The Pulitzer Prize-winning play about a father, a daughter, what tears them apart, and what ties them together

Proof

By David Auburn
The Story So Far  *Proof* is about a young woman, Catherine, who has put her life on hold for years to take care of her father, a math genius who has become mentally ill. When the play begins, her father has just died. *Proof* takes place over the course of a week, interrupted by a series of flashbacks. This scene is one of those flashbacks—a few years earlier when it wasn’t clear how far her father’s mental illness had progressed.

Winter. About three and a half years earlier. ROBERT is on the porch. He wears a T-shirt. He writes in a notebook. After a moment we hear CATHERINE’s voice from offstage.

CATHERINE: Dad? (She enters wearing a parka. She sees her father and stops.) What are you doing out here?

ROBERT: Working.

CATHERINE: It’s December. It’s thirty degrees.

ROBERT: I know. (CATHERINE stares at him, baffled.)

CATHERINE: Don’t you need a coat?

ROBERT: Don’t you think I can make that assessment for myself? (Beat.)

CATHERINE: Aren’t you cold?

ROBERT: Of course I am! I’m freezing my ass off!

CATHERINE: So what are you *doing* out here?

ROBERT: Thinking! Writing!

CATHERINE: You’re gonna freeze.

understanding inferences: See page 14

continued →
ROBERT: It’s too hot in the house. The radiators dry out the air. Also the clanking—I can’t concentrate. If the house weren’t so old, we’d have central air heating, but we don’t, so I have to come out here to get any work done.

CATHERINE: I’ll turn off the radiators. They won’t make any noise. Come inside, it isn’t safe.

ROBERT: I’m okay.

CATHERINE: I’ve been calling. Didn’t you hear the phone?

ROBERT: It’s a distraction.

CATHERINE: I didn’t know what was going on. I had to drive all the way down here.

ROBERT: Well I’m sorry, Catherine, but it’s a question of priorities, and work takes priority, you know that.

CATHERINE: You’re working?

ROBERT: Goddamnit, I am working! I say “I”—The machinery. The machinery is working. Catherine, it’s on full-blast. All the cylinders are firing, I’m on fire. That’s why I came out here, to cool off. I haven’t felt like this for years.

CATHERINE: You’re kidding.

ROBERT: No!
CATHERINE: I don’t believe it.

ROBERT: I don’t believe it either! But it’s true. It started about a week ago. I woke up, came downstairs, made a cup of coffee, and before I could pour in the milk it was like someone turned the light on in my head.

CATHERINE: Really?

ROBERT: Not the light, the whole power grid. I lit up, and it’s like no time has passed since I was twenty-one.

CATHERINE: You’re kidding!

ROBERT: No! I’m back! I’m back in touch with the source—the font, the—whatever the source of my creativity was all those years ago. I’m in contact with it again. I’m sitting on it. It’s a geyser and I’m shooting right up into the air on top of it.

CATHERINE: My God.

ROBERT: I’m not talking about divine inspiration. It’s not funneling down into my head and onto the page. It’ll take work to shape these things; I’m not saying it won’t be a tremendous amount of work. It will be a tremendous amount of work. It’s not going to be easy. But the raw material is there. It’s like I’ve been driving in traffic and now the lanes are opening up before me and I can accelerate. I see whole landscapes—places for the work to go, new techniques, revolutionary possibilities. I’m going to get whole branches of the profession talking to each other. I—I’m sorry, I’m being rude. How’s school?

CATHERINE: (Taken aback) Fine.

ROBERT: You’re working hard?

CATHERINE: Sure.

ROBERT: Faculty treating you all right?

CATHERINE: Yes. Dad—

ROBERT: Made any friends?

CATHERINE: Of course. I—

ROBERT: Dating?

CATHERINE: Dad, hold on.
ROBERT: No details necessary if you don’t want to provide them. I’m just interested.

CATHERINE: School’s great. I want to talk about what you’re doing.

ROBERT: Great, let’s talk.

CATHERINE: This work.

ROBERT: Yes.

CATHERINE: (Indicating the notebooks) Is it here?

---

**Family Drama**

**FOR PLAYWRIGHTS—LIKE THE REST OF US—FAMILIES HAVE LONG BEEN A SOURCE OF BOTH CONFLICT AND COMFORT. READ SHAKESPEARE’S ORIGINAL FAMILY TRAGEDY, AND THEN CHOOSE ONE OF ITS 20TH-CENTURY COUNTERPARTS.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE PLAY</th>
<th>THE STORY</th>
<th>THE STYLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>KING LEAR (1599)</strong></td>
<td>Old King Lear decides to doff his crown and divide his kingdom among his three daughters by testing them to see how much they love him. He misjudges his daughters and disowns Cordelia, the one who loves him most.</td>
<td>Shakespeare’s prose is vivid with metaphor, image, and witty dialogue that make this tragic tale of greed and misunderstanding one of the most compelling dramas ever written.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by William Shakespeare</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DEATH OF A SALESMAN</strong></td>
<td>Willy Loman is a 63-year-old salesman who has failed to achieve the success he dreamed of as a younger man. His disappointment leads him to criticize his sons, Biff and Happy, who have likewise stalled in life.</td>
<td>As regret and dementia take over, Willy confuses events from the past with the present, and the play shuttles between flashbacks and live scenes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1949) by Arthur Miller</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A RAISIN IN THE SUN</strong></td>
<td>The Youngers are an African-American family living on the South Side of Chicago in the 1950s. When Big Walter, the family patriarch, dies, his wife and children argue about how to use the inheritance to improve their lives.</td>
<td>Colloquial language and scenes from daily life illustrate the larger forces of racism, classism, and sexism that shape the characters’ lives and spark intergenerational conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1959) by Lorraine Hansberry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ROBERT: Part of it, yes.

CATHERINE: Can I see it?

ROBERT: It’s all at a very early stage.

CATHERINE: I don’t mind.

ROBERT: Nothing’s actually complete, to be honest. It’s all in progress. I think we’re talking years.

CATHERINE: That’s okay. I don’t care. Just let me see anything.

ROBERT: You really want to?

CATHERINE: Yes.

I think there’s enough here to keep me working the rest of my life. Not just me. I was starting to imagine I was finished, Catherine. Really finished. Don’t get me wrong, I was grateful I could go to my office, have a life, but secretly I was terrified I’d never work again.

ROBERT: You’re genuinely interested.

CATHERINE: Dad, of course!

ROBERT: Of course. It’s your field.

CATHERINE: Yes.

ROBERT: You know how happy that makes me. (Beat.)

CATHERINE: Yes.

ROBERT: I think there’s enough here to keep me working the rest of my life. Not just me. I was starting to imagine I was finished, Catherine. Really finished. Don’t get me wrong, I was grateful I could go to my office, have a life, but secretly I was terrified I’d never work again. Did you know that?

CATHERINE: I wondered.
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

ROBERT: I was absolutely terrified. Then I remembered something and a part of the terror went away. I remembered you. Your creative years were just beginning. You’d get your degree, do your own work. You were just getting started. If you hadn’t gone into math, that would have been all right. Claire’s done well for herself. I’m satisfied with her. I’m proud of you. I don’t mean to embarrass you. It’s part of the reason we have children. We hope they’ll survive us, accomplish what we can’t. Now that I’m back in the game I admit I’ve got another idea, a better one.

CATHERINE: What?

ROBERT: I know you’ve got your own work. I don’t want you to neglect that. You can’t neglect it. But I could probably use some help. Work with me. If you want to, if you can work it out with your class schedule and everything else, I could help you with that, make some calls, talk to your teachers . . . I’m getting ahead of myself. Well, Jesus, look, enough bull. You asked to see something. Let’s start with this. I’ve roughed something out. General outline for a proof. Major result. Important. It’s not finished but you can see where it’s going. Let’s see. (He selects a notebook.) Here. (He gives it to CATHERINE. She opens it and reads.) It’s very rough.

(After a long moment CATHERINE closes the notebook. A beat. She sits down next to ROBERT.)

CATHERINE: Dad. Let’s go inside.

ROBERT: The gaps might make it hard to follow. We can talk it through.

CATHERINE: You’re cold. Let’s go in.

Gwyneth Paltrow plays the role of Catherine in the film version of David Auburn’s Proof, which will be released by Miramax Films within the year. Anthony Hopkins—best known as the evil genius Hannibal Lecter in Silence of the Lambs—will co-star as Catherine’s father, Robert. Paltrow, whose performance in Shakespeare in Love netted her an Oscar, won critical acclaim in London in 2002 for her portrayal of Catherine. The London production was directed by John Madden, who collaborated with Paltrow in Shakespeare in Love and also directed the film version of Proof. Of Paltrow’s stage performance, one London critic remarked that “the actress brings a hauntingly lost, 25-going-on-14 quality to the role of Catherine.” So impressed was Harvey Weinstein, who heads Miramax Films, that he bought the film rights to Proof with Paltrow and Madden in mind. Rounding out the film cast are Jake Gyllenhaal as Robert’s protégé Hal, and Hope Davis as Catherine’s sister Claire.

LITERATURE SELECTION >> PROOF by David Auburn

Paltrow Reprises Stage Role

Gwyneth Paltrow plays the role of Catherine in the film version of David Auburn’s Proof, which will be released by Miramax Films within the year. Anthony Hopkins—best known as the evil genius Hannibal Lecter in Silence of the Lambs—will co-star as Catherine’s father, Robert. Paltrow, whose performance in Shakespeare in Love netted her an Oscar, won critical acclaim in London in 2002 for her portrayal of Catherine. The London production was directed by John Madden, who collaborated with Paltrow in Shakespeare in Love and also directed the film version of Proof. Of Paltrow’s stage performance, one London critic remarked that “the actress brings a hauntingly lost, 25-going-on-14 quality to the role of Catherine.” So impressed was Harvey Weinstein, who heads Miramax Films, that he bought the film rights to Proof with Paltrow and Madden in mind. Rounding out the film cast are Jake Gyllenhaal as Robert’s protégé Hal, and Hope Davis as Catherine’s sister Claire.
ROBERT: Maybe we could work on this together. This might be a great place to start. What about it? What do you think? Let’s talk it through.

CATHERINE: Not now. I’m cold too. It’s really freezing out here. Let’s go inside.

ROBERT: I’m telling you it’s stifling in there, goddamn it. The radiators. Look, read out the first couple of lines. That’s how we start: you read, and we go line by line, out loud, through the argument. See if there’s a better way, a shorter way. Let’s collaborate.

CATHERINE: No. Come on.

ROBERT: I’ve been waiting years for this. This is something I want to do. Come on, let’s do some work together.

CATHERINE: We can’t do it out here. It’s freezing cold. I’m taking you in.

ROBERT: Not until we talk about the proof.

CATHERINE: No.

ROBERT: Goddamn, Catherine, open the goddamn book and read me the lines.

(Beat. CATHERINE opens the book. She reads slowly, without inflection.)

CATHERINE: “Let X equal the quantity of all quantities of X. Let X equal the cold. It is cold in December. The months of cold equal November through February. There are four months of cold and four of heat, leaving four months of indeterminate temperature. In February it snows. In March the lake is a lake of ice. In September the students come back and the bookstores are full. Let X equal the month of full bookstores. The number of books approaches infinity as the number of months of cold approaches four. I will never be as cold now as I will in the future. The future of cold is infinite. The future of heat is the future of cold. The bookstores are infinite and so are never full except in September...” (She stops reading and slowly closes the book. ROBERT is shivering uncontrollably. She puts her arms around him and helps him to his feet.) It’s all right. We’ll go inside.

ROBERT: I’m cold.

CATHERINE: We’ll warm you up.

ROBERT: Don’t leave. Please.

CATHERINE: I won’t. Let’s go inside.

_fade_
WHAT’S GOING ON HERE?

DAVID AUBURN’S PLAY PROOF INCLUDES SEVERAL EXCHANGES BETWEEN THE CHARACTERS CATHERINE AND ROBERT. AS THE PLAY UNFOLDS, YOU BEGIN TO INFERENCE CERTAIN THINGS ABOUT THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR SITUATION.

Below, you will find a numbered list of “inferences.” For each exchange between the two characters, list all of the numbers that apply.

SELECTIONS FROM THE TEXT

1. CATHERINE: Dad? (She enters wearing a parka. She sees her father and stops.) What are you doing out here? ROBERT: Working. CATHERINE: It’s December. It’s thirty degrees. ROBERT: I know. INFERENCES _______

Example:

1. Catherine is Robert’s daughter.
2. ROBERT: Working.
3. ROBERT: It’s too hot in the house. The radiators dry out the air. Also the clanking—I can’t concentrate. If the house weren’t so old, we’d have central air heating, but we don’t, so I have to come out here to get any work done.
4. CATHERINE: I’ll turn off the radiators. They won’t make any noise. Come inside, it isn’t safe.

INFERENCES _______

2. CATHERINE: I’ve been calling. Didn’t you hear the phone? ROBERT: It’s a distraction. CATHERINE: I didn’t know what was going on. I had to drive all the way down here.

INFERENCES _______

3. ROBERT: Well I’m sorry, Catherine, but it’s a question of priorities, and work takes priority, you know that.

INFERENCES _______

LIST OF INFERENCES:

1. Catherine is Robert’s daughter.
2. Roles have been reversed; Catherine is Robert’s “parent.”
3. Robert works at home.
4. Robert considers his work to be important.
5. It’s very cold outside.
6. Catherine is worried about Robert.
7. Robert is hypersensitive to heat and noise.
8. Robert is volatile and irritable.
9. At some time in the past, Robert has been unable to work.
10. Robert may be emotionally unstable.