



FAT PIG

"Cow." "Slob." "Pig."

October 29 - November 4

Presented by Theatre and Performance Studies

a play by Neil LaBute

Fat Pig

By Neil LaBute

Directed by Dr. Patrick Santoro

Saturday, October 29 and November 3 & 4, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.

Sunday, October 30, 2016 at 2 p.m.

GSU Center for Performing Arts

Curriculum Connection Guide is prepared by Jane Cox

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SYNOPSIS

Tom meets Helen by chance and the two hit it off. Helen is everything Tom could wish for: she is intelligent, unique, funny, and kind but she is also plus-sized. Very plus-sized. As Tom and Helen's relationship intensifies, Tom must deal with his own insecurities and pre-conceived notions of beauty. Meanwhile, Tom's female coworker – Jeannie - whom he previously dated, and never properly broke things off with, is hurt and threatened by his new relationship. And his shallow co-worker and friend Carter dogs him endlessly about his new girlfriend.

Despite Tom's love for, and his comfort and compatibility with Helen, he ultimately decides that he is not brave enough to face his friends' and society's constant judgment and ends things with her.

The play speaks to how one's relentless pursuit for conventional beauty makes one ugly. Tom wants to be strong and true to his convictions but he is incapable of escaping societal and peer pressure.

CHARACTERS

Helen: A funny intelligent young woman who works at a library. She also happens to be plus-sized. Very.

Tom: A young, handsome, affluent, up-and-coming man who falls in love with Helen. Ultimately a coward.

Carter: Tom's coworker.

Jeannie: Tom's coworker and former girlfriend.

PLAYWRIGHT BIOGRAPHY



Neil LaBute was born March 19, 1963 in Detroit, Michigan. His father, a truck driver, and his mother, a homemaker, soon relocated after his birth to Spokane, Washington, where he grew up. As a teenager he won a scholarship to Brigham Young University run by The Church of Latter Day Saints. It was here that he majored in playwriting, met his wife Lisa, and joined the Mormon Church (he later severed ties from the Mormon Church due to their objections over his plays' content). Neil and Lisa settled in a Chicago suburb and have two grown children.

LaBute earned his MFA from the University of Kansas. He cites Harold Pinter and David Mamet as his creative influences. In fact, *Fat Pig* is dedicated to David Mamet.

LaBute is also a film director. His films include his screen adaptation of his play *In the Company of Men* (1997), *Nurse Betty* (2000), and *The Wicker Man* (2006) for which he also wrote the screenplay.

WORKS BY NEIL LABUTE

- *In the Company of Men* (1992)
- *Bash: Latter-Day Plays* (1999)
- *The Shape of Things* (2001)
- *The Mercy Seat* (2002)
- *Autobahn* (2003)
- *Fat Pig* (2004)
- *This Is How it Goes* (2005)
- *Some Girl(s)* (2005)
- *Wrecks* (2005)
- *In A Dark Dark House* (2007)
- *reasons to be pretty* (2008)
- *In a Forest, Dark and Deep* (2011)
- *Lovely Head & Other Plays* (2013)

PREFACE TO THE PLAY

It was easy enough to lose, I suppose. The weight, I mean. One day I simply decided it was time, and I went about the process with a tenacity and diligence unheard of for me. Unlike Adam, the protagonist of my 2001 play *The Shape of Things*, who is led down the path toward self-improvement by his interest in a young woman, my journey was a singular pursuit that was spurred on by more mundane reasons. I didn't feel so hot. I looked like shit. I was tired of wearing the same pants. So I did something about it.

I set up a rather specific regimen for myself and got down to the task at hand by using this simple mantra: "Stop eating so damn much, you fat bastard." Now, that sounds pretty basic and not very scientific, but I swear it was at the heart of my program. Alter a few basic ingredients and the recipe was bound to change, right? If I stopped gobbling down so much food (and a certain kind at that), started exercising a little, and gave it some time, my body would have no choice but to follow along. I didn't read the Atkins book or consult anyone in the medical profession; I simply decided to go for it. And I did just that – I dropped sixty pounds over the course of the next eight months and could see a marked difference in my attitude, body, and overall demeanor. I was happy, healthy, and in good spirits. Or so I thought.

Like the main character in that play, I also discovered the preening fool who was living just beneath the surface of my usual self. Suddenly, the mirror became my friend. How I loved to rush home from a walk or jump up in the morning and study myself, checking to see if I looked

a bit thinner. The day-to-day changes were imperceptible, of course, but that didn't stop me from slowing at every reflection or feeling my waistline or secretly patting my own ass to see if it was growing tighter or not. Who was this person? Not me, or at least it never had been me before this. But now here I was, stopping in at Banana Republic to try on new sweaters and secretly hoping I could drop one more waist size, just for fun. Taking my second long walk of the day simply because I had a free hour. This low-carb, heavy work-out cycle was becoming as addictive to me as food had ever been, and I didn't see an end in sight. I also noticed that I was writing less and less.

The end, of course, came in the same way it does for so many people. Six months later I've gained back forty pounds, and I don't see that trend stopping anytime soon. Adam's first impulse when he discovers the deception of his girlfriend, Evelyn, is to eat. The stage directions ask for the character to shovel a few cookies into his mouth. "Look what I've been missing all this time," he seems to say. Like my fictional creation, I'm a stress eater. When things get bad or even slightly tricky, I reach for a bag of chips or a bucket of popcorn and hunker down. My mother taught me this self-medicating trick years ago, and I've stood by it for a long time now. When in doubt, eat some Pringles. A few personal and professional mishaps led me straight back to the pantry and right off the beaten path. Or any path, for that matter. I can't remember the last time I exercised. And I'm back wearing those same pants again, thank you very much for asking. Oh, yeah, and I've also written several new plays. One of them with the jaunty title *Fat Pig*. Now, I'm not saying that creativity is entirely linked to personal unhappiness, but I remember reading with awe and respect the stories about Eugene O'Neill crying out behind closed doors and clawing at his own face as he composed *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. Nothing of the sort happened here, of course, but you can definitely hear the crunch and crackle of snack food being consumed during some of my best work.

Which is what interests me so much about writing, I suppose. The notion of creation and how easy it is to make everything work out on paper. Unlike the character of Helen – the overweight, sensible, and perfectly lovely heroine of *Fat Pig* who disdains fiction for reality – I find things so much easier on the page than in real life. Want to visit the beach and not actually sweat or get sand in your hair? Start writing. Want to conjure up an unlikely but delightful romance without having to deal with the ramifications and fallout? Pick up your pen. It's an interesting anomaly: I love to make life unpredictable for a lot of my fictional characters as they face terrible mishaps, calamities, and upheavals, but more and more I find myself going to the computer to live out life rather than dealing with it. Writers, for better or worse, are gods of their own universe. "It is so because I say it's so." And while it might be a bit lonely in this particular heaven, I've got a terrific view. On paper, nobody complains as they climb a flight of stairs unless it's by my design. No one betrays a friend or lover unless I give the "all clear" sign. Life should be so easy.

As this play headed to New York for its premiere, it prompted a certain amount of introspection. I've often been asked who I see myself as when I write, which character is really me. In the past, I've been coy or clever or a bit of a smart-ass about it, falling back on that tired adage, "There's a bit of me in all of them." In this case, though, I suppose it's true. But not just a bit. I see a lot of myself in *Fat Pig*; whatever the name of the piece, the story really deals with human weakness and the difficulty many people face when trying to stand up for, live up to, or come out for something they believe in. And that's pretty much me in a nutshell – well-meaning as can be, but surprisingly lame when push really comes to shove. Heroism, it would seem, is a tough gig.

As for the characters who populate *Fat Pig*, I love them all because they are so desperately human – they want to have convictions but, in the end, they'd rather be like or get their needs met. They're not conventionally likeable, perhaps, but they're absolutely recognizable as people. Actually, I don't ever worry too much about the audience liking my characters or wanting to see them in a sequel or buying some merchandise related to the show. Leave that to the movies. All I care about is creating individuals who are interesting. Interesting and as complex as people are in life. I hope I've done that here.

Neil LaBute
Summer 2004

ORIGINAL CAST



Ashlie Atkinson starred in the title role with Jeremy Piven as Tom. Kerri Russell plays Jeannie and Andrew McCarthy plays Carter.

Source: <http://www.playbill.com/article/photo-call-mccarthy-and-russell-try-to-convince-piven-hes-dating-a-fat-pig-at-the-lucille-lortel-com-123106>

CRITICAL REVIEWS

[Ben Brantley of The New York Times reviews Fat Pig](#)

[John Simon reviews Fat Pig for New York Magazine](#)

[Elyse Sommer reviews Fat Pig for CurtainUp](#)

THEMES

Prejudice	Interpersonal Relationships
Personal Insecurities	Loyalty
Body Image	Peer Pressures
Societal Pressures	Society's Unrealistic Standards of Beauty
Fear	

MOTIFS AND RECURRING SYMBOLS

War Movies

The Guns of Navarone (1961)

Stars David Niven, Gregory Peck and Anthony Quinn

WWII film. A British team is sent to cross occupied Greek territory and destroy the massive German gun emplacement that commands a key sea channel.

Where Eagles Dare (1968)

Stars Richard Burton and Clint Eastwood

Allied agents stage a raid on a castle where Nazis are holding an American General prisoner...but not all is what it seems.

Ice Station Zebra (1968)

Stars Rock Hudson, Ernest Borgnine and Patrick McGoohan

Commander James Ferraday, USN, has new orders: get David Jones, a British civilian, Captain Anders, a tough Marine with a platoon of troops, Boris Vasilov, a friendly Russian, and the crew of the nuclear sub USS Tigerfish to the North Pole to rescue the crew of Drift Ice Station Zebra, a weather station at the top of the world.

Von Ryan's Express (1965)

Stars Frank Sinatra

An American Prisoner of War leads a group of mostly British prisoners to escape from the Germans in WWII.

Lonely Are the Brave (1962) (Misnomer) Helen confuses this film with None But the Brave

Stars Kirk Douglas, Gena Rowlands and Walker Matthau.

A cowboy arranges to have himself locked up to help with the escape of an old friend who has been sentenced to the penitentiary.

None But the Brave (1965)

Directed by and Stars Frank Sinatra

A platoon of Marines crash land on a Pacific island occupied by a Japanese unit during WWII.

Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison (1957)

Stars Robert Mitchum and Deborah Kerr

A marine shipwrecked on a Pacific island finds an unlikely friendship in a nun who has been left there as the two wait out WWII.

Reality vs Fantasy/Fiction

The character of Helen consistently prefers reality over fiction.

Magazines

Carter is often seen with his face in magazines. Magazines are notorious for portraying unrealistic standards of beauty with their use of Photoshop to alter “imperfect” bodies.

GLOSSARY OF REFERENCES USED WITHIN THE PLAY

Alistair MacLean - (1922-1987) a Scottish novelist known for his thriller and adventure novels. Three of his novels *The Guns of Navarone*, *Ice Station Zebra* and *Where Eagles Dare* were made into popular films.

Thomas More – (1478-1535) Saint of the Catholic Church. He opposed Henry VIII proclaiming himself head of the English Church and England’s break from the Catholic Church. He ultimately paid for his principles with his life when Henry VIII sentenced him to death.

Gunga Din – a poem written by Rudyard Kipling in 1890. The title character is an Indian water boy in British imperialist India who tends to wounded British soldiers on the battlefield and is ultimately killed while tending to the soldiers. Despite being beaten for not bringing the British soldiers water fast enough, he is a loyal companion. Adapted for two films, one in 1939 and one in the early 1960s reset in the American West with Sammy Davis Jr in the title role.

DISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

Theatre and Performance Studies

Film and Media Studies

Identity Studies

Gender and Women's Studies

Communication Studies

Anthropology

Sociology

Philosophy and Ethics

Psychology

Interdisciplinary Studies

Social Sciences

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Besides the reason Helen gives for liking war movies, why do you think she enjoys this genre?
2. The film *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison* is referenced frequently by Tom and Helen. See the synopsis of this film above. What are some parallels between *Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison* and Tom and Helen's situation?
3. Why do you think Tom lets the opinions of Carter, who he knows is an "asshole" and Jeannie, who he has deliberately stopped seeing, affect his personal relationships and happiness? Why doesn't he seek out new friendships?
4. Why did LaBute choose to end *Fat Pig* with Tom giving into peer and societal pressures? Were you surprised by this ending? Is this ending consistent with Tom's character?
5. Think of a time that you were swayed by other people's opinions and denied your own convictions for their approval. If this happened again, do you have the courage to follow your own heart? Why or why not?
6. Carter says that "People are not comfortable with difference... The thing they represent that's so scary is what we could be, how vulnerable we are." Is he correct? Have you ever experienced this fear before?
7. How does insecurity affect each of the four characters differently?

LINKS

[NPR Interview with Neil LaBute](#)

[The Guardian - Interview with Neil LaBute](#)

[David Amsden's article on Fat Pig in New York Magazine](#)