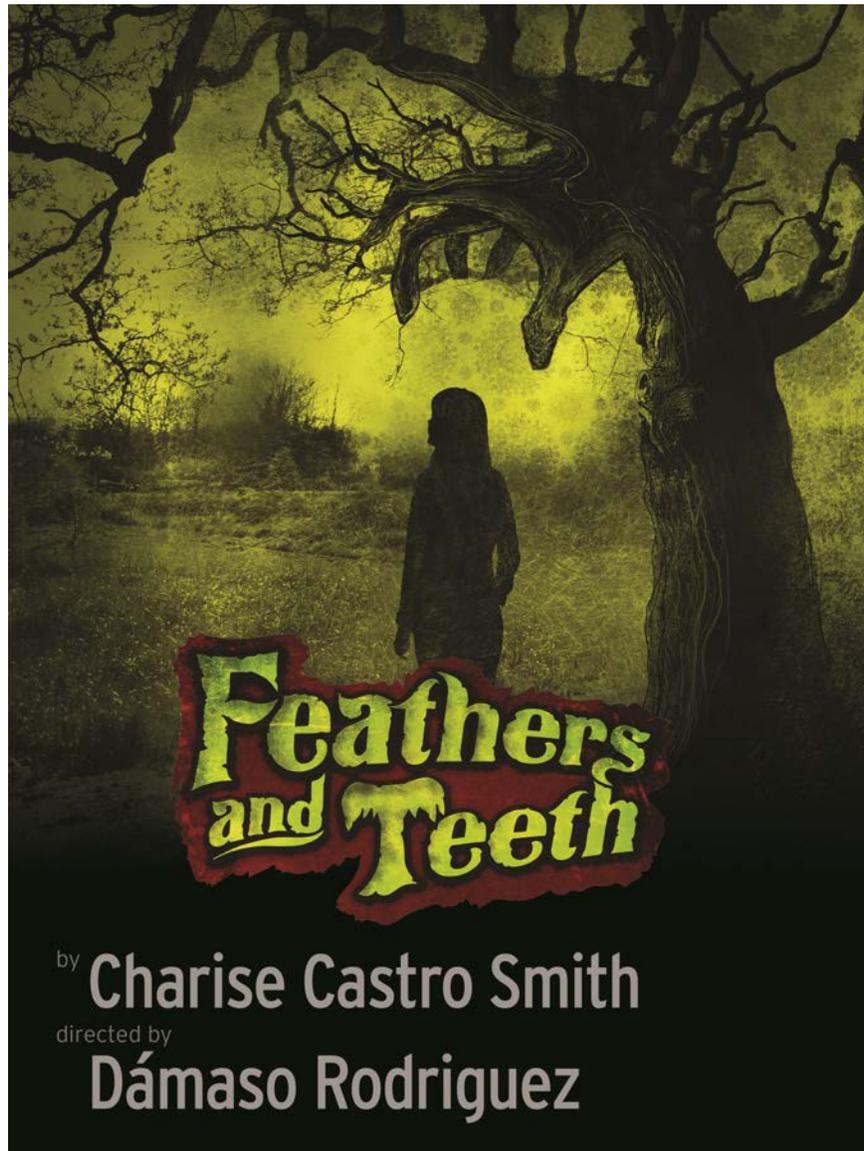


ARTISTS REPERTORY THEATRE



March 7—April 2

Time & Place: 1978, a factory town in the Midwest  
[80 minute runtime with no intermission]

# Study Guide

Spoilers ahead!

Study guide prepared by Maddie Odegaard, Marketing & PR Department Intern

# Cast

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Carol ... Sara Hennessey +  
Chris ... Agatha Day Olson  
Arthur ... Darius Pierce +  
Hugo Schmidt ... Dámaso J. Rodríguez



# Creative Team

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Director ..... Dámaso Rodríguez\*  
Scenic Designer ..... Megan Wilkerson #^  
Costume Designer ..... Sarah Gahagan  
Lighting Designer ..... Kristeen Willis Crosser #  
Composer/Sound Designer ..... Rodolfo Ortega ^  
Projections Designer ..... Andrés Alcalá  
Props Master ..... Emily Wilken  
Resident Fight Choreographer ..... Jonathan Cole \*  
Dramaturg ..... Luan Schooler  
Voice & Text Director ..... Mary McDonald-Lewis ^  
Assistant Scenic Designer ..... Trevor Sargent  
Assistant Director/Voice Artist ..... Nelda Reyes  
Assistant Costume Designer ..... Alex Pletcher  
Stage Manager ..... Carol Ann Wohlmut + ^  
Board Op ..... Alan Cline  
Sound Engineer ..... Dave Petersen  
Production Assistant ..... Charlie Capps  
Production Assistant ..... Will Bailey  
Costumer ..... Clare Hungate Hawk

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# ABOUT THE THEATRE

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*Artists Repertory Theatre's mission is to produce intimate, provocative theatre and provide a home for artists of varied backgrounds to take creative risks. Artists Rep is Portland's premiere mid-size regional theatre company and is led by Artistic Director Dámaso Rodríguez and Managing Director Sarah Horton. Founded in 1982, Artists Repertory Theatre is the longest-running professional theatre company in Portland. Artist Rep became the 72nd member of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) in May 2016 and is an Associate Member of the National New Play Network (NNPN).*

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## SHOW DESCRIPTION

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This stew of dark comedy, family drama and fantastical horror makes for a crackling good time. It's 1978 and young Chris is reeling from her mom's illness and recent death. Throw in dad's new girlfriend (mom's ex-nurse!), a few freaky little creatures and the boy next door, and things really get out of hand. Part monster tale and part revenge tragedy, the highly theatrical FEATHERS AND TEETH delivers a meaty exploration of grief and obsession.



### [ Critics Corner ]

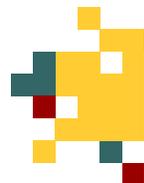
"An unusual and promising new black comedy by Charise Castro Smith that combines the grief of a bereaved teenager with a flesh-eating, lid-rattling, bone-chewing, monster-in-a-cooking-pot." - *Chicago Tribune*

"Charise Castro Smith's odd and arresting play...many funny, dark moments that parody the horror genre, with a psychological twist..." - Nancy Churnin, *Dallas News*

"FEATHERS AND TEETH already is that rare show in our socially earnest collection of nonprofit theaters that will make high school kids and college students feel like they're on a date rather than still doing their social-studies homework." - *Chicago Tribune*

"A ghoulish good time." - *Daily Herald*

"There is genuine sentiment amid the splatter." - *Daily Herald*





## CHARISE CASTRO SMITH

PLAYWRIGHT

CHARISE CASTRO SMITH is a playwright, television writer and actor from Miami, currently residing in Los Angeles. Playwriting credits include: FEATHERS AND TEETH (Goodman Theater/ Developed a Atlantic Theater Company), ESTRELLA CRUZ [THE JUNKYARD QUEEN] (Ars Nova/ Yale Cabaret/ Halycon Theatre), THE HUNCHBACK OF SEVILLE (Washington Ensemble Theater/ Trinity Repertory Theatre), WASHETERIA (Soho Rep) and BOOMCRACKLEFLY (Miracle Theater). She is currently under commission by South Coast Rep and Trinity Repertory Theatre, and is developing a new drama series at ABC. Select acting credits include ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA (Royal Shakespeare Company/ Public Theater), AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE (Baltimore Center Stage) and THE GOOD WIFE (CBS). Charise is the recipient of a Van Lier Fellowship at New Dramatists, and is an alumna of Ars Nova's Playgroup and New George's The Jam. MFA: Yale School of Drama, BA: Brown University.

# A Conversation with Charise Castro Smith

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By Neena Arndt, Goodman Theatre

In Charise Castro Smith's genre-blending play *FEATHERS AND TEETH*, Chris, a teenage girl lamenting the recent death of her mother, plots against her father's new girlfriend with an intricate revenge plan. Castro Smith recently sat down with the Goodman's Associate Dramaturg Neena Arndt to discuss her inspirations for the play, her dual career as an actor and playwright and why she enjoys mixing comedy with horror.

**Neena Arndt:** What was the catalyst for *FEATHERS AND TEETH*, ?

**Charise Castro Smith:** I trained as an actor and only started seriously writing about five years ago. As an actor, I was always cast as girlfriends or in sidekick roles. The juicy, cool roles I wanted to play were usually dudes. I would love to play Richard III, but chances are they're going to cast a dude. I started thinking about this with my last play, *THE HUNCHBACK OF SEVILLE*, in which the lead character is a hunchback lady. So for this play I thought, what about female psychopaths? Where are they on stage? I wanted to create an awesome, crazy role for a woman to play. I started with the character of Chris and originally thought the play was going to be about this young girl who was a psychopath. I read *The Psychopath Test: A Journey Through the Madness Industry* by Jon Ronson, which I really loved. The book explores whether this condition of non-empathy is a nature or nurture issue. But then my thought process moved away from that and I started watching '70s horror films and got really interested in how horror can actually be a way to understand the obsessions or fears of a culture. It also provides access to some really primal issues—this play is a horror play, yes, but it's also about a family grieving. As I was finishing the play and developing it in subsequent workshops, I became very interested in the idea of revenge plays.

**NA:** Did you go back and read Elizabethan plays?

**CCS:** Yeah! *HAMLET*! *HAMLET* is basically a play about this dude who is paralyzed by his father's death. I thought I could find some parallels there too, so there were a lot of different streams of inspiration that converged into *FEATHERS AND TEETH*, .

**NA:** How would you describe the genre of the play?

**CCS:** My friend put it in a way that I really love —s he called it a "thrilledy." She said, "It's a thriller comedy." And I was like, "Oh yeah? Okay, yeah, I'll take that." I love the juxtaposition of a genre with comedy. The play I mentioned earlier, *THE HUNCHBACK OF SEVILLE*, is historical, but it's funny. A play I'm currently working on is science fiction, but it's also funny.

***Continued on next page***

**NA:** Tell me about transitioning from working solely as an actor to also becoming a playwright. Do those two disciplines feed each other?

**CCS:** I went to the Yale School of Drama to get an MFA as an actor. They have an event called the Yale Cabaret where anyone can put on a play. So I wrote this play called ESTRELLA CRUZ (THE JUNKYARD QUEEN) Estrella Cruz (and they produced it. [Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright] Paula Vogel, who was the head of the playwriting program at the time, took me under her wing. When I graduated I was mostly an actor and did a couple of small TV jobs and some plays. At the same time I was writing and had started a fellowship at New Dramatists in New York, which made me embrace playwriting more as a career rather than just a side project. Then I got a job writing for a TV show. I've mostly been writing, so that's becoming the larger part of my life right now. But because I'm an actor too I'm really interested in hearing what actors have to say when I'm developing a new play and the script is still in progress. I am very much interested in what an actor's experience is of the inside of the play. They track their character's journey and there might be things that don't make sense to them—I want to hear those ideas.

**NA:** FEATHERS AND TEETH has a lot of elements of horror, like little evil creatures, but also involves a family that recently lost its matriarch. What are you looking to explore about grief and loss, or about what it means to lose a parent?

**CCS:** I'm extremely fortunate that both my parents are living. My grandma died seven years ago and I was very close with her. With grief, I think first you try to deny it and then you are angry. Then there are the stages of grief, right? Seven years later I've accepted it in a way, but I don't know if there's ever a way to really forget about it or fully let it go. You just kind of negotiate it. In the play, Chris, the daughter, deals with loss in a really specific way by seeking revenge and acting out; she's really angry. Arthur, her father, handles it in a different way. He's totally in denial and shuts the door to the past. Both of those methods of coping really come back to bite them—literally. I think there's this primal thing that we can manage in different ways, but ultimately we can't really control it. For this play I thought, what about female psychopaths? Where are they on stage? I wanted to create an awesome, crazy role for a woman to play.

**NA:** This play was developed over the past several years as part of the Goodman's New Stages Festival. How did that process work for you?

**CCS:** [Director] Henry Godinez and I have developed a way of talking about the play and I totally trust his vision. During that process I learned how not to tip my hand too much early on—how to preserve the suspense as long as possible. Sometimes people ask me what I want the audience to know about the play going into it. My response is "not much." The surprises are the most fun things about the play.

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# DÁMASO RODRÍGUEZ

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DIRECTOR



Dámaso is in his fourth year as Artistic Director of Artists Repertory Theatre. In 2001 he co-founded the Los Angeles-based Furious Theatre Company, where he served as Co-Artistic Director until 2012. From 2007-2010 he served as Associate Artistic Director of the Pasadena Playhouse. His directing credits include work at Artists Rep, Playwrights' Center, the Pasadena Playhouse, Intiman Theatre, South Coast Repertory, Laguna Playhouse, A Noise Within, The Theatre@Boston Court, Naked Angels and Furious Theatre. Rodríguez is a recipient of the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle Award, the Back Stage Garland Award, the NAACP Theatre Award and the Pasadena Arts Council's Gold Crown Award. His productions have been nominated for multiple LA Weekly Theatre Awards and LA Stage Alliance Ovation Awards. In 2012, Rodríguez was honored by the Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation as a Finalist for the Zelda Fichandler Award. He is a member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC).

Directing credits at Artists Rep include revivals of *THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH* by Thornton Wilder, *THE MIRACLE WORKER* by William Gibson and *THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD* by J.M. Synge, the World Premiere musical *CUBA LIBRE* featuring the music of three-time Grammy-nominated Tiempo Libre, the Portland premieres of Nick Jones' *TREVOR*, David Ives' adaptation of Pierre Corneille's *THE LIAR*, Nina Raine's *TRIBES*, *EXILES* by Carlos Lácámara, the U.S. premiere of Dawn King's *FOXFINDER*, and the West Coast premieres of Jeffrey Hatcher's *TEN CHIMNEYS* and Dan LeFranc's *THE BIG MEAL*. Credits at other theatres include productions by contemporary and classic playwrights including Craig Wright, Neil LaBute, Matt Pelfrey, Peter Sinn Nachtrieb, Richard Bean, Owen McCafferty, Alex Jones, William Shakespeare, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Noel Coward, Bernard Shaw, Clifford Odets and Lillian Hellman. [www.damaso-rodriguez.com/](http://www.damaso-rodriguez.com/)

## A Message from Artistic Director Dámaso Rodríguez

***“Something terrible’s happened, Hugo.”***



— Christine faces her new reality in Charise Castro Smith’s FEATHERS AND TEETH.

Welcome to Artists Rep and to the Portland Premiere of Charise Castro Smith’s horror genre-inspired FEATHERS AND TEETH. Advisory: Be prepared for Castro Smith’s pitch dark comedy, heightened theatrical style and subversive intentions. On the surface, this play is a lot of fun, with its nostalgic 1970s setting and its outrageous blend of sitcom, fairytale and monster movie plot, but I invite you to look beneath this fun façade. FEATHERS AND TEETH has more in common with HAMLET (and comparable dramatic ambitions) than *The Brady Bunch*.

Christine (aka “Chris”), the 13-year old girl at the center of our story, is dealing with the profound grief of losing her beloved mother while facing the betrayal of her father. Chris’ world is spinning out of control and things seem only to be getting worse. For Chris, she is living a nightmare scenario — almost literally “the worst thing that could happen.” That which seemed impossible or absurd, has become day-to-day reality ... I’ll leave the allusions to you.

And so FEATHERS AND TEETH takes the form of a horror story, not for the purpose of campy comedy, but because the genre fills a need to overcome our collective fear of horrors known and unknown, the dreadful and the terrible.

Now, enough of this seriousness! I invite to you laugh, gasp and squirm in your seat while you enjoy the wild ride this playwright, cast and design team have created for you today. Until next time,

Dámaso

# Full Synopsis

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## WARNING: SPOILERS AHEAD

Lit cigarette in the air, Carol sits in the kitchen thumbing through a magazine, with a pot roast in the oven. Christine, a sullen 13-year-old, arrives home finds her father's new girlfriend in the kitchen and ignores her attempts at conversation. Chris stomps off to her room, the pot roast burns, Carol resorts to a Hamburger Helper dinner but as she begins preparation, we see pop some raw meat into her mouth and enjoy it.

Enter Chris' father, the 40-year-old Arthur, his hands dripping with blood. He ran over something as he was pulling into the driveway. Arthur grabs a pot from the kitchen, puts the unknown creature in it and brings it inside. They don't know what it is. It has gruesome teeth...and feathers. Is it dead or not? Arthur tries to wash the blood off of his hands, but it is very sticky and, strangely, doesn't come off. Chris has been watching the curious scene and makes herself known by abruptly stabbing the creature several times with a large carving knife. It's likely dead now. Arthur and Carol are in shock. Chris thinks nothing of it. Carol buries the pot with the dead creatures in the backyard that night.

Over Chinese takeout, the trio have a manipulative conversation about the pot and the creatures, but it is also about their relationships. Chris believes her father is forgetting about, and too easily replacing, her mother, Ellie, who died two months ago. Arthur is annoyed by Chris' bad attitude toward Carol. Later that night, Chris comes downstairs, puts on her father's jacket as a comfort and lights a candle. She remembers her mother and pleads with her for a sign, then reaches into her father's pocket and finds her mother's favorite necklace.

The next morning, Carol, a nurse, enters the kitchen and sees the pot (and creature) she'd buried the night before has appeared on the kitchen table. She is horrified and a concerned Arthur comes in to help. Arthur confronts Chris and blames her, but she denies it. Instead, Chris blames Carol. Arthur buries the pot, and the creature again.

After school, Chris comes home, digs up the pot and creature again and hides it under the kitchen table. She reads an apology note from Carol, but doesn't buy it. She lights a candle and listens to a recording of her and her mother singing. She remembers how her mother fell ill one night and comes to the conclusion that perhaps Carol had something to do with her mother's death. Bizarre noises start coming from the pot. She realizes that not are the contents not dead, but there also more than one creature inside now.

Next comes Hugo, an 11-year-old German boy who lives next door who stops in to say hello. He also hears the noises coming from the pot. They soon realize the creatures do not like daylight and guess that they are babies of the creature of the night before. What are they eating? Likely their dead mother...for now. They feed them by throwing raw meat in the pot for them to eat. They hear Carol coming home and Chris sends the pot with Hugo to hide.

Carol arrives, asks Chris about who'd dashed out the back door, seeing the matches on the table, thinks that Chris and her friend were smoking cigarettes. Carol is surprised, but offers to smoke with Chris. Chris and Carol have an actual conversation, but it is mostly Carol who does the talking. Chris wants to know why her mother had to die of cancer and indirectly accuses Carol of killing her mother. Chris puts out the cigarette on her own arm, but it doesn't phase her. Something in Carol changes... did her eyes just go black?

At dinner, Arthur tells Chris that he and Carol are getting married tomorrow. Chris tells him that he cannot marry Carol, that Carol killed Ellie. Arthur refutes the accusations and is mad at Chris. Carol decides she does not deserve this sort of treatment and threatens to leave. Chris begins to lose it and Arthur reacts by shoving her to the floor. Chris grabs a knife and threatens Carol. Arthur thwarts the violence and Carol claims she is pregnant. She tells Arthur he must choose between her or his daughter.

Arthur and Carol go for a drive and when he comes back, he will be taking Chris to her grandparents' house or the hospital. Hugo reveals to Chris that he is still there. They feed the creatures more meat. Chris confesses that her plan is to kill Carol and feed her body to the creatures. She even thinks her mother sent her the creatures for that purpose. Chris entreats Hugo to help.

Hugo hides and Chris runs up to her room as Arthur and Carol arrive back from their drive. While they talk, strange noises are heard throughout the house. Arthur investigates the crawl-space and finds the creatures, they seem to be worked into a frenzy. The sound of them eating (Arthur) engulfs the house.

Hugo emerges, using two cans of Raid as a weapon and sprays Carol in the face. She passes out. They duct tape Carol to a chair. Carol regains consciousness and pleads with Hugo not to let Chris kill her. Hugo decides to call the police as Carol loses consciousness again. Chris smashes the phone. Hugo makes a run for the door, but Chris locks him in the pantry. We hear an attack from behind the closet door and the disgusting eating noises of the creatures.

A little while later, Carol awakes, finds that she is still restrained, and that Chris, who is wearing a gas mask, has turned on the gas for the oven. Carol pleads with Chris to release her. She begins to tell Chris stories that Ellie had told her on her deathbed, and tells Chris she will take care of her and keep her safe. In that moment, something in Chris shifts and she considers letting Carol go and turns off the gas. Carol assures the young girl and Chris rests her head on Carol's lap. In a quick move, Carol chokes Chris to death. Carol frees herself, rubs her belly and we hear the sounds of the little creatures in the pot. She turns off the lights to the kitchen and exits.

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# HORROR STORIES

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By Luan Schooler, Director of New Play Development & Dramaturgy

Horror, as a genre, is often dismissed as trashy material, appealing only to teenagers and those seeking gratuitous titillation. But in reality, it has a long and illustrious history in folklore, literature, film and the visual arts. Distinguished by its purposeful creation of fear, dread and prickling uneasiness, the style of horror can be mercurial and blend into science fiction and fantasy. Some horror relies on lurking monstrosities, some on psychopathic humans, and some on an unsettling presence of the uncanny.

As early as the Sumerian civilization, tales of vampire-like creatures emerge, and stories of witches and strange spirits are found in nearly all cultures. Homer's Odysseus barely escapes from the witch Circe's siren song and the Cyclops. During the Inquisition, an obsession with witchcraft emerged and the Malleus Maleficarum served as the horror-drenched handbook for witch hunts.

In the late 18th Century, Horace Walpole's novel Castle of Otranto combined medieval ideas of the supernatural with elements of realism, creating an entirely new style that became wildly popular: Gothic Horror. In America a few years later, Washington Irving's The Legend of Sleepy Hollow and Rip Van Winkle gave horror a distinctly regional flavor that some of Nathaniel Hawthorne's short stories also carry. Modern novelists like Stephen King, Anne Rice, Clive Barker, Peter Straub and Ray Bradbury have popularized fear for a contemporary audience.

Although horror literature is often derided as pulp, over the years the genre has inspired many literary masterpieces: Frankenstein, Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde, Dracula, A Christmas Carol, The Picture of Dorian Gray, Turn of the Screw, The Fall of the House of Usher – all are extraordinary examples of literary craft, using mood, suspense, style and language to raise the hairs on readers' necks.

***Cont. on next page***

***"A glimpse into the world proves that  
horror is nothing other than reality."  
— Alfred Hitchcock***

Playwrights have also used horror to propel their plots. During the Jacobean and Elizabethan eras, Thomas Kyd launched an era of gruesome works with *The Spanish Tragedy*; a few years later Shakespeare relied on supernatural events to drive *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Titus Andronicus*. The Parisian Théâtre du Grand-Guignol poured blood-drenched revenge tales over its audiences from 1897 to 1962. Stephen Sondheim's Tony Award-winning *Sweeney Todd* was drawn from a character created in an 1846 penny dreadful, *A String of Pearls*. And of course, *The Rocky Horror Show* was a wildly popular stage hit in London and on Broadway before being turned into a film in 1975. Martin McDonagh's *The Pillowman* and Conor McPherson's *The Weir* are two contemporary examples of plays that rely on dread and eeriness.

In the visual arts, the works of Hieronymus Bosch, Francisco de Goya and El Greco all include elements of horror, as do the surrealist works of Salvador Dalí and Max Ernst.

Film and television, of course, are full of examples of popular horror – as well as classic masterpieces. The German Expressionist films, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Nosferatu*, introduced terror into the cinema, followed in a long line of films that include *The Cat People*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Psycho*, *The Birds*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *The Exorcist*, *The Omen*, *The Shining* and many others.

Throughout history, humans have explored the unknown by investigating tales of the weird, the uncanny, the shadowy, creeping dangers that surround us. Perhaps by facing our fears we learn something about ourselves, or perhaps the experiences provide catharsis and a release of pent up emotions, or perhaps we are simply attracted to the intensity of the emotions created.

For whatever reason, horror has always been around, lurking and waiting in the dark.



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ◆ Chris deals with grief in an exceptionally extreme way. Have you dealt with grief? Would you have described your grief as a “creature?” What helped you process those emotions?
- ◆ Adding a new member to a family can be challenging. How have you handled someone new coming into your family?
- ◆ What do you predict will occur after the conclusion of the play?
- ◆ What are your usual preconceptions about seeing a play? Did FEATHERS AND TEETH deviate from your expectations?

