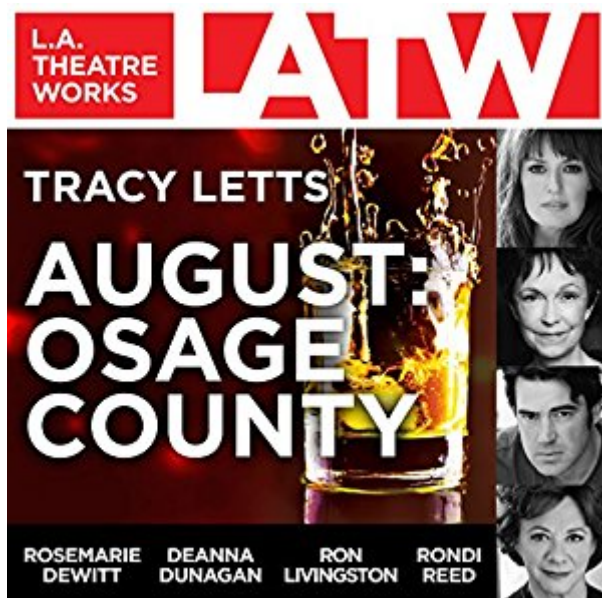


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August: Osage County



Synopsis

Winner of the 2008 Tony Award for Best Play, Tracy Letts' darkly comic epic offers a painfully funny look at a family struggling in the desolate heart of America. An L.A. Theatre Works full-cast recording, featuring members of the original Steppenwolf Theatre and Broadway productions: Tara Lynne Barr, Shannon Cochran, Deanna Dunagan (Tony Award® Best Leading Actress), Kimberly Guerrero, Francis Guinan, Scott Jaeck, Ron Livingston, Robert Maffia, Mariann Mayberry, Rondi Reed (Tony Award® Best Featured Actress), and David Warshofsky. Directed by Bart DeLorenzo. Recorded by L.A. Theatre Works before a live audience.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I purposely chose the play form of Tracy Letts' 'August: Osage County' since there is a screenplay version coming out as a tie in with the movie. Reading a play without a great deal of content is so refreshing. 'August: Osage County' is so good, so dysfunctionally twisted, that no one gets away unscathed. A masterpiece. Mr. Lett's won a Pulitzer Prize for this jewel and deservedly so. The story is set in Oklahoma, in the home of Beverly and Violet Weston. They are children of the 60's, born into poor families. The Westons worked hard in youth and for their toils have all the trappings of a good life. But it is not enough. The past's secrets haunt them and have taken too great a toll; Beverly drinks, while Violet is addicted to prescription drugs-again. Then Beverly Weston comes up missing. Their three daughters gather to support Violet and each other while they wait for news. This is when the sadness, madness and secrets of every member comes pouring out. At times funny, charming and shocking, 'August: Osage County' receives the highest of fives from me. I just know I will be

reading it again. Aloud.

Tracy Letts's masterpiece won the 2008 Tony for best play and the 2008 Pulitzer as well. That's an accomplished double dip that has only been shared by 19 other plays in 90+ years. TS Eliot's "The Hollow Men" is a symbolic poem whose themes run throughout the play, and the last verses of the play are also the last verses of the poem: "This is the way the world ends, this is the way the world ends...." The play is set in Oklahoma in 2007. It begins in August and ends around December. It opens in the living room of a country house 60 miles outside of Tulsa. We find Beverly Winston drinking and musing about life by quoting those he likes: Eliot: "Life is long" and Berryman: "The world is gradually becoming a place where I do not care to be anymore." He sums up his situation shortly: "My wife takes pills and I drink." He interviews Johnna, a 20ish Native American, to work as a caretaker -- especially to look after his wife Violet, a cancer survivor and a prescription pill addict. The prologue ends and that is the last we see of Beverly. Beverly's disappearance causes all three children, his sister-in-law's family and a few assorted others, to descend upon the family home. We watch brutal arguments with stunningly vicious language -- and the meanest viper of all is Violet Weston, who is one of the most difficult mother figures to ever grace the stage. All three daughters have been unlucky in love -- never finding it, picking the wrong man or dealing with the difficulties of a struggling marriage in the face of aging and childrearing. All of these themes are portrayed in dramatic detail. Throughout the action, Letts discusses 21st century education, work, relationships, family, sex, drugs and laws through a variety of the characters. It's an instant classic and something that I'll teach my students if I ever get a drama class.

There is no doubt that "August: Osage County" is a great American play. Reading it one instantly gets the same feeling you get from the best O'Neill, Neil and Williams dramas. And like those plays, it is saturated with anger and bitterness and love, and all those complex emotions that make us human. Tracy Letts has written the text in a very simple direct style that flows easily, and the structure of the piece fills out nicely. It opens with a prologue that is worth going back and rereading after getting about halfway through, just to see what new resonance it has now that the reader has more information. Written in three acts, the same structure that many great American plays seem to share, the first act pulls you in with an interesting ensemble and plotlines that hint at more under the surface. The second act features a family dinner for the ages and violently and relentlessly will propel the reader to its conclusion. The third act contains more scenes, seems to have a quicker pace, and really punches the reader in the gut with many

moments that come up in quick succession. In the hands of a talented director and cast this play would be a gripping night in the theatre. A key moment that stood out to me was Act 3:2, when the character of Barbara realizes that she will never really know why her marriage ended. That moment of acknowledging that she will never get the answers she deserves is recognizable, and painful, to anyone who has suffered through a breakup where the communication was less than should be desired. And really, that lack of honest communication is what the play is about in general. Our inability to be honest with others, and ourselves, is a profound recognition that you see in yourself as you read this play. Which brings me to the ending of the piece, a dark warning that to live your life without honesty and kindness will catch up to you at some point. "August: Osage County" is a play that will be performed and read for generations, and it deserves to be because it is about important human truths, and if we don't read and go to the theatre every once in a while to have those things pointed out to us then why are we doing it?

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