

# RUTH DRAPER'S MONOLOGUES

## STUDY GUIDE



GEFFEN  
**PLAYHOUSE**

# RUTH DRAPER'S MONOLOGUES

WORLD PREMIERE PERFORMANCE IN THE  
GIL CATES THEATER AT THE GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE

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SPECIAL THANKS TO

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*This publication is to be used for educational purposes only.*

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## SECTION 1

# ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION

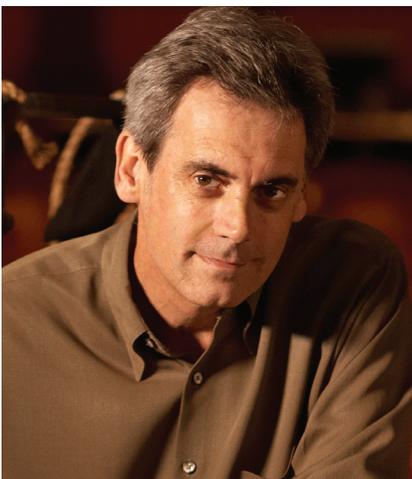
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## RUTH DRAPER'S MONOLOGUES



## ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S COMMENT

RANDALL ARNEY



RUTH DRAPER WAS REVERED BY HER CONTEMPORARIES FOR being one of the most brilliant monologists ever to grace the stage. Born in New York City in the 1880s, she carved out a life not often afforded to women at that time in the performing arts. Her ability to immerse herself completely into a persona and then another and another became a blueprint for such actors as Lily Tomlin, Whoopi Goldberg and John Leguizamo.

We embraced it when another revered actress came to us with the idea of a revival of Draper's monologues. Annette Bening is an extraordinarily exciting and versatile performer. Having played some of the most renowned characters in dramatic literature – Hedda Gabler, Medea, Madame Ranevskaya – she has also created memorable contemporary characters in plays by Tina Howe and Joanna Murray-Smith.

But Ruth Draper has long been a passion of Annette's. For years she has been honing in on and making these monologues her own. At once a tour-de-force and an homage to a great writer and actress, Annette has infused this evening with her fiery interpretation of four of Draper's best pieces.

Over the last 15 years, Annette has not only graced our stage, but she has also been an incredible friend and supporter of the Geffen and of arts education. To facilitate and, thus, share in her dream project is our pleasure. These monologues are gems, never meant to be contained within the pages of a book. To see Annette breathe life into them has been nothing short of joyous.

# SYNOPSIS

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## MONOLOGUE SYNOPSES

A Class in Greek Poise – A teacher leads a class on how to move gracefully.

A Débutante at a Dance – While attending a ball, a young woman muses on what is important in life.

Doctors and Diets – A woman takes friends to lunch at a popular restaurant.

The Italian Lesson – A busy housewife attempts to study Italian literature.

## RUNNING TIME

Approximately 1 hours and 20 minutes. *There will be no intermission.*

# ARTISTIC BIOGRAPHIES

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## ANNETTE BENING

(Performer / Director)

Theater, Los Angeles: Geffen Playhouse: *Hedda Gabler*, *The Female of the Species*. Mark Taper Forum: *The Cherry Orchard*. Tiffany Theater: Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads*. UCLA: *Medea*. Annette graduated from Mesa Community College and San Francisco State University and then attended the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, where she trained and then joined the repertory company. Plays there included *Arms and the Man*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Macbeth*. Annette received both a Tony nomination and the Clarence Derwent Award for outstanding debut performances on Broadway in *Coastal Disturbances*. Films: *The Face of Love*, *Ruby Sparks*, *Ginger & Rosa*, *The Kids are All Right*, *Mother and Child*, *Being Julia*, *American Beauty*, *Open Range*, *In Dreams*, *The Siege*, *Mars Attacks!*, *Richard III*, *The American President*, *Love Affair*, *Bugsy*, *Regarding Henry*, *The Grifters*, *Guilty by Suspicion*, *Valmont*, *Postcards from the Edge*, *The Great Outdoors*. Ms. Bening has won the BAFTA, two Golden Globes, and has received an Emmy nomination for *Mrs. Harris* and four Academy Award nominations.

## RUTH DRAPER

(Playwright)

Ruth Draper was an American monologist and monodramatist whose art was acclaimed throughout the United States and Europe. Her repertory grew to 39 pieces with such titles as *Three Generations at a Court of Domestic Relations*, *At an English House Party*, *The Miner's Wife*, *A French Dressmaker*, *Opening a Bazaar*, *In County Kerry*, *The Italian Lesson*, *At an Art Exhibition* and *Vive La France*. In them, she conjured up some 58 principal characters, endowing each with full individuality. A command of languages and dialects played a large part in her characterizations as well. She died in 1956, a few days after a performance at the Playhouse Theatre in New York City.

## SECTION 2

# THEMES & TOPICS

## NEW YORK SOCIETY

### SOURCES

*The Art of Ruth Draper: Her Dramas and Characters, with a Memoir by Morton Dauwen Zabel* (Oxford University Press, 1960)

*Making the American Aristocracy: Women, Cultural Capital, and High Society in New York City, 1870-1900*, by Emily Katherine Bibby (Thesis, Master of Arts in History, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2009)

### PHOTO CREDIT

Residence of Wm. K. Vanderbilt by Benjamin J. Falk, This image is available from the United States Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs division under the digital ID cph.3b06982.



Ruth Draper (1884-1956) based many of her monologues on her sharp observations of the people who populated the world into which she was born.

The decades from 1870 to 1900 in the United States were a time of rapidly growing prosperity for those who owned industries, such as railroads and steel. The newly rich flocked to Manhattan, where they built palatial homes and joined families whose status and wealth extended back to Colonial times in forming the upper class of New York society. Their lives, and those of the middle class who sought to emulate them, centered on social activities. They hosted luncheons, attended parties that featured entertainment and introduced their daughters to society at debutante

### DISCUSSION POINT

Consider the saying “Money can’t buy happiness.” To what extent do you believe this to be true or untrue, and for whom? Why?

# NEW YORK SOCIETY

## PHOTO CREDIT

Photo Courtesy: pdpics.com:  
Photo by Prerana Jangam

balls. While husbands were off making their fortunes and wives were managing their families' social lives, secretaries handled appointments, nannies and governesses cared for children and live-in servants maintained their residences and provided meals.

Draper's father was an affluent, highly respected doctor. Her mother was the daughter of the part-owner and editor of the *New York Sun* newspaper. Except for a few years when she attended a private school, Draper was taught at home. One governess in particular inspired her love of literature and history. At age nineteen, she made her debut to society.

As a child she was asked to share the impersonations that had long delighted her family, when her parents entertained guests. As a young woman she performed in the homes of prominent hostesses and at charity benefits. When presenting monologues became a professional pursuit at age 36, she parted ways with her social set by becoming an independent and financially successful theatre artist.

While she continued to socialize with the elite in New York (and London) throughout her life, the distance afforded by being an artist may have allowed her to infuse her portrayals of them with the satire and psychological understanding for which she became known. Innately curious and empathetic and an avid traveler, she became acquainted with people of diverse backgrounds, whom she also portrayed in her monologues.



## FRIENDS & ADMIRERS

### SOURCES

*The Art of Ruth Draper: Her Dramas and Characters, with a Memoir by Morton Dauwen Zabel* (Oxford University Press, 1960)

*Discovering Draper*, by Amy Levinson (*Ruth Draper's Monologues* Geffen Playhouse Program)

### PHOTO CREDITS

Portrait of actress Ruth Draper by John Singer Sargent: 1913: <http://artsy.net/artwork/john-singer-sargent-portrait-of-ruth-draper> Artsy.net

Wikimedia Commons: Photo by Billy Hathor

*Portrait of Ignacy Jan Paderewski* by Edward Burne-Jones, 1892. Drawing from National Museum in Warsaw. Wikimedia Commons



From 1910 to the mid-1940s, Draper created and presented over 50 central characters in her “miniature dramas.” Her performances awed her many friends and admirers, which included major literary figures, painters and actors in New York and London; U.S. presidents; British royalty; and audiences in the United States, Europe, Africa, Latin America, Australia and Asia.

British painter John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) drew Draper’s portrait (top left) and insisted on creating several sketches of her characters after seeing her perform.

Novelist Henry James (1843-1916 – center left), whose nephew later married Draper’s sister, became a close friend and supporter. When she questioned the wisdom of striking out on her own as a professional monologist rather than taking a more traditional path as an actress, he famously said, “My dear young friend you have woven yourself a magic carpet—stand on it!”

Draper credits Polish pianist Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860-1941 – bottom left), a family friend, with helping her move from being an amateur to a professional artist, when he urged her to take her talent seriously and make the necessary sacrifices for her art.

### DISCUSSION POINT

Think of someone who helped you follow your dreams or achieve a goal. What did they do or say that made a difference?

Why is support often crucial to the success of artists?

## ARTISTIC EVOLUTION

## SOURCES

*The Art of Ruth Draper: Her Dramas and Characters, with a Memoir by Morton Dauwen Zabel* (Oxford University Press, 1960)

That Ruth Draper never studied acting is a testament to her gifts as an actress and may be the reason her work was considered so original and fresh. Instead of interpreting the work of playwrights, she created her own characters and brought them to life as naturally as possible.

It took time for her to perfect her approach. When she first started performing, she offered impersonations of people she had observed. From her mid-twenties on, she worked hard on writing and rehearsing dramatic monologues in which characters revealed themselves by how they related to other characters in a particular setting. In *The Italian Lesson*, we get to know a well-to-do housewife through Draper's gently satiric evocation of her life as she attempts to study Dante with a tutor.

...Of course he was a genius, wasn't he—like Shakespeare?  
...He and Dante seem to have known *everything*...known what would always be true...I imagine we're going to find this *full* of quotations!...(Starts to resume reading, then abruptly breaks off)

Oh! Goodness—is that half-past nine?...Will you excuse me one minute, Signorina, while I call up a friend? I have to catch her before she goes out.

(Into telephone) Hello! Plaza 3-7674.

It's something rather important...(Speaks to a little girl whom she sees entering) Hello, my sweet!... Gently, darling—don't pull me over...Say good morning to Signorina, Nancy, and then run along, because Mother is having her Italian lesson...

In addition to finding the humor in her characters' situations, Draper often mined their innermost thoughts and feelings to find their truths. In *A Débutante at a Dance*, a young woman at first shares her delight with a young male companion about the party they are attending then discloses deeper thoughts:

...Nobody has more fun than I do, but I think a lot... Do you...I think practically *all* the time...and they say you shouldn't...Yes, because I think the whole point is...there's *so-much-more* in life than just all this!...And I want to find out what it is!

Draper embodied her characters through distinctive facial expressions, gestures, and body language as well as vocal tones, accents and rhythms.

She credited a play (*The Yellow Jacket*, 1913), with showing her how minimal props could create rich illusions and engage the audience's imaginations. As a result, she often worked with only a table and chair, and used scarves to suggest costumes.

# ARTISTIC IMPACT

### SOURCES

*The Art of Ruth Draper: Her Dramas and Characters, with a Memoir by Morton Dauwen Zabel* (Oxford University Press, 1960)

[tinyurl.com/TomlinDraper](http://tinyurl.com/TomlinDraper)

[tinyurl.com/MametDraper](http://tinyurl.com/MametDraper)

### PHOTO CREDIT

Courtesy of Mount Desert Island Historical Society

Before Draper took the world by storm, one-person shows “had become either an elocutionary stunt or a form of humorous exhibitionism.” In her portrayals she refused to be exaggerated or melodramatic, preferring instead to be understated and real. While she did not revolutionize her art, she had a powerful impact on how one-person shows were presented, as well as on theatre artists and critics.

Draper’s work was appreciated deeply by legendary actors Sarah Bernhardt, Laurence Olivier and John Gielgud, who wrote to her, “This is only a word of grateful thanks for the great pleasure you gave me, and a tribute to the fresh and exquisite variety of your brilliant work.”

Lily Tomlin, the comic actress and creator and performer of one-woman shows, has credited Draper’s recordings with setting a standard to which she could aspire, saying she was “thrilled at the perfection of the these monologues and the richness and humanity of them.”

Playwright David Mamet found the economy and restraint of Draper’s written monologues so moving he proposed, “Though they are monologues, it is insufficient, in fact misleading, to identify them as such. They are true and complete dramas. She was, in my opinion, one of the great dramatists of the 20th century.”

Influential British critic Kenneth Tynan saw her for the first time in 1952, when she was 68 years old. He feared she might be “...a museum-piece, ripe for the dust sheet and oblivion.” He found her to be “...about as old-fashioned and mummified as spring.” As he watched Draper’s set of monologues, in which she evoked multiple characters, he stated, “...I could only conclude that this was the best and most modern group acting I had ever seen.”



## DISCUSSION POINT

Recall the most memorable live theatrical performance you have ever experienced. How did it make you feel? What did it make you think about? Why are performances we see in person sometimes more powerful than ones we see in films or on television?



# PERSONNEL PROFILE

## AN INTERVIEW WITH BRIAN DUNNING

**What is your official title, and how long have you been working at the Geffen Playhouse?**

My title is Graphics/Production Artist. I joined the Geffen in May 2009.

**What are your primary tasks?**

I am responsible for how the theater presents itself visually in our brochures, advertisements and printed programs, and on our website. As Production Artist, I prepare and assemble the art to make sure it is ready to be printed.

**How did you get involved in graphic design?**

It was almost by accident. I began studying computer science at Cal State Long Beach, but found it too dry, so I ended up majoring in English. Along the way, I became involved with the school newspaper, initially just writing music reviews. Eventually I did every job that needed to be done – writing features, editing and designing graphics. I am not a great artist – I can't draw at all, but I think my background in computer science helped because I understood how to use software to compose pages for the newspaper. I also actively studied how magazines and newspapers designed features and ads. Senior year, I became

editor-in-chief and worked with photographers and illustrators as well as writers and editors to create the look and content of the paper.

**How did you come to work at the Geffen Playhouse?**

After graduating college, I began working at the *District Weekly* in Long Beach, and would create anywhere from 20 to 100 ads in a week. I also designed advertorials, which were like mini-magazines. While I was freelancing with several ad agencies, the Geffen approached my employment agency to fill my current position.

**How do you come up with images for the plays presented at the Geffen?**

I collaborate with colleagues in the literary and marketing departments and we consult an outside design firm to develop the key art for the shows that appear in ads and on signage and program covers.

**What design elements are particularly effective in getting people's attention when promoting plays and events?**

The most important thing is knowing who we're marketing to – that will dictate how we approach the ad. For instance, in some publications, we find that including an exclusive offer will attract people. For others, the



price point is not important if they see that their favorite playwright or actor or director is involved with the show. It's about trying to find the balance in giving enough information while also creating an aesthetically pleasing piece of art.

**What do you find most challenging about your work at the Geffen?**

How much the theater is growing. We are branching out into new opportunities in branding and marketing, especially online. I will be taking a more active role in creating a greater web-based presence that makes more information available to audiences online.

**What do you find most satisfying about your work at the theater?**

Often, we start the design process a year before a show opens. When it's brought to life onstage and the art we created has really captured what it's about, we are very pleased. It's also great when people connect to the art so much they put it up on their walls. ■

## SECTION 4

# POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Depending on the time available and members' interests, guide your group to respond to the questions suggested below. Encourage everyone to participate, while having respect for differing opinions. Individuals can share their thoughts with a partner or in a small group. Then, ask for a volunteer to share their group's answers with the larger group.

- Overall, how did you feel while watching the series of monologues? Engaged? Provoked? Put off? Bored? Entertained? What made you feel this way?
- What was the most memorable moment in the performance? Describe it in detail.
- At the beginning of each monologue, what was the character's state of mind? How did it change over the course of the scene? Where did it end up?
- How did the performer create distinct characters with her body and voice? How did she evoke the other characters with whom she interacted in the scene? Provide or show details.
- Even though the furniture and props were minimal, were you able to envision each setting? If so, what did you see? How did the performer help you fill in the details?
- In what ways did author Ruth Draper satirize the personalities or lifestyles she was evoking? What emotional truths did she reveal?
- How is the "world" of the characters similar or different from your own? Would you have enjoyed living in theirs? Why, or why not?

# NOTES



## SECTION 5

# RESOURCES

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**LEARN ABOUT** Ruth Draper’s fascinating life and work in *The Art of Ruth Draper: Her Dramas and Characters, with a Memoir by Morton Dauwen Zabel* (Oxford University Press, 1960).

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**LISTEN TO** Ruth Draper perform her monologues on the CD, *Ruth Draper and Her Company of Characters: Selected Recordings*. (Available at some libraries.)

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**LEARN ABOUT** the Gilded Age (1868-1899) – a turbulent, complex and formative time in America’s history, which shaped the world into which Ruth Draper was born, at [tinyurl.com/TheGildedAge](http://tinyurl.com/TheGildedAge).

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**EXPERIENCE** the paintings of John Singer Sargent online at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. at [tinyurl.com/JSingerSargent](http://tinyurl.com/JSingerSargent).

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**WATCH** the DVD of Lily Tomlin’s one-woman show, *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*. (Available at some libraries.)

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**EXAMINE** research featured in *Psychology Today* on how money does and does not provide happiness at [tinyurl.com/MoneybuyHappiness](http://tinyurl.com/MoneybuyHappiness).

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Shay Family Foundation  
Sidley Austin Foundation  
Simms/Mann Family Foundation  
Simon Strauss Foundation  
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Sony Pictures Entertainment  
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Transamerica Foundation  
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