

## Plays by John Patrick Shanley

### BEGGARS IN THE HOUSE OF PLENTY

**ACTORS:** 3 male, 3 female

Johnny is the youngest and most sensitive of three siblings stranded in a surreal Irish Catholic household lorded over by their father, a butcher from the Bronx, and their mother, a chipper, hope-mongering wreck of a woman who can only grant chill advice, not comfort. Their daughter Sheila flees her family through marriage while Joey, a high-school dropout, opts for a career in the navy and eventually returns from Vietnam. Alone, Johnny takes solace in pyromania and writing about his family. As Johnny matures, he becomes increasingly perceptive, revealing with more and more sympathy the underlying causes of so much family misery. In between Johnny's musings are raucous scenes of catastrophic violence barely held in check by each character's submerged but instinctual need for the love of one another. In the play's final scenes, part memory, part hallucination and part truth, Ma is seen through Johnny's eyes as she once was: innocent and flirtatious (even with Johnny), and painfully unprepared for her ultimate destination with Pop. The father is also transfigured in Johnny's imagination: broken, remorseful and unable to identify with the mantle of fatherhood that his own traditional upbringing inflicted upon him. As the forgiving vision begins, Pop and Ma dance to "Danny Boy," the song to which they used to force their children to dance, but when Joey interrupts he is struck dead by his father. Johnny ends the play by lighting more matches, looking back upon his vision of Joey's death but unable to outrun it.

### THE BIG FUNK

**ACTORS:** 3 male, 2 female

A series of self-revelations opens the book of life on the characters, drawing their view of life. From here we watch them interact: Omar throws knives for a living and muses about the state of the world. His understanding wife, Fifi, suddenly pregnant with twins, acts as a rudder for him, and often for his friend, Austin, an out of work actor, who believes the world would be a better place if everyone would do something, even one small act of kindness. He follows his own advice when he comes upon Jill, a young woman sitting in a bar, covered with grease. Jill had been attracted to Gregory, but on their first date, he berates her and covers her with petroleum jelly. When Austin finds her, he must break through her distrust of strangers and persuade her to let him clean her as an act of mercy. He succeeds and gives her a wonderful bubble bath, the cleansing becoming a metaphor for the play: that the big funk engulfing society will dissipate only if everyone will join in the purification process. A dinner party later reveals the zany and deep way in which the characters try to make things better, despite their obstacles and even their triumphs. The play's theme is summed up by Austin, addressing the world in a very unique way, asking us all to choose love and life over neurosis and death.

### CELLINI

**ACTORS:** 7 male, 2 female

The play chronicles the life of the original "Renaissance Man," Benvenuto Cellini, the sixteenth-century Italian sculptor and man-about-town. Cellini's masterwork is the magnificent *Perseus*, the creation of which is the play's centerpiece. As he works, he dictates his memoirs, letting us into his life: We learn of his days in Paris and Rome, and of his beloved Florence; we also get a glimpse of the artist's bravado—he snubbed the patronage of Pope Paolo and was promptly thrown in jail; we're given accounts of his love life; and we're also teased about a couple of juicy murders. The play closes with the unveiling of the *Perseus* and leaves the audience touched by Cellini's genius.

## DANNY AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

**ACTORS:** 1 male, 1 female

The setting is a rundown bar in the Bronx, where two of society's rejects, Danny and Roberta, strike up a halting conversation over their beer. He is a brooding, self-loathing young man who resorts more to violence than reason; she is a divorced, guilt-ridden young woman whose troubled teenage son is now being cared for by her parents. Danny, whose fellow truck drivers call him "the animal," seems incapable of tender emotion, while Roberta, who is still haunted by the memory of an ugly sexual incident involving her father, is distrustful of men in general. And yet, as their initial reserve begins to melt, and they decide to spend the night together, the possibility of a genuine and meaningful relationship begins to emerge—the first for both of them. In the end there are no facile, easy answers, but thanks to the playwright's skill and compassion, both characters are able to probe within themselves to find an exorcism and forgiveness that, while painfully achieved, offers the hope of a future touched, at last, with more than the bitterness and loneliness that had been their lot before their fateful meeting.

## DEFIANCE

**ACTORS:** 5 male, 1 female

DEFIANCE is set on a United States Marine Corps base in North Carolina in 1971. Two officers, one black and one white, are on a collision course over race, women and the high cost of doing the right thing. This riveting, surprising new work is about power, love and responsibility—who has it, who wants it and who deserves it.

## DIRTY STORY

**ACTORS:** 3 male, 1 female

When aspiring novelist Wanda seeks the advice of successful writer Brutus, she gets more than she bargained for. Of the manuscript she sent him, he tells her, "It was wretched, it was ignominious. It takes seventeen trees to make one ton of paper. You might think about that the next time you consider writing." None of this prevents Wanda and Brutus from moving in together and commencing a sadomasochistic relationship. But when a dispute over the apartment arises, Wanda's ex-boyfriend, pistol-toting cowboy Frank, sledgehammers the door and enters with his sidekick, a British bartender named Watson, at which point the story takes a surprising allegorical turn. "Call me Israel!" Wanda says, and it suddenly becomes clear that Frank and

Watson bear a notable resemblance to two fellahs on the international scene named Bush and Blair, while Wanda and Brutus' territorial hostilities are not dissimilar to a certain notorious conflict in the Middle East. Can Frank and Watson resolve this crisis? Have they any business doing so? Will it all come down to a game of poker? Cowboy Frank seems to think he has the answer: "Be like me. Do like I do. And it works."

## DOUBT, A PARABLE

**ACTORS:** 1 male, 3 female

In this brilliant and powerful drama, Sister Aloysius, a Bronx school principal, takes matters into her own hands when she suspects the young Father Flynn of improper relations with one of the male students.

## DOWN AND OUT – *Short play*

**ACTORS:** 2 male, 1 female

In *DOWN AND OUT*, a Poet and his Love live in abject poverty, hounded by a maniacal Spectre. The Spectre first takes away the Poet's library card, and then returns to offer money for his soul. His Love protects him.

## THE DREAMER EXAMINES HIS PILLOW

**ACTORS:** 2 male, 1 female

The first scene of the play is a conversation between two lovers, Tommy and Donna, who broke up some time earlier but who are obviously still attracted to each other. Donna is enraged because Tommy, a would-be artist, is now having an affair with her younger sister, but Tommy, stretched out on his recliner (which, apart from a refrigerator full of beer, comprises the entire furnishings of his spartan apartment), is seemingly unmoved by her harangue. In the second scene Donna visits her father, a once successful artist who stopped painting at the death of his wife, whom he had bullied and betrayed despite his professed love for her. Combative and complex (but also very funny) the father sits and drinks and eventually gives in to his daughter's demand that he force Tommy to marry her or beat him up. Then, in the third and final scene, the father and Tommy confront each other, with results that are sometimes menacing, sometimes antic, with a lively discussion about art and women eventually leading to a sort of tenuous truce—and a grudging recognition of the responsibility that love, in its various guises, imposes.

## FOUR DOGS AND A BONE

**ACTORS:** 2 male, 2 female

Brenda, a seemingly guileless young actress, takes a meeting with Bradley, a troubled, middle-aged producer, to discuss the film on which they are working. Brenda wants to be a star, she even chants for it! But Collette, the other actress in the film, is in her way, so Brenda must convince Bradley that the film is in serious trouble unless he makes certain changes, one of which is taking out Collette's part. Bradley, knowing full well that the film is seriously over

budget, intimates that he will effect Brenda's suggestions if she can convince her stepbrother, a giant movie star, to make a cameo appearance in the film, guaranteeing more capitalization and the cachet of success. Meanwhile, Collette has her own agenda: She knows she's not as young as she once was. She tries to convince Victor, the writer, to alter the film so she can be the heroine, or else, this, his first film, is destined to be lost in art houses or, worse, go directly to video. Victor, a naïve young writer from Off-Off Broadway, doesn't know how to handle any of this, and his mother just died. He needs to mourn and to drink himself into a stupor before he changes his screenplay. Later, in the make-up trailer, Brenda and Collette find out they've been trying to stab the other in the back which leads to the kind of cat fight only actresses do and culminates in a mock-bonding. All hell breaks loose in the final scene when Bradley and Victor confront one another over the state of the film and are interrupted by Brenda and Collette, and all the lies and backbiting are exposed as these four dogs go after their bone.

## FRENCH WAITRESS

**ACTORS:** 1 male, 2 female

In *FRENCH WAITRESS*, Ricky and his girlfriend Pamela sit down to an unsettling meal, served to them by a beautiful but unnerving French waitress.

## ITALIAN AMERICAN RECONCILIATION

**ACTORS:** 2 male, 3 female

Huey Maximilian Bonfigliano has a problem: While he is safely divorced from his shrewish first wife, Janice, who shot his dog and even took a bead on him, he feels he cannot regain his "manhood" until he woos and wins her one more time—if only to put his broken marriage behind him once and for all. He enlists the aid of his lifelong buddy, Aldo Scalicki, a confirmed bachelor who tries, without apparent success, to convince Huey that he would be better off sticking with his new lady friend, Teresa, a usually placid young waitress whose indignation flares when she learns what Huey is up to. In a moonlit balcony scene (hilariously reminiscent of *Cyrano de Bergerac*) Aldo pleads his lovesick friend's case and, to his astonishment, Janice capitulates—although not for long. However we do learn that her earlier abuse of Huey was intended to make him "act like a man" which, at last, he does. And, more than that, he (and the audience) become aware that, in the final essence, "the greatest—and only—success is to be able to love"—a truth which emerges delightfully from the heartwarming, wonderfully antic and always imaginatively conceived action of the play.

## JEALOUS

**ACTORS:** 1 male, 1 female

*JEALOUS* pits one couple's love against otherworldly forces.

## KISSING CHRISTINE

**ACTORS:** 1 male, 2 female

Larry and Christine meet at a Thai restaurant for dinner. It's a first date and they know nothing about each other. In the course of conversation, it quickly becomes clear that this is no ordinary couple. Christine is a reconfigured person. A couple of years before she had an accident. She fell through an open trapdoor in a store and landed on her head. As a result of this accident, her face had to be reconstructed. So she looks different. Pretty, but a different pretty. Even more significantly, she received a severe concussion which, among other things, changed her personality. She has become a much nicer person. But she has fallen out of life a little bit. Larry listens to this in astonishment. But he has revelations of his own. He is married and has two children. His wife and he are having terrible problems. Out of loneliness and frustration he has gone on a date. Two people who, through different kinds of trauma, have disconnected from the flow of life. In this play, they help each other by deeply talking to each other. And finally, they reconnect with something vital through a kiss. In volume entitled *Missing/Kissing*.

## LAST NIGHT IN THE GARDEN I SAW YOU

**ACTORS:** 1 male, 1 female

LAST NIGHT IN THE GARDEN I SAW YOU follows one man's journey over the fence into the house of a woman he abandoned. Now that he's returned, will she leave the life she's built since his absence? And if she won't, will he truly let her live her life without him in peace.

## LET US GO OUT INTO THE STARRY NIGHT – *Short play*

**ACTORS:** 1 male, 1 female

LET US GO OUT INTO THE STARRY NIGHT, deals with a skinny woman in a cafe who approaches a haunted young man who reminds her of Dostoevsky. They have an intensely serious conversation which temporarily transports them into an ecstatic spot among the stars.

## A LONELY IMPULSE OF DELIGHT – *Short play*

**ACTORS:** 2 male

In A LONELY IMPULSE OF DELIGHT, a young man falls in love with a mermaid in the lake in New York's Central Park and decides to introduce her to his best friend with delightfully humorous results.

## MISSING MARISA

**ACTORS:** 2 male

Terry and Eli are friends with a woman in common: Marisa. Marisa was Eli's wife. Then she ran off with Terry. Now she has abandoned Terry as well. Terry comes to Eli's apartment looking for Marisa. Did she return to Eli? Eli is not forthcoming. The two men circle each other, combative and vulnerable. Eli wants friendship. Terry just wants Marisa back. Neither man can get what he wants. The phone rings. Is it Marisa? Eli won't pick it up. Terry grabs the receiver and says hello. But the caller hangs up. Eli is baking a chicken. Terry wants to know who's coming to dinner. Eli will not say. Finally, Terry, excluded from Eli and Marisa's life, begs for at least a taste of

chicken. Eli gives Terry one tiny taste. This is Terry's portion in life. He is the eternal wanderer, the outcast. He thanks Eli for the little he is allowed and prepares to move on. In volume entitled *Missing/kissing*.

## AN OLD STORY

**ACTORS:** 1 male, 1 female

AN OLD STORY is a tale of the subtle distinctions between pain and pleasure, fear and exhilaration, necessity and desire.

## OUT WEST – *Short play*

**ACTORS:** 3 male, 2 female

OUT WEST centers on the old story of the coming of a Cowboy to a small western town. There is a Good Girl, a Bad Girl, a gunfight, and then the need to move on. But it all happens at about triple normal speed!

## OUTSIDE MULLINGAR

**ACTORS:** 2 male, 2 female

Anthony and Rosemary are two introverted misfits straddling 40. Anthony has spent his entire life on a cattle farm in rural Ireland, a state of affairs that—due to his painful shyness—suits him well. Rosemary lives right next door, determined to have him, watching the years slip away. With Anthony's father threatening to disinherit him and a land feud simmering between their families, Rosemary has every reason to fear romantic catastrophe. But then, in this very Irish story with a surprising depth of poetic passion, these yearning, eccentric souls fight their way towards solid ground and some kind of happiness. Their journey is heartbreaking, funny as hell, and ultimately deeply moving. OUTSIDE MULLINGAR is a compassionate, delightful work about how it's never too late to take a chance on love.

## POISON – *Short play*

**ACTORS:** 1 male, 2 female

Kenny has seen the depths of Kelly's self-hatred, and he'll never date her again—unless he drinks a fortune-teller's mysterious potion, which will kill his soul as dead as Kelly's. Can Kelly convince him to drink the potion? Can she convince herself?

## PORTUGUESE KID, THE

**ACTORS:** 2 male, 3 female

In Providence, Rhode Island, habitually widowed Atalanta pays a visit to her second-rate lawyer Barry Dragonetti. Intending to settle her latest husband's affairs, this larger-than-life Greek tightwad quickly becomes a nightmare for her cheesy, self-aggrandizing attorney. Add Barry's

impossible Croatian mother, a dash of current politics and a couple of opportunistic young lovers, and you have in hand a recipe for comic combustion.

## PRODIGAL SON

**ACTORS:** 4 male, 1 female

A 17-year-old boy from the Bronx suddenly finds himself in a private school in New Hampshire. He's violent, gifted, alienated, and on fire with a ferocious loneliness. Two faculty members wrestle with the dilemma: Is the kid a star or a disaster? A passionate, explosive portrait of a young man on the verge of salvation or destruction.

## PSYCHOPATHIA SEXUALIS

**ACTORS:** 3 male, 2 female

Arthur, an obscure young painter struggling in the art world of Manhattan, announces to his self-satisfied friend, Howard, that he is engaged to be married. To whom? Asks Howard. The answer is to Lucille, a powerful, attractive, no-nonsense Texas socialite, a kind of wealthy Annie Oakley. But, Arthur confides to Howard, there are three problems: 1. Arthur is a fetishist, and Lucille doesn't know. He cannot make love without being in proximity to his father's argyle socks. 2. Arthur's psychiatrist, Dr. Block, unable to cure Arthur of his fetish, has stolen said socks. 3. Arthur's wedding night is fast approaching, and he needs his socks back. Howard vows to retrieve his friend's socks from the wily Dr. Block. This brilliant if unconventional shrink proceeds to reduce Howard to a sniveling wreck. We finally meet the robust Lucille, in her wedding dress, as her friend Ellie (Howard's wife) blurts out all the bad news. At this point, Arthur enters and begs Lucille's forgiveness, which he obtains. Lucille resolves to go to this Block character and rescue her man's socks. Lucille and Dr. Block fight it out for the soul and the socks of Arthur. Lucille wipes the floor with the clever psychiatrist. Her secret weapon? A hearty store of common sense and razor-sharp country wit. Block finally resorts to trying to seduce her. When she cries help, Arthur and Howard burst in and save her. Arthur reclaims his socks (as each man must), and he and Lucille are married.

## THE RED COAT – *Short play*

**ACTORS:** 1 male, 1 female

In *THE RED COAT*, a teenage boy in the Bronx lays in wait outside a party for a girl he hardly knows. His mission, which he accomplishes with touching if halting effectiveness, is to tell her that he loves her.

## ROMANTIC POETRY

**ACTORS:** 4 male, 2 female

From the Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Doubt* and the two-time Tony Award-nominated composer of *Dreamgirls* comes this crackpot musical romance. Connie of

Woodmere has just married Fred of Newark, but her exes are back in the picture and not sure they approve of the union. Mary of Greenpoint climbs Frankie of Little Italy's fire escape with amorous and erotic intent—but things go awry as she reaches for her dream. A fanciful musical romance about our need for dreams and for each other, ROMANTIC POETRY puts the lunatic, the lover and the poet onstage and lets them sing.

## SAILOR'S SONG

**ACTORS:** 2 male, 3 female

SAILOR'S SONG is an extravagant romantic seaside story decorated with dance. In the tradition of Gene Kelly and Eugene O'Neill, who should have worked together but never did, this stylistically daring love story gives us a cynical man and a true believer who battle over beautiful women and the power of love.

## SAVAGE IN LIMBO

**ACTORS:** 2 male, 3 female

The setting is a slightly seedy neighborhood bar in the Bronx, where a group of regulars (who all happen to be the same age—thirty-two) seek relief from the disappointments and tedium of the outside world. The first to arrive is Denise Savage, a perennial loner who announces that she is still a virgin, but would like to remedy the situation. She is joined by an old school friend, Linda Rotunda, whose problem has been the opposite—too many lovers (and illegitimate children) but who is now fearful that her current boyfriend, Tony Aronica, is losing interest in her. And when the macho Tony comes bursting in shortly thereafter and announces that he is leaving her to pursue "ugly girls," girls who have read books and can teach him something, Linda is desolate. Denise, sensing an advantage, makes a play for Tony, and the action quickens, moving swiftly from zany comedy to tense confrontation which requires the muscle and mediating skills of the taciturn bartender, Murk, who, heretofore, had been content to keep the glasses filled, including that of his mixed-up girlfriend, April, a failed nun who is also a classmate of the others. In the end, tensions subside, Linda recaptures Tony, Murk proposes to April, and only Denise remains as she was—still in the limbo of loneliness from which she so desperately wants to escape.

## STOREFRONT CHURCH

**ACTORS:** 5 male, 1 female

When a Bronx Borough President is forced by the mortgage crisis into a confrontation with a local minister, the question they confront is one that faces us all: What is the relationship between spiritual experience and social action?

## TENNESSEE

**ACTORS:** 1 male, 1 female

In Mt. Juliet, TENNESSEE, a lonely woman with the power of foresight is approached by a young man wanting to know his future. Knowing one's future, however, comes with the responsibility of accepting it or changing it.

## WELCOME TO THE MOON – *Short play*

**ACTORS:** 4 male, 1 female

In WELCOME TO THE MOON, Stephen, a guy still madly in love with a girl he hasn't seen in fourteen years, joins his old friend, Ronny, who has been unsuccessfully trying to do away with himself for fourteen years, for a drink in a Bronx bar. They decide to commit suicide together by putting plastic bags over their heads—but the two people whom they've always loved arrive in time to stop them. Time then stops for a bittersweet moment, as past and present become one.

## WHERE'S MY MONEY?

**ACTORS:** 3 male, 3 female

Marriage and its discontents are the subject of WHERE'S MY MONEY? When Celeste, an out-of-work actor who's cheating on her boyfriend with a married man, runs into Natalie, whom she hasn't seen in years, the two have some catching up to do. Natalie, an accountant married to a lawyer, gives the impression of being very together and does not approve of Celeste's lifestyle. "I don't know any other way to put this," she tells her. "You're a whore." But Natalie's life is not nearly as together as it appears. In fact, her marriage with Henry is hanging by a thread, and she's being visited by the ghost of an ex-boyfriend who claims she owes him money. Meanwhile, it turns out that the married man Celeste is having an affair with is Henry's idol, Sidney, a divorce lawyer with a pet theory that one partner in every marriage will be unfaithful, so it might as well be you. Sardonic and caustic, WHERE'S MY MONEY? vivisects the institution of marriage with Shanley's inimitable razor-sharp wit.

## THE WILD GOOSE

**ACTORS:** 2 male, 1 female

When the story opens, we find Jameson and Renaldo amongst table and chairs, deciding if they can live together in the world or not. They share their water and peanuts as they tear each other down to gain the upper hand. Jameson shoots Renaldo dead. Just in time, for Ramona comes in and now Jameson can have her all to himself. But Ramona misses Renaldo and nothing is settled until Renaldo jumps up! Alive again! Aha, now Ramona must choose between them. This presents a problem since Ramona was just about to hang herself. Jameson shoots her instead—to forego the grief of a suicide. Soon the wild goose hovers over the scene with its majestic sound and beauty. Ramona jumps up just after Jameson shoots the bird, and it falls at their feet. Can anything survive in this world? They wonder as they all sing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame," and prod the goose to come alive again, which, in time he does, to join the living.

## WOMEN OF MANHATTAN

**ACTORS:** 2 male, 3 female

Rhonda, Judy and Billie are having dinner, over which they lament the fact that, while their careers are flourishing, their emotional lives are a wreck. Rhonda has just broken up with her boyfriend (but is unable to jettison the oversized sneakers still sitting in the corner of her room); Billie, "happily married," frets that she and her husband are stuck in their honeymoon phase; and Judy despairs of ever meeting an attractive man who isn't gay. But then, in a series of sharply written, subtly revealing scenes, their situations change. Billie fixes up Judy with her ex-boyfriend, a debonair black executive who proves to be more than an adequate lover; Billie's husband gives her a black eye (which delights her because it finally proves that the honeymoon is over!); and Rhonda, still alone, summons up the courage to dispose of her boyfriend's sneakers. As the play ends, the three are hopeful about better times ahead but also painfully aware that the brittle, competitive Manhattan lifestyle disappoints as quickly as it rewards.