

InsideOUT

PRODUCED BY THE DENVER CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

RECKLESS
By Craig Lucas
Directed by Scott Schwartz



RECKLESS

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Synopsis

“RACHEL: I always wanted to do something reckless, you know?”
—*Reckless*

Rachel Fitzsimmons adores Christmas: the carols on the radio, giving gifts, the sound and smell of snow. She is absolutely euphoric one Christmas Eve until her husband Tom confesses he’s taken a contract out on her life. This news forces Rachel to flee their cozy suburban home and plunge into unpredictably real life, which includes murder, embezzlement, psychiatric sessions, appearances on a humiliating quiz show, and a questionable talk show. Her companions in this mayhem include Lloyd, a physical therapist; Pooty, his paraplegic mute girlfriend; Roy, a charity organization director and Trish, a sour bookkeeper. Rachel discovers they all have secrets to burn and so she asks, “Do you think we ever really know other people?” In trying to answer that question, the playwright comically deals with some dark subjects—pain, loss, alienation and the general chaos of the universe. ■

THE PLAYWRIGHT, CRAIG LUCAS

“The truth wins out over lies in the end.”

—Craig Lucas ¹

On April 30, 1951, newborn Craig Lucas was abandoned in a car in Atlanta. Eight months later he was adopted by a conservative Pennsylvania couple. His father was an FBI agent; his mother was a housewife and painter. In 1969 he graduated from Conestoga High School in Berwyn, Pennsylvania; in the 1960s and 1970s he became interested in the political left and also discovered an attraction toward men. He recalls that his coming out made it possible for him to develop as a playwright and as a person.

Lucas does not withhold information about himself. He believes in therapy and in talking things over with many people. He goes to the theatre often and he loves actors. “His life, he will tell you, has been a search for truth, boundary, fantasy, identity, intimacy and a coherent value system.” ²

In 1973, Lucas left Boston University with a Bachelor of Arts in theatre and creative writing. His mentor, Anne Sexton, urged him to try his luck in New York City as a playwright. He worked many day jobs while performing in Broadway musicals including *Shenandoah*, *On the Twentieth Century*, *Rex* and *Sweeney Todd*. Stephen Sondheim would later tell him he was a better writer than an actor.

Lucas met director Norman Rene in 1979. Their first collaboration was *Marry Me a Little* (1981), a script that incorporated songs written for but discarded from Sondheim musicals. They followed this with the Lucas’s own *Missing Persons* (1981), *Reckless* (1983), *Blue Window* (1984), and *Three Postcards* (1987). In 1990 they joined forces for what would prove to be their biggest commercial and critical success, *Prelude to a Kiss*. They also worked together on the feature film *Longtime Companion* (1990), the 1992 film adaptation of *Prelude* with Alec Baldwin and Meg Ryan and the 1995 film version of *Reckless* with Mia Farrow and Mary Louise Parker.

Following his early romantic comedies, Lucas began to write more serious plays, particularly about AIDS, including *The Singing Forest* and *The Dying Gaul*, the latter made into a film that Lucas directed. He also authored the book for the musical *The Light in the Piazza*, and directed the world premiere at the Intiman Theatre in Seattle. The Lincoln Center production, directed by Bartlett Sher, garnered Lucas a Tony Award nomination.

Lucas has also directed classic plays such as Joe Orton’s *Loot*. While some critics have divided his work into gay plays (*Blue Window*, *Longtime Companion*) and straight plays (*Reckless*, *Three Postcards*, *Prelude to a Kiss*), Lucas has always written about human problems in a universal manner. His latest play, *Prayer for My Enemy*, premiered in New York at Playwrights Horizon in 2008. It deals with the Iraq War, homosexuality,

alcoholism and the definition of family.

In 2001 Lucas received an OBIE Award for his direction of Harry Kondoleon's *Saved or Destroyed* at the Rattlestick Theatre. His *Small Tragedy* was awarded an OBIE as Best Play in 2004. In 2003 he won the New York Film Critics Circle Award for best screenplay for *The Secret Lives of Dentists*. Other awards include the Excellence in Literature Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the PEN/Laura Pels Mid-Career Achievement Award and the Lambda Literary Award. Fellowships include those from the Guggenheim and Rockefeller Foundations, the National Endowment for the Arts and the Pew Charitable Trust. He was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his plays *Prelude to a Kiss* and *The Dying Gaul*. ■

WORKS

Plays

Missing Persons (1981)
Alec Wilder: Clues to a Life (1982)
Reckless (1983)
Blue Window (1984)
Three Postcards (1987)
Marry Me a Little (1988)
Prelude to a Kiss (1990)
Credo (1995)
God's Heart (1997)
The Dying Gaul (1998)
Strangers (2000)
Small Tragedy (2004)
The Singing Forest (2004)
The Light in the Piazza (2005)
Prayer for My Enemy (2007)

Films

Longtime Companion (1990)
Prelude to a Kiss (1992)
Reckless (1995)
The Secret Lives of Dentists (2002)
The Dying Gaul (2005)
Birds of America (2008)

1. Schulman, p. 111.
2. Schulman, p. 36.

Schulman, Sarah. "Eyes Wide Open: Craig Lucas Talks Candidly with a Collaborator about the Twisty Course of his Writing Career." *American Theatre*, January 2001.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Craig_Lucas

QUIZ SHOWS

In *Rules of the Game*, author Olaf Hoerschelmann believes the development of quiz shows from the 1930s to the 1990s “demonstrated a high degree of flexibility and instability under changing industrial and cultural conditions.”² Their popularity was derived from a certain amount of repetition and ritual that emphasized competition, success and knowledge. Those shows depended on factual knowledge (such as “Jeopardy”) or human knowledge. Human knowledge, writes Hoerschelmann, can be divided into knowledge of people in general and knowledge of specific individuals. Shows such as “The Newlywed Game” and “Blind Date” rely on interaction between a limited number of participants. Similarly “Your Mother or Your Wife,” the show on which Rachel and Lloyd appear, takes little skill but a personal knowledge of family members. ■

1. Hoerschelmann, p. 7.

Hoerschelmann, Olaf. *Rules of the Game: Quiz Shows and American Culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.

TALK SHOWS

Rachel is recruited to be on a talk show hosted by the author of the book *Stand Up Straight*. Talk shows are an important part of TV programming. They are relatively cheap to produce and, in taking human beings as their subjects, have a seemingly inexhaustible supply of material. Supposedly unscripted and unpredictable, they contain the vital sparks of spontaneity that attract audiences who watch to see what happens.

There are two types of talk shows. The first involves a presenter plus celebrity guests who speak about current events, movies, books, scandals, etc. Examples would include “The Late Show with David Letterman,” “The Tonight Show with Jay Leno” and the “Larry King Live” show. The strength of these programs lies in the host and the caliber of celebrities featured. The second type of talk show is “issue based” where research teams trawl the population (or audience) to find people with problems that deal in the reality of human existence. Some of these TV talk shows purport to help people by airing problems that those in the audience may be experiencing.

Julie Engel Marga, in her book *Talking Trash: the Cultural Politics of Daytime TV Talk Shows*, claims that talk shows “are a forum in which people can speak in their own voices.”¹ Some viewers derive personal meaning from these programs and make them a part of their daily lives.

They are especially popular for networks because “they have emerged as a viable, low cost programming option for daytime television in a volatile media business climate.”² Some networks allow their affiliates to shop around for their programming; as a result, they can choose talk shows produced by syndicators.

One of the first issue-based talk shows was the “Phil Donahue Show” which premiered in 1967. This program blended discussions of social issues with lighter topics and was oriented toward women. Phil’s success was soon followed by Oprah Winfrey and her “A.M. Chicago” debut. She not only discussed social and political issues and interviewed celebrities, she aired her own problems such as her weight and health difficulties. Oprah spawned a number of talk shows hosts including Sally Jessy Raphael, Maury Povich, Geraldo Rivera, Ellen de Generes and the group of women who make up “The View.” Talk shows have become so important now that they attract presidents and politicians. Or as the *New York Times* reports on Obama’s appearance on “The View”: “It was just another example of how politicians increasingly co-opt entertainment shows to make news.”³ ■

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1. Manga, p. 15.
 2. Manga, p. 23.
 3. Stanley, p. C.1.

Manga, Julie Engel. *Talking Trash: the Cultural Politics of Daytime TV Talk Shows*. New York: New York University Press, 2002.

Stanley, Alessandra. “Daytime Diplomacy.” *New York Times*, July 30, 2010.

<http://www.mediaknowall.com/talkshow.html>

ENCOUNTERS WITH PSYCHIATRISTS

**“DOCTOR: Sometimes it’s a good idea to shop around,
try different types of therapies.”**

—*Reckless*

Several chains of events send Rachel to a succession of psychiatrists who are trying to saddle her with their own fixations. For example, Doctor Number One has been strongly influenced by Freud’s dream theory in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. “Associations to dream images were used as guides to the discovery of forgotten memories of traumatic experiences of early life.”¹ Rachel’s explanation of her bizarre past Christmas is enough to make Doc. No. 1 believe it’s all been a dream.

The second psychiatrist Rachel visits believes her angst comes from early parental loss. Children who lose a parent early in life, either by death or permanent separation, “appear more likely than others to develop schizophrenia, depression or bipolar disorder as adults.”² The effect of parental loss is more striking if the loss occurred before the age of nine. Parental privation can also increase the risk of smoking, physical illness, divorce and low income.

Shrink Number Three believes Rachel suffers from a psychosomatic illness, be it eczema or dandruff. Her emotions and thought processes are causing physical disorders because her disease-fighting ability has been weakened by stress.

Doctor Number Four is hung up on birth trauma. This concept, described by Otto Rank, Austrian psychoanalyst and colleague of Freud’s, states that the circumstances of birth are deeply impressed upon the infant’s psyche and can reappear later in psychiatric patients. Rank thought birth “produced a psychic shock of great consequence, a trauma with which the person is never reconciled.”³

Finally, Physician Number Six believes Rachel suffers from low self-esteem. Self-esteem is one’s overall opinion of oneself—the personal view of one’s successes, abilities, failures and flaws. A person with healthy self-esteem feels good about himself/herself and deserves others’ respect. One who suffers from low self-esteem puts little value on his opinions and ideas and constantly worries about his place in society. ■

1. Reiser, *American Journal of Psychiatry*.

2. www.mensrights.com

3. Hinsie and Campbell, p. 783.

Hinsie, Leland, M.D. and Campbell, Robert Jean, M.D. *Psychiatric Dictionary, 4th Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Reiser, Morton F., M.D. “The Dream in Contemporary Psychiatry.” *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 158:3, March 2001.

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/self-esteem/mhoo128>.

<http://www.med.med.umich.edu/1libr/aha/umpsyom.htm>

<http://www.mensrights.com.au/page17g.htm>

AGAINST-ALL-ODDS OPTIMISM

“RACHEL: I’m just saying that sometimes things happen and they look bad at the moment like being crippled or having to pretend you’re deaf when you’re not, but you never know what would have happened if these things that looked bad hadn’t happened. Other things could have happened. Worse things.”

—*Reckless*

Rachel’s heightened sense of optimism may be an historical inheritance. The Pilgrims valued self-help and optimism; the life they pursued was built on a strong belief in themselves and their society. Benjamin Franklin was a great champion of individualism and self-industry; his life is an example of perseverance and self-initiative as demonstrated by his writings and inventions. Thomas Jefferson coined the phrase “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” which is the very essence of optimism. In addition, Americans have always admired the self-made man as exemplified by the cowboy who gets back on his horse when thrown and rides off to save the day. Even our children’s literature is charged with a can-do attitude such as *The Little Engine that Could* who puffs his way to the top of the mountain chanting, “I think I can, I think I can.”

However, as *The Wall Street Journal* of December 2009 points out, the lingering economic crisis has “taken a heavy toll on our national psyche, leaving scars that may take years to heal.”¹ Job losses, the fall in housing values, declines in financial markets, the emergence of China as a leading nation and the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico have put the United States in a national funk. As Jay Campbell, a pollster, remarked: “It’s hard to have optimism when you can’t even pay your bills.”²

Individually, a spirit of optimism can transform the negative thoughts we have. Everyone suffers and experiences misfortunes, but one has to address problems effectively and face life’s toughest challenges. As Winston Churchill said: “I am an optimist. It does not seem too much use being anything else.”³ ■

1. [wsj.com](http://www.wsj.com).

2. [wsj.com](http://www.wsj.com).

3. [public agenda.org](http://www.publicagenda.org).

[http://online.wsj.com/article/SB12610606158396365.htm/?mod=WSJ_hps_RIGHT/Top Carousel](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB12610606158396365.htm/?mod=WSJ_hps_RIGHT/Top+Carousel)

<http://www.publicagenda.org/articles/viewpoint-american-optimism-all-hope-lost-or-can-we-find-it>

THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF CHRISTMAS

“RACHEL: I remember thinking that I wanted to live in Alaska because it always snowed and Santa was up there, so it must always be Christmas if it always snowed.”

—*Reckless*

More than just a mixture of diverse traditions, as Rachel sees it, Christmas is now big business. While the Christian calendar calls for a solemn several week preparation to celebrate the birth of Christ, the “Christmas economy “ has subsumed Thanksgiving and threatens to overtake Halloween. In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt moved the date of Thanksgiving back to the third Thursday of November to expand the Christmas shopping season. With the survival of many businesses dependent on Christmas profits and half of the annual advertising dollar spent on Christmas-related advertising, it is not surprising that for some shoppers Christmas spending is regarded as a patriotic duty.

The commercialization of Christmas did not occur in a social vacuum. It is part of our society in which consumption for its own sake—regardless of any need—is legitimate and encouraged. Without reluctance, consumerism exploits religious beliefs and deep emotions to persuade people to buy almost anything. Advertising’s behavior modification specialists argue that the strains of “Joy to the World” heard throughout shopping malls produce healthy profits, but “Silent Night” does even better. Using Christmas as a religion-sanctioned occasion for extravagant spending, businesses hope that the practice of spending too many dollars on Christmas gifts in North America is simply practice for greater spending throughout the rest of the year.

Christmas has now become a massive marketing event where companies can advertise their products as a must-have Christmas gift. Microsoft and Sony, for example, both market their products to coincide with the Christmas period so that masses of children will ask for, if not demand, it from their parents.

Commercial Christmas continues its spiraling growth. It seems evident that its cultural pervasiveness makes future change unlikely. The reason, one suspects, is not so much an insensitivity to the issues, but rather a feeling of impotence—not knowing what to do or how to do it. Everybody talks about it, but nobody does anything about it. ■

http://www.newcelebrations.com/Advent_Christmas_in_History.htm

[http://ezinearticles.com/?Has_Christmas_Become_Too
Commercialized?&id=330586](http://ezinearticles.com/?Has_Christmas_Become_Too_Commercialized?&id=330586)

ERASING YOUR IDENTITY

Lloyd has walked out on his wife and children, a past he couldn't handle and changed his identity. But is this possible in real life? The short answer is no; you can't completely erase your identity in this day and age—unless the government does it for you. Legally changing your name is not too difficult, but legally changing your Social Security Number (SSN) is more of a hassle. It is possible, but only under certain circumstances. But even if you do change your name and SSN, the system will still have records that link the “new” you to the “old” one.

Why do some people want to erase their identity? Individuals who've acquired a huge amount of debt think that an identity change will allow them to escape the creditors. Sadly, this isn't the case—they will be found out eventually. Perhaps you are a victim of abuse or identity theft and it's the only option. These are the only two reasons the government recognizes as legitimate.

As Jeffrey Rosen writes in his *New York Times Magazine* article “The End of Forgetting,” “We live in a world where the Internet records everything and forgets nothing—where every online photo, status update, Twitter post and blog entry by and about us can be stored forever.”¹ ■

1. Rosen, p. 32.

Rosen, Jeffrey. “The End of Forgetting.” *The New York Times Magazine*, July 25, 2010.

<http://people.howstuffworks.com/how-can-i-erase-my-identity-and-start-over.htm>

ANAGRAMS

“RACHEL: And so I sort of kept up the habit.

A lot of these are anagrams actually.”

—*Reckless*

An anagram is a type of word play, the result of rearranging the letters of a word or phrase to produce a new word or phrase, using all the original letters exactly once, e.g., orchestra= carthorse, a decimal point = I'm a dot in place.

While anagramming is certainly a recreation first, there are ways in

which anagrams are put to use and these can be more serious, or at least not frivolous. For example, psychologists use anagram-oriented tests, often called “anagram solution tasks” to assess the implicit memory of young adults. Rachel seems to use anagrams as a way to decipher the meaning of peoples’ names (as Moses did) and finally to puzzle out the problems of her reality.

The goal of serious or skilled anagrammists is to produce anagrams that in some way reflect or comment on the subject. Such an anagram may be a synonym or antonym of its subject, a parody, a criticism, a praise, e.g., George Bush=He bugs Gore; Madonna Louise Ciccone= Occasional nude income or One cool dance musician; William Shakespeare=I am a weakish speller.

Anagrams can be traced back to the time of Moses, the purpose of which was to find the hidden and mystical meaning in names. They are said to go back at least to the Greek poet Lycophron in the third century BCE. In Greek and Roman times anagrams were thought to reveal dynastic and divine meanings or to have prophetic powers.

As a literary game when Latin was the common property of the literate, Latin anagrams were prominent. Two examples are the change of “Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum” (Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you) into “Virgo serena, pia, munda et immaculate” (Serene virgin, pious, clean and spotless). The second is the anagrammatic answer to Plato’s question, “Quid est veritas?” (What is truth?) to “Est vir qui adeste” (It is the man who is here). The origins of these are not documented.

During the 17th century lawyers, courtiers and physicians used anagrams often. An example from France was a flattering anagram for Cardinal Richelieu, comparing him to Hercules or at least one of his hands (Hercules being a noble symbol), where “Armand de Richelieu” became “Ardue main d’Hercule.”

Examples from the 19th century are the transposition of “Horatio Nelson” into “Honor est a Nilo (Latin: Honor is from the Nile) and of “Florence Nightingale” into “Flit on, cheering angel.” The Victorian love of anagramming as recreation is alluded to by Augustus De Morgan using his own name as example, “Great Gun, do us a sum!”

Anagrams used for titles afford scope or some types of wit. Examples include:

Homer Hickam, Jr.’s book *Rocket Boys* was adapted into the 1999 film *October Sky*.

The New Wave band Missing Persons’ best-selling album was called “Spring Session M.”

Hip-hop artist MF DOOM recorded a 2004 album called “MM.FOOD.”

Brian Eno’s album “Before and After Science” includes a song entitled “King Lead Hat”; an anagram of “Talking Heads,” a band Eno has worked with. ■

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anagram>

RECKLESS QUESTIONS

PRE-PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS

- 1) What is the difference between a lie and a secret?
- 2) What would prompt you to create a new life for yourself?

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POST PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS

- 1) How would you describe Rachel and her journey through the play? What surprises you about the decisions that she makes and what are the results of her decisions?
- 2) How are relationships portrayed in the play? How would you describe the relationship that Lloyd and Pooty share? What secrets in the relationship are revealed?
- 3) Each character has a secret in this play. What are some of the secrets that the characters have and how are they revealed?
- 4) How are the different doctors portrayed? How do their methods differ?
- 5) How would you describe or classify this play? Is it a satire, drama, comedy or some combination? Explain your answer.
- 6) Explain how this play comments on familial bonds?

RECKLESS ACTIVITIES

CREATE A QUIZ SHOW: DO YOU KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOR?

Start by creating some questions for the contestants. These questions should be rather tame but revealing at the same time. For example, what sports do they like, who is their favorite teacher, do they have a pet, etc. Take the questions and write them on slips of paper and drop them in a hat or other container.

Create a few comparison questions. From the play, is the contestant “more like a paper clip or a ping-pong ball?” and “What kind of salad dressing would they be?” Create a few more of these comparison questions, write them on slips of paper and drop them in the hat.

Pick one person to be the game show host and have them pick a question or two out of the hat. Send the first contestant outside the room and ask the students that sit next to him or her one of the questions. When the contestant returns to the room, see if they can determine which one of their classmates said what.

TWO TRUTHS AND A LIE

Have the students sit in a circle. They must think of three statements to tell the group. Two of these statements must be true and one statement must be false. The group must guess which statement is false. The objective is for the student to create a false statement that could be probable. Raise the bar: Make it two lies and one truth or make it two truths and something that they wish to be true.

Colorado Model Content Standards

Theatre 2:

Students understand and apply the creative process to skills of storytelling, playwriting, acting and directing.

NOTE TO TEACHERS:

Note to Teachers: It takes more than 50 trained professionals to bring you any single production at the Denver Center Theatre Company. Did you know that Colorado has over 186,000 people employed in what are called the Creative Industries? Career Exploration and ICAPs (Individual Career and Academic Plans) are part of the new Post Secondary and Workforce Readiness Standards adopted by the State Board of Education <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdegen/downloads/PWRdescription.pdf>. Creative Careers are “front and center” in this conversation. Your students can find out more about themselves and the career pathways open to them at Colorado’s free online Career and College Planning Tool, www.CollegeinColorado.org. They will find out about trends and salaries for thousands of jobs across the state. They can explore colleges and courses that will prepare them for successful careers and learn what they need to know about paying for college, applying for grants, loans and scholarships.

College in Colorado is pleased to offer your students a free Career Exploration Workshop in your classroom. For more information, please contact Gully Stanford, Director of Partnerships at 720-264-8563 or gully.stanford@cic.state.co.us

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