

AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER

Carey Perloff, *Artistic Director*

PRESENTS

# WORDS <sup>on</sup> PLAYS

INSIGHT INTO THE PLAY, THE PLAYWRIGHT, AND THE PRODUCTION

## *November*

BY DAVID MAMET

DIRECTED BY RON LAGOMARSINO

AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER

OCTOBER 23–NOVEMBER 22, 2009

WORDS ON PLAYS PREPARED BY

**ELIZABETH BRODERSEN**

PUBLICATIONS EDITOR

**MICHAEL PALLER**

RESIDENT DRAMATURG

**DAN RUBIN**

PUBLICATIONS & LITERARY ASSOCIATE

**KATIE MAY**

PUBLICATIONS INTERN

**ELLEN CASSIDY, MEGAN COHEN**

DRAMATURGY INTERNS

*Words on Plays* is made possible in part by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

A.C.T. is supported in part by the Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the donors of *The Next Generation Campaign*.



© 2009 AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER, A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

## NOVEMBER MEET AND GREET/DESIGN PRESENTATION

Excerpts from Remarks Made to A.C.T. Cast and Staff, September 22, 2009

---

During the first week of rehearsal of each production, A.C.T. staff members and the show's cast and creative team gather in a studio to meet, mingle, and get to know each other. After personal introductions are made, the director and designers present to the assembled group their vision for the design of the production, which is typically the culmination of months of research, discussion, and textual analysis. This introduction is a kind of “snapshot” of the creative team's understanding of the world of the play at the moment they step into the room with the actors, an understanding that will evolve and grow and perhaps change in significant ways as the cast brings life and breath and physical action to the playwright's words over the following four weeks of rehearsal.

Below are excerpts from remarks made at the first rehearsal of *November* at A.C.T., which offer a glimpse into the initial impulses behind the look and feel of the upcoming production.

### DIRECTOR

#### RON LAGOMARSINO

First of all, I am really happy to be here and to be back in my hometown with all of you again. When Carey [Perloff] sent me this play—of course, I had heard about it, it was in New York about two years ago now [in January 2008]—I thought, at first blush, it was yesterday's news, because I *thought* it was about our late, great George W. Bush. Carey said, “Just read it, just read it,” and it turned out to be one of the funniest plays I had read in a long, long time. Not only that, it is *not* about George W. It is about an ongoing thing



Archer Brown

happening in our country. I mean, you should have heard the conversation we had about John Edwards today [in rehearsal]: art is never going to be as crazy as life, but this play gives life a good run for its money. [Laughter]

Mamet wrote an article in the *Village Voice* a couple of years ago called “Why I Am No Longer a ‘Brain-Dead Liberal,’” and so, supposedly, now he is a conservative. I think the truth is somewhere in between, because I think he is very wily and he’s out to incite us. I think this play is going to incite a lot of people. Yes, there is a lot of silliness. Yes, there is pardoning turkeys in this play. But underneath, there are strong forces at hand.

In tackling this play, [scenic designer] Erik Flatmo and I decided that we want it to be anchored in reality. It is actually, hopefully, going to be amusing when the curtain goes up and it feels like we are actually in the Oval Office.

#### SCENIC DESIGNER ERIK FLATMO

[The set] isn’t any single, particular Oval Office, but rather I looked at every Oval Office since the West Wing was built and pulled what we wanted, mostly from more recent

times. You’ll see that there’s a lot of Bush in there. You’ll also notice that there is a golden color scheme that works very well for autumn.

When Ron and I started working on this, we were trying not to do an actual “oval” office, but the more we talked about it and thought about it, it became clear that we had to have an oval room of some sort. So what you will see here is a slice of the Oval Office, not the entire room realized. My compositional inspiration came from photographs. I’ve never visited the Oval Office myself, but when you look at photographs of that round room you get this fish-eye kind of distortion. So we were able to



Turkey Guy



Clarice Bernstein

rake the stage and have a bit of a curved wall and a forced-perspective cornice, which creates the same effect as a photo.

It has been so much fun researching all of this: the Sheraton card table and the *Resolute* desk, this very famous desk that was carved from timber from the HMS *Resolute* and given as a gift to [President Rutherford B.] Hayes. There's a lot of trivia involved in this set. I could go on and on and on. But at the end . . . well, Ron, I'll let you, because you'll be better at explaining this.

LAGOMARSINO: The play ends with the president and the speechwriter finally achieving détente, and he agrees to marry her to her lesbian partner, come hell or high water. So we thought, What is going to be the final

moment of this play? During the final bows, this flag [*reveals model of set backdrop*] is going to drop in behind the actors. It is a rainbow flag that is beyond a rainbow flag, because there's not a group in this play that escapes unscathed. I didn't want it to just be a gay flag: it's an American flag that bleeds into this other *thing*, and it will run the length of the stage. It'll be huge.

#### COSTUME DESIGNER ALEX JAEGER

We went round and round: should we go with hip-hop, should we go with Eurotrash, fashionistas? But we decided to go with suits [*laughter*], and it has all become about the flag pin, basically. Originally, for our president, I wanted to have an everyday suit he wears in his office—for example, when in the second act they are working on the speech and he's a little disheveled—and then bring in something a little bit sharper for the third act, more television camera-ready, when he is going to give his press conference. We're doing almost

the same thing with Archer, only with a gray color scheme instead of blue.

For dear Dwight Grackle, we went through a number of incarnations, but we finally settled on a Tex-Mex, Western, Indian kind of thing with the suede fringed vest and snakeskin boots and southwestern shirt. Lots of turquoise jewelry.

The concept for our speech-writer: we are going to get a lot of oversized, comfy clothes that you would wear at home when you aren't feeling well and just play dress up with René [Augesen] and find something that looks fabulously horrible. Then in the third act she shows up ready for her on-camera wedding.

Our Turkey Guy—what can I say about him? I was thrilled to hear [actor Manoel Felciano's] reading this afternoon, because it is right in line with my thinking: he's wearing very cheap suits—brown and green, as opposed to the cool colors of the guys in the Oval Office—with a lovely comb-over and some bad, old glasses. It was so fun hearing the reading today, and I hope we can play back and forth and get the costumes in line with the characters.

**ANTHONY FUSCO (WHO PERFORMS THE ROLE OF ARCHER BROWN)**

What are you thinking about in terms of sound?

LAGOMARSINO: Very little. When the door opens, I don't imagine re-creating turkeys gobbling, although I would imagine there will be some waiting in the wings if we want them. Probably some music at the act breaks and definitely at the end. Also, phones, intercoms.



Dwight Grackle