



Quarterly Newsletter of the International Centre for Women Playwrights

Winter 2005

Greetings From The Editor

Dear ICWP members and friends,

This has been a long, dreary winter. In fact, it's snowing – hard – as I type this introduction. And my two-year-old son is finding out that the cat doesn't like to drink orange juice. Yes, we're all a little stir-crazy these days...so it gives me a great deal of pleasure to bring a little bit of spring to your in-box.

I'm thrilled to present the latest issue of ICWP's SEASONS Newsletter. Here's a glimpse of what you'll find inside:

- Rebecca Ritchie's **Play Doctor** column;
- Kathy Coudle King's account of starting the North Dakota Playwrights' Co-Op, which is inspiring theatres, playwrights, and students in the heartland;
- A look at the uses (and usefulness) of playwriting agents, by Sharyn Shipley;
- **Certain Expectations** by Karen Mueller Bryson, who explains how she uses ethnography to create dramatic works;
- The gripping – and amusing – **Marathon Madness** by Judith Pratt, who recently took part in the The Kitchen Theatre's 48-hour Marathon Play Festival (in Ithaca, New York);
- Details from Alan Woods about the upcoming ICWP retreat in Columbus, Ohio; and
- Sandra Hosking's interview with playwright Jennifer Maisel, who was recently profiled in the *Dramatist* (reprinted from the February issue of *Insight For Playwrights*).

Also I've thrown in a few opportunities just to get you back in gear for submitting your scripts. I hope they are helpful.

I want to send out a big THANK YOU to all of the contributors!

Editing this issue has been a wonderful experience and I'm sure you'll find something in it of interest. Please feel free to e-mail me with any comments. Happy reading! And may spring soon arrive in earnest...

Rachel Rubin Ladutke, Guest Editor
Weehawken, New Jersey
February 2005

THE PLAY DOCTOR
by Rebecca Ritchie

The Play Doctor is in! All playwrights are welcome to submit questions on structural and craft issues for diagnosis by **Rebecca Ritchie, JD**, at rtritchie@att.net.

Disclaimer: Please note that the Play Doctor did her residency in The Well-Made Play. All comments reflect that bias.

Dear Play Doctor:

Help! Two Equity actors who are close friends of mine have asked me to write a play for them that they plan to tour. I've poured my heart into this project for half a year, but every draft seems to have something seriously wrong with it. Either she thinks her role is pale and unconvincing -- so that I have to rewrite her speeches to bring life, energy, and depth to them - - or he thinks the structure unreasonably emphasizes the other character in this two-hander. His view is that the play lacks the necessary balance between yin and yang: He hates it and doesn't get the jokes. But when I give his character more truth and feeling and a couple of damn good monologues, she finds the play too sad.

What do I do? Can I breathe life into this play? Is there some homeopathy to diagnose its condition? And if not, how do I know it's well and truly dead?

Dear Playwright:

You're in deep, deep trouble. Luckily, you have come to a specialist who can diagnose your play's condition.

First – and here I beg your forgiveness in advance for my candor -- you have broken the cardinal rule of playwriting: Write for yourself.

You seem to be evaluating this play through somebody else's eyes rather than your own. You wouldn't try to write wearing someone else's eyeglasses, would you? Then why let someone else define your intentions? There is such a thing as too much or the wrong kind of development. Unless one of your patrons is Walt Disney -- defrosted and propped against the kitchen wall, albeit with noticeable freezer burn -- no amount of money should sway your artistic integrity. (That was a joke.)

So step back. Take a deep breath, and squint. Look for these signs of life:

Does the Central Character – or, in your case, characters -- have a choice or decision (a conflict of desire or intention) or a dilemma to work out?

Suppose your play is about a long-term marriage and one of the parties is trying to work out her feelings about mortality in the context of her relationship with her husband. She's angry. He's oblivious. They need to work this out before she dies, an event that is imminent.

OK. Good start. Now, have you given your central character a choice or decision to make so that, in making that choice or decision, she can change on some very deep level? And, since this is a two-hander, have you also given the other character a significant choice or decision to make so that when he makes his choice, the scales fall from her eyes so that she is kick-started into understanding their relationship and making her final choice?

Yes, you say? Good sign. Now, since this play by the reports of your actor friends, is *in extremis*, put your ear to its chest, shake the body ever so slightly, saying “Ma’am, ma’am?” and check if it’s breathing. Does your blood seem to run through its veins? If it speaks, do you cry out, “Yes, that’s exactly how I feel?” Do you sense your own heart pounding in its frail little body? If an angel pure and radiant were to descend *deus ex machina* tomorrow, would you be happy that your play, at least, still lived?

Yes, again? Then the play’s on the road to recovery. It is not suffering from your ministrations, but from a bad case of multi-drug resistant interference by your well-meaning actor friends.

Actors, no matter how good, no matter how experienced as teachers, directors, playwrights themselves, develop a kind of theatrical sepsis when confronted by the possibility of a playwright amanuensis creating a vehicle *just for them!* Too good to be true: A talented craftswoman writing the actor’s thoughts, the actor’s feelings into a dynamite play that will have strong and lusty legs for generations to come – who could resist mucking around with that just a little?

This is when you cross your pointer fingers in front of your face and cry out, “Get thee behind me, Satan!” This is your play, ducky. This is part of the body of your work. It will be the monument on your tomb. (And let me digress here just a moment to say that arranging for Hebrew letters on a tombstone takes the patience of a saint, especially in Houston, where monument companies have never quite gotten the concept of writing from right to left although they will cheerfully etch John Wayne and your second place ribbon in sheep rearing on the headstone.)

Thank your actor friends for their advice, but when you feel the play’s been coddled enough, set it on its feet and give it a decent reading, preferably before an audience of theater professionals. If you hate what you hear, if the actors were right, and you agree that gangrene has set in, then the world offers a surprising number of ways to bury a script.

But if you like what you hear, give your friends the choice to stay a part of the project – as you’ve written it -- or to walk away. Because that will be their only involvement in the future.

It’s your play, not their play, case closed.

THE NORTH DAKOTA PLAYWRIGHTS CO-OP
by Kathy Coudle King

In late July, 2004, I had the privilege of participating in a writing retreat at Ohio State University, hosted by Alan Woods, as part of the International Center for Women Playwrights. While I was only in attendance for a few short days, I took much away with me at the end of the retreat. Days were spent writing, visiting with other playwrights, and hearing from theatre professionals. Each afternoon, playwrights were able to have their pages read aloud by actors and other writers. As any playwright knows, hearing one's work read aloud is much different than hearing it read in one's head. Rhythm, realism, and repetition can all be discerned when hearing one's words come to life in another's mouth.

While I hold a BFA in Dramatic Writing from NYU, and have taken numerous playwriting classes as both an undergraduate and a graduate student, it has been over a decade since I was in a formal classroom where I could look forward to sharing rough drafts of works-in-progress. I realized during the OSU writing retreat how much I missed this part of the process and how much my work missed it.

I returned home with a renewed energy to develop a long-held dream: a playwriting co-op in North Dakota. As most of you know, North Dakota is one of those large, sparsely populated states in the middle of the United States right on the Canadian border. While there is much community theatre, there are few professional theatres, and playwrights work in isolation. If one is not affiliated with a university, it is difficult to find a group that is able to effectively comment on one's plays. Certainly, there are numerous writing groups in which members work on fiction, poetry, and creative fiction, but I think it takes a special ear to comment on a play-in-progress. In fact, I've met very few playwrights in the state since moving here in 1989. However, there are a few of us, and I suspect there are more than a few whom I have not met or heard about. Therefore, I wanted to see an organization that could bring us together. The seed that was the ND PW Co-op began to grow.

I enlisted two friends, Adonica Shultz Aune, and John Thompson, fellow-writers who had directed two of my productions, to help me develop that idea. I have known them for over a decade, and the three of us became the founding members of the ND PW Co-op.

What purpose would our co-op serve? To begin with, it would host meetings in which playwrights could read and get feedback on their plays from other playwrights. It would be a place where new plays could be nurtured along with their writers. It would be a clearinghouse for submission opportunities. Unlike me, most of the playwrights in my region aren't members of ICWP or other on-line playwriting listserves (yet!). The Co-op would be a true co-operative in the sense that members would contribute what they could in terms of time, skills (directing, acting, producing, grant-writing, public relations), connections (associations with other theatres, media, arts and community organizations), and occasionally financial support. The Co-op would assist writers in providing staged readings of their work, and would even sponsor festivals where their work could be performed, creating media attention for the writers and their work.

There are a lot of "woulds" and "coulds" in the previous paragraph. All of these subjunctives hung on one huge IF. We could do all this IF we could become an official organization. One

can certainly come up with a catchy name for an organization, print off some letterhead, and “poof!” -- it exists. But in order to access grant money and non-profit status, one needs to be legit. Legit means paperwork, and lots of it. My first goal for the Co-op, after attracting some members, was to find some grant money to provide us with our first opportunity to showcase our work. After a few preliminary inquiries, we realized that it would be out of the question to be a stand-alone non-profit organization. The paperwork and financial costs of attorney fees seemed too daunting. So . . . we sought out adoptive parents.

We found just the right match with the Hatton Community Theatre in Hatton, ND. This small, rural town of approximately 800 welcomed us into their theatre, incorporating our mission into theirs. This enabled the Co-op to apply for grants that would benefit both the Hatton Community Theatre and the developing Co-op. I am pleased to say that so far, we have acquired over \$3500.00 to produce two ten-minute play festivals this spring. We will showcase the work of 8 ND playwrights in the "Cabin Fever Festival," to be held in Clifford/Galesburg on Mar. 19th, and in Hatton on Mar. 20th. In late April, we will again mount a festival, this time highlighting the "Adventures of Lewis & Clark." The submission deadline has not yet arrived for this festival, but we hope to produce another 8 playwrights at 3 different venues, in addition to performing the plays for 3 small-town schools. Since our creation, members have also participated in our first in-school playwriting seminar with ten high school students in Hatton, ND. It is also rewarding to see members begin the first tentative steps to getting their work read outside of the state, learning "the ropes" of submitting their work. One member wrote her first play with the encouragement of the Co-op .

The Co-op is still small in number, but we believe that the festivals will encourage others to join us in our efforts to provide a nurturing environment where playwrights across the state can come together to hone their craft, lend support for each other, and grow as writers. The festivals will also serve a second purpose, which is to alert local drama teachers, actors, and community theatres that when they are seeking fresh scripts that there is wonderful material available from regional playwrights. Already, a half-dozen articles about the ND PW Co-op have appeared in newspapers across the state, and theatre professors have begun to take notice of our organization.

Future plans include creating our own catalogue, developing a web-site, creating a newsletter, perhaps publishing our work as a collection, hosting staged readings of full-lengths, and continuing to work with area youth.

Our logo is a grain elevator -- in fact, the one on my web page was taken by none other than an ICWP sister-lister, Dianne Glassburn Sandau. Sometimes, while driving across our sprawling, flat, treeless state the only thing visible in the distance is the tall, hulking sight of a grain elevator. They stand sentinel over the plains, simple in construction, no fancy architectural details or lights or shining glass. Simple and solid, they serve as the beacon for farmers, the place to bring their seed and crops. The trains pull in alongside the elevators and take what has been grown in the surrounding land to places far and wide. A taste of North Dakota, the stories of those who dwell here -- far and wide -- that's our ultimate goal.

For more information about the North Dakota Playwrights Co-op, please visit www.dakotalit.com/coop.htm

PLAYWRIGHTING AGENTS – WHY WOULD YOU WANT ONE?

by Sharyn Shipley

My friend and teacher, William Gibson, is 90. His play GOLDA'S BALCONY just closed on Broadway and is now touring the country. His most well known work is THE MIRACLE WORKER. He has numerous movie and television credits. He finished a new play months ago.

He can't get his agent to read it. Now, there's a clue.

A playwright wants an agent so that her play can get to a producer. If you think getting an agent is difficult, try to approach a theatrical producer. One producer's website has the following (paraphrased) disclaimer on it: "Any material sent to me via this website becomes mine, wholly and completely, upon receipt." I don't know if this is legal, but it sure is intimidating.

I have not been able to discover even one instance of an agent actually helping to get a play produced. And believe me, I've been asking. I had an agent myself for awhile. He did, in fact, help me get one writing job. That was it. However, in his defense, I don't think I presented myself well at the time. There is a certain professional polish that one must have to deal well with the non-creative elements of the theatrical world. You have to take criticism (direct or indirect) with grace and be able to make changes when they are necessary.

As an unagented writer, it is up to you to polish your presentation and your style until people want to help you, want to be around you, and are willing to work with you until your work is excellent and ready for a full production.

The mechanics of agency are simple:

They represent you when you are not available.

They take 10% of what your work earns.

They want your play to be marketable. (That means you must arrange to workshop your play yourself.)

They determine the fee for productions that are not professional, based on experience and an assessment of the situation. (A practiced eye is really useful here).

A good agent will have extensive contacts in the theatrical world and, while they may not be able to place the play, they may be able to show it to actors and directors whose interest in it will stimulate a production. (For some interesting info about networking I recommend Ken Kragen's Book "Life is a Contact Sport".)

Summary: Network. Network. Network. The more people you know, the more productions you will have. The internet has changed the way many businesses operate, and theater is not exempt from this. Many of the things, once done by agents only, can now be done by the playwright. Determine the level of work you are willing to do, in order to achieve your production goal. Learn to market your material. Learn your art and craft well and agents and managers will come looking for you. Check out their histories, preferably through the ICWP (what a great resource).

Certain Expectations: Using Ethnodrama as Transformational Theatre
by Karen Mueller Bryson

To paraphrase Johnny Saldana, professor of theatre at Arizona State University, ethnotheatre, or ethnodrama, is defined as the use of theatre techniques to present research findings. In an ethnodrama, characters are actual research participants and the participants' lives are dramatized on stage. In this art form, the traditional lines between the social sciences and the arts are not easily distinguishable. While it has been the case that much of the ethnodrama created by social scientists has been less artistic in nature, the work of well-known documentary playwrights such as Moises Kaufman and Anna Deavere Smith serve as excellent examples of research-art that is more theatrical in nature. As both a playwright and social scientist, I believe I have found a niche in using my skills in both areas to create ethnodrama that is truly dramatic.

The creation of the play *Certain Expectations* was one of several methods I used to display the results of my dissertation research in human sciences. The ethnodrama is based upon interviews with graduates of the McNair Scholars Program at the University of South Florida in Tampa. The McNair Scholars Program is a federally funded program that assists high achieving undergraduate students from low-income, first generation backgrounds and students from traditionally underrepresented groups to motivate and encourage them to attend graduate and professional school. The media tends to focus on the academic failure of "poor" and "minority" students rather than focusing on those students who succeed despite the obstacles they face. *Certain Expectations* is a theatrical vehicle to celebrate the success of those students who were expected not to succeed.

Certain Expectations was written from the actual text of interviews in which the participants described their experiences growing up and going to college. It was my intention to present evocative portrayals of McNair scholars and their exceptional academic accomplishments and demonstrate how the McNair Program contributed to their success. By using an arts-based method, I was able to capture the voices of the students themselves and provide a forum for their voices to be heard. In creating a theater script that can be performed, I believe I provide a forum for the students' stories to have a transformative impact on others.

Our country is currently divided in so many ways – by ethnicity and race, politics, religion, economics and sexual orientation. In a survey of nearly 4,000 college students, Charles and Massey (2003 – *Chronicle of Higher Education*), found that racial stereotypes and discriminatory beliefs are still pervasive amongst college students. According to Beverly Daniel Tatum, author of *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*, young people rarely have the opportunity to interact with students who are different from them before they go to college. Tatum expressed the need for all levels of education to create truly inclusive environments in which all students feel valued and respected. Yet educational institutions have been unable to help students (1) develop a positive identity and sense of self, and (2) develop an understanding and acceptance of others regardless of their differences.

Certain Expectations can be used as a vehicle to create a sense of empathy that can lead to a greater understanding of others and their experiences. The use of art forms such as drama increases the likelihood that audiences will get to know and understand the experience of participants. By producing *Certain Expectations* on high school and college campus, I anticipate

that performances of the play will facilitate understanding and acceptance amongst students and educators alike. By bringing graduates' personal stories to the stage, I hope to change social attitudes by replacing discrimination and prejudice with understanding and acceptance.

With funding from generous sources such as the Puffin Foundation, I am able to bring *Certain Expectations* to audiences of educators as well as young people. I believe it is important for me to present the voices of McNair participants to educators, who can use the information gathered to better serve their students. I also believe the play has the power to motivate and encourage "at risk" students to reach for their dreams. I hope that *Certain Expectations* will inspire others to defy expectations and succeed despite the obstacles they face. I also hope that depicting students from low-income backgrounds and underrepresented groups in a positive way will promote greater understanding and awareness and help to decrease the intolerance and discrimination that we face in the world today.

For additional information about *Certain Expectations*, please visit:

<http://www.homestead.com/karenmueller/>

Educational institutions can produce *Certain Expectations* free of charge thanks to the support of the Puffin Foundation.

A New Landscape: Marathon Madness
by Judith Pratt

Ithaca, New York, Valentine's Day 2005

The Kitchen Theatre's 48-hour Marathon Play Festival has drawn to a wildly successful close. And I have managed to stay up all night and write a ten-minute play that doesn't suck.

Although centrally isolated in upstate New York, Ithaca attracts artists of all kinds. We lucked out when playwright Aoise Stratford's astrophysicist husband joined the faculty at Cornell University. Aoise (pronounced "Aysha") comes from Sydney Australia, co-founded Three Wise Monkeys Theatre Company in San Francisco, and has received many awards for her plays, which have been performed in the USA, Australia, Canada and Italy. She has also participated in several play marathons with the Daytrippers program of the Rough Theatre Company in San Francisco, and brought that format to the Kitchen Theatre. Here's how it worked.

First, the call for playwrights: send in three pages, from which Aoise chose the five she thought were strongest and demonstrated a variety of styles. Of the final five, four of us live in Ithaca and have had work done both in and out of town: journalist Kenny Berkowitz, mathematician David Gauspari, actor/director/educator Marie Sirakos, and me. The fifth, Christine Carrie Fien, is a Rochester journalist.

Then all five of us itch around worrying, because we won't find out the topic, actors, or directors until 10:30 p.m. on Friday night, and have to bring in ten brilliant minutes by 9 a.m. on Saturday morning. Yikes.

We all meet on Friday, February 11: five experienced directors, seventeen actors (ranging in age from about 20 to 65 and in experience from amateur to professional), five production assistants, a production stage manager, and Rachel Lampert, Artistic Director of the Kitchen Theatre, our hostess and sponsor. Almost forty talented people volunteered their time and energy for this project!

The Kitchen staff produced a beautifully clear document that explained the rehearsal spaces (they actually found five!) and a schedule that gave each group equal time onstage. We got a tour of the theatre, where we were to perform on the existing set. Props and sound were limited to what the theatre owned, including a couch and a bunch of sound effects, or whatever we could turn up in a day.

Limited? Those are not limits! I've directed and produced both my own work and plays by my fellow playwrights in 3rd Floor Productions. Shoestring, struggling, strung out. Now I have everything just handed to me. Lights. Props. Sound. Stage managers. Wow.

Aoise and Rachel had pre-assigned the director/playwright pairs, and I was delighted to find myself with Norm Johnson, of the Ithaca College theatre faculty. I'd already enjoyed working with him on two other shows. Then Rachel produced a hat with all the actors' names on slips of paper, and Aoise drew them until each playwright had three actors. The last two actors got assigned to me and David.

More luck: four very different actors, all of whom I'd seen onstage or actually worked with. Susannah Berryman, Cynthia Henderson, Peter Shuman, and Rosie Taube. With me, Norm, and production assistant Jessamyn Perlus, we had our company.

Aoise announced the topic--*A New Landscape*. As she explained: "With elections changing our political landscape, tsunamis changing our physical landscape, and art changing the landscape of Central Park, new landscapes seemed a fitting topic. Or maybe it's just because this is my first winter in a cold climate and every time I look out the window I am awed by the way things can change color in a matter of hours."

Now each new production company sat down to get acquainted. I asked everyone to tell me their thoughts about the topic, and we discussed them. That let me hear the actors' voices, and gave me a buzzing headful of ideas. I remembered a phrase from D.H. Lawrence about the end of the world: "just grass, and maybe a hare sitting up." And Norm said—that's your first line.

From midnight to about 5:30 a.m., I wrote. Not only did I come up with a new writing process, I focused on my work in a new way.

First, I wrote what each cast member had said, in their voices. From there, a plot appeared, and I just typed it down like the rough draft of a short story. By the end of three pages, I found the conflict. I printed the stuff out, stared at it, circled a few things, and started to write. At the point where I usually say hell, this is stuck, and wander off for a glass of soda, I realized time was a wastin', and I had to sit there. And at the point where I thought, okay, this is done, I realized I only had five pages and had to keep writing.

Suddenly it was 5:30 a.m. and I had a play. After an hour's nap, while my wonderful husband the ex-sound designer found me music and a cougar's roar, I printed 'em out and headed for the theatre. (As a free-lance writer, I have a great computer-printer setup, but we could also e-mail our scripts to the Kitchen for printout.)

Directors, consider this challenge: You see the script for the first time and immediately have to start rehearsing the actors! Norm wisely and bravely took plenty of time for read-throughs and discussions, allowing me to find and fix clunkers. Then he asked the actors to improvise their way through the story—during which time I got lots of swell new lines! Actors asking questions, director focusing energies, playwright scribbling insanely, collaboration at its best.

Let me point out here that I am closer to 60 than 50, and I have fibromyalgia. So I really didn't think I'd survive this all-nighter thing. Instead, I had a terrific time working with Norm and the actors. At about 3 p.m., I finally crashed—only to pop up again on Sunday morning ready for more. It helped that Aoise insisted we take lunch breaks, and the Kitchen provided coffee, water, fruit and cookies. And it helped that I haven't had this much fun doing theatre in years.

By Sunday morning, Norm, Jessamyn and the actors had located props and costumes. I'd really tried not to ask for a waterfall or a working 747, but I did end up needing a spear, a rabbit's scream, that cougar, and a strong light change. Each group had about an hour for a cue-to-cue in the theatre, with stage manager Melissa Thompson punching light cues like an air traffic controller and shuffling CDs like a Las Vegas croupier.

I fled the final tech, lunched with an out-of-town friend and went to find some little gifts for the cast—organic fruit and nut bars, in keeping with my post-apocalyptic plot.

Showtime. 4 p.m. Sunday afternoon. The theatre is packed—if it had a balcony, people would be hanging from it. The actors are drilling lines in the dressing room. For the over 50s, the words learned so easily at 20 become horribly elusive! The Kitchen staff has produced an actual program. David, Marie, and I huddle together by the booth. We can't see Christine or Kenny.

Rachel and Aoise describe the process for the audience, and the lights go up. Our five works couldn't be more different from one another—five completely diverse voices, five fascinating views of that new landscape. The acting is amazing—fully realized characters in 10 hours of rehearsal. The production assistants efficiently get the sofas and tables and spears and jumper cables on and off stage. Melissa doesn't miss a beat. The magic of theatre, created by 37 people working their butts off for 48 hours.

When your work gets fully produced for an audience, there is no hiding place. I could see and hear the good parts, as well as those, um, other parts. As I rewrite, I'll be way ahead of where I'd be if I'd simply scribbled alone for those 48 hours.

What more could I wish for? Maybe some time for directors and writers to debrief. And maybe a second performance, to get more bucks for the Kitchen Theatre, and to let more people see all that great work. Except that most of us were asleep by 8 p.m. on Sunday night.

P.S. In e-mail exchanges, everyone writes that they had a glorious time, and are ready to start again next Friday.

ICWP Retreat Details **By Alan Woods**

- Columbus, Ohio: home to the Ohio State University, one of the largest campuses in the country with over 50,000 students
- Columbus, Ohio: state capital, legislative center, site of a contested Presidential election
- Columbus, Ohio: host to the great Ohio State Fair
- Columbus, Ohio: home to James Thurber, Elsie Janis, William Howard Taft, and other heavyweights of arts and politics

But in August, 2005, Columbus, Ohio, reaches new heights of fame and artistry. That's when Columbus becomes the center of the playwriting universe, as the International Centre for Women Playwrights Playwrights' Retreat occupies computer labs and performance spaces in the Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute and the Department of Theatre.

The dates are August 13-21. Here's what happens: playwrights work during the days at what they do best: writing. Late each afternoon, workshops and panels on theatre topics will be available. Then each evening, playwrights gather with Columbus-area performers for readings of works-in-progress. A chance to hear how that scene works, how the act is developing, whether the characters are cooperating or not.

And, perhaps most importantly: the schmooze events. Whether gathering on benches outside the dorm, over wine or beer in campus saloons, or at the Ohio sweet corn roasts that will open and close the retreat: a chance to exchange ideas, inspirations, or theatrical traumas.

Playwrights can attend for the full week, or for a few days. Accommodations are comfortable, if spartan, in a dorm across the street from both the Lawrence and Lee Institute (which houses the ICWP Archives) and the computer lab/theatres in the Drake Performance and Event Center. A shopping center, with coffee house, multiplex cinemas, a Target, and a Barnes & Noble is a five minute walk. And those who arrive on the 13th can catch the last couple of days of the Ohio State Fair (entertainment not announced at our press time; check it out at <http://www.ohioexpocenter.com/osf/osf.htm> - a chance for cotton candy, prize livestock, and the pie and jelly contests—not to mention the annual butter sculpture, usually a life-size cow plus a life-sized celebrity, all in chilled butter).

Dorm fees range from \$18 nightly (double, no linen) to \$50 nightly (single, all linen), and everywhere in between. For further information and reservations: contact workshop coordinator Alan Woods, woods.1@osu.edu. For photos of, and comments about, the 2004 retreat, visit www.internationalwomenplaywrights.org/

ONE TO WATCH...
By Sandra Hosking

Playwright: Jennifer Maisel

City of Residence: Los Angeles

Education: M.F.A. in Dramatic Writing, New York University's Tisch School of the Arts

Web site: www.dogearplays.com

Selected Titles: *The Last Seder, Eden, ... And the Two Romeos, Mallbaby, Mad Love, Dark Hours*

Keep your eye on Jennifer Maisel. In a recent issue of the Dramatist Guild of America's *The Dramatist* magazine, she was listed as one of four playwrights who are "ones to watch."

Her plays have been workshopped and produced in Chicago, New York, Minneapolis, San Francisco, and elsewhere. She has worked on film and television projects for ABC, NBC, MTV, and Disney.

The Long Island native's full-length play, *The Last Seder*, is slated to be published the fall or winter of 2006 by the University of Texas Press in an anthology of Jewish plays. The publication will mark her first full-length in print, but she has had short pieces featured in scene and monologue books in the past.

In *Seder*, Lily and Marvin Price return for the last Passover in their family home and discover that the magic of the Seder ritual is the one thing that allows them to heal the past. Although *Seder* is considered a Jewish play, it has a more universal appeal, Maisel asserts.

The play received the 2002 Fund for New American Plays Award from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and has received productions in Chicago and Washington D.C. She also received Showtime's Tony Cox Screenwriting Award at the Nantucket Film Festival for her film adaptation of the script.

Seder has been scheduled to receive a staged reading on Jan. 23 at the Emanuel Arts Center in Beverly Hills, featuring Ed Asner, Cloris Leachman, Mayim Bialik, and others. In New York this March, *Seder* will receive a "backers presentation," which Maisel describes as being more rehearsed than a reading, but not a full production. It will be a showcase of sorts for producers who might be interested in mounting the show.

That kind of production sounds like a resourceful strategy and perhaps a way to break out of the endless-reading cycle. Maisel, like other playwrights, has become a tad frustrated with theaters only wanting to commit to a reading. "It makes me crazy. I have a couple of other plays that have gotten a lot of attention, but they've only had readings," she says.

In addition to her full-length plays, Maisel has written shorter pieces, including Heideman Award finalist *How I Learned to Spell?*, *Impenetrable*, and a one-woman show titled *Animal Dreams*.

As an undergraduate at Cornell University, Maisel created her own major in visual studies, focusing on theater. In her freshman year there, a friend convinced her to sign up for a playwriting class. Robert Gross, the instructor, ended up being Maisel's playwriting mentor throughout her time at Cornell. "I worked with him my whole time there," she says.

But don't ask her to recall details about the early plays she wrote there. "I don't know what happened to those plays, and I'm not sure I want to," she says with a laugh.

In her senior year, she entered two plays in the college's playwriting contest and took first and second place. "That gave me the maybe-I-can-do-this-for-my-life feeling."

She found herself moving out west in 1991 after becoming involved with the Padua Hills Playwrights Workshop/Festival in the Los Angeles area. "The people I met there are people I work with today," she says. Now she travels often between the east and west coasts.

"I'd love to move out of L.A. and be somewhere that has weather, but I'm happy to be around this wealth of talent. That's a lucky thing. There's a lot of good stuff happening around here."

Says Maisel, "There are a lot of good and great writers and directors out here." Some might find it surprising that the film capital of the world would have a vibrant theater community. "There's a lot of theater for film's sake and theater for theater's sake. They're two very different animals," she says.

Maisel belongs to several playwriting groups in L.A., including Dog Ear.

"It's a phenomenal group of people. I feel very fortunate to have been asked to join them," she says.

The group was formed roughly three years ago by playwrights who had attended workshops at the now defunct A.S.K. Theater Projects. It contains 10 playwrights, including Leon Martell, Robert Fieldsteel, Katy Hickman, Bryan Davidson, and others.

"I really cherish their opinions and also what they're trying to do in theater," Maisel says. "Everybody is so different yet really respectful of each other."

When Maisel first joined the group, the members had just written "witch" plays. Maisel took on the challenge, and her ten-minute dark comedy *Goody Fucking Two-Shoes* about two high school girls auditioning for the *Crucible*, will be featured at the Actors Theatre of Louisville's Humana Festival of New American Plays in April.

Goody, as well as the "witch" plays written by other Dog Ear members, can be downloaded from the group's Web site at www.dogearplays.com.

People Maisel has considered mentors include fellow Dog Ear member Leon Martell and the late Pamela Gordon, an actress for whom Maisel wrote material. “She was like my theater mom,” Maisel says. “I learned so much from her by writing for her.” Among others, she also credits director Joseph Megel, who directed *Seder* and worked with her on *Eden* and other plays.

“These people are indispensable to me whether they’re a mentor or a testing ground,” Maisel says. “They’re people who’ve always offered me insights and support.”

Tips

The play isn’t ready until it’s ready. “It’s always good to workshop. Sometimes you need to grow into your own play. I’ll write the first draft of something, then I’ll need to put it away until I can understand it more. Sometimes it’s being too intoxicated with yourself to rewrite.”

Playwriting is not easy.

Experiment with the form.

Know the difference between writing for the theater and writing for film. “The potential for both of them is remarkable,” she says. “If I can see it in a movie, I’m not sure I want to see it onstage.”

Think outside the kitchen. “I have a personal thing against kitchen sink drama,” she says. “The naturalistic stuff is death to anything I do. It weighs it down ... If you hand an actor a beer bottle — we’re in a bar. You don’t need the bar there. The audience goes right with you.”

Your life isn’t as interesting as you think it is. “The conversation you had with your friends last week isn’t interesting, but there’s something in it that is,” she says.

Trust who you are. “Don’t let anybody tell you it’s not going to work; make them show you,” Maisel says. She has been teaching a playwriting workshop for teenagers at a local high school where the students write short plays and stage them. “It’s kind of amazing once they let loose what they find ... trusting their voice. You have to trust who you are.”

Sandra Hosking’s plays have been produced in New York City, Los Angeles, Canada, and elsewhere. She is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America and the International Centre for Women Playwrights.

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OPPORTUNITIES

PLAYHOUSE ON THE SQUARE NEW PLAY COMPETITION (formerly the Mid-South Playwright Contest)

Deadline: 4-1-2005

Rules: Play must be unproduced (college-produced accepted); plays will be produced on the second stage (Circuit Playhouse). Play must be full length, play may be a musical, but music must be fully arranged for the piano or accompanied by audio tape, in order for it to be considered for production the following season.

Play must be received in typewritten manuscript form; materials will be returned only if a self-addressed, stamped envelope is enclosed. Please allow 9 months for return of material.

c/o Mr. Jackie Nichols
Playhouse On The Square
51 South Cooper St
Memphis, TN 38104
901-725-0776
website: www.playhouseonthesquare.org

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THE WADE FESTIVAL - presented by Pig's Eye Theatre

The Wade Festival is designed to give staged readings of new works and works-in-progress and promotes the development of new plays by emerging playwrights. The Festival serves to increase the visibility of those writers, and to encourage production of their work in the Twin Cities. The Wade Festival is named for the late George Franklin Wade, the founder of Shakespeare & Company, Minnesota's longest running classical outdoor repertory theater and a mentor to many of Pigs Eye's founding members.

We're looking for plays that have not yet received a professional production, and that the playwright feels is in need of development. We accept proposals for the Wade Festival on a year-round basis.

Plays selected will be developed in rehearsal for two to five days, and then performed in front of a paying audience either once or twice.

Submission Guidelines available at: www.pigseyetheatre.org

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The Themantics Group, a New York-based theater, chooses a theme or an issue to examine from four different perspectives. The four plays in each season will fall into a line-up following our "wedding plan":

Something Old --a classic play by an American playwright
Something New --a New York premiere production by a new voice writing for theater today
Something Borrowed --a play by a foreign playwright
Something "Blew" --a play that had a short-lived initial run and is now ready for reworking

By enticing patrons to see all four shows each season, the Group hopes to broaden its audience's understanding of that year's theme and create discussion in the community. The company's ultimate goal is to add community and educational programming each year that deals with that season's theme.

We always welcome submissions for new plays. Please send a treatment and synopsis to: plays@themantics.org PLEASE DO NOT SEND A FULL SCRIPT!