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# Best Student One Acts

## Volume 4

Winners of the 1998  
KENNEDY CENTER AMERICAN COLLEGE THEATER FESTIVAL  
One-Act Play Competition



## The Kennedy Center

THE JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS  
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## Introduction

The publication of volume 4 of *Best Student One Acts* by Dramatic Publishing marks a new beginning for this series. The three previous editions were published under the auspices of the Kennedy Center and the American College Theatre Festival. The plays in these four volumes are all winners in regional competitions sponsored by the American College Theatre Festival. Prior to the publication of this series, the winning one-act plays received very little recognition unless they were selected for performance at the Kennedy Center.

The Kennedy Center/American College Theatre Festival's Michael Kanin Playwriting Awards Program began in 1974. The list of national winners contains a number of notable playwrights including Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Paula Vogel who won the 1977 national competition with *Meg*; Lee Blessing with *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid*; and James Leonard Jr., with *The Diviners*. These names are now associated with the vibrant and divergent world of contemporary theatre.

Whereas the national winners have received considerable attention, the regional winners were largely ignored for many years. As a result, many significant works were unavailable for additional exposure. Maybe the most glaring example of a play which won a regional award but not the national is George C. Wolfe's *Up for Grabs*. The publication of volume 1 in this series of *Best Student One Acts* altered the landscape for the students who won their regional competitions. The initial vision for these antholo-

gies came from Jeffery Scott Elwell, who also edited the first volume, with the endorsement and support from the Michael Kanin Playwriting Awards Committee. This anthology series then emerged from the efforts of Harlene Marley, chair of that committee, to put the vision into action. Dramatic Publishing's release of this and future editions marks a significant departure from the previous volumes. The publishing idea that germinated a number of years ago has now reached full maturity with the assistance of a major publishing house.

The publication of this series is one small effort to bring new works to the attention of interested directors, actors, playwrights and scholars. The variety of institutions represented in the series is significant in a national publication. The 32 playwrights represent 24 different schools located in 21 states. This anthology is in fact the only nationwide publication for student playwrights because it includes plays from the eight national regions within the American College Theatre Festival. The size and nature of the theatre program varies greatly. Some of the authors are undergraduate students from colleges in small-town America while others are pursuing graduate degrees at large, urban universities.

Geography alone is not the only means by which difference can be observed. The sense of a national portraiture is also reflected in the diversity of subject matter. These plays explore themes from a variety of ethnic, religious and social perspectives. Included are history plays, autobiographical explorations, poetic worlds and styles that include an example from nearly every age in theatre history. There are overtones of tragedy, surrealism, comedy, farce, epic and so forth. The value of each work is not limited to

its command of form and style. Instead, each play opens another window on American identity from the perspective of a student playwright. Some playwrights open that window to a tragic landscape, while others show us humor, absurdity, or pathos that is rooted in careful observation. Each work reflects a desire to participate in the process of creating a work of art that is an expression to a unique voice. Some of those voices shout from housetops, whereas others explore the hidden chambers of the soul. The assortment of themes, styles and values reflected in these works serves as a mirror to the diversity of America's academic institutions and society itself.

Each play represents a personal journey from the blank page to the stage while also symbolically representing a narrative larger than the play itself. Actors, directors, designers, classmates and supportive faculty from many institutions have guided these playwrights to this stage of development. These collaborative teams deserve commendation and gratitude for their willingness to work with original plays.

This volume represents one dimension of the Kennedy Center's multifaceted initiative for student playwrights. The Michael Kanin Playwriting Awards Program sponsors a variety of national student playwriting awards. Some include publication for the winning playwright and an opportunity for the playwright to participate in play development workshops. The Jean Kennedy Smith Award is given for the best play on the theme of disability. For the best play on World Peace and Disarmament, the Fourth Freedom Foundation provides first- and second-place awards. Anchorage Press offers the Theatre for Youth Playwriting Award. Dramatic Publishing will continue to publish the

Lorraine Hansberry Award for the best play that explores African or African-American themes, and will be publishing several awards recently established, including: The David Mark Cohen Playwriting Award, open to all playwrights; the National AIDS Fund/CFDA-Vogue Initiative Award for the best play that deals with AIDS/HIV; The Mark Twain Comedy Playwriting Award; and the Sí TV Playwriting Award, created to stimulate the voices of young Latino playwrights in America. The John Cauble Award is given for the best student short play. The Musical Theatre Award is available to student lyricists, composers or book authors. The workshop opportunities for the winning playwrights include Sundance Theatre Laboratory, the Bay Area Playwrights Festival, and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

These anthologies could not exist without the untold hours that regional playwriting committee chairs have devoted to developing original plays within each region. Regional chairs Kate Snodgrass, Gary Garrison, Steve Sarra-tore, Jim Epperson, Clyde Ruffin, Ray Paolino, Bryan Willis and Judith Royer have assisted with the development and implementation of this volume while also serving as a guide and advocate for the other playwriting awards. I also wish to express my gratitude to Jeffery Scott Elwell for his initial vision for the series, to Harlene Marley for unwavering advocacy for student playwrights, to Kenneth Robbins for his commitment to award and publication venues for student plays, to Jeff Koep for his support in sustaining and developing the programs within the Playwriting Award Committee, to Derek Gordon and his innovative leadership at the Kennedy Center, to John Lion and his discerning eye for new plays and playwriting op-

portunities, and to Susan Shaffer and her effective management of American College Theatre Festival. Finally, I want to thank my colleagues at the University of Michigan-Flint for their assistance and encouragement. The theatre department, under the guidance of Carolyn Gillespie, has demonstrated an exceptional level of commitment to student playwriting and creative theatrical ventures.

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve as editor of this volume.



# **THE FATHER CLOCK**

**Walter Wykes**  
**University of Nevada, Las Vegas**

## CHARACTERS

SNUB: A young man.

FLUB: An older man.

STAGE MANAGER: A woman.

PLACE: A theatre.

TIME: The present.

*THE FATHER CLOCK* premiered at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, on October 29, 1997 with the following cast:

Flub . . . . .	DOUG HILL
Snub . . . . .	RUSS MARCHAND
Stage Manager . . . . .	SHEILAGH M. POLK

The production was directed and designed by Greg Vovos with sound design by Matt Moore.

## THE FATHER CLOCK

NOTE: <> indicates lines of dialogue that belong to the play within the play.

SETTING: *A bare stage. Shadows from the grid above. Somewhere, the ticking of a clock. After a few moments, a dim glow appears DC and grows into a great pool of light. Silence except for the ticking of the clock. More silence. Finally frantic whispering offstage L.*

FLUB. Where is she?

SNUB. What?

FLUB. Where is she?

SNUB. Who?

FLUB. The stage manager! *(The whispering rises, grows indecipherable. A heated exchange. A slap.)*

SNUB. Oww!

*(Pause. FLUB rushes across the stage, his face hidden beneath his jacket. He disappears into the wings, R. More whispering, urgent but indecipherable.)*

STAGE MANAGER. Breathe! *(Offstage R, FLUB takes in a great gulp of air.)* Now go!

FLUB. But—

STAGE MANAGER. Go!

FLUB. All right! I don't think they suspect anything yet!

*(Again, FLUB rushes across the stage, his jacket over his head. He disappears into the wings, L.)*

FLUB. She's coming!

SNUB. What?

FLUB. She's coming!

SNUB. So?

*(Another heated exchange as the STAGE MANAGER enters and steps into the pool of light. She is an attractive young woman, although a little out of sorts. Off-stage, a slap.)*

FLUB. Oww!

STAGE MANAGER. Good evening, and welcome to—  
*(She sneezes.)* Sorry. There's... ahh... there's something going around. A little bug. *(She wipes her nose.)* Welcome to the theatre. Now, before we get started, I'm afraid we have a bit of bad news. The director won't be with us tonight. He was called away suddenly. Several weeks ago. *(Pause.)* Before rehearsals began, really. *(Pause.)* Oh, no need to worry! I know many of you have come for his fabled *mise en scène*, and you won't be disappointed! He did supervise some table work! And we do have *this*— *(She produces a black prompt book.)* —with a few scribbles from the director himself! Various notes. Suggestions and so forth. So stay for the show. We think you'll find his hand at work in our little play. And if you must leave, please slip out as quietly as possible. Without making too much of a fuss. The actors, you know. *(Lights shift.)* OK. That's it. *(She sneezes, takes her place on a stool R, and flips to the*

*beginning of the prompt book.)* The home of Flub and Snub Drub. Four walls—deep olive.

*(Lights rise to full on the empty stage.)*

Note from the director: Four walls may or may not appear. Probably not. *(They do not.)* A table R. Two chairs.

*(FLUB enters with a table and two chairs. SNUB wanders on behind him, casually smoking a cigarette. FLUB drops his load R and carefully places each item in its proper place. SNUB flops down in one of the chairs. FLUB glares at him.)*

A couch.

*(FLUB turns to exit. He pauses for a moment, expecting SNUB to follow, but he does not. Exit FLUB, glaring. He returns with a couch.)*

Brown.

*(As FLUB's couch is not brown, he exits. He returns with a brown couch.)*

With four legs.

*(As FLUB's couch has only three legs, he exits. He returns with a brown, four-legged couch.)*

Stage left.

*(FLUB complies. SNUB puffs on his cigarette. The STAGE MANAGER watches carefully. When FLUB is finished, she continues.)*

A purple throw rug from Indonesia just downstage and to the right of the couch.

*(FLUB glares at SNUB. He motions, "After you," but SNUB does not budge. Again, he motions, "After you." Again, SNUB does not budge. FLUB exits in a huff. He produces the rug and, with a flourish, places it in front of the couch.)*

A grandfather clock, upstage center.

*(Exit FLUB. Offstage, a tremendous groan. FLUB reappears carrying a huge antique grandfather clock and places it UC. The clock has no hands, but its pendulum is in motion and its steady ticking fills the auditorium.)*

This particular piece was procured by the director himself!

SNUB. Pfff. *(SNUB exits. The others glare after him.)*

STAGE MANAGER. Snub Drub enters as if from nowhere.

*(SNUB enters—clearly from somewhere. He may be clawing his way out of some primordial muck, blowing kisses to a lover he has just left behind, running from some mythical beast with four heads and ten eyes, or perhaps all of these at once.)*

STAGE MANAGER. From nowhere. (*SNUB shrugs his shoulders and snorts.*) From nowhere. (*SNUB ignores her, or perhaps continues his pantomime.*) Snub Drub enters as if—

SNUB (*nastily*). Trollop!

STAGE MANAGER. *What's that?*

SNUB. Pig-whore! (*SNUB folds his arms and turns away from the STAGE MANAGER. She approaches him.*)

STAGE MANAGER. Is there a problem?

SNUB. No!

STAGE MANAGER. *No? No problem?* (*SNUB ignores her.*) Then what was all of *this?* (*She reenacts his entrance. SNUB shrugs.*)

SNUB. Nothing.

STAGE MANAGER. *Nothing?*

SNUB. I'm trying to establish the "moment before."

STAGE MANAGER. Ahh! The moment before!

SNUB. That's right.

STAGE MANAGER. Well, that's very considerate. But the note specifically states— (*SNUB snorts and rolls his eyes.*) All right. That's enough. Snub Drub enters as if—

SNUB (*explodes*). Why? Why do I have to enter from *nowhere?* What if I want to enter from *somewhere?*

STAGE MANAGER. It's not your place to question.

SNUB. Why not?

STAGE MANAGER. An actor doesn't have to understand.

SNUB. Why not?

STAGE MANAGER. It's not his place.

SNUB. Why not?

STAGE MANAGER. Because!

SNUB. Because *why?*

STAGE MANAGER. It's the director's job!

SNUB. Ah-hah! The *director!* I knew it'd come down to him!

STAGE MANAGER. Oh, just do it. We don't have time for—

SNUB. But it doesn't make any sense! Think about it! The way you used to! Take the whole clock thing—

STAGE MANAGER. Don't!

SNUB. Break it down!

STAGE MANAGER. Don't start about the clock! From nowhere!

SNUB. There's no logical explanation!

STAGE MANAGER. It's symbolic!

SNUB. Of what? (*Pause.*)

STAGE MANAGER. From nowhere!

SNUB. You see! It doesn't make any—

STAGE MANAGER (*reading from the prompt book*).

Note from the Director: It is most crucial that Snub enter as if from nowhere! Nothingness! Absolute non-existence! The fact that he is, indeed, entering from somewhere is irrelevant! Total nonsense! The important thing is that he's here!

*(They glare at each other for a long moment. Finally, SNUB relents. He exits and returns a moment later as if from nowhere.)*

Thank you.

SNUB (*under his breath*). He's lost his mind.

STAGE MANAGER. What's that?

SNUB. Nothing. (*Pause. The STAGE MANAGER returns to her prompt book.*)

STAGE MANAGER. Snub wears a pleasant expression, although not so pleasant! A raspberry longing in his eyes. His hair is short and hangs to his waist. He is well built, although a little flabby and thin as a stick. His dress is not unusual. And he carries with him an ice cream cone—flavor optional. (*SNUB produces an ice cream cone.*) He flops down on the couch. Head stage right. Feet stage left. Belly up. One foot off. Cone in downstage hand. (*SNUB complies.*) Enter Flub Drub. He wheezes slightly.

(*Enter FLUB, wheezing.*)

Approximately ten decibels please. (*FLUB complies.*) He looks much the same as Snub—only older. In his left hand, he carries a pipe. (*FLUB produces a pipe.*)

FLUB. <Snub...I call you Snub because that is your name. Snub Drub.>

STAGE MANAGER. Snub licks his cone.

FLUB. <As you well know...I am your father.>

STAGE MANAGER. Snub licks his cone! (*He does.*)

FLUB. <Please do not drip on this couch which we purchased only yesterday at approximately two a.m. in the freezing blizzard that is outside our prefabricated home in the northern portion of the United States of America—specifically North Dakota—although we are originally from Amarillo.>

STAGE MANAGER. A strange expression comes over Snub that cannot be explained. (*Indeed, it does.*)

FLUB. <Son?>  
SNUB. <Our couch!>  
FLUB. <What's that?>  
SNUB. <Our couch! Our couch!>  
FLUB. <Ahh! Yes!>  
SNUB. <I remember!>  
FLUB. <The couch?>  
SNUB. <The old one!>  
FLUB. <Ahh! The old one!>  
SNUB. <I remember when we bought it!>  
FLUB. <Yesterday. When you were six.>  
SNUB. <We went to the store—>  
FLUB. <The store! That's right!>  
SNUB. <—and we bought the couch!>  
FLUB. <We bought it! Yes!>  
SNUB. <You said, "Snub, do you think this couch will do?" And I said, "Yes, Father," for you are my father, "I think it will." I remember quite vividly. It was also brown—>  
FLUB. <Like broccoli.>  
SNUB. <—although not as comfortable.>  
FLUB. <And with only three legs.>  
SNUB. <My mother—your wife—who is now dead if you don't remember—loved that couch.> (*The STAGE MANAGER sneezes. FLUB and SNUB stare at her. She wipes her nose.*)  
STAGE MANAGER. Oh... sorry ... sorry ... go ahead ... I'm sorry ... go on ... just a little cold.  
SNUB (*bitterly*). Hah! A little cold!  
FLUB. What's that she says?  
SNUB. A cold!  
FLUB. A cold! Ah!

SNUB. Strumpet!

FLUB. Trollop!

SNUB. Hussy!

FLUB. Wench!

SNUB. Where do you suppose she *caught* that cold?

FLUB. That cold?

SNUB. Yes! “The cold!”

FLUB. Hmmm... let me think!

SNUB. The *old*?

FLUB. The *dying*?

SNUB. The *sick*?

FLUB. *Diseased*?

SNUB. Perhaps she shouldn’t hump the lepers! Bang the bedridden!

STAGE MANAGER. It’s just a little cold!

SNUB. A little cold, she says!

FLUB. Hah! A little cold!

STAGE MANAGER. DO YOU MIND?

SNUB (*to FLUB, quietly*). A short temper. That’s one of the first signs.

STAGE MANAGER. All right! That’s it! Perhaps you’d like to muddle through on your own! Perhaps I should just take the book and leave!

FLUB. No, wait—

SNUB. Go ahead. (*SNUB pulls a cigarette from his pocket and lights up.*) Take the clock too, if you’d like. It’s only confusing things.

STAGE MANAGER. Oh! *It’s* confusing things?

SNUB. That’s right.

FLUB. He’s...he’s only saying that. He doesn’t mean it. *Do you?* He’s really quite fond of the clock. He’s confided in me many times just how ... how fond of it he is.

How it comforts him! Nurtures him! Suckles him like a pig! (*SNUB snorts.*) It's just...it's just...with his hard outer shell...you know...it's so hard for him to admit.

SNUB. We're better off without it.

FLUB. Shut up!

SNUB. Well, it's true.

FLUB. No need to take chances!

STAGE MANAGER. No smoking.

SNUB. What's that?

STAGE MANAGER. No smoking in the theatre.

SNUB. You never complained when *he* used to light up.

STAGE MANAGER. It was his theatre.

SNUB (*jumps on this*). Was? Did you say was?

STAGE MANAGER (*flustered*). No...I—

SNUB. “Was!” “Was his theatre!”

FLUB. We...we should continue! OK? Here...here we go!

We're moving on! We're...we're, ahh...c'mon...we're...we're not... (*Pause.*) What would he think if he were to return and find us like this? He could be making his way through the parking lot right now! Wiping the smoke and dust from his spectacles! He...he could be in the lobby...his ear pressed to the door...listening! He'd be heartbroken! And besides... (*FLUB glances nervously into the auditorium.*) I think they're getting restless! (*All three turn to the audience. An awkward pause.*)

STAGE MANAGER. You're right. (*STAGE MANAGER flips through her prompt book. FLUB moves back to his place, SNUB takes a deep drag.*) Snub extinguishes his cigarette.

SNUB. It doesn't say—

STAGE MANAGER. Snub extinguishes his cigarette!  
(Pause.)

SNUB. Fine. (He extinguishes the cigarette and returns to his place.) That's all you understand anymore. Rules.

FLUB (continuing the performance). <As you know, Snub, I have called you here under the premise of purchasing yet a third couch. Of course, I am slightly untrustworthy, as you know, and there is the possibility this was a ruse.>

SNUB. <That is always a possibility with you, Father. As you say, you are slightly untrustworthy.>

FLUB. <Indeed.>

SNUB. <Take, for instance, the time you told me we were going to the fair and instead you took me for a polio vaccination.>

FLUB. <Ah! Yes!> (FLUB laughs *maniacally*.)

SNUB. <Or the spoon thing.> (FLUB freezes.)

STAGE MANAGER. An awkward moment. (*Indeed.*)

FLUB. <As...as you know, your mother—who is dead—>

SNUB. <What did she die of again?>

FLUB. <Polio.>

SNUB. <That's right. Do you remember when we bought this clock?>

FLUB. <Ah! The Father Clock!>

SNUB. <There was a saleswoman with dark red lipstick and large thighs. She wore a purple blouse.>

FLUB. <Yes! She gave you that cone!>

SNUB. <A black skirt. And her panty-line was quite visible. I remember noticing her panty-line. It was an important moment in my life. A sexual awakening, if you will.>