

Treatment and Synopsis for *ScienceKids*

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Artistic Statement

Growing up overweight, shy, and socially awkward with a love for mathematics and theater finds you straddling both the world of isolation and privacy with the world of performance and ego. As a boy who spent school lunches alone in the library, the personal identity of an outsider is one which I felt most comfortable in: I could enjoy my books on dragons fighting robots and watch people have fun at a distance. At the same time, theater is a place of community, and it is through theater that I felt the burning need to have friends, to integrate with a larger group, and share common stories and experiences. It is that polarity that my characters share: that of an outsider and their need for integration.

Like myself, my characters are mathematicians at heart. My outsiders see their ideal world as a few short logical steps away from the current one. It is that myopic vision which spurs them on, but also causes their problems: repercussions can blind-side you when you are only focusing on what you have to do to succeed. But like a mathematician, setbacks don't deter them. By using the same thinking which caused the problems, they determine a specific work-around to serve their larger goal and move forward.

As the characters use their mathematical core to achieve their goals, I construct them with another one of my core conceits: that our current concepts of 'family' are outdated. Your father does not have to be the one who sired you and your mother the one who birthed you. Commonly used phrases of brother, sister, friend, and lover are being re-evaluated and re-defined. At the end of my character's journey, the position that they respected the least is usually the one they feel most at home as.

This is also found in my supplied writing sample, *Swagger Like This*, where both mother and father have to redefine how they have been caring for Jonah, their handicapped but fiercely independent son, as he has found a new home in the students who used to bully him at school. When your child picks their own path, what is the parent's role in helping them achieve it?

The perspective appears again in my proposed play, *ScienceKids*, where a father who is not ready to accept that title summons a manifestation of his unborn daughter to lead him to acceptance.

Resume

FULL-LENGTH PLAYS

- Clockwork Child* Commission, Reading; Fox Valley Repertory, 2011.
- Magician's Apprentice* Production; Seabury Quinn Jr, Playwright's Festival, 2010.
Reading; Ohio University, 2010.
- Swagger Like This* Reading; Brick Monkey Theater Company, 2010.
Reading; Seabury Quinn Jr, Playwright's Festival, 2009.

SHORT PLAYS

- Dropped Call* Reading; Ten-Minute Playhouse, Spring '12.
Reading; Midnight Madness, Spring '12.
- Echoes* Production; Ten-Minute Playhouse, Winter '11.
Reading; Ten-Minute Playhouse, Spring '11.
Workshop-Production; Midnight Madness, Spring '09
- Call Him 'Gene'* Reading; Dark Horse Theater, Winter '11.
Reading; Mid-American Theater Conference, Winter '11.
- A Stone's Throw* Production; Fancy Pants Theater, Winter '11.
Reading; Mid-American Theater Conference, Winter '10.
Reading; Ohio University, Fall '08.
- A Dating* Production; 24-hour Theater Company, Spring '07.

RELATED ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE

- Fund. of Playwriting** Ohio University; Prepared Lectures, Script Analysis,
Teacher of Record: Winter, '10. Spring, '10.
- Play Analysis** Ohio University; Prepared Quizzes, Tests, Lectures.
T.A.; Fall, '07. Winter, '09.
- Pedagogy Symposium** Mid-American Theatre Conference; Lecture:
On the Weekly Execution of New Plays at Ohio University.
Winter, '09.
- The Theater Experience** Ohio University; Prepared Syllabus, Quizzes, Tests, Lectures.
Teacher of Record; Winter, '08. Spring, '08. T.A.; Fall, '07.

EDUCATION

- M.A. in Teaching;** Belmont University, June, 2012.
- M.F.A. in Playwriting;** Ohio University, June, 2010.
- B.A. in Theatre, Mathematics;** Lehigh University, May, 2005.

Synopsis

The play starts at the pivotal point in in Aaron and Jesse's married life: Jesse announces that she's pregnant. Aaron rejects this announcement, wanting her to bring no children into their lives. This forms a schism in their relationship that causes Aaron to sleep on the couch in his basement laboratory.

He is awoken the next day by his daughter, Sam, fully formed and only seen by him. She entreats him to speak to Jesse and be happy about her. Aaron decides that he can't live without his wife, and goes to stop her before she goes to work.

In Aaron and Jesse's conversation, she isn't convinced that he wants to have their child, and thinks that he will ignore their baby and focus instead on his work to avoid the issues. Aaron, understanding what he needs to do, starts to pack-up his lab but is stopped by Sam, who asks what his equipment does. They bond over a lab experiment and Aaron realizes that he wants to meet Sam, moving towards the embracement of fatherhood.

Aaron presents this information to Jesse, and begs for another chance. She agrees, but on a conditional basis.

Time moves forward, and Jesse is almost due. Aaron is picking out cribs when he gets a call from Jesse. There is a problem and he races to be there for her, but he is too late, his wife is dead.

Jesse has passed, but Sam was born. Jesse comes out to tell him that she is dead and that he has to raise their daughter alone. We hear Sam screaming blame at him through the hospital walls.

After Jesse's funeral, Aaron is trying to feed Sam, who still blames him for her mother's death. He asks Jesse for help, but Jesse is fuming because he refused to speak at her service. This causes an argument in which Aaron blames Jesse for making him a single father. Jesse fights back, saying that if he isn't going to be a good father, then to give Sam to her sister, who knows how to take responsibility.

Throughout this scene, Sam continues to berate her father until he says that he's going to follow Jesse's advice, and give Sam away. There is a knock, and Jesse's sister is there to pick up Sam for the night. As Aaron goes to answer the door, Sam says that she misses Jesse. Jesse holds Sam.

The next day, Aaron is determined to do a better job at being a father, and puts Sam on a rigid eating schedule, since he read that newborns need consistency above all else. He treats her like a repeatable science experiment, which she rejects. Sam asks to be sent back to Jesse's sisters' house, but for good.

That night, Aaron is debating sending Sam to live with Jesse's sister, but instead talks to Jesse. He tells her of his fears of fatherhood, and how he can't do what she did. Jesse absolves him of guilt, and reminds him that he has to be not only Sam's father, but also her mother. Aaron leaves to go to Sam's room, where he holds her and they talk about how much they miss Jesse. He finally demonstrates love and compassion to his newborn, which coupled with his strength and consistency, shows to the audience that he is ready to be a father.

Cast Breakdown

In its current form, the cast needs can be met with three actors:

Aaron..... Mid-thirties. The protagonist who is Jesse's husband and Sam's father.

Jesse..... Mid-thirties. Alive in the first act, dead in the second.

Sam..... Aaron and Jesse's daughter. She can only be seen by Aaron in the first act, and plays the newborn in the second act.

Concept and Structure

I believe that, past a certain age, many men think about fatherhood. I was different in two ways: (1) I started thinking about it in Middle School, and (2) I fantasized about raising a daughter alone. My imaginary wife had died earlier, and it was just I, raising a nerdy tomboy. I never had help, I never remarried, I was the strong and encouraging father.

When people fixate on an ideal, they trivialize things that don't fall into their fixation. I had no idea how I would handle insurance, or their life outside of the ages 10-17.

It is with this fixation that I wanted to explore the struggle of a man who is so consumed: with his work, his ideas, and with his expectations, that anything outside of his myopic vision acts upon him as a fundamental paradigm shift.

Sam starts as Aaron's ideal child, pushing him towards accepting her by fulfilling a father's fantasy: to be a sponge of information and perpetuate his legacy. After his wife dies, Sam becomes the opposite: now a live child, every time she cried is her blaming him for every bad thing that he did wrong. It is this dichotomy: the child who he wants and the child he thinks he has that is Aaron's main struggle throughout the play.

Jesse, on the other hand, gives Aaron an odd freedom when she passes. Instead of following Jesse's perception of what he needs to do, Aaron is able to strike his own path to fatherhood. There he meets resistance and failure, until he learns to be both himself and his wife.

The audience needs to root for this father. It is only after the audience truly experiences Aaron's view and struggles that they can embrace the momentous step forward that is the end of the play.

Use of Workshop

While I have lived in Nashville for coming-on three years, I still feel like my wife and I only just arrived. While we both have jobs, and with it stability, I feel isolated from both the artistic and the Nashville community. I not only see the workshop as the opportunity to get the needed support to write a play, but also to connect with Nashville. To be put simply, I feel like one of my protagonists: someone who has observed on the *outside*, and ready to come in.

The workshop is a unique opportunity: to work with a group of Nashville's finest actors is a rare opportunity, and to be given a space to rehearse is an added benefit, but to be able to talk to my peers about my work is wonderful. I feel that most of my play improvement comes not from looking at the page, but hearing the actors speak my words and my peers talk about it afterwards. Ohio University had a similar structure for developing new plays, and I took to it at once. Playwrighting, while itself is solitary, rewriting is a community event.

Aside from the physical workshop, this residency is a wonderful opportunity to connect with the artistic core of Nashville and plan future collaborations: the actors, directors, and playwrights who make Nashville the new works capital of Tennessee. For me, the residency is a springboard for future collaborations with Nashville artists.

Any talk of connecting with the artistic community naturally blends into talking about the entire Nashville community. I am now a Nashville writer. Granted I still have my New England roots, but I want to create work that the *community* responds to.

Audience doesn't refer to a *theater audience*, but those in Nashville who don't consider theater to be relevant anymore. I want to know what those people, my audience, need to be willing to even enter a theater, and I want to learn to develop that.

This may seem like a lot of expectations of what I would get from an Artist in Residency, but Tennessee Rep is more than a supportive organization that sponsors my play. You would be sponsoring me, and I am an artist whose goals are to write great plays, to find my audience, and to grow it.