A Noise Within Study Guide

The Rainmaker

Photo by Craig Schwartz.

A NOISE WITHIN'S 2008/2009
Season of Awakenings!

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The Rainmaker: N. Richard Nash on his Play

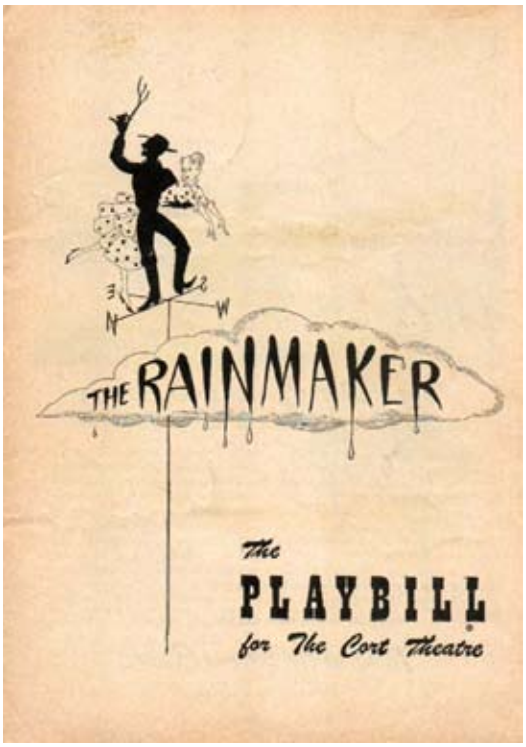
WHEN DROUGHT HITS the lush grasslands of the richly fertile west, they are green no more and the dying is a palpable thing. What happens to…vegetation [and] to…livestock can be read in the coldly statistical little bulletins freely issued by the Department of Agriculture. What happens to the people of the west—beyond the…sudden poverty and loss of substance—is a… kind of desperation. Rain will never come again; the earth will be sere forever; and in all of heaven, there is no promise of remedy.

Yet, men of wisdom like H.C. Curry know to be patient with heaven. They know that the earth will not thirst forever; they know that one day they will again awaken to a green morning. Young people like Lizzie, his daughter, cannot know this as certainly as he does. Bright as she is, she cannot know. She can only count the shooting stars, and hope.

The play is set in such a drought-beset region in the moment when Lizzie's hope is faltering. Because the hopes of Lizzie and H.C., of Jim and Starbuck and File are finally brought to blessing, because the people of the play are deserving and filled with love of one another—and most important, because it is not always that the hopes of deserving, loving human beings *are* blessed —this play is a comedy and it is a romance. It must never be forgotten that it is a romance.

—N. Richard Nash, *The Rainmaker,* 1954

Characters, Cast, and Synopsis of *The Rainmaker*



The original Broadway production of *The Rainmaker* opened at the Cort Theatre on October 28, 1954.

CHARACTERS AND CAST

H.C. Curry
Noah Curry
Jim Curry
Lizzie Curry
File
Sheriff Thomas
Bill Starbuck

THE SETTING

The play takes place in a western state on a summer day in a time of drought.

SYNOPSIS

Act I.

The Curry house, morning. H.C. is making breakfast when his oldest son, Noah, comes into the house. Noah is disappointed to see his father—instead of his sister, Lizzie—cooking, but H.C. says that Lizzie is tired and they should let her sleep. She returned late the night before from a trip to visit relatives in Sweetriver. Noah fusses with the radio, hoping to hear something about the drought through which they are suffering. It has been so hot and dry for so long that their cattle are dying and Noah has had to let their ranch hands go.

Jim comes racing in, energetic and agitated. Noah berates him for paying too much attention to "a certain girl named Snookie" at a dance the previous night. Noah is concerned that if Jim continues to "carry on" with Snookie, she will "hog-tie" him into marrying her. Jim, however, hopes that Snookie will give him her little red hat—a hat she always wears, but plans one day to give to some "handsome fella."

The three Curry men wonder what to do about Lizzie. Jim says they should at least talk to her, but H.C. disagrees: "I can't just speak up and say: 'Lizzie, you gotta get married!' She knows she's gotta get married. We all know it." Lizzie comes downstairs, and H.C. asks about her trip. Lizzie demands that they not beat around the bush: she knows the trip was an attempt to marry her off to one of her cousins. The entire experience was humiliating, because the family knew why she was there and she felt like a horse up for auction. "You're afraid of bein' beautiful," H.C. accuses, but Lizzie declares that she's afraid to think she's beautiful when she knows she's not.

The Curry men hatch a plan to invite the Sheriff's deputy, File, to dinner. At first, Lizzie protests—she doesn't want her family to "lasso a husband" for her—but she eventually surrenders, and the Curry men set off for town.

File's office. File and the Sheriff are in the midst of a friendly argument: the Sheriff wants to give File a dog—he doesn't think it's right for File to live alone—but File stubbornly refuses. The Sheriff leaves and the Curry men arrive; they invite him to supper, but, seeing through their plot, File resists. He agrees to come "one of these days," but not tonight, as there's an outlaw named Tornado Johnson coming their way. Jim is frustrated by File's refusal. Giving up the pretense, File says that he wants to be friendly, but he doesn't want

to be married. Jim, angry and embarrassed, starts a fistfight that File quickly wins, leaving Jim with a black eye.

Noah and Jim leave, but H.C. stays behind to tell File that he knows File's secret: File is not a widower, as he claims to be, but a divorced man whose wife ran out on him. H.C. says that Lizzie could be good for File, but File grows defensive and H.C. leaves him to his solitude.

The Curry house, afternoon. Lizzie, excited by File's supposedly imminent arrival, makes final adjustments to supper preparations. Noah comes in, but she darts away to change her dress before he can work up the nerve to tell her of their failure. Jim enters as the phone rings: it's Snookie, who wants Jim to come for a ride in her car. Noah orders Jim to stay home; Jim is upset. Lizzie returns, all dressed up, and H.C. breaks the news that File is not coming. Lizzie attempts to hide her disappointment. Noah wonders why Lizzie must be married at all—after all, she has everything she needs in her father and brothers and their home. H.C. disagrees, asserting that she won't be happy until she marries. Jim declares that Lizzie will never get married unless she learns to flirt like flibbertigibbets like Lily Ann Beasley, but Lizzie doesn't want a man who succumbs to inane girlish airs. She wants a man "to stand up straight," and she wants "to stand up straight to him."

Suddenly, the door swings open to reveal a stranger on the threshold. "The name is Starbuck—Rainmaker!" he announces; for one hundred dollars paid in advance he promises to bring rain within 24 hours. Noah and Lizzie are extremely skeptical, but H.C. decides to take the offer. When Lizzie scoffs at her father's reasoning, Starbuck declares: "You gotta take my deal because once in your life you gotta take a chance on a con man! . . . [A] hundred bucks is only a hundred bucks—but rain in a dry season is a sight to behold!" They all sit down to supper.

Act II.

The Curry house, evening. A resistant Noah counts out Starbuck's hundred dollars. Lizzie and Noah are angry with H.C., for letting himself be conned. Jim and H.C., however, readily take on the bizarre tasks Starbuck gives them to help bring rain: Jim goes outside to beat Starbuck's big bass drum, and H.C., takes Starbuck's "special" paint and paints a big white arrow pointing away from the house. Even Noah leaves, in a huff, to tie the mule's hind legs together.

Left alone with Starbuck, Lizzie rages: "You're not satisfied to steal our money! You have to make jackasses out of us!" Starbuck attempts to defend himself, but she will have none of his stories. He, in turn, sees right to the heart of her insecurities: "You don't believe in nothin'—not even in yourself. You don't even believe you're a woman. And if you don't—you're not!" Leaving her deeply perturbed, he exits.

File's office, night. File lies on the couch in his office, which is also his home, unhappy and uncomfortable. The Sheriff enters and asks File about the visit from the Curry men. File brushes him off; he has changed his mind about the dog, he says, but the Sheriff has already given the dog away. The Sheriff sees through File's change of heart, and urges him to go see Lizzie. File agrees to take an hour off.

The Curry house. H.C., covered in paint, comes into the house. He is followed by a limping Noah, much the worse for the discourteous treatment he has had from the recalcitrant mule. They discuss their respective woes until Jim comes in, carrying the bass drum. He describes how Starbuck listens to him and takes him seriously. He gets a blanket out of Lizzie's linen chest so that Starbuck can bed down in the tack room.
Lizzie comes back downstairs. It is too hot—and Jim's drum is too loud—for her to sleep. The phone rings; it is Snookie for Jim, again, but Noah hangs up on her. Starbuck encourages Jim to call her right back, but

Lizzie demands that he not interfere with their family. Starbuck returns to the tack room, Jim flees upstairs, and Noah storms out.

Still in anguish over Starbuck's accusation, Lizzie says that she would be better off like Lily Ann Beasley, the empty-headed flirt. She begins to imitate Lily Ann's absurd flirtation. File appears in the doorway during her improvisation, unnoticed by Lizzie and H.C. He finally announces his presence, and Lizzie is mortified.

File claims that he has come to apologize to Jim. H.C. goes upstairs to fetch Jim, unsubtly leaving Lizzie and File alone together. Painfully embarrassed, they exchange awkward pleasantries until Jim comes downstairs and File can make his apology. Jim, pleased by File's unexpected appearance, exuberantly beats the drum and races out of the room. Again alone with Lizzie, File admits that he lied about his reason for visiting: he really came to tell Lizzie the truth about his divorce. They begin to open up to each other; he tells her that his wife left him because his pride prevented him from asking her to stay.

Lizzie, far too candid, calls him a fool for letting her go. He becomes angry, and she desperately attempts to fix things by flirting like Lily Ann Beasley. Appalled by her act, File leaves. Lizzie's family rushes in, asking what happened. When Lizzie explains, Noah lashes out at H.C., blaming his father for Lizzie's plight. "You've been building up a rosy dream for her," he says, "[but] she's gotta face the facts….She's plain." Jim launches himself at Noah in a fury. Starbuck, who has been watching from the sidelines, breaks up the fight. Jim runs out of the house. Noah orders Starbuck to clear out, but Starbuck refuses. "And while I'm here, you're gonna quit callin' that kid a dumbbell—because he's not…. And…don't you ever call her plain," Starbuck says and goes out after Jim. Noah, however, does not back down: "You're gonna be an old maid. And the sooner you face it, the sooner you'll stop breakin' your heart," he tells Lizzie and goes upstairs. H.C. advises Lizzie to ignore Noah, but Lizzie is certain that her brother is right; devastated, she snatches up the bed linens Jim took out for Starbuck and races outside.

The tack room. Starbuck is undressing for bed when Lizzie enters, carrying the bed linens. She has come to thank him for his defense of Jim, although she does not believe what he said about her—she believes she truly is plain. Starbuck encourages her to dream big dreams, but Lizzie explains that, while her dreams may be smaller and quieter than his, they are still dreams. Certain that her dreams will never come true, she breaks down, and Starbuck comforts her, telling her to believe in herself. "There's no such thing as a plain woman," he says, encouraging her to see herself through her own eyes, and not as she fears others see her; he takes the pins out of her hair and insists that she recognize her own beauty. When she finally does, he kisses her.

Act III.

The Curry house, around 2 a.m. H.C. is on the phone, trying to track down Jim, who has disappeared. Noah comes downstairs, unable to sleep. Jim returns, self-satisfied and confident; he has been out with Snookie and has her little red hat to show for it—they are engaged. Jim wants to tell Lizzie his news, but H.C. explains that Lizzie is out in the tack room with Starbuck. Suddenly, File and the Sheriff appear seeking Starbuck, who is also known as Tornado Johnson and wanted in several states for swindling the populace. H.C. and Jim deny any knowledge of Tornado Johnson, but the Sheriff and File see through their inexpert lies and go outside to investigate Starbuck's wagon of supplies. Noah prepares to bring Starbuck in himself, but H.C. stops him: "Lizzie has got to have somethin'. Even if it's only one minute."

The tack room. Starbuck and Lizzie sit in the early morning light, intimate. Starbuck demands that Lizzie never forget that she is beautiful, even after he leaves. He is moved by their momentary romance and tells her the truth: "I never made rain in my life!" "It's not good to live in your dreams," Lizzie counsels, but Starbuck notes that it's not good to live outside them, either. He offers to stick around for a while—not for good, but for a few days—and Lizzie is overjoyed.

The Curry house. Lizzie returns from the tack room and joyfully tells her family that she has a beau. H.C. informs her that File and the Sheriff are there to arrest him, and Lizzie is about to run out to warn Starbuck when File and Jim come into the house. File demands that H.C. tell him where Starbuck is; when H.C. lies again, File begins to suspect that something is going on between Lizzie and the fugitive. Starbuck comes into the house, singing too loudly to hear Lizzie yelling at him to run. File arrests Starbuck; Lizzie begs File to let him get away. H.C., Jim, and even Noah defend Starbuck's character, and File reluctantly lets Starbuck go. On his way out the door, Starbuck asks Lizzie to come with him. She hesitates, considering, until File begs her not to go—the one thing he could never bring himself to ask the wife who left him. Lizzie chooses File—and her small, quiet dreams—and Starbuck leaves. There is a rumble of thunder and a flash of lightning; it rains. ❖

Bringing *The Rainmaker* to the Stage at *A Noise Within*

IN DIRECTING *The Rainmaker*, I tried to bring as much psychological depth as possible to the characters in the story. Each character needs to be real, conflicted, honest and truthful to what they are and what they believe in the play. This presented certain challenges both in terms of the acting work, and in terms of the set.

The original production featured all three scenes onstage at the same time. We couldn't do that within the space—and so, adapting a huge realistic proscenium set within the confines of the thrust stage forced us to use a kind of selective realism in terms of the details of the set. The play needs to keep moving along and can't be slowed down by large, cumbersome scene changes. So, this play operates using movement of furniture and placement of the scenes to convey as realistic a sense as possible of the changes in locale. The downstage area changes to the tack room and Sherriff's office when needed, and when not set, the entire thrust becomes the Curry house.

I made a conscious decision to set this play in the 1950s. I understand this play has been done in the 1930s. I didn't believe that—this wasn't a depression era play about the dust bowl to me. One thing people point to justify why the play is set in the 1930's is that Snookie's car is an Essex and they stopped manufacturing the Essex in the 1930s. We changed her car to a Studebaker, a very 50s car and a name more people would recognize. Nash is very clear in the opening stage directions that this is a moderately wealthy family who is experiencing a drought. Their economic position is clear—and doesn't fit in with the poverty of the dust bowl.

The 50s were the last age of American innocence before the explosion of the radicalism of the 1960s and that presented some challenges. For example, to get a contemporary actress to think like a 1950s woman—they often didn't work and were relegated to cook dinner, iron shirts, etc.— was difficult. Lizzie is too smart to fit within the traditional 50s housewife mold—she's too much like a man in some ways. For Lizzie to woo a man in those times was a major hurdle, and our actor portraying Lizzie had to buy into this 50s gender reality and jump over that hurdle to make us believe that she hadn't grown up after the women's movement. That was one of the bigger challenges to overcome. So, when I talk about making each character's reality honest and believable, that's the challenge I'm describing. It all comes down to the script—just what you do with a good script. In this production, I am very faithful to the text—we just go by what's in it, and what we know of the history of the time. ❖

—Director Andrew Traister

Theatre Lore

Why do actors say "break a leg"?

Perhaps the saying comes—in a complicated way—from the use of "leg." In theatre, a "leg" is a part of the mechanics that open and close the curtain. To break a leg is to earn so many curtain calls that opening and closing the curtain over and over during final applause causes the curtain mechanics to break. At the outset of theatre tradition, players acted outdoors, where there were no stages or curtains. Applause came in the form of foot stomping, which could indicate another origin of this phrase.

A Simple Story About Faith

by Michael Paller

ON A WESTERN ROAD TRIP he took in 1951, N. Richard Nash met an eight-year-old boy at a filling station. The boy was covered in grime and dirt, his complexion "the color of dust." It hadn't rained in a long time. He clutched a long, forked stick, which he shook at the sky every few minutes. "What's that for?" Nash asked. "Rain," he said. Recalling that encounter five years later, after *The Rainmaker* had become an international hit, Nash wrote,

> I tried to tell a simple story about droughts that happen to people, and about faith. I tried to say that belief in a forked stick is sweet in an eight-year-old but a grownup has to find his magic in the rites of daily living. I tried to protest that the dreamers who are fugitive from the world have too long pretended that they alone know what is beautiful; that there's beauty for those who stick around and have a good look at things. That there is beauty in reality, beauty in the balances of nature, no matter how brutal the imbalances; beauty in the togetherness of people which, sadly, must sometimes be measured by loneliness; beauty in seeing the fact and naming it the fact.

If that were all *The Rainmaker* had to say on the subject of dreams—that dreams are fine for children but that adults must settle for reality—it wouldn't have become a phenomenon: when Nash recalled this meeting in 1956, the film version was about to be released and the play had been produced 90 times around the world. By the time Nash died in 2000, it had been translated into 40 languages, including an unwritten African one. Surely, there are few plays that stake the claims of reality over those of dreams and win the love and affection of a worldwide audience. *The Rainmaker* isn't one of them.

For if we look closely at *The Rainmaker*, we see that it does not divide its characters into dreamers and realists. Rather, Nash populates his world with those for whom daring to dream is as natural as rain, and those who want in their hearts to dream

Like Starbuck, Jimmy, the youngest Curry, dreams big.

but who, for any number of reasons, cannot take the risk. Lizzie Curry is one of those who are caught high and dry in a drought of dust and reality. "You're all dreams," she says to Starbuck. "And it's no good to live in your dreams." Starbuck, who wants things to be as beautiful when he gets them as they are when he thinks about them, replies, "It's no good to live outside [your dreams] either." "Somewhere between the two," Lizzie offers as a compromise. At first glance her response doesn't make much sense: What does it mean, how is it possible, to live somewhere between dreams and reality? But she is wiser than she knows, and it is Nash's accomplishment that he shows us that we can change the world of our quotidian reality if we nourish it with dreams.

Starbuck advertises himself as a rainmaker, a bringer of new life: "You're in a parcel of trouble," he says to Noah, the elder Curry brother and, like Lizzie, a hard-eyed non-dreamer. "You've lost twelve steers on the north range and sixty-two in the gully." The solution, of course, is rain, which Starbuck promises in prodigious amounts: "Rain in buckets, rain in barrels, fillin' the lowlands, floodin' the gullies. And the land is as green as the valley of Adam."

It is not necessarily rain that will make the world fertile. Starbuck makes it green for Lizzie through his dreams; his gift for dreaming big dreams is what gives Lizzy permission to have her small ones: "Like a man's voice saying: 'Lizzie, is my blue suit pressed?' And the same man saying: 'Scratch behind my shoulder blades.'" She *says* these are little, quiet dreams, but they are little only compared to the hope, which she cannot dare express, that they will come true. Being loved, and taking pleasure in doing the things that bring happiness to someone she loves, are large dreams for Lizzie, indeed. Too large, in fact, for her to acknowledge or say out loud before Starbuck rides onto the Curry ranch with his own visionary dreams of a fabulous woman named Melisande, of being able to bring torrents of rain to a parched country, of a woman believing that she's beautiful when most everyone around her is telling her that she's plain. Starbuck's big dreams allow Lizzie to have hers, but not without a struggle. Some people have to be shaken awake, but others have to be startled into closing their eyes.

Like Starbuck, Jimmy, the youngest Curry, dreams big. When he tells H.C., "Pop, the whole world's gonna blow up! The world's gonna get all s-w-o-l-e up—and bust right in our faces!" one feels that if it does, it won't be due to the curious theory of sunspots he describes, but because the world is simply too small to contain his dreams and longings. File, on the other hand—whom Nash described as "the dull stay-at-home whose boots were so deeply planted in the dust that his spurs actually jammed when he walked"—has given up dreaming. He has reduced his life to such tiny, manageable proportions that it can't possibly disappoint him; it's no coincidence that he lives in the town jail. Nor does Noah dream. We don't know why he goes through life blinkered by his account books; we only know that he puts out the dreams of his sister and brother as if they were fires threatening to engulf him, and he holds his father's dreams against him as if they were crimes.

By the end, though, even the dream-challenged characters show distinct signs of seeing things that aren't there yet. Which is what dreaming does: it sharpens our vision and pushes the horizon beyond the point where our reason insists it lies.

The Rainmaker actually makes two points about dreams: we can't live entirely in them, but we can't lead a hopeful life without them, and dreaming big increases the scale of the possible in the waking world. For that reason, N. Richard Nash insisted that *The Rainmaker* is a hopeful play—which is what makes it a particularly American play, and one that, after 50 years, is still such a persuasive one. ❖

About the Playwright

N. RICHARD NASH was born in 1913, as Nathaniel Richard Nussbaum, on the rough south side of Philadelphia, the son of Sael L. Nussbaum, a bookbinder, and Jenny Singer Nussbaum. Nash grew up on the streets and first worked as a ten-dollar-a-match boxer. He was also a good student, however, and, after graduating from South Philadelphia High School in 1930, he attended the University of Pennsylvania, where he studied English and philosophy. He published two books on philosophy after graduating in 1934: *The Athenian Spirit* and *The Wounds of Sparta*.

Nash soon switched to teaching and writing plays. His first, *Parting at Imsdorf* (1940), brought him some immediate success, earning him the Maxwell Anderson Verse Drama Award. His Broadway debut, *The Second Best Bed* (a comedy about Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway, which he also directed), opened at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre in 1946, followed by *The Young and Fair* in 1948. His next play, *See the Jaguar* (James Dean's Broadway debut, 1952), won the International Drama Award in Cannes and the Prague Award.

Nash's greatest success and lasting fame were made with *The Rainmaker*, which opened on Broadway on October 28, 1954, starring Geraldine Page in the role of Lizzie Curry and Darren McGavin as Starbuck. Nash originally wrote the play as a television drama for the Philco Playhouse in tribute to his older sister, Mae, whom Nash described as "one of the left-out people." He credited Mae with curing him of a childhood stutter. "Mae got me into a corner and would say to me, 'Talk,'" Nash remembered. "She would say, 'I'm here, I'll stay here, I won't rush you, and I won't leave you. Now talk.' Her willingness to listen is what saved my life. And this is what this play is about."

Writing in the *New York Times*, Brooks Atkinson described the play as "warm, simple, and friendly; the humor is captivating, and the characters are lovable and original." Two years later, the London production, also starring Miss Page (who received nine curtain calls on opening night), charmed British audiences as well as critics; *The Times* of London described the play as "a humorous, tender, and wise little American comedy," while the *Daily Mail* began its review: "Here is a beautiful little American comedy with a catch in its throat." *The Rainmaker* became Nash's signature piece, ensuring his place in American popular culture. Eva Marie Saint, Nancy Marchand, Tuesday Weld, Sally Field, and Jayne Atkinson are among the actors who have played Lizzie in subsequent productions. The script has been translated into 40 languages and was adapted (by Nash) in 1956 into a film starring Katharine Hepburn and Burt Lancaster, as well as a musical, *110 in the Shade*, which ran on Broadway for ten months in 1963 and was revived to acclaim in 2005 with Audra McDonald singing Lizzie's role. (Hepburn received an Academy Award nomination for best actress for her performance in the film).

Although Nash could have lived comfortably on the income from *The Rainmaker* for the rest of his life, he continued to work consistently. His subsequent writing for the stage includes *Girls of Summer* (1956), *Handful of Fire* (1958), *Wildcat* (starring Lucille Ball, 1960), *The Happy Time* (with music by John Kander and Fred Ebb; nominated for the Tony Award for best musical in 1968), and *Saravà* (1979). He also wrote extensively for television anthologies, including the U.S. Steel Hour, General Electric Theater, Philco Playhouse, Goodyear Playhouse, and Theater Guild of the Air, as well as 12 episodes of the series *Here Come the Brides* (1968–69). His screenplays for Hollywood include *Welcome Stranger* (a 1947 hit starring Bing Crosby and Barry Fitzgerald), the noir *Nora Prentiss* (one of Warner's top four money makers of 1947), *The Sainted Sisters* (1948), *Dear Wife* (1949), *Mara Maru* (1952), *Helen of Troy* (1956), *Porgy and Bess* (1959), and *Between the Darkness and the Dawn* (1985). He also published a novel, *East Wind, Rain* (about the bombing of Pearl Harbor, 1977), and taught in several academic theater departments over the course of his career, including those of Bryn Mawr, Haverford, Yale, Princeton, and Brandeis. Under the pseudonym of John Roc, he wrote a play, *Fire!* (1969), and a novel, *Winter Blood* (1971).

Nash died in Manhattan on December 11, 2000, at the age of 87. Of *The Rainmaker*, ultimately his most memorable achievement, he said, "I tried to tell a simple story about droughts that happen to people, and about faith." ❖

A Short History of Pluviculture in the American West

by Martin Schwartz

Rainmaker Charles Hatfield mixing his rainmaking chemicals in San Diego prior to the 1916 flood.

Rainmaking and the Mid-Century Mind

Reading or watching *The Rainmaker* in our empirical age, we may be inclined to dismiss the very notion of producing rain from the ground—to say nothing of the thought of paying someone for their efforts—as fanciful at best. The Currys' willingness even to entertain the idea that the itinerant Starbuck's boasts could be anything but a scam might strike us as extremely wishful thinking. To appreciate N. Richard Nash's work in its original context, however, we must recognize how far removed our automatic skepticism towards what seems to us an exotic, primitive superstition is from the relative currency rainmaking and rainmakers would have had in the minds of an audience of Nash's contemporaries.

While a New York audience of the middle 1950s would likely have shared at least a modicum of our suspicion towards "pluviculture," even the scientific case against rainmaking would by no means have appeared closed to them, and the cultural significance of the phenomenon was palpable, especially in the West. Pseudoscientific American rainmaking, many of the hallmarks of which we can discern in Starbuck's unusual practices, was a fixture of the culture, economy, and lore of the western United States throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. A 1954 scholarly article called "Hatfield the Rainmaker" in *Western Folklore* refers to rainmaking as "one of the more contemporary miracles of science," and the editors of the *Stanford Law Review* took it seriously enough to publish an article entitled "Tort Liability for Rainmaking" in 1949. Regarding the rainmakers themselves, mainstream media paid them considerable attention even years after *The Rainmaker* debuted. The Dallas *Morning News* of June 15, 1963, matter-of-factly reported that one Neal Bosco of Fabens, Texas, was offered $750 by residents of Waco to use "a system of flares which he ignites to release material which he says 'seeds' the clouds to make them release their moisture."

Early History and the Golden Age

While the art of rainmaking was far from dead by the premiere of Nash's play, the craft had already seen its glory days come and go well before World War II. Although, as W.E. Steps remarks in *Transactions of the Kansas Academy of Science,* "the period of greatest early-day activity in Kansas in the rainmaking field occurred during the drouth [sic] years of 1890 to 1894," the history of rainmaking in the American West goes

back a good deal farther than that. Numerous Native American groups, famously including the Hopi, have dedicated dances and highly cultivated rituals to the coming rains for millennia, and rainmaking and rain dances became a staple of western U.S. folklore.

Though Starbuck's methods themselves may owe more to pioneer folklore and the iconographic figure of the lone rainmaker on the Plains, the government and the scientific establishment also made significant forays into rainmaking during the 19th century. As Barbara Tuthill observes, the names of authorities like James P. Espy, General Robert Dryenforth, L. Gatham, Edward Powers, and William Morse Davis were frequently on the lips of rainmakers as they set up their towers or prepared their gaseous emissions. Almost all of these scholars have been more or less willfully forgotten by the scientific community.

To help us understand the position of rainmaking in the American society of the 1890s, it might be worthwhile to take a look at the procedure of the first government-appointed rainmaker, General Dryenforth. Congress appropriated some $19,000 in the drought years of the early 1890s to conduct official tests of rainmaking methods. Under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture, Dryenforth set off to Texas to begin the experiments. His cargo included: "sixty-eight explosive balloons, three large balloons for making ascensions, and material for making one hundred cloth-covered kites, beside the necessary explosives, etc." Of the experiment, according to Caldwell, "an observer stated that 'it was a beautiful imitation of a battle.'" Though the results of the government tests were inconclusive, the official experiments only served to heighten the popular appeal of rainmaking—and rainmakers.

Despite government involvement, however, the tradition of rainmaking in the American West was dominated by the charisma and discretion of lone men. They always made certain that their reputations preceded them, often made reference to science in their broad claims about their practices, and invariably kept their "secret" close to the breast. Their methods commonly included producing explosions, releasing chemical gases, or building large towers on public fairgrounds for indeterminate purposes.

Frank Melbourne and the Kansas Drought

During the Kansas drought of 1890–94, Frank Melbourne, the first great star of western rainmaking, came to prominence, traveling much of the region plying his craft. Because of his self-mythologizing, wide success, itinerant habits, and overblown assertions about the efficacy of his methods, Melbourne's story typifies the conception of the rainmaker in the popular culture of his time. Martha B. Caldwell writes:

> The fame of Frank Melbourne, said to be an Australian, as a "rain wizard" had spread throughout the country. Marvelous stories were told of his operations at Canton, Ohio, where he was said to so control the weather that he could "bring rain at a given hour." Since he was fond of outdoor sports he "so adjusted his machine that all the Sunday rains come late in the afternoon, after the baseball games and horse races for the day are over." Mr. Melbourne said his machine was "so simple that were its character known to the public every man would soon own one and bring rain whenever he felt like it."

Melbourne's operations in Goodland, Kansas, were, in classic rainmaking style, both profoundly public and veiled in an intentional secrecy.

> [O]n Wednesday he took his rain apparatus to the fair grounds to begin work [which] he performed in great secrecy; no one was allowed within the building and to keep the inquisitive from coming too close a rope barrier was erected about twenty feet from the building and the windows were curtained. However, everyone went up and "gazed" at the building and the small hole in the roof through which cloud-making substances escaped. . . . The upper story, containing four windows facing the different points of the compass, was Melbourne's workroom. The room also contained a hole in the roof four inches in diameter for the escape of rain-making gases.

The residents of Goodland and numerous other Plains cities treated Melbourne's work with the utmost seriousness. He was greeted with an official welcome wherever he went, and although there was always a vocal minority of those who considered his rainmaking either fraudulent or blasphemous, the arrival of the rainmaker was nothing if not a major civic event.

Rainmaking, the "never-failing drought crop," as W. J. Humphries of the Weather Bureau put it, continued on in the Plains until relatively recently, but on a decidedly more modest scale. By the turn of the 20th century, with endless trainloads of people from all walks of life streaming into the semi-arid region of Southern California and trying to farm, the area of greatest uncertainty about rain had shifted west, and the stage for the greatest rainmaker of them all had been set.

The Great Rainmaker

As in so many genres, the rainmaker who enjoyed the widest acclaim and power—the man who epitomized his medium—was the last of his kind. Though the journalist and historian Carey McWilliams calls Charles Mallory Hatfield—or Hatfield the Rainmaker, as he was popularly known, or simply the Great Rainmaker—"the first

popular folk-hero" of Southern California, he lacked the unpolished braggadocio of the midwestern huckster of the 1890s: Hatfield was a professional. This "moisture accelerator," whom nearly every Southern California municipality contracted between 1903 and 1928 "for fees ranging from $50 to $10,000," was described in the San Diego *Union* as "a quietly dressed, slender man of middle height with square shoulders, who is crowding forty." Well versed in the scientific literature, Hatfield peppered his sentences with scientific-sounding phrases, called himself a specialist in "meteorology, the science of the atmosphere," and referred to his métier as creating "a chemical attraction or an affinity working in harmony with natural forces that make rain."

While his language and appearance may have been more refined than those of his midwestern brethren, his means were similar. When contracted by a community, he would typically have several towers (or "evaporating tanks") built, generally between 12 and 20 feet high, topped with platforms. These tanks gave the distinct impression that the rainmaker was hard at work, with the added benefit of ensuring that the public could have no clear idea of what exactly he was doing. On each platform, there were, "galvanized iron pans about 3 feet square and 9 inches deep containing Hatfield's chemicals"—or, as Hatfield himself put it, "certain chemicals the character of which must necessarily remain secret." Hatfield's true methods, however, were the very soul of western rainmaking; as McWilliams writes:

> Hatfield was a close student of weather charts. His usual technique was to wait until the dry season was far advanced and the people were beginning to despair of rain. Then he would appear upon the scene, sometimes as late as mid January, and obtain a contract to produce rain within, say, thirty or sixty days. And of course he never missed.

Dependent as rainmaking is on the vagaries of climate, most men who set themselves up as rainmakers were able to celebrate a triumph or two. Unlike most rainmakers, however, Hatfield almost never failed, and his successes were fantastic. "One of his last great feats," reports McWilliams, "was to produce forty inches of rainfall in three hours on the Mojave Desert near Randsburg." Impressive though his desert deluge may seem, it pales in comparison to his San Diego flood of 1916.

"The most potent test I ever made," Hatfield called the flood, and the damages it incurred ran into the tens of millions of dollars. The San Diego *Union* of December 14, 1915, records: "The city council signed a contract yesterday with Hatfield, the Moisture Accelerator. He has promised to fill the Morena reservoir to overflowing by December 20, 1916, for $10,000." Hatfield immediately began setting up his "evaporator tanks" at Morena. By January 20, writes Tuthill, "Black headlines screamed, 'San Diego in State of Flood.'" The next day, Hatfield was reputed to have called City Hall, saying, "I just wanted to tell you that it is only sprinkling now. So far we have encountered only a couple of showers. Within the next few days I expect to make it really rain." The torrents continued, with brief respites, for weeks, breaking the Otay dam, leaving thousands homeless, many dead, and San Diego entirely cut off from the rest of the country. This was rainmaking on a grand scale, and Hatfield became an instant national celebrity. When he showed up at City Hall, demanding his $10,000, the City Attorney told him that he would give him credit for the water in the reservoir only if he accepted the $6,000,000 in suits filed against the city for flood damages. Practical rainmaker that he was, Hatfield declined.

Contracts in California stopped coming in once the Boulder Dam Act was passed in 1928, guaranteeing a secure source of water, and since the Great Rainmaker's retreat into private life, large-scale weather modification has been undertaken almost entirely through government offices.

While rainmaking might not have been the model of contemporary scientific thought for Nash and his audience, they would have had several powerful ideas to draw from on the subject. The archetypes of the government scientist, the itinerant Plains rainmaker, and the modern, miracle-working "moisture accelerator" would all have enriched the original audience's appreciation of *The Rainmaker*. ❖

Theatre Lore

What is a raked stage?

Where do the terms upstage and downstage originate?

Historically, stages were built on inclines, with the backs of the stages slightly higher than the fronts. The incline was called a rake and helped those in the back of the audience see the action onstage. Eventually, theatres started placing seats on inclines instead of stages, but the terminology stuck. Downstage is the front of the stage, closest to the audience, and upstage is the back of the stage. Some theatres, like *A Noise Within*, still participate in the tradition of using raked stages.

The Rainmaker in Eisenhower's America

by Kevin Wetmore

1952 Federal Civil Defense Administration film *Duck and Cover*.

Theatre Lore

Why is it bad luck to say "Macbeth" inside the theatre?

There are many origins for this superstition. Old actors believe the witches' song in Macbeth to possess the uncanny power of casting evil spells. The reasons for this fear usually bring tales of accidents and ill-fortunes that have plagued productions of the play throughout the world. An alternative is that the superstition began in the days of stock companies, which would struggle to remain in business. Frequently, near the end of a season, a company would realize it was not going to break even, and, in an attempt to boost ticket sales, would announce the production of a crowd favorite: Macbeth. If times were particularly bad, the play would frequently be a portent of the company's demise.

RICHARD NASH'S *THE RAINMAKER* developed as a script between 1951 and 1954, and is an excellent example of American "magical realism," similar to, if not as serious as, the plays of Miller, Williams and Inge, as well as the innocuous television programs and films for which Nash also wrote. Yet, as a product of the early fifties, the play demonstrates the Cold War context. The genuine fears and concerns of the period lie underneath its seemingly innocent, romantic surface, and we can observe the pride and sense of community that small town America was believed to epitomize.

When Nash developed the play, World War II was still in recent memory, but had already been surpassed by concerns about the growing Communist menace. Not only had an "Iron Curtain" been falling across Eastern Europe, but in 1949 China also became Communist. The following year, America became involved in a conflict to fight Communism on the Korean peninsula, a "police action" which continued under Eisenhower until the cease fire in 1953. In 1954, the same year that Nash's play was on Broadway, Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam was taken over by Communist insurgents, which marked the beginning of the decades-long fight in that nation. Lastly, in 1949 the Soviets had successfully tested their atomic bomb, so the cold war threatened to become a hot war between the Communists and the West—with world-ending implications.

At home, this was the era of "duck and cover" (a term first coined in 1952 by the film *Duck and Cover*, produced by the Federal Civil Defense Administration), when school children were taught how to act in the event of a nuclear attack. In this same period between 1950 and 1954, America also experienced the "Red Scare," with the McCarthy hearings and the notorious blacklists, as the fear of Communists among us began to equal or excel the fear of those abroad. Such concerns manifested themselves in such films as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, but these fears are also realized in *The Rainmaker*.

Note in the first scene how Jim is afraid of the world blowing up. While the cause he fears is "sunspots," underlying it is a real fear of global destruction through nuclear war with the godless Soviet Union. Likewise, the drought which is threatening can be seen as a threat from outside—dangerous to the farm, dangerous to the family, threatening their livelihood and even their lives.

The play also engages fear within the community. Many films, novels and plays from this period engage the fear of strangers, queers, women and young people.

Starbuck is a stranger in a small community. He has come from outside. The local law enforcement, File, is an upstanding, John Wayne-type who is distrustful of outsiders and those who are different. Men must be manly in this world and not show weakness. File cannot bring himself initially to ask Lizzie to stay, even though he wants her to, for fear of appearing less of a man.

Likewise, in keeping with film and television of the early fifties, one of the greatest threats to American life is strong, unmarried women. Noah worries about Jimmy leaving the dance with a "hot pants girl" named "Snooky" and, of course, Lizzie is smart, independent, and (gasp) wears pants. She knows where Madagascar is. She is unable to fulfill the expectations of women in this period, and when she tries, she fails. She is similar to a number of female characters from the fifties who, despite their unconventionality, end up getting married and presumably starting a nuclear family, from Nellie in *South Pacific* to the sadder-but-wiser Marion the librarian from Meredith Wilson's *The Music Man*. In Eisenhower's America, idiosyncratic women are entertaining, but must ultimately be tamed and domesticated.

Jimmy is a young man. He likes cars, dances, girls and fun. His older brother thinks he is dumb and is concerned about how, where and with whom Jimmy spends his time. Though Nash underplays these anxieties, behind them is the growing alarm in America about the juvenile delinquent, a favorite topic of the films and popular culture of the fifties. Youth culture developed after World War II; until that period, there was no notion of a separate culture for younger people. The entire family listened to the same music, and if there were separate books, films or songs for young people, it is because they were educational. In Eisenhower's America, a new class of young people with disposable income and interests different from both children and parents developed, fueled by rock and roll music and catered to and depicted by Hollywood. These young people were of great concern, as they represented a disruptive threat to society. While Jimmy is obviously not a juvenile delinquent, Noah's concern over the "hot pants girl" demonstrates a mindset anxious over this new generation of young people with their different pleasures, priorities and culture.

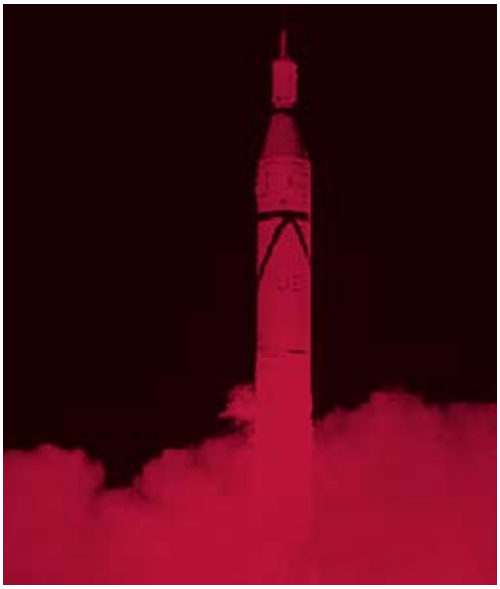
Despite all these anxieties, Nash's play ultimately reflects a very positive, hopeful view of America and the future, also consistent with the worldview of the time. Though the dangers and threats both within and without may be real and of genuine concern, the family works together, has faith, and supports one another. And, while we might be suspicious of strangers, those who remind us of the power of imagination and faith can help us to make a better world. Lastly, as Lizzie tells File, friendship is an obligation. We Americans can, will, and must take care of one another. And if we do, we shall surely triumph. These beliefs and this self-image of Eisenhower's America transform the earlier fears into reassuring hopes for a cleaning, life-sustaining rain.❖

Theatre Lore

Why are actors called thespians?

In the sixth century B.C., a Greek chorus performer named Thespus was the first person in history to step away from the chorus and speak by himself, exchanging dialogue with the group and impersonating a character instead of simply reciting a story as the chorus had done before then.

The Fifties – A Timeline



1950

President Truman sends troops to defend South Korea against Communist invasion

First organ transplant performed

"Peanuts" comic strip debuts

1951

Transcontinental television begins

South Africans required to carry ID cards denoting race

1952

Immigration and Naturalization Act signed, removing racial and ethnic barriers to citizenship

Norman Vincent Peale publishes *The Power of Positive Thinking*

1953

Julius and Ethel Rosenberg electrocuted for providing atomic secrets to the Soviet Union

Edmund Hilary and Tenzig Norgay become the first climbers to scale Mt. Everest

Watson and Crick discover double-helix form of DNA

Fighting ends in Korea, with North and South still divided

1954

Sen. Joseph McCarthy begins hearings about alleged Communists in the army and government

U.S. Supreme Court rules racial segregation unconstitutional in public schools

British launch an expedition to search for the Abominable Snowman

1955

Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat on a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama, sparking a boycott

American Federation of Labor merges with Congress of Industrial Organizations, forming AFL-CIO

McDonald's Corporation founded

1956

The Federal Highway Act is signed, beginning work on the interstate highway system

Hungarians launch an unsuccessful revolt against Soviet occupation

1958

Explorer I, the first U.S. satellite, successfully orbits the earth

First domestic jet airline passenger service begins between New York and Miami

1959

Alaska and Hawaii become the 49th and 50th states

Communist revolutionary Fidel Castro seizes power as the leader of new regime in Cuba

The Sound of Music opens on Broadway

The Fifties – A Glossary

Luke Howard, Esq. advanced the science of cloud watching in 1802 with his publication: *On the Modifications of Clouds, and on the Principles of their Production, Suspension, and Destruction.*

Cirrus. Parallel, flexuous, or diverging fibres, extensible in any or in all directions.

Cumulus. Convex or conical heaps, increasing upwards from a horizontal base.

Stratus. A widely extended, continuous, horizontal sheet, increasing from below upward.

CON MAN –short for "confidence man;" a trickster or swindler who exploits the confidence of his victim; a fraud. Since Starbuck's scam involves allegedly making rain, he has a whole language he uses that relates to it, including some weather terms and related words:

Tropopause –the boundary between two very high layers of the earth's atmosphere, the troposphere and the stratosphere, about 5-10 miles up; "barometricizing" this space would mean measuring its air pressure.

Cumulus –formal name for a dense, white, fluffy, flat-based cloud with a multiple rounded top and a well-defined outline.

Cumulo-nimbus –formal name for an extremely dense, vertically developed cloud mass with a hazy outline extending to great heights, usually producing heavy rains, thunderstorms, or hailstorms.

Nimbulo cumulus –not actually a term for clouds, but a word Starbuck has made up.

Occlusions –air masses forced up, as when a cold front overtakes and undercuts a warm one.

Sodium chloride –chemical name for salt.

De-chromated –having the chromatic acids, or salts, removed.

DROUGHT –occurs when an area receives less than 75% of its average rainfall in a single year. The effects of a drought are made worse by poor irrigation and the loss of grasslands that help retain groundwater and topsoil. Dying crops are only the most obvious side effect of drought. Also associated with dry times are grasshopper plagues, brush and grass fires, sand and dust storms, economic depression, livestock deaths, disease from insufficient or impure drinking water or inhalation of clouds of dust, and mass population migrations. In

the 1950s, when Nash conceived *The Rainmaker* (supposedly after witnessing the effects of a drought during a cross-country drive), severe drought conditions crippled the Great Plains, with only a few inches of rain a year—the worst drought since the Dust Bowl years of the Depression—which itself produced one of the most famous drought-related works, John Steinbeck's masterpiece *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Essex –a popular car model in the early 20th century. While there was never a "five-cylinder" model, one with four had a specially modified carburetor referred to as a "fifth cylinder." For anyone to have a new car in the community of Three Point would be fairly remarkable; for an adolescent girl like Snookie McGuire, it would be extraordinary.

King Hamlet –In actuality, the father of the hero of Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*; Starbuck mixes his story in with that of the mythical Greek hero Jason, the leader of a group of adventurers known as the Argonauts who recovered the mythical Golden Fleece (the carefully guarded gold wool of a huge ram).

Lady Godiva –legendary English noblewoman who rode nude through Coventry as a tax protest in the 11th century.

"...livestock fella from Chicago" –probably a buyer for a major meat company: until recently, Chicago was the "Gateway to the West," an industrial and commercial center built on the meat industry. Cattle and pigs would be shipped in by rail from the West, butchered in massive slaughterhouses, and shipped to the tables and kitchens of the East.

Melisande –historical Queen of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem, remembered for rebuilding the famous Church of the Holy Sepulchre (and getting besieged by her own son, who wanted the crown). In some legends, a woman tragically beloved by two rival princes in the Kingdom of Allemonde; in others, a famous French fairy condemned to become half-serpent every Saturday and later to wander the earth as a spectre.

"One hundred dollars in advance" –a hefty sum, the equivalent of almost $700 today.

Queen of Sheba –rich, beautiful African queen who visits Solomon in the Old Testament.

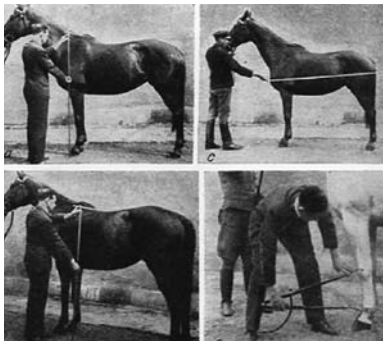
RAINMAKER –from African shamans to Native American ceremonies, many cultures and religions have believed in the ability of special rituals to dispel drought or bring rain; the modern use of the term in business and law indicates someone who achieves spectacular results.

> "I get out my big wheel and my rolling drum and my yella hat with the three little feathers in it!"

Starbuck's rainmaking routine seems to be a combination of old-time carnival barkers, medicine shows, traveling peddlers, and Native American rituals, with a bit of meteorology thrown in for good measure.

RANCH –comes from Mexican-Spanish rancho, the home or headquarters of the ranchero. The original ranches were engaged in livestock production—cattle, sheep, goats, and horses—using unimproved range pastures as the primary resource, with or without crops. The Curry family, with a couple of hired hands, seem to operate a mid-sized ranch—probably several thousand head of cattle.

Sears, Roebuck catalog –often referred to as the "Farmers Bible," it was the granddaddy of sales catalogs, going on to revolutionize mass-marketing, American consumer and corporate culture, credit, manufacturing, and leisure while providing for everyday needs and feeding everyday dreams; the descendants of the Sears, Roebuck catalog include: QVC, Amazon, the Web boom, the piles of mail-order catalogs clogging your mailbox, and the email spam choking the Internet.



"...seventeen hands high" –Lizzie refers to the system for measuring the height of horses; one "hand" is 4 inches. She doesn't believe her hosts see her for who she is, or even as a person — just as a commodity to be bought or sold, like a horse or a cow. ❖

The Music of *The Rainmaker*

Featuring Composer David O

David O is a composer, performer, and musical director whose work has been featured at Walt Disney Concert Hall, The Kennedy Center, The Mark Taper Forum, and the Hollywood Bowl, as well as other venues in Los Angeles and around the world. His concert compositions include the critically-acclaimed *A Map of Los Angeles* (commissioned and performed by the Los Angeles Master Chorale), *Elements*, and *Dadme*. His original musicals for families include *Imagine* (South Coast Rep), *The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip*, *The Legend of Alex* (Center Theatre Group's P.L.A.Y. program), and *Atalanta* (based on the story from "Free to Be You and Me"). Other compositions for the theatre include his award-winning scores for *Hippolytos* and *Ubu Roi* (at *A Noise Within*). Many Los Angeles children and their parents know David as "The Professor" for his performances in *Summersounds at the Hollywood Bowl*, produced by the LA Philharmonic. His credits as Musical Director include the world premieres of *Toy Story: The Musical* and Jason Robert Brown's *13*, and the West Coast premieres of Michael John LaChiusa's *The Wild Party* and *Little Fish*.

IN MOST FORMS of entertainment, music plays the role of directing the emotions of the viewer. Whether the medium is film, theater or video games, music is in the background helping the viewer to emotionally interpret the images in front of them. In *The Rainmaker,* the music will emotionally reflect what is going on inside the characters' minds. The score for *The Rainmaker* is specifically influenced by early- to mid-20th Century American composers, specifically Charles Ives, and George Gershwin, and Aaron Copland.

Aaron Copland (1900-1990) helped define the American 20th Century musical sound. He often named his pieces after important American public figures or pastimes. For example, his ballet *Rodeo*, a tale of a ranch wedding, was written around the same time as *Lincoln Portrait*. The "Hoe-Down" section from *Rodeo* is one of the most well-known compositions by any American composer, having been used numerous times in movies and on television. In the early to mid 1990s, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association used Hoe-Down as the background music to their "Beef, it's what's for dinner" marketing campaign, and it was also used during the 78th Academy Awards as background music. In 1939, Copland completed his first two Hollywood film scores, for *Of Mice and Men* and *Our Town*.

Composer David O describes the inspiration for the music of *The Rainmaker:*

> *The Director of* The Rainmaker *and I decided early on to create a handful of musical themes that are closely tied to the characters of the story: Lizzie, Starbuck, File, and the men of the Curry family. In addition, we wanted to create a "main theme" of the play that reflected the wide open spaces of the American West. We decided to keep these themes firmly rooted in 20th century American romantic music, specifically the music of film scoring.*

The themes David O describes are closely related to the concept of a leitmotif. Leitmotif is a commonly-used device in musical scoring for movies, television, and opera. This term, coined by German composer Richard Wagner, refers to a selected melody, key, and tonality that is heard each time a particular character or theme appears in a performance. For example, the "Hero theme" occurs during each act of heroism performed by the character Tristan in Wagner's opera *Tristan and Isolde*. In *The Rainmaker*, Composer David O created a musical theme to accompany each character in this same tradition.

> *Each of the characters' themes is used several times in the play, revised each time to reflect the emotional and dramatic moment in which it occurs. Specifically, the music follows the yearning of Lizzie, the pensivenss of File, the braggadocio of Starbuck, and the clumsy earnestness of the Curry men as they all grow and change through the story.*

ACTIVITIES

Analyze and Respond Critically:
Why do you think that composer David O would use Aaron Copland's music as inspiration for *The Rainmaker*?

Do you see any connections between N. Richard Nash's Hollywood career and the music David O used to inspire the pieces for this production of *The Rainmaker*?

Ask students to respond to a CD recording of the music of Copland and Gershwin. (Widely available online or in music stores.) Discuss similarities in orchestration, melody, and color between recordings and the music from *The Rainmaker*.

"To explain the creative musician's basic objective in elementary terms, I would say that a composer writes music to express and communicate and put down in permanent form certain thoughts, emotions and states of being. These thoughts and emotions are gradually formed by the contact of the composer's personality with the world in which he lives. He expresses these thoughts in the musical language of his own time. The resultant work of art should speak to men and women of the artist's own time with a directness and immediacy of communicative power that no previous art expression can give."

–Aaron Copland, American composer, conductor and author.

Are there particular instruments or melodies that sound like they "belong" to the American West in these examples from *The Rainmaker*? Why?

Soundtrack:
Imagine that you are a sound designer for a show at a theatre. Using contemporary instrumental or vocal music, create your own soundtrack for your own production of *The Rainmaker.* There should be at least one song for each of the following parts of the play:

1. Curtain Opens
2. Starbuck Arrives
3. Lizzie Prepares to entertain
4. The Rain Comes

Think about important elements such as change of locale, passage of time, or important shifts of mood. Make a mix CD or playlist for a portable digital music device that contains all of your selected songs. Then write a summary of your choices to be included in the CD liner notes. Students can share their projects together in a class music festival when finished.

Listen and Respond:
Listen and respond to the musical selections as featured on our website. These are available at: http://www.anoisewithin.org/education_forstudentsonly.html. These cuts from our original music from *The Rainmaker* accompany the show during key moments.

Example One: *The Rainmaker Main Theme*
Example Two: *The Curry Men*
Example Three: *File's Theme*
Example Four: *Lizzie's Antiwaltz*
Example Five: *Starbuck's Romp*

Listen to each and respond either orally or in written form to the following for each musical example:
1. What is the tonality of the piece? Does it sound primarily *major* or *minor*? Would you say that the tonality affects the emotions conveyed by the piece? What would they be, and how do these fit within the scene they accompany or introduce from the show?

2. What is the tempo of the piece? Is it *allegro* or *andante*? What affect does the tempo have on the pacing—does it indicate some type of physical or emotional momentum in the play? If so, describe the feelings you think the piece intends to convey to the listener with regards to tempo.

3. If you had to choose a color for each piece of music, what would it be? Would this color be dark, light, or medium in tone? Would the color be heavily saturated or somewhat transparent?

Leitmotifs:
Using the idea of leitmotif, design the qualities for your own leitmotifs for the following characters: Lizzie, File, Starbuck, Noah, and Jimmy. What types of tonalities, tempos, and themes would you use for each? Would a particularly dangerous or moody character have a similar theme? How would you describe that? If students write music, each may write a simple melody to accompany their plan. If not, each student may write a short paragraph describing the leitmotif they would design using the concepts of tone, major/minor, andante/allegro, staccato/legato, dark, light, aggressive, peaceful, calm, soaring, sweet, or any adjective that evokes the mood of the piece and corresponds to the character chosen. ❖

Visual Arts: Creating the World of *The Rainmaker*

Thomas Hart Benton, A Drink of Water (Lithograph), 1937, in The University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor MI.

SET DESIGNER JAMES P. TAYLOR reworks a classic piece of American theatre with his vision for *The Rainmaker*. Taylor cites three Midwestern artists whose work is illustrative of the period and location of the play: Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, and John Steuart Curry. All three artists gave details and the sense of location that was so important in designing the show. According to Taylor,

"*The Rainmaker* is solidly grounded in a realistic style that is fitting with its 1950s origin. At the same time, the playwright expressly cites his play as a romance, and calls for a set design that is in every way romantic. The most significant challenge that we faced in the set design is that Nash sets a relatively realistic play in three different locations, and moves back and forth between these locations with a great deal of frequency. In examining the structure of the play it is clear that Nash was heavily influenced by film, which is both realistic in detail, and highly flexible in its transitions. Nash makes fast cinematic 'jump cuts' from location to location. This is easy to do in film, but harder to do in the theatre. The thrust style of our stage space, and Andrew's desire to play File's office and the tack room, both intimate scenes, way downstage and close to the audience, were the driving factors in our set design choices. What we eventually settled on is a relatively realistic kitchen area on a raised platform upstage. This simple approach maintains the Curry house as the central visual element, and keeps the momentum of the play moving forward without slow and cumbersome scene changes.

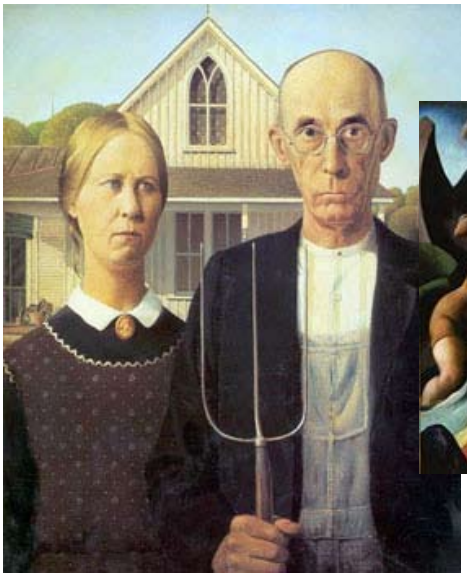
In his moving prologue to the play, Nash makes a very pointed reference to the use of gauze as a lens through which to view the play, and its protagonist, Lizzie. We took a visual cue from Nash's ideas of gauze, and have created 'see through' walls that enable us to bring the exterior world of the play into the highly romantic tack room scene, and in transitions between the scenes as well. It is with this exterior world, featuring a sky, pieces of a barn, and a lonely iconic windmill, that the influences of the source material from John Steuart Curry, Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton will be most clearly seen."

John Steuart Curry (November 14, 1897-August 29, 1946), **Grant Wood** (February 13, 1891-February 12, 1942), and **Thomas Hart Benton** (April 15, 1889-January 19, 1975) were at the forefront of the regionalist art movement in the United States. Regionalism was associated with the area beyond the Mississippi, mainly Iowa, Missouri and Kansas. Regionalist artists were concerned with rural nostalgia, and the American heartland, and the unified resistance to centralization, which was considered a major evil of the industrial revolution.

Benton was a painter and muralist, who produced numerous works with New York, the American West, and the American South as subjects. His work as a draftsman in the U.S. Navy — where he concentrated on sketches of shipyard life — brought a sense of realism to his work. Leftist politics influenced his murals, which often depicted social issues such as slavery, outlaw Jesse James, and political boss Tom Pendergast. Benton taught at Art Students League of New York from 1926-35, and his pupils included expressionist artist Jackson Pollock. Pollock cited Benton's traditionalist teachings as the source material for his artistic rebellion into abstraction. Benton was heavily influenced by 15th Century Spanish painter and sculptor El Greco.

Like Benton, Wood and Curry were considered to be iconic regionalist painters. In fact, all three were featured in Time Magazine's 1934 article entitled "The U.S. Scene," portraying the artists as veritable heroes of the American art and the Regionalist movement. Wood was most famous for painting American Gothic, a classic work of American art that has been used in countless ad campaigns, textbooks, and is one of the most widely-recognized pieces of American Art. It hangs at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Curry was most famous for his depictions of his home state of Kansas. He had a diverse career — which included work as an illustrator for such magazines as *A Boy's Life* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, and for the *Ringling Brothers Circus*. He became most known as a muralist, and his works are shown in the Federal Department of Justice, the Department of the Interior, and the State Capitol of Kansas.



Grant Wood. *American Gothic.* (Oil Painting), 1930, in the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago IL. Art © Estate of Grant Wood/licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

Thomas Hart Benton. *People of Chilmark* (Figure Composition), 1920, in the Hirshhorn Museum collection, Washington, D.C.

Grant Wood. *Dinner for Threshers* (Painting), 1934, in the DeYoung Museum. San Francisco CA. Art © Estate of Grant Wood/licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

Suggested Activities

1. The design for *The Rainmaker* draws upon specific American artists and attempts to create an iconic view of 1950s America in the Midwest. Have students produce a series of small sketches based on real-life subjects that, to them, comprise a modern American aesthetic. Ask students to refine their observational drawings by asking questions such as: What makes this subject particularly American? How does it affect the viewer? What makes this subject particularly modern—and what makes it relevant to the unique slice of American life I experience versus that of the Curry family? Encourage students to articulate a position about the aesthetic value of each others' selections, and either alter or defend their positions.

2. Note similarities and contrasts between the bodies of work of John Steuart Curry, Grant Wood, and Thomas Hart Benton using pictorial examples. Identify trends and discuss how issues of time, place, and cultural influence are reflected in their works. Compare the results of this discussion to the design elements from *The Rainmaker*. What trends were retained or duplicated? How did theatrical environment present in *The Rainmaker* retain a similar sense of place and cultural influence through design?

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Thomas Hart Benton, *A Drink of Water*, 1937.

CA VISUAL ARTS STANDARDS: Grades 9-12 Proficient: Creative Expression 2.0, 2.2, 2.4, Historical and Cultural Context 3.0, 3.3, Aesthetic Valuing 4.0, 4.1, 4.3, 4.5.

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About Theatre Arts

Being an Audience Member

Today, movies and television take audiences away from what was once the number one form of entertainment: going to the theatre. But attending a live performance is still one of the most thrilling and active forms of spending time. In a theatre, observers are catapulted into the action, especially at an intimate venue like *A Noise Within*, whose thrust stage reaches out into the audience and whose actors can see, hear, and feel the response of the crowd. Although in the past playhouses could sometimes be rowdy, today participating in the performance by giving respect and attention to the actors is the most appropriate behavior at a theatrical performance. Shouting out or even whispering can be heard throughout the auditorium, as can rustling paper or ringing phones.

After *A Noise Within*'s performance of *The Rainmaker*, you will have the opportunity to discuss the play's content and style with the performing artists and directors. You may wish to remind students to observe the performance carefully or to compile questions ahead of time so they are prepared to participate in the discussion.

Theatre Vocabulary

These terms will be included in pre- and post-performance discussions at *A Noise Within*.

blocking: The instructions a director gives his actors that tell them how and where to move in relation to each other or to the set in a particular scene.

character: The personality or part portrayed by an actor on stage.

conflict: The opposition of people or forces which causes the play's rising action.

dramatic irony: A dramatic technique used by a writer in which a character is unaware of something the audience knows.

genre: Literally, "kind" or "type." In literary terms, genre refers to the main types of literary form, principally comedy and tragedy. It can also refer to forms that are more specific to a given historical era, such as the revenge tragedy, or to more specific sub-genres of tragedy and comedy such as the comedy of manners, farce or social drama.

motivation: The situation or mood which initiates an action. Actors often look for their "motivation" when they try to dissect how a character thinks or acts.

props: Items carried on stage by an actor to represent objects mentioned in or implied by the script. Sometimes the props are actual, sometimes they are manufactured in the theatre shop.

proscenium stage: There is usually a front curtain on a proscenium stage. The audience views the play from the front through a "frame" called the proscenium arch. In this scenario, all audience members have the same view of the actors.

set: The physical world created on stage in which the action of the play takes place.

setting: The environment in which a play takes place. It may include the historical period as well as the physical space.

stage areas: The stage is divided into areas to help the director to note where action will take place.

> **Upstage** is the area furthest from the audience. **Downstage** is the area closest to the audience. **Center stage** defines the middle of the playing space. **Stage left** is the actor's left as he faces the audience. **Stage right** is the actor's right as he faces the audience.

theme: The overarching message or main idea of a literary or dramatic work. A recurring idea in a play or story.

thrust stage: A stage that juts out into the audience seating area so that patrons are seated on three sides. In this scenario, audience members see the play from varying viewpoints. *A Noise Within* features a thrust stage.

About *A Noise Within*

A NOISE WITHIN'S MISSION is to produce the great works of world drama in rotating repertory, with a company of professional, classically- trained actors. *A Noise Within* educates the public through comprehensive outreach efforts and conservatory training programs that foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of history's greatest plays and playwrights.

As the only company in southern California working in the repertory tradition (rotating productions using a resident ensemble of professional, trained artists), *A Noise Within* is dedicated solely to producing classical literature from authors such as Shakespeare, Molière, Ibsen, Shaw, and Euripides.

The company was formed in 1991 by founders Geoff Elliott and Julia Rodriguez-Elliott, both of whom were classically trained at the acclaimed American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco. They envisioned *A Noise Within* after recognizing a lack of professional, classical productions and education in Southern California and sought out and assembled their own company of actors to meet the need. All of *A Noise Within's* resident artists have been classically trained, and many hold Master of Fine Arts degrees from some of the nation's most respected institutions, such as Juilliard, Yale, and the American Conservatory Theatre.

In its fourteen-year history, *A Noise Within* has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle's revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the coveted Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

In 2004, *A Noise Within* accepted an invitation to collaborate with the Los Angeles Philharmonic for a tandem performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Hollywood Bowl.

More than 25,000 individuals attend productions at *A Noise Within*, annually, and between performances at the theatre and touring productions, the company draws 13,000 student participants to its arts education programs every year. Students benefit from in-school workshops, conservatory training, and an internship program, as well as subsidized tickets to matinee and evening performances, discussions with artists, and state standards-compliant study guides.

Study Guides

A Noise Within creates California standards-compliant study guides to help educators prepare their students for their visit to our theatre. Study guides are available at no extra cost to download through our website: www.anoisewithin.org. All of the information and activities outlined in these guides are designed to work in compliance with Visual and Performing Arts, English Language, and other subject standards as set forth by the state of California.

Study guides include background information on the plays and playwrights, historical context, textual analysis, in-depth discussion of *A Noise Within*'s artistic interpretation of the work, interviews with directors and designers, as well as discussion points and suggested classroom activities. Guides from past seasons are also available to download from the website.

aNoiseWithin
California's Home for the Classics

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