

Writing an Effective Socio-Political Stage Play
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Proposed time: 8 weeks

This semester I am taking Playwriting, taught by Dr. cfrancis blackchild, in which I was introduced to the form and had the opportunity to work through the playwriting process. In class, we read *Writing Your First Play* by Stephen Sossaman, which introduces the reader to the character-driven dramatic plot. I studied plot structure, created characters, scenes, and situations, and learned how to give and receive constructive criticism. Through the first half of the semester, I developed a 10-minute play following the story of a few men during a poker night in jail. It explores their struggle for power in an oppressive environment. Working through this process, I learned I'm very interested in systemic problems and their solutions. I tend to ask and write about questions I have regarding how people can create equitable political systems, a healthy planet, or establish justice, and enjoy disentangling the compounding contributing factors surrounding these issues. I see playwriting as the ultimate form to tackle these questions. Plays are intimate by nature: they zoom in on specific characters in specific situations, yet strive to understand and unpack human truths and complexity. The form itself amazes me because it exists indefinitely and ephemerally: each performance is slightly different given the new audience or cast, but the text itself endures. Discussions in class sparked my curiosity about different styles of playwriting, and how genre impacts the story. I want to continue my exploration and practice of playwriting in dramatic and comedic styles, and understand how other playwrights have tackled the relationship between political, cultural, and social issues and the stage.

To begin exploration, I intend to pair several dramatic and comedic scripts focused on the same or similar socio-political issues. These pairings include Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs* with Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*, John Patrick Stanley's *Defiance* and Jackie Sibblies Drury's *Fairview*, and Christopher Durang's *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You* with John Patrick Stanley's *Doubt*. I would analyze these scripts in two manners; first by taking note of the structural elements each uses to study the differences between the writing styles. This, along with reading both *The Elements of Playwriting* by Louis E. Catron and Norman A. Bert and *The Actor's Script: Script Analysis for Performers* by Charles S. Waxberg would extend upon my knowledge of dramatic playwriting and introduce comedy. I would use them to study the differing plot structures and devices, as well as understand how plays are interpreted by other artists to best convey my purpose. Furthermore, I would analyze, contrast, and evaluate the scripts in comparative essays. Analyzing each play's particular purpose and context, comparing how the style of play influenced the discussion of the topic, and evaluating how effective each was in delivery will contribute to my understanding of fundamental differences between the dramatic and comedic scripts, and the relationship between intended purpose and method of delivery. This intensive study would inform my approach and practice of playwriting.

I would use the skills gleaned from experimentation in different styles to write a full-length stage play focusing on a social or political idea. To reach this goal, I would work through the stages of playwriting based on the methods I learned in class. As I examine the effectiveness of plays I read, I would employ new skills by revising my prior work and developing characters, situations, and scenes. This work may focus on dialogue, plot, or

characterization, depending on what I glean from exploration. Regardless, I intend to increase the effectiveness of my writing by employing style that best conveys the purpose of my work. After elaborating on and testing several ideas, I would select one to write my final product. Playwriting involves several stages of drafting, revision, self-evaluation, and feedback. At each of these stages, Dr. cfrancis blackchild would serve as an integral resource. I've learned writing is highly collaborative, and that I discover what I am trying to write as I talk aloud with others. Dr. blackchild and I would meet in person at least once a week and maintain e-mail communication to discuss ideas and direction of the project, and answer questions as challenges arise. In the past, discussions together have proved extremely useful in clarifying the story I want to tell and have provided practical methods to move forward. I always leave our meetings with a new perspective than the one I came in with, which has contributed to the quality of my work. Dr. blackchild provides feedback and evaluation, as well as encouraging insight and support. This project will challenge me to turn political ideas into human-centered drama and work through prior criticism I received in class. I am confident that our collaborative relationship will make the project a success.

The Emerging Scholars program provides an especially beneficial environment for playwriting because feedback is essential to the revision process. After the halfway point of the research process, I will conduct a reading of my draft with an audience of other Emerging Scholars to listen and respond to the work. This practice was conducted in class, and I found it exceptionally useful in my revision process. Especially early in the development of comedic style, listening to audience responses would help me discern what was or was not funny, and whether or not the draft effectively communicates its purpose. The reading would inform the approach to revision and final drafts. Conducting a productive feedback session with my peers will also allow me to practice developing an essential skill for future creative writing endeavors.

I see this project as both personally beneficial and contributing to the Bucknell community. In the fall, I acted in the First-year show, directed by senior Abby Strayer. Her project supported the development of first-year talent and created relevant conversations on campus about anxiety. Like Abby, I would hope to approach a relevant social or political issue, and contribute to intellectual discussion in the Bucknell community. Eventually, I would like to take the project from page to stage, which would provide other artists on campus the opportunity to contribute to the work with their unique perspectives as actors, designers, or directors. This project is a testament to my passion for writing and commitment to learning. Undertaking it would help me achieve my goals of becoming a cross-contextual critical thinker, and thus a stronger playwright. Mentioned in the first paragraph, I use writing as a means to consider and form an opinion on nuanced ideas. My 10-minute play is exemplary of this approach to writing. The idea began in my struggle with texts I was reading in a Political Theory course. I used my interpretations of the texts to create characters and conflicts between them. My academic pursuits and extracurricular involvement at Bucknell display my preparation to undertake this research project. During my first semester at Bucknell, I took two W1 courses in which I achieved As. For me, the grade is not only an example of hard work, but of dedication to learning and mastery of

subject material as well. During that time, I discovered I loved working through ideas with my peers and was often asked to consult with them on their papers. This led me to interview for and obtain a spot in the Writing Center training Course, in which we discuss writing theory and the process. In my free time, I work on the newly established Bison Gazette, an assembly of students who write about ideas across disciplines. As someone deeply invested in the writing process, I am prepared, determined, and excited to explore the art and process of playwriting.