

Yours In Words,



WRITTEN BY LAURA THOMA



Laura Thoma
Guilford, CT
708-370-5928
Laurathomaplaywright@gmail.com

Synopsis

SYNOPSIS: Set in New York City, *Yours in Words*, is a story of two women writers with vastly different life experiences amidst a burgeoning turning point for women and invention. Lily Lamont is a daring young sapphist (lesbian) from Nebraska. Annabelle is a famous novelist, the world only knows as A.B. Jones. After an unlikely meeting, the two women realize they have an opportunity to change the landscape of The Great White Way. To do so, they must overcome their differences and break away from the societal limitations set for women, and challenge the gender norms of the day.

Note: From its inception I've known I wanted the play to be diversely cast like *Hamilton* or *Bridgerton*. *Yours in Words*, is historical in setting and contemporary in theme. For although set in 1895, the misogyny that Annabelle and Lily confront in *Yours in Words*, is sadly, the same misogyny that we're still up against today. And while *Yours in Words*, details the *struggles* of women in the late 1800s, it also celebrates the triumphs of women who live their lives completely on their own terms. It's important for women and queer people to see themselves represented on the stage in diverse, multifaceted and complex ways. *Yours in Words*, is a play that helps foster the narrative that beautiful and rich storytelling isn't only for the heteronormative gaze.

YOURS IN WORDS, DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

Table Read	Deep River, CT	2015
Staged Reading	Blackstone Library - Branford, CT	2016
Staged Reading	Ivoryton Players - Ivoryton, CT	2017
Developed as Audio Play	Recorded/Produced/Distributed	2018
Workshopped	Theatre Artist Workshop	2019
Scene Revision/Reading	Manhattan Rep via Zoom	2020
Revision Workshops	Sherry Wilner/Julian Jimenez	2021
Zoom Reading	Shoreline Playwrights	2022

The play has been through a major revision in the last year. There is still character work to do on Dot and Lenny. The play as a whole needs to be shaped and trimmed. I can't go much further alone. It's time for the piece to be on it's feet and to be in a room with a director and actors.

CHARACTERS

Lilian Lamont (Lily): Female, early to mid 20s. Smart, daring, eager, determined and head strong. Lesbian.

ANNABELLE Jones (A.B. Jones): Female, early 50s. Widowed. Smart, steadfast, tried and true but curious.

Dorothy Murphy (Dot): Female, early 20s. Lily's roommate. Artist, girlie, flirtatious, activist, tends to mother. Queer.

Bernard Badger: (Bernie): Male, late 50s, Annabelle's publisher. Quirky, powerful, loyal.

Claire Dennison: Female late 30's. Mr. Badger's secretary. Intelligent, consistent, brave, empowers other women.

**** Lenard Ayers (Lenny):** Male, early 30's, library clerk. Genuine, friendly, eager to learn and part of the public library movement.

**** Thomas Miller (Tom):** Male, early 30's. Assistant Manager Macy's. Insecure, charming know it all, cocky, competitive.

Gilbert Wilkinson: Male, 40-50. Famous vaudeville sketch writer. Bombastic, arrogant, falsely charming with an edge of smarminess.

**** Lenny can be Tom played by the same actor**

Note: During a reading I had a realization of an abstract connection between Lily and Annabelle. At the beginning of the play both of them resemble the other's preferred writing tool--Lily is like a fountain pen: scratchy, flowing, and messy. Annabelle is like a typewriter. Methodical if not exact, consistent and loud. They influence each other during the course of play as does Dot who is like a paintbrush. She explores and discovers with different strokes and is capable of blending things, people, and identity together.

SETTINGS

New York City 1895-1896

Stilton's (Restaurant), Exterior

Arveson Library, Exterior

Badger Yates Publishing

Noonan Boarding House

Annabelle's Study

Au Petite Beurre, Exterior

Compound, Exterior

Park

NOTES

WORLD: The playwright encourages diverse casting. Though this work is set in 1895 and explores much of what was going on historically at that time: innovation, invention, women's rights. It is also its own world where homophobia, misogyny, and discrimination may exist but do not triumph. The playwright encourages diverse casting.

SETS: Simple, representational, flexible.

COSTUMES: Simple representational.

SOUNDS: A soundscape could be quite effective for helping to show the clash of old and new. Sounds of horse hooves and carriages mixed with the occasional motors, different bells from trolleys, stores, push carts all mixing with nature sounds from the park: frogs, crickets perhaps music as well.

ACT [1]

SCENE [1]

1895-NEW YORK CITY. A CRISP AUTUMN EVENING OUTSIDE STILTON'S RESTAURANT LOCATED IN GREENWICH VILLAGE.

LILY, A FIERCELY SMART, CURIOUS, AND HEADSTRONG YOUNG WRITER, RUSHES ON, PULLING UP THE COLLAR OF HER COAT AND TUGGING ON THE SLEEVES OF HER DRESS. AS SHE APPROACHES THE FRONT ENTRANCE TO STILTON'S, DOT LILY'S ROOMMATE, A FLIRTATIOUS YOUNG WOMAN ESCORTED BY HER ADMIRER TOM, IS EXITING. LILY DOES HER BEST TO WALK BY UNNOTICED.

DOT

Lil! Lily, wait.

LILY

(Stops begrudgingly. Waits.)

I don't have all night.

TOM

Come on, Lamont, if you'd waited instead of storming out, you could have left with us, through the front door.

LILY

I didn't storm out, I have somewhere to be...and I am perfectly capable of exiting a building without your arm -- Thank you very much.

TOM

You do know rushing off to read doesn't count as somewhere to be...right?

LILY

It does when you're a writer. And I'm not just reading
I'm studying A.B. Jones's work.

TOM

Jones, eh? I don't care for his books, but my sister
loves them.

(Choosing to ignore his ignorance.)

LILY

Are you coming, Dot?

TOM

I hear he's adapting one of his novel's for the stage?

LILY

I doubt that.

TOM

It's true. Read it in the Times...business section.
Don't read that do you, Lamont?

LILY

I'm leaving.

(Lily starts walking.)

DOT

I'm coming! Goodnight, Tom.

*(Dot leans in to kiss Tom on both
cheeks and as she finds international.
Just as she nears his cheek he turns
and kisses her briefly on the lips. She
Giggles.)*

TOM

Goodnight, Dorothy. I thoroughly enjoyed our talk this
evening.

*(They have a moment of whispers and
another brief kiss. Tom exits and Dot
runs to catch up with Lily taking her
arm.)*

DOT

You're never going to believe what Tom just told me.

LILY

That he doesn't know how to read.

DOT

He just told me it's Hunger in the Depths of Love that's being adapted.

LILY

That can't be true.

DOT

It is. Not only that but they are looking for a collaborator for A.B. Jones

LILY

A collaborator?

DOT

Yes. Tom said it was in the Bab's Babble column.

LILY

(Laughs) The gossip column of course...Business section my eye...

(They walk for a bit both in their own thoughts.)

DOT

I know this evening didn't go exactly as we planned but...

LILY

It sure didn't. I don't know what you see in that windbag. He doesn't even know that A.B. Jones is a woman.

DOT

Most people don't. That's why she's been so successful. And Tom isn't so bad...

LILY

You mustn't call him that...

(Lily stops walking and imitates Tom)

"I no longer go by Tom. All of my employees call me Thomas."

(Dot giggles in spite of herself)

LILY (Continued)

What a rube! He has one poor fellow who has to report to him and now he thinks he's R.H.Macy!

DOT

No, he doesn't.

(She slips her arm into Lily's and they begin to walk)

He's just trying to be professional. Besides, he doesn't mind if I call him Tom.

LILY

I'm sure he doesn't. Shall I assume that means you got some information about the giveaway?

DOT

I tried my best.

LILY

(*Sourly*) I'll say you did.

(Dot stops walking)

DOT

What's that supposed to mean?

LILY

Nothing...I just think our plan was stupid. I mean it's pretty obvious that Tom really likes you...and it sure looked like you have a thing for him.

DOT

I don't have a thing for Thomas. I was flirting with him for you...to get information on the typewriter that YOU want.

LILY

I know...and I appreciate it.

(She takes Dot's arm and begins to walk)

DOT

Once you get to know Tom he's endearing...and funny, and kind of...

LILY

A pompous ass, that's what he is!

DOT

Lil!

LILY

What? He is. And you deserve better than Thomas.

DOT

Oh, do I?

(They stop Lily turns to Dot and takes her hands.)

LILY

Yes! You deserve someone as magnificent as you are...someone who understands you and appreciates you...someone who won't stifle your creativity but will support it and your political interests...someone who will treat you like an equal.

(They stare into each other's eyes. Lily wants to tell Dot that she's that person.)

DOT

Sounds wonderful. When you meet this person be sure to introduce me.

LILY

I...

(Yearns to tell Dot her true feelings but is afraid of being selfish.)

I... will...

(They walk in silence for a beat.)

DOT

Lil, I know how much you want that typewriter, and I did my best...I even asked Tom directly about the giveaway.

LILY

And what did *dear* Thomas have to say?

DOT

(Trying to make Lily laugh she imitates Tom.)

"Ah yes, the Underwood Typewriter -- won't that be a lucky fellow?"

LILY

(Laughing) You sound just like him! Of course he thinks a man will win it.

DOT

I corrected him immediately, telling him many women would be thrilled to win the typewriter.

LILY

I wish I could just buy one.

DOT

You must have quite a bit saved from your letter writing.

LILY

Only about five dollars. Which means I need at least a hundred and twenty more.

DOT

What about your father?

LILY

No. He already pays for my boarding. My pocket money is my responsibility.

DOT

I'm sure Mrs. Lawless and Mrs. Moyer will recommend you to all their friends to letters and run errands.

LILY

I do hope so. Tom didn't have anything else to say about the giveaway?

DOT

He was rather protective about the details. He said it wasn't in his best interest to share such delicate information with a lay person such as myself-- especially because I am woman.

LILY

(Angry) He said that to you?

DOT

Don't be mad, Lil...he's harmless. He's like a puppy...a bit clumsy but eager to please. I'm not bothered by men like Tom.

LILY

I am!

DOT

You needn't be...and besides he did mention something about a discount for family members...so I thought perhaps you could...

LILY

Doesn't he see that women are changing the world?

DOT

No, I don't believe he does.

LILY

I'll have to remind *Thomas* that he's working for a company that has promoted a woman to an executive position.

DOT

Have they really?

LILY

Yes! Why if it wasn't for Margaret Getchell, and her mantra: "Be everywhere, do everything, and never forget to astonish the customer," no one would even know about R.H. Macy's!

DOT

That's amazing! Though, I have a feeling *Thomas* won't be interested.

LILY

I have a feeling you're right.

*DOT STOPS SUDDENLY AND WAVES
AT LENNY.*

LENNY - UNINTENTIONALLY
HANDSOME, FRIENDLY,
GOODHEARTED, IS A LIBRARY
CLERK. HE SMOKES, LEANING
AGAINST THE WALL JUST OUTSIDE
THE BACK ENTRANCE OF THE
ARVESON LIBRARY--BATHED IN
THE GLOW OF THE LARGE GAS
LAMP ABOVE THE DOOR.

LILY

I'm happy to walk you home and come back.

DOT

No, I'm fine. It's just a few blocks and I have my hat
pin.

LILY

I won't be late I only have a few pages left. But I
don't have my fee -- so... *(She unbuttons her coat)*
we'll see what this green dress can do!

DOT

Lil!

LILY

Isn't that what you were just doing with Tom?

DOT

Yes, for you...and isn't that why you stormed out?

LILY

(Trying to hide her embarrassment.)

I didn't storm out. Besides, I'm... just working in
the current system. When men evolve I won't take
advantage of their...limitations.

DOT

(Admires Lily and fixes her collar.)

Poor Lenny, he'll take one look at you in this dress
and never know what hit him!

(Lily fidgets with her sleeves)

LILY

You know I don't usually take advantage, but my pocket money was a little short this week.

DOT

Be gentle with Lenny and don't worry Lil, I know you'll find a way to get a typewriter.

LILY

Thank you.

(The kiss on each cheek.)

DOT

Ta!

(Lily crosses to the library. Dot Exits.)

LILY

Ta!

LENNY

Good Evening, Miss Lamont!

(He takes his cigarette out of his mouth and is about to flick it into the street when Lily grabs it.)

LILY

Good Evening, Lenny! Please, I've told you call me Lily. On a break, eh?

(Lily takes a drag of the cigarette and flicks the butt into the street)

LENNY

Sure am. Just snuck out for cigarette...and to look at the stars.

(Looks to the sky)

Beautiful night.

LILY

(She looks up at the starry sky)

LILY (Continued)

Certainly is...reminds me of home.

LENNY

Miss Lily, if you don't mind me saying, that's an awfully pretty dress you're wearing.

LILY

(Remembering she doesn't have her fee she does her best impersonation of Dot)
Oh this old thing? It's just something I threw on.

(She immediately regrets trying this tactic.)

LENNY

Not many girls could wear that color the way you do.

LILY

(Sincerely) Thank you, Lenny, that's terribly sweet of you to say. Let me step into the light so you can really see the color.

(Lenny steps away and Lily steps into the light in front of the door. She feels like a prize cow but tries not to show it.)

LENNY

Wow, that sure is green and ruffly.

LILY

(Giggling) Do you like it? *(Posing)* What about the sleeves?

LENNY

(Egging her on) Oh, yeah, those are real nice. I bet they're something... when you're twirling.

LILY

(Accepting his challenge)
I dare say you're right, Mr. Ayers.

(Lily starts to turn.)
How do they look?

LENNY

Not bad, but I suspect they'd look even better you went a bit faster?

(Lily tries to turn faster but loses her balance and at the same moment Annabelle Jones comes barreling out of the back door right into Lily. They both drop their belongings, Annabelle's note cards spill into the street)

ANNABELLE

For heaven's sake, I just organized those.
(Lenny is horrified.)

LENNY

My apologies, ma'am.

(Both Lenny and Lily drop to their hands and knees to pick up all the cards.)

LILY

(Embarrassed she begins to babble while picking up the cards, and belongings)
I'm terribly sorry, I didn't see you. I was...spinning, well not spinning exactly...maybe turning or...twirling...I...

ANNABELLE

Mr. Ayers...

(Lenny stands up involuntarily)
I thought you might want to know that Mr. Reynolds is looking for you and he isn't too pleased.

(Annabelle turns to Lily who is trying to stand Lenny gives her a hand.)
Young lady, I dare say it isn't polite to linger in front of doors. Didn't your mother raise you better than that?

(Looks Lily up and down)
Or perhaps you're just one of those girls who places frivolity over common courtesy? Either way, it's rude!

(Lily doesn't appreciate being spoken to this way.)

LILY

I wasn't lingering and I ...

ANNABELLE

I haven't the time to explain the subtleties of the word linger to you. I'll thank you to hand me my belongings.

(A bit stunned Lily hands them to her.)

Good Evening!

(Annabelle exits quickly and with purpose.)

LENNY

(Lenny waves and calls after Annabelle.)

I'm terribly sorry we were blocking the door! Won't happen again Ma'am...my mother DID raise me better than that!

LILY

She doesn't have to explain anything to me...I

LENNY

Goodnight, Mrs. Jones!

LILY

Mrs. Jones?

LENNY

Yeah, Annabelle Jones, the writer! Good seeing you Miss Lily I best be getting back inside.

LILY

Wait! You're sure that was A.B. Jones?!

LENNY

One in the same. Are you surprised? Most thinks she's a man.

LILY

You mean to tell me Annabelle Jones is a member of the library?!