

InDepth Notes on *She-Rantulas from Outer Space-in 3D!*

Conceived and Written by
Phil Johnson & Ruff Yeager



Diversenary Theatre
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Notes written and compiled by
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A Letter From Our Writer / Director

In 2009, we had the idea to present *The Bad Seed* as a satire on the fear of the 'other' in our contemporary society - particularly the 'gay other'. To accomplish that task, I suggested that men play the women's roles and vice-versa. Phil loved the idea. I adapted Maxwell Anderson's play and we presented our concept as a staged reading in February of 2010. Those who came really had a great time. The room was filled with laughter and applause. The timing, however, wasn't right for Diversionary to stage a production then.

About one year later John Alexander became the new Executive Artistic director of the theatre. Phil and I approached him with the property and he was eager to see Diversionary produce it. As John endeavored to find a slot for the show in the season he discovered that the rights were not available if we wanted to switch the gender roles.

A series of spectacular events then occurred (as they often do in the theatre) that allowed Phil and I to write our own comic play based on the idea of fear of the 'other'. We began by imagining that if a B Horror movie had been made in the late '50s about homosexuals taking over the world that it would have been *She-Rantulas from Outer Space- In 3-D!*. We then met weekly during the next year and wrote our own fartire (our own unique combination of farce and satire) and had a great time doing it!

Sincerely,
Ruff

***She-Rantulas from Outer Space* Creator Biographies**

PHIL JOHNSON (Betty & Co-Author) Is seen regularly at Diversionary as the creator and host of *Senior Phil's Casa Del HaHa* and *The New Century*. He performed on Broadway in *Les Miserables*, in the Canadian production of *Sunset Boulevard*, and toured with *Les Miz* and the 1st National Company of *Miss Saigon*. He is an actor, writer and singer, now in San Diego and L.A. Phil's acting work includes: *Man Who Came to Dinner* (SD Critics Circle Craig Noel Award, directed by Ruff Yeager) at Coronado Playhouse; *Midsummer Night's Dream* at Intrepid Shakespeare; *Mistakes Were Made* (West Coast Premiere) & *Little Shop of Horrors* at Cygnet Theatre; *Hound of the Baskervilles* (Original solo show, funded by the SD Foundation),*Putnam County Spelling Bee & Pageant* at North Coast Repertory Theatre; *How The Grinch Stole Christmas* at the Old Globe Theatre; and *Pete n' Keely* at Lamb's Players. On television he appeared on *Notes from the Underbelly*, a sitcom on ABC. For theatres he has written: *She-Rantulas....* (co-written with Ruff Yeager), *Hound of the Baskervilles*, *The Humbug's Holiday Spectacular* (co-writer, this Christmas) and *Mistletoe, Music & Mayhem* (co-writer) for North Coast Rep. www.philjohnson.net

RUFF YEAGER (Director & Co-Author) is thrilled to be returning to Diversionary Theatre with *She-Rantulas from Outer Space-in 3-D!* Previously for Diversionary: *Friends of Dorothy* and *Bent*. Elsewhere: *The Laramie Project*, *Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge*, *Night of the Iguana*, *Anon-ymous*, *Simply Maria* or *The American Dream*, *Macbeth*, *You Can't Take it With You*, *The Musical Comedy Murders of 1940*, *Oedipus in the Tragi-comic Bathtub* (Southwestern College); *Cuatro Corridos* (UCSD Dept. of Music); *The Tutor*, *Arrow to the Heart*, *The Waves* (Vox Nova Theatre Company); *[sic]*, *Bronze*, (Sledgehammer Theatre); *American Buffalo*, *Medea*, *Come Back to the 5 and Dime*, *Jimmy Dean*, *Jimmy Dean* (Compass Theatre); *The Man Who Came to Dinner* (Coronado Playhouse); *Brooklyn Boy* (Scripps Ranch Theatre). Awards: San Diego Theatre Critics Circle Award for Outstanding New Play; KPBS/Patte awards for Outstanding Direction, Outstanding Acting Ensemble, Outstanding Original Music for a Play; finalist in the Disney/ASCAP musical theatre workshop, directed by Stephen Schwartz. I dedicate this production to all of the aliens out there (extraterrestrial and otherwise)! www.ruffyeager.com

Conquering *She-Rantulas*: A Glossary of Influences

The Avon Lady

It can be said that the first Avon Lady was actually a man- the company's founder David H. McConnell. In 1886, the bookseller became a perfume entrepreneur and gave women the opportunity to create and manage their own businesses. His first recruit was Mrs. P.F.E. Albee, the original Avon Lady, bringing beauty into the lives of women through door-to-door sales. The image of the smartly dressed woman ringing a doorbell and cheerily intoning, "Avon calling!" has become one of the most enduring and iconic images of the mid-century woman and is beautifully embodied by Dianne Wiest's character Peg in the Tim Burton film *Edward Scissorhands*.



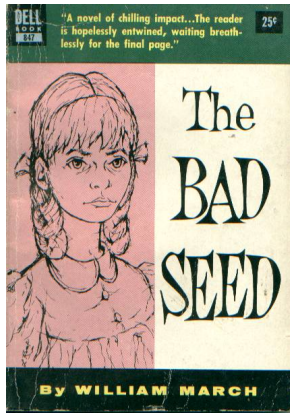
B Movies

A low-budget commercial motion picture that is not definitively an arthouse or pornographic film. In its original usage, during the Golden Age of Hollywood, the term B movie more precisely identified a film intended for distribution as the less publicized, bottom half of a double feature. In its post Golden Age usage, they have emerged as films- usually genre films such as westerns, science fiction, or horror- that display a high degree of craft and aesthetic ingenuity despite their lack of funding and often featured the exploitation of fear, the body, sexuality, or violence in their quest to entertain and sometimes, whether intentional or not, make a social, cultural, or political statement along the way. They served as a safe place for artistic experimentation and proved a training ground for many great actors and filmmakers including Jack Nicholson, John Wayne, Jonathan Demme and the king of the B movies, Roger Corman.



The Bad Seed

A 1954 novel by William March and the last of his major works published before his death. Nominated for the 1955 National Book Award for Fiction,



The Bad Seed tells the story of a mother's realization that her young daughter has committed murder. The scene is a small town where Colonel and Christine Penmark live with their daughter, little Rhoda Penmark, who is the evil center of the story. On the surface she is sweet, charming, full of old-fashioned graces, loved by her parents, admired by all her elders. But Rhoda's mother has an uneasy feeling about her. When one of Rhoda's schoolmates is mysteriously drowned at a picnic, Mrs. Penmark is alarmed. For the

boy who was drowned was the one who had won the penmanship medal that Rhoda felt she deserved. The book's enormous critical and commercial success was largely realized after March's death only one month after publication. It also helped kick start a national conversation on the ideas of nature vs. nurture and how they shape who young people become. The novel was adapted into a successful and long-running Broadway play by Maxwell Anderson and an Academy Award-nominated film directed by Mervyn LeRoy.



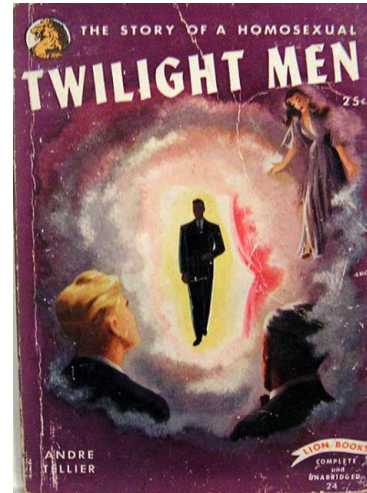
Busch, Charles

An American actor, screenwriter, playwright and female impersonator born on August 23, 1954 and known for his appearances on stage in his own campy plays and in film and television. He wrote and starred in his early plays Off-Off-Broadway beginning in 1978, generally in drag roles and influenced by tropes of classic Hollywood women. He also acted in the works of other playwrights, as well as writing for and performing in films and on television. His best-known play is *The Tale of the Allergist's Wife*, which was a success on Broadway in 2000, and Diversionary Theatre has produced several of his works, including *Psycho Beach Party* in 2001 and *The Divine Sister* in 2013.



The Closet

Closeted and in the closet are adjectives for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) people who have not disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity and aspects thereof, including sexual identity and sexual behavior. In the mid-20th century, life in the closet was almost a given, leading to an LGBT culture lived on the fringes and in the shadows and often shrouded in secrecy and shame. The notion of the closet is inseparable from the concept of coming out. The closet narrative sets up an implicit dualism between being in and being out. Those who are in are often stigmatized as living false, unhappy lives. However, though many people would prefer to be out of the closet, there are numerous social, economic, familial, and personal repercussions that lead to them remaining, whether consciously or unconsciously, in the closet. In late 20th century America, the closet has become a central metaphor for grasping the history and social dynamics of gay life and the decision to come out or remain in the closet is considered a deeply personal one.



The Cold War

A sustained state of political and military tension, often dated from 1947 to 1991, between powers in the Western Bloc, dominated by the United States, and powers in the Eastern Bloc, dominated by the Soviet Union. This began after the success of their temporary wartime alliance against Nazi Germany left the USSR and the US as two superpowers with profound economic and political differences. The term "Cold War" was coined by the English writer George Orwell and described a world where the two major powers—each possessing nuclear weapons and thereby threatened with mutual assured destruction—never met in direct military combat. Instead, in their struggle for global influence they engaged in ongoing psychological warfare and in regular indirect confrontations through proxy wars. Cycles of relative calm would be followed by high tension, which could have led to world war. The Cold War was reflected in culture through music, movies, books, television and other media. The period 1953-1962 saw Cold War themes first enter the mainstream culture as a public preoccupation.



Fear of 'The Other'

In mid-century America, as a result of the perpetually looming Cold War, Red and Lavender Scares and cultural conservatism, there emerged a pervading fear of those who were different. Variance from the status quo was looked upon as a threat to society and people of different nationalities, religions, races, and sexualities were shunned. People, clinging to the sense of stability that they had willed into existence after World War II, were wary of any perceived threat to their delicate utopia. The patina of the 50's becomes quite muted when you observe it through the lens of this omnipresent paranoia.

Kelly, Nancy

An American actress who made 36 movies between 1926 and 1977. She began her career as a child actress, whose image had appeared in so many different advertisements by the time she was nine years old that *Film Daily* called her



"the most photographed child in America due to commercial posing." As an adult, she was a leading lady in twenty-seven movies in the 1930s and '40s. Kelly was subsequently a two-time winner of the Sarah Siddons Award for her work in Chicago theatre as well as a Tony Award winner for her performance in *The Bad Seed*, which she followed

up by starring in the film version in 1956 and receiving a nomination for the Academy Award for Best Actress. She died in 1995 from complications of diabetes. For her contribution to the motion picture industry, Nancy Kelly has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Lichtenstein, Roy

(October 27, 1923 – September 29, 1997) An American pop artist.

During the 1960s, along with Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, and James Rosenquist, among others, he became a leading figure in the new art movement. His work defined the basic premise of pop art better than any other through his use of parody. Favoring the comic strip as his main inspiration, Lichtenstein produced hard-edged, precise compositions that documented while it parodied, often in a tongue-in-cheek, humorous manner. Popular advertising also heavily influenced his work.



Looney Tunes

A series of Warner Brothers animated short films produced from 1930 to 1969 during the golden age of American animation. From 1942 into the 1960s, *Looney Tunes* were the most popular cartoon shorts in movie theaters, exceeding the works of Disney and other popular competitors. They originally



showcased Warner-owned musical compositions (basically serving as the music videos of their day) through the adventures of cartoon characters such as Bosko and Buddy, and later featured such popular characters as Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Porky Pig, Elmer Fudd, Sylvester, Tweety, Taz, Marvin the Martian, Foghorn Leghorn, Yosemite Sam, Pepé Le Pew, Speedy Gonzales, Wile E.

Coyote and The Road Runner. These cartoons were meant to rip off the sweet, sentimental musical shorts that were then in vogue and were primarily character-driven comedy, with their comedic style firmly rooted in vaudeville, early Broadway, and silent-film slapstick. They could be as anarchistic, violent, racially insensitive, and bawdy as they were brilliantly funny.

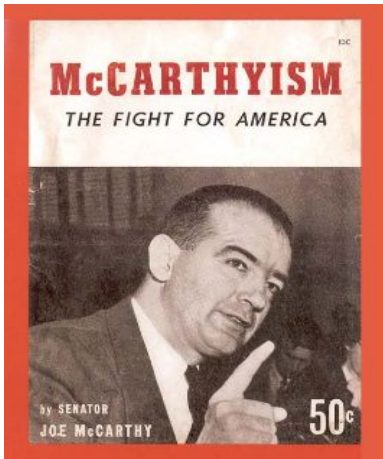
March, William

An American writer and highly decorated US Marine, March was born in 1893 and grew up poor in rural Alabama. In 1917, he volunteered for the US Marines and saw action in World War I. After the war, he began writing, though literary success eluded him. He led a troubled life, suffering several severe breakdowns early on and becoming increasingly alone and bizarre over the years, preoccupied with sex and criminality. He was obsessed with the sex lives of both his friends and strangers, but very reticent about his own. Clearly homosexual, he was very conflicted about it, which is not surprising given his birthplace and era, and outright repressed it. He apparently liked to look out his Central Park window with a pair of binoculars and watch the comings, goings, and sexual pairings in the park below. March suffered another serious breakdown in 1946 and spent six months in a Southern sanitarium. He moved to New Orleans' French Quarter in 1950. He finished *The Bad Seed*, which he had been working on (and talking to friends about) for years. The manuscript was rejected at first as too shocking, but was published in 1954, the year March died. It became a bestseller, but he never saw his story adapted for stage and film.



McCarthy, Joseph

An American politician born in 1908, who served as a Republican U.S. Senator from the state of Wisconsin from 1947 until his death in 1957. Beginning in 1950, McCarthy became the most visible public face of a period in which Cold War tensions fueled fears of widespread Communist subversion. He was noted for making claims that there were large numbers of



Communists and Soviet spies and sympathizers inside the United States federal government. He also used various charges of communism, communist sympathies, disloyalty, or homosexuality to attack a number of politicians and other individuals inside and outside of government. Ultimately, his tactics and inability to substantiate his claims led him to be censured by the United States Senate. Not as widely known as McCarthy's anti-Communist crusade were his various attempts to intimidate, and expel from government positions, persons whom he accused, or threatened to publicly accuse, of

homosexuality. The anti-homosexual witch-hunt McCarthy waged alongside his anti-Communist Red Scare tactics has been referred to by some as the Lavender Scare. The term McCarthyism, coined in 1950 in reference to McCarthy's practices, is used more generally now in reference to demagogic, reckless, and unsubstantiated accusations, as well as public attacks on the character or patriotism of political opponents.

McCormack, Patty

An American actress, born in 1945, McCormack was a child model at the age of four and began appearing on television at the age of seven. She made her first film in 1951 and made her Broadway debut in 1953. After this came her benchmark portrayal of Rhoda Penmark, an eight-year-old sociopath and fledgling serial killer, in *The Bad Seed* on Broadway in 1954. She received an Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actress for her performance in the film version of *The Bad Seed* in 1956. McCormack briefly starred in her own TV series, *Peck's Bad Girl*, in 1959. After a half-dozen teen roles during the 1960s, her film career declined but she continued to work in television. She married in 1967 and had two children before her marriage was dissolved. She continues to act in secondary roles, mostly in television with occasional film appearances.



The Red Scare

The term Red Scare denotes the promotion of fear of a potential rise of communism or radical leftism, used by anti-leftist proponents. The Second Red Scare (1947-1954) was focused on national and foreign communists influencing society, infiltrating the federal government, or both and was popularly known as McCarthyism after its most famous supporter, Senator Joseph McCarthy. The events of the late 1940s—the trial of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, the Iron Curtain around Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union's nuclear weapon—influenced popular opinion about U.S. national security, and were connected to the fear of the Soviet Union hydrogen-bombing the U.S. and of the Communist Party of the United States of America. Many invoked the threat of communism to justify suppressing all elements of society that didn't meet their vision of a stable family. These elements were deemed subversive and linked to communism as a threat to national security.



Teenagers from Outer Space

A 1959 science-fiction B movie about an alien spaceship, carrying the titular teenagers, landing on Earth to use it as a farm for its food supply. It was largely the work of Tom Graeff, who, in addition to playing the role of reporter Joe Rogers, wrote, directed, edited, and produced the film, as well as providing cinematography, special effects, and music coordination. The film's budget was tiny and guerrilla tactics were employed to cut costs. Space costumes were simple flight suits clearly decorated with masking tape, stock footage was used in lieu of special effects, props included a single-bolted-joint skeleton reused for every dead body and a dime store "Atomic Disintegrator" as the aliens' focusing disintegrator ray. Some of the dialogue was pre-recorded for several scenes and the actors had to learn to synchronize their actions with the sound. The score of the film came from stock. The film failed to perform at the box office, and, in the fall of 1959, Graeff suffered a breakdown, proclaiming himself as the second coming of Christ. After a subsequent arrest, he disappeared from Hollywood until 1964 and committed suicide in 1970.



“Camping it Up with The Bad Seed”
By Michael Bronski

She is instantly recognizable as a camp icon. With her flouncing gingham dress, blond pigtails, obnoxious bangs, and disingenuously angelic voice, eight-year-old Rhoda Penmark—“the bad seed”—exhibits the thin veneer that can mask criminal insanity. Over the past decade, Mervyn Leroy’s 1956 film *The Bad Seed* has been endlessly parodied by drag queens, a staple of gay bar jokes, a stock image in the gay press, screened at teenage parties, and plumbed by David Letterman for laughs. But despite the mirth it elicits today, *The Bad Seed*—as well as the 1954 novel by William March (whose real name was William Edward Campbell) on which it is based—is deadly serious. When March wrote *The Bad Seed*, he intended to engage the most important question on everyone’s mind in the aftermath of the Holocaust and Hiroshima: what are the causes of evil and how do we eradicate it—or at least keep it in abeyance?

It is probably no coincidence that, as naughty little Rhoda got camped to the max, the word “evil” found a secure place in our political vocabulary. Ronald Reagan popularized its use as a political concept in a 1982 speech condemning the Soviet Union before the British House of Commons. Clearly a reference to *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*, which was released a year and a half earlier, Reagan’s rhetoric was pure Hollywood public relations. Among the emergent Christian right, however, the word had serious theological resonance. That was George W. Bush’s intent when, in his 2002 State of the Union address, he charged Iraq, Iran, and North Korea with being an “axis of evil.” With that sop to his fundamentalist base—speechwriter David Frum originally suggested the term “axis of hatred”—Bush set the stage for the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the next four years of carnage. Four months later, in May 2002, John Bolton, before his role as unconfirmed U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, gave a speech titled “Beyond the Axis of Evil,” to which he added Libya, Syria, and Cuba to the list. The Bush administration so normalized the idea that Hugo Chavez later turned it against them, referring to Bush as “the devil” who left behind the smell of sulfur when he stepped out of the room.

What’s interesting here is that by politicizing evil, by applying it to entire nations perceived as threats to the United States—the regimes of Saddam Hussein and Kim Jong Il, the fundamentalist megalomania of Osama bin Laden, a shadowy network of terrorist cells—Bush inverted the biblical concept of evil as something that makes its home in the individual human heart. Liberals, meanwhile, tend to be averse to the idea altogether, even as they rail against genocide in Darfur, massive networks of child prostitution

in Thailand, and, yes, nuclear proliferation and organized terrorism as horrific and ethically appalling. The difference is that liberalism and its pop-culture handmaidens, unwilling to reduce entire cultures to the status of “evil,” offer a broader and more complex range of analytical tools for understanding humanity’s darker turns.

It’s worth taking a closer look at *The Bad Seed*, a work that offers us a chance to revive a broader debate about the nature of “evil.”

The film version of *The Bad Seed* —with startling performances by Nancy Kelly as Rhoda’s mother, Christine; Eileen Heckett as the mother of one of her victims; and Patty McCormick as the film’s unnerving anti-heroine—has eclipsed the novel on which it was based. Although out of print, March’s *The Bad Seed* was an instant bestseller when it was published in April 1954, selling more than one million copies within a year. *The New York Times* called it “a true artistic achievement” and Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Maxwell Anderson penned a stage version that opened to rave reviews.

Aside from the film’s cop-out Hollywood ending, which kills Rhoda off and allows her mother to survive, its plot and narrative structure is identical to March’s original work. In a near parody of post-war family life, lovely, educated Christine Penmark is married to a traveling businessperson (a former army officer) and their daughter, Rhoda, seems the perfect child. Suddenly their idyllic life in an unnamed Southern city is shattered by the death of a boy in Rhoda’s day school. It quickly becomes evident that Rhoda knows more about the death than she will admit and that she murdered him. As Christine agonizes over what to do, Rhoda strikes again. Christine, the hapless heroine, is trapped in a sunny all-American home with the knowledge that her perfectly behaved, obedient child is the source of malevolence and horror. This was the birth of suburban gothic at its finest—and earliest.

After it becomes clear that Rhoda is a sociopathic killer, March goes to great lengths to explain why. Rather methodically, he delineates, through conversations among the novel’s adults, three theories that account for the cause of human “evil.” Monica Breedlove, Christine’s landlady and a strict Freudian, treats every aspect of human behavior as a clash between id and superego. Reginald Tasker, a crime writer, believes human behavior is shaped by a confluence of factors, including developmental issues and mental illness. Richard Bravo, Christine’s war-journalist father (who is deceased in the novel, but a character in the film) believes violence is caused by environment, especially poverty. Christine believes—especially after discovering that she is the daughter of a famous female serial killer—that her daughter’s behavior is genetic, and that mind and environment are of far

less consequence than an inborn tendency to violence. The novel and film present these theories with equal weight and to the literate reader of the 1950s, who was well versed in popularized Freud, as well as the cultural critiques of Jacob Riis, Jane Addams, Franz Boas, and Ruth Benedict, *The Bad Seed* set off a vibrant debate about the genesis of human wickedness.

March seems to come down on the side of genetics, but the way he characterizes the individual presentation of evil informs the other accounts. He is, after all, concerned with how to identify evil before it strikes and describes this trait in Rhoda as “being so cool, so impersonal about things that bother others.” Throughout the novel he makes clear that the trait of the “bad seed” consigns humans to lack warmth, empathy, curiosity. As Christine and her husband reckon with just how bad their little girl is, they take to calling it “the Rhoda reaction.”

Under cover of a frightening gothic tale exposing the horror lurking beneath the facade of post-war suburban tranquility, March also explored the realm of international politics. No reader in the 1950s could entertain a discussion of how human beings can inflict horrific suffering on others without being constantly mindful of the Holocaust and the bombing of Hiroshima.

March’s biography testifies to his near-obsession with evil and why it assumed such world-historical form. As a soldier during World War I he was enmeshed in the horrors of war and suffered several nervous breakdowns, as well as continued bouts of hysteria throughout his life. He was also withdrawn and guarded in relationships—being a deeply closeted homosexual didn’t help—and wary of all human interaction.

In the early 1930s, as an employee of the Waterman Steamship Corporation, March lived in Germany and saw the rise of Nazism firsthand. In his letters home he compared Hitler’s thugs to the KKK and noted the rise of virulent anti-Semitism, book burning, and the formation of the first concentration camps. He even detailed how the German political situation was pitting family members against one another. Certainly, as the author of *Company K*, a noted pacifist novel published in 1933 that is considered a classic of U.S. war fiction, March understood intimately the dangers posed by Nazism. The genius of *The Bad Seed* is that March transferred his observations about the Third Reich to a horror story of the idealized American family—replete with the perfect, obedient child who, in both novel and film, bears an uncanny resemblance to the members of Hitler Youth. In *The Bad Seed*, March emphasizes the parallel by describing Rhoda’s hair in Teutonic fashion as “plaited precisely in two narrow braids which were looped back into two hangman-nooses.”

While some critics in 1954 saw *The Bad Seed* as a good psychological thriller, many took it seriously as veiled social criticism. The critic for *The New York Herald Tribune* noted that, “It is possible to read *The Bad Seed* as an allegory of our violent times, as a commentary on the bewilderment and helplessness of all men and women of average good will who find themselves face to face with pure evil, which is incomprehensible.” In light of World War II and all it uncovered, how else was *The Bad Seed* to be interpreted?

So what has happened since 1954? How did William March’s somber, frightening, historically informed meditation on evil become a joke? In part it is due to the fact that, in an era when the longstanding mockery of suburban culture has culminated in *American Beauty* and *Desperate Housewives*, the film’s seriousness now reads as melodrama. But it is also because the immediacy of the Holocaust and Hiroshima has faded and been replaced by new horrors: the carnage of Vietnam; the murderous regimes in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Chile; the genocide in Rwanda; and the current war in Iraq have become commonplace. Meliorated by passive television coverage and an increasingly knee-jerk nationalism, the U.S. public has become increasingly inured to horrors around the world.

As a nation, we have, in short, succumbed to “the Rhoda reaction,” a lack of basic empathy for the pain of others in spite of—or more likely because of—our government’s complicity in horror. It took the attacks of September 11 to remind many that really horrible things can happen in the world. But it hasn’t helped at all that, thanks to George Bush, our national rhetoric sees it as a result of “evil” and not geopolitics.

“Evil” has been and still is a bipartisan word. You won’t catch Bush describing Henry Kissinger’s decision to carpet bomb Cambodia as “evil,” likewise the Reagan administration’s appalling support of Pinochet’s large-scale, state-sponsored murders. While there was some outcry over these events, by and large “the Rhoda reaction” was and continues to be the operational mode for too many Americans. Bush’s invocation of “evil” heralded a sea change in our political discourse.

Yet the worst aspect of the “Rhoda reaction” is not the lack of empathy for human suffering—we can all understand how humans deaden themselves to avoid dealing with pain—but rather the lack of curiosity that goes along with it. We, as a nation, have become appallingly incurious.

But there is still the question of why Rhoda and *The Bad Seed* have become such staples of camp. Writers such as Susan Sontag in her famous “Notes on Camp” argued that camp is a homosexual sensibility that grapples with political realities by making them ironic, in a sense, de-fanging them. Sontag

did not subscribe to the idea that camp itself was political; she assigned it an almost completely aesthetic quality. The British artist Philip Core perhaps had a more comprehensive explanation of camp, calling it “the lie that tells the truth.” Indeed, this is the essence of the political and social critique of gay male camp—to expose the absurd formalities, the idiocies, and injustices of mainstream culture. Perhaps, this is how the journey of little Rhoda from serious cultural signifier to camp heroine makes the most sense. It’s possible to say that we’ve all become Rhoda, but it’s also possible to see the embrace of *The Bad Seed* as a commentary on how dismal and disenfranchised much of the mainstream political culture in the U.S. has become.

So let’s continue to camp up dear little Rhoda—the pain really is almost too hard to bear. Until humans of all nations can discuss, without relying on religious abstractions, the harsh reality of what we are doing and why, we will live in a world that eludes comprehension. But that doesn’t absolve us from continuing to try.

Michael Bronski teaches gender studies and Jewish studies at Dartmouth College. His latest book is *A Queer History of the United States* (Beacon Press 2012).

A Legacy of New Works at Diversionary Theatre

San Diego has a well-deserved reputation as an incubator for new works and emerging creative theatre artists. From the monster Broadway hits that have sprung from The Old Globe and La Jolla Playhouse to smaller shows, like *Forever Plaid* and *Suds*, which have proven to be perennial favorites across the country, our local theatrical community has played a major role in new play and musical development by giving their creators a chance to hone their burgeoning theatre pieces. Diversionary Theatre is proud of its contribution to this legacy and specifically of its work supporting new works with LGBT characters and themes and those by LGBT playwrights.

During our very first season, over a quarter century ago in 1987, Diversionary presented the world premiere of a work it commissioned, *Disappearing Act* by Michael Oster. Over the next 20 years, pieces such as *Our Gay Apparel*, *Something in Common*, *Friends of Dorothy*, *Wrinkles*, and *Sextet* have been developed or have had their world premieres here. Giving new theatrical voices a platform to be heard on its stage is part of Diversionary's DNA.

Diversionary has recently launched two new works series. WordPlay Tuesdays, presented with Playwrights Project, is an opportunity for artists to hear short excerpts of their work read aloud in front of a supportive group of other writers and theatergoers in a structured, casual, and constructive environment. OpenMondays, gives unproduced and unpublished works with LGBT themes and characters and/or by LGBT playwrights a short rehearsal period with professional actors and directors culminating in a public reading.

Diversionary has also created a program to commission and develop new plays and musicals, producing two of these new works- a family musical, *The Daddy Machine*, and a Harvey Milk tribute, *Dear Harvey*. We commissioned Zsa Zsa Gershick to adapt her book, *Gay Old Girls*, for the stage, Thomas Hodges to adapt Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* into a contemporary musical, and Sarah Burgess to write a play with themes important to young lesbians. We plan to give them workshops and present readings for our audiences.

Additionally, Diversionary is excited to have played a pivotal role in the development of new plays and musicals such as the second full production of *The Break-Up Notebook* with the full original creative team in 2007, the first full developmental production of *Yank!* in 2008, the world-premiere production of *Dooley* in 2011, in addition to the acclaimed new musical *Harmony, Kansas* and first full production of the new play *when last we flew* in 2012. We are thrilled to be able to continue the tradition with the world premiere of *She-Rantulas in Outer Space- in 3D!*