects—ethnic stereotypes, legal mumbo jumbo, and sexual hanky panky.

In a small conference room, a defendant and his defense attorney confer:

**DEFENDANT:** *Oh, Lord, Oh Lord, now I am in trouble...now I am, truly, truly fucked... You don’t want to lie?...Why did you go to Law School? If you don’t want to lie? ... what have I done? I hired a Goy lawyer! It’s like going to a straight hairdresser....You fucken brain-dead, white socks, country club, plaid pants, Campbell’s soup fucken sheigetz Goy....*

**DEFENSE ATTORNEY:** *...you people can’t order a cheese sandwich ...without mentioning the Holocaust.*

**DEFENDANT:** *My people do not eat cheese sandwiches.*

**DEFENSE ATTORNEY:** *...It isn’t “kosher” ...?*

**DEFENDANT:** *IT ISN’T TASTY. TASTY. YOU MINDLESS NAZI FUCK. It doesn’t taste good, and so we don’t eat it. ...*

**BAILIFF:** *You fellas want lunch?...What do you eat?...*

**DEFENDANT:** *I eat “food.”What do you mean?*

**DEFENSE ATTORNEY:** *He meant, is there anything you don’t eat?*

**DEFENDANT:** *...Why do you ask?*

**DEFENSE ATTORNEY:** *He asked out of politeness, because you’re Jewish.*

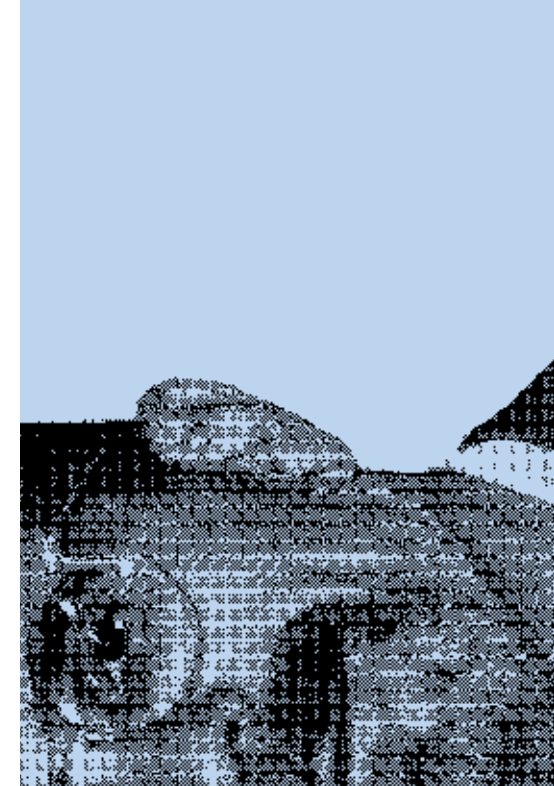
**DEFENDANT:** *How would he know that?*

**DEFENSE ATTORNEY:** *You’ve been shouting “goy cocksucker” for an hour.*

Mamet is fearless as he attacks one PC sacred cow after another. By exaggerating the stereotypes and rubbing our faces in them, he makes us laugh, but he also makes us examine these stereotypes critically.

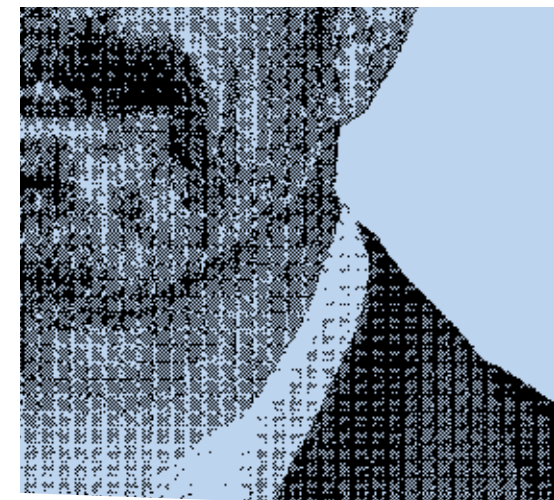
Mamet skewers the legal system with the punch-line of any good lawyer joke: lawyers make an honest living by lying. Later the judge admits to taking bribes as the trial ends with a fistfight and a kiss.

Even though Mamet’s plays with their jazz rhythms seem as fresh as tomorrow, his theory of comedy is as old



as yesterday. He continues the classical tradition of satire: *castigo mores ridendo*. Through laughter, the satirist hopes to correct the follies of mankind. Laughter is the best medicine. Mamet’s recent plays contain more laughs than ever, but America’s most incendiary playwright has not lost his idealism. David Mamet would like nothing better than to replace hatred with...*Romance*.

*Brendan Shea is a first-year dramaturgy student in the A.R.T./MXAT Institute for Advanced Theatre Training.*





# Cambridge Marriage: Mamet at the A.R.T.

By Sean Bartley



**DAVID MAMET'S MARRIAGE** with the A.R.T. was brokered by an unlikely go-between: Anton Chekhov. In 1988 Robert Brustein, a long-time Mamet collaborator, commissioned the playwright to adapt *Uncle Vanya*. Brustein saw Mamet, famous for his spare but poetic language, as the perfect choice to render Chekhov's dialogue into contemporary American rhythms. According to Brustein, the production, starring Christopher Walken, was "an act of deconstruction designed to exhume the living energies of Chekhov's writing from under the heavy weight of 'masterpiece topsoil.'"

Four years later at the A.R.T., Mamet scored an incendiary hit directing his new play *Oleanna*. Starring William H. Macy and Mamet's wife Rebecca Pidgeon, the piece tackled sexual harassment in the wake of the Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill train wreck. A controversial success in Cambridge and New York, *Oleanna* inspired roundtables in *The New York*

*Times* and engaged academics in heated debate. No other Mamet play has inspired critics to spill so much ink.

After a performance, a female student asked the playwright whose side he was on, the strutting macho professor's or the guerilla feminist's. "I'm an artist," Mamet replied. "I write plays, not political propaganda. If you want easy solutions, turn on the boob tube. Social and political issues on TV are cartoons; the good guy wears a white hat, the bad guy a black hat. Cartoons don't interest me."

"I write plays, not political propaganda. If you want easy solutions, turn on the boob tube..."

Although in *Oleanna* Mamet created a complex feminist firebrand, the play also used Mamet trademarks—testosterone-drenched dialogue and physical violence. With his next play at the A.R.T., Mamet explored a new path. Set in a living room rather than a male workplace, *The Cryptogram* dramatizes the tension between a boy and his mother as they struggle to deal with the parents' divorce. When their worlds collapse, the two turn to and on each other. Tinged with tender bitterness, the play shows an astonishing capacity to dramatize the fragile world of a ten-year-old who, eager to go on a fishing trip with his father, cannot fall asleep. "When is Dad coming home?" the boy keeps asking his mother. But the father never comes home. In this semi-autobiographical work, Mamet also created one

of the most fascinating women on the contemporary American stage. As Felicity Huffman, who played the mother, told the *Boston Herald*:

*"He writes difficult, challenging roles for women, but he also writes difficult, challenging roles for men. No one's the hero. There wasn't a hero in The Cryptogram, but it has a brilliant part for a woman. No one's the hero in Speed-the-Plow. He gives his women, along with the men, really difficult jobs to do, and*

*you can get so mad at his women. In Speed-the-Plow, for example, the only female character has the tough and often maligned job of speaking the truth. So I don't think it's true that Mamet doesn't write well for women. He's certainly written well for me."*



far left: William H. Macy and David Mamet in rehearsal for Mamet's *Oleanna*, photo: Brigitte Lacombe; bottom left: Felicity Huffman and Shelton Dane in the A.R.T.'s production of *The Cryptogram*, photo: Henry Horenstein; left: Felicity Huffman and Rebecca Pidgeon in the A.R.T.'s production of *Boston Marriage*, photo: Richard Feldman; below: Brooke Adams and Tony Shalhoub in the A.R.T.'s production of *The Old Neighborhood*, photo: Richard Feldman

After *The Cryptogram*'s success, Mamet penned *The Old Neighborhood*, a trio of short plays starring Tony Shalhoub and his wife Brooke Adams. The pieces follow Bobby Gould, a man who tries to reconnect with his Chicago roots. By going back to his past, Bobby hopes to find the strength to move forward into the future. In an interview with A.R.T. Literary Director Arthur Holmberg, Mamet revealed the identity crisis at the play's core:

**HOLMBERG:** Although they both try, neither Bob Gold in *Homicide* nor Bobby Gould in *The Old Neighborhood* seems to be able to find any kind of meaningful way to be Jewish in the United States. Why do they both fail?

**MAMET:** Because they're Jewish in the United States.

Mamet's next play, his fifth at the A.R.T., caught critics and audiences off guard. *Boston Marriage*, a comedy of

manners, was Mamet's homage to Oscar Wilde. Starring Felicity Huffman and Rebecca Pidgeon as feuding lovers, the play featured Mamet's first all-female cast and was set in a turn-of-the-century drawing room. The title was a nineteenth-century euphemism for a loving attachment between women. Claire, the older of the two, has snagged a wealthy protector. "Is he married?" asks Anna, her young lover. "Why would he require a mistress," Claire responds, "if he had no wife?" Anna has her own surprise. She wants to use Claire's boudoir to seduce an even younger woman. The younger woman turns out to be the protector's daughter as the convoluted plot bubbles and boils and thickens. Mamet's elegant dialogue, dotted with polysyllabic epigrams, showed new colors on the author's linguistic palette.

With *Romance*, Mamet tackles courtroom farce. At first Mamet's trial, presided over by a pill-popping judge, seems ordinary enough. Soon, however,

the courtroom's solemnity is shattered. Spurned lovers and sadistic doctors arrive, hurling cookware and bodies across the room. By the time the near-comatose judge declares his verdict, such bedlam has arisen that the audience never learns the charges against the defendant.

Chekhov once quipped: "There is nothing new in art except talent." During his two decades at the A.R.T., Mamet has stretched his prodigious talent in unexpected ways. Freed from the commercial pressures of Broadway, the playwright used the A.R.T. stage to break new ground: he took on new genres, expanded his linguistic registers, and enlarged his gallery of female roles. With *Romance* he presents A.R.T. audiences with his wackiest dramatic world yet.

*Sean Bartley is a second-year dramaturgy student at the A.R.T./MXAT Institute for Advanced Theatre Training.*



# A Mamet Reunion

## SEXUAL PERVERSITY IN CHICAGO AND THE DUCK VARIATIONS

By Sean Bartley

ORIGINALLY, THE PAIRING of David Mamet's short plays *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and *The Duck Variations* was pragmatic rather than artistic. A marriage of convenience, the decision to perform the two works as a double bill in their 1976 premiere justified a full ticket price. Strong parallels, however, exist between the two works, particularly in their male friendships. Emil and George, the chums of *The Duck Variations*, may be viewed as older versions of Bernard and Danny, *Sexual Perversity's* randy twenty-somethings.

Take this exchange from *The Duck Variations*:

**GEORGE:** *Where?*

**EMIL:** *Look at her will ya!*

**GEORGE:** *That?*

**EMIL:** *What else? Go, sister?*

And a similar sequence from *Sexual Perversity*:

**BERNARD:** *Lookit this.*

**DANNY:** *Where?*

**BERNARD:** *There.*

**DANNY:** *Oh yeah.*

**BERNARD:** *My sweet goodness.*

**DANNY:** *Uh huh.*

**BERNARD:** *What a sensitive young lady.*

At first glance, the two passages are interchangeable. But Mamet has hidden a parable on sex and aging inside these two examples of male banter. Only Bernard and Danny are actually looking at a half-naked woman. George and Emil describe a sailboat.

*The Duck Variations* begins precisely where *Sexual Perversity* left off. In the final

moments of *Sexual Perversity*, Bernard and Danny sit beside Lake Michigan ogling women in bikinis. The women ignore them as the men dish out insults:

(They watch an imaginary woman pass in front of them.)

**BERNARD:** *Hi.*

**DANNY:** *Hello there. (Pause. She walks by.)*

**BERNARD:** *She's probably deaf.*

**DANNY:** *She did look deaf, didn't she.*

**BERNARD:** *Yeah. (Pause.)*

**DANNY:** *Deaf bitch.*

*The Duck Variations* begins with Emil and George alongside the same lake. But instead of drooling over babes, they contemplate the ducks.

Both Bernard and George are masters of comic exaggeration. For Bernie, the object of hyperbole is sex. In increasingly absurd stories, he describes lovemaking inside a plane, underwater, and in a hotel room in flames. But George, Bernie's *The Duck Variations* counterpart, has more on his mind than sex. Trying to impress the importance of pollution upon his friend, George spins his tallest tale: "They're finding ducks with lung cancer. There were these five or six stunted ducks sitting in a clearing hacking their guts out...they were trying to bum a smoke."

George and Emil have become prudes in their old age. In *Sexual Perversity*, sex is the central issue. But in *The Duck Variations*, copulation comes up only once, in a priggish exchange on duck sex:

**GEORGE:** *They're allowed to mate?*

**EMIL:** *This we do not know.*



**GEORGE:** *Eh?*

**EMIL:** *Only a few farmers know this.*

**GEORGE:** *Yeah?*

**EMIL:** *The mating of ducks is a private matter between the duck in question and his mate.*

**GEORGE:** *Yeah?*

**EMIL:** *It is a thing which few White men have witnessed... And those who claim to have seen it... Strangely do not wish to speak.*

**GEORGE:** *There are things we're better off not to know.*

**EMIL:** *If you don't know, you never can be forced to tell.*

**GEORGE:** *They don't got those beaks for nothing.*

But despite the parallels, *Sexual Perversity* and *The Duck Variations* have been divorced from one another for decades. *Sexual Perversity* proved much more popular with younger audiences, and Mamet penned the short curtain-raiser *A Sermon* to introduce it. This spring, the A.R.T. will reunite Mamet's early comedies, juxtaposing them with one of his latest comic hits and allowing audiences to make their own connections among the works.

Sean Bartley is a second-year dramaturgy student in the A.R.T./MXAT Institute for Advanced Theatre Training.

# Short Works, Long Histories: David Mamet, Harold Pinter, and Shel Silverstein

By Scott Zigler



DAVID MAMET ENJOYED longtime friendships and collaborations with both Harold Pinter and Shel Silverstein. His most interesting collaboration with Pinter was on the film version of *Catastrophe*, a play by Samuel Beckett—a writer whom both acknowledge as an important influence on their work. In the film of *Catastrophe*, Mamet directed Pinter in the leading role of the Director while Mamet's wife, the Scottish actress Rebecca Pidgeon, played the role of the Assistant. This film also marked the last on-screen appearance of the legendary English actor Sir John Gielgud, who appeared in the role of the Protagonist. In another collaboration, Pinter directed the British premiere

of Mamet's play *Oleanna*, which had its world premiere at the A.R.T.

Mamet's two best-known collaborations with Silverstein are the screenplay for the film *Things Change* (which Mamet also directed) and a successful off-Broadway evening of one acts entitled "Oh Hell" which included Mamet's play *Bobby Gould in Hell* and Silverstein's *The Devil and Billy Markham*, produced at Lincoln Center. When Mamet, his longtime collaborating actor William H. Macy, and I founded the Atlantic Theater Company, we chose Silverstein's short plays as the best vehicle for the company's debut.

Mamet, Pinter, and Silverstein all agree on the importance of the short

form play in developing both their craft and their discipline as writers; they have each acknowledged that it is extremely important in the life of the writer to always have something to work on, especially when a larger project might require some distance.

"Seriously Funny" presents a selection of comedic short works from these three great playwrights.

Scott Zigler is the Director of the A.R.T./MXAT Institute for Advanced Theatre Training.

Above, left to right: David Mamet, Harold



CURTAIN TIMES

7:30 p.m. Tue, Wed, Thu, Sun eves  
8:00 p.m. Fri & Sat evenings  
2:00 p.m. Sat & Sun matinees

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HOT DATES

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2009						<b>MAR 28</b> <i>HOT</i> BAR 8pm
<b>29</b> BAR 2pm	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b> <i>HOT</i> BAR	<b>APR 1</b> BAR	<b>2</b> BAR u	<b>3</b> <i>HOT</i> BAR	<b>4</b> BAR t, BAR
<b>5</b> <i>HOT</i> BAR, BAR	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b> BAR	<b>9</b> BAR	<b>10</b> BAR o,t	<b>11</b> BAR t, BAR
<b>12</b> BAR 2pm	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b> BAR	<b>17</b> BAR	<b>18</b> BAR t, BAR
<b>19</b> BAR, BAR	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b> BAR	<b>22</b> BAR			<b>MAY 9</b> <i>HOT</i> ROM 8pm
<b>10</b> ROM 2pm	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b> <i>HOT</i> ROM	<b>13</b> ROM	<b>14</b> ROM u	<b>15</b> <i>HOT</i> ROM	<b>16</b> ROM t, ROM
<b>17</b> <i>HOT</i> ROM, ROM	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b> ROM	<b>20</b> ROM	<b>21</b> ROM	<b>22</b> ROM o,t	<b>23</b> ROM c,t, ROM
<b>24</b> ROM, ROM p	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b> ROM	<b>27</b> ROM p	<b>28</b> ROM p	<b>29</b> ROM, SF	<b>30</b> SF 8pm ROM t, ROM
<b>31</b> SF 8pm ROM, ROM	<b>JUNE 1</b>	<b>2</b> ROM	<b>3</b> ROM, SF	<b>4</b> ROM, SF	<b>5</b> ROM, SF	<b>6</b> SF 8pm ROM, ROM
<b>7</b> ROM ROM	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b> SPC	<b>12</b> SPC	<b>13</b> SPC, SPC
<b>14</b> SPC, SPC	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b> SPC	<b>17</b> SPC	<b>18</b> SPC	<b>19</b> SPC	<b>20</b> SPC, SPC
<b>21</b> SPC, SPC	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b> SPC	<b>24</b> SPC	<b>25</b> SPC	<b>26</b> SPC	<b>27</b> SPC, SPC
<b>28</b> SPC, SPC			<b>JULY 22</b> AUR	<b>23</b> AUR	<b>24</b> AUR	<b>25</b> AUR 8pm
<b>26</b> AUR 3pm AUR	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b> AUR	<b>29</b> AUR	<b>30</b> AUR	<b>31</b> AUR 3pm AUR	<b>AUG 1</b> AUR
<b>2</b> AUR 3pm AUR						

Dates and times subject to change. Please see [amrep.org/calendar](http://amrep.org/calendar) for the most up-to-date calendar.

BAR	Trojan Barbie	Performance times unless	p	Preplay discussion
ROM	Romance	otherwise noted:	t	Talkback discussion
SF	Seriously Funny	Fri/Sat Eves. 8PM	c	Childcare series
SPC	Sexual Perversity in Chicago	Sun./Tue./Wed./Thu. Eves. 7:30PM	o	Out at A.R.T.
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In Memoriam

REMEMBERING PAUL BENEDICT (1938–2008)

by Robert Brustein

**IMPISH AND LACONIC**, intelligent and alert, Paul Benedict gained his greatest fame in television and movies: as “Harry Bentley” in *The Jeffersons*, the director in *The Goodbye Girl*, and “Guffman” in *Waiting for Guffman*. But he was always happiest in the monastic role of non-profit stage actor. Among the last stage roles he played was the patrician Hirst in *No Man’s Land* at the A.R.T.; he had previously appeared at the A.R.T. in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* in 1994 and in *Journey of the Fifth Horse* in 1982.

Most actors are notoriously gregarious, but I suspect Paul loved raw nature more than human society. He certainly found some of his closest companions among raccoons, inviting them to dinner every night on Martha’s Vineyard, sharing meals with them, treating them as friends.

Paul died too young: a longer life for Paul would have given us the opportunity to watch him lend his relaxed and enigmatic style to those great roles he never got to play. Paul Benedict was a loyal friend and a loyal man of the theatre. I miss him. Hell, I even miss his raccoons.

*Excerpted from Robert Brustein’s eulogy at Paul Benedict’s memorial service. To read the full text, visit [www.amrep.org/articles/](http://www.amrep.org/articles/)*

*Robert Brustein is the Founding Director of the American Repertory Theatre.*



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top: Paul Benedict and Cherry Jones in Journey of the Fifth Horse; bottom left: Bill Camp and Benedict in Picasso at the Lapin Agile; bottom right: Benedict and Henry David Clarke in No Man’s Land at the A.R.T.



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A.R.T.

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**Trojan Barbie** March 28–April 22

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**Sexual Perversity in Chicago**

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