

Despite the evident problems with treating people like mathematical formulas, though, Auburn shows it to be a common habit. Even Catherine's brilliant and loving father Robert falls into the trap, calling his mind "the machinery." It is easy, Auburn suggests, to try to impose mathematical certainty and order on one's much more complex human relationships. In showing the audience this problem, Auburn may be helping them to avoid it.

Reviews

"A wonderful drama that elegantly describes the world of mathematics and suggests how ill the mathematical notion of the truth is for life. Its impossible to divine the future and its not easier to derive it, we're only as certain as our next best guess."

-- Daniel Rockmore, *Chronicle of Higher Education*

"An exciting new drama. This play by David Auburn combines elements of mystery and surprise with old-fashioned story telling to provide a compelling evening of theatre."

-- David Kaufman, *Daily News*

This guide was researched by

The *Proof* Task Force:

Vivien Zelazny, Daniel Steeves, Sarah Richard,
Leslie MacLean and Patti MacMullin

And assembled and edited by:

Michael MacKinnon, Kristi Peterson and Chantal Dugas

St. Thomas University English 2223:

From the Page to the Stage

visit our Web site, at:

<http://people.stu.ca/~hunt/22230304/proof/mainpage.htm>

David Auburn's



A playgoer's guide

Proof, n. 1. The evidence or argument that compels the mind to accept an assertion as true.
2. a. The validation of a proposition by application of specified rules, as of induction or deduction, to assumptions, axioms and sequentially derived conclusions.
b. A statement or argument used in such a validation.
(Dictionary.com)

Proof premiered at the Manhattan Theatre Club May 23, 2000, and finally opened on Broadway with the Walter Kerr Theatre on October 24th. It was widely accepted and continued to win many prestigious awards. Along with Tony Awards for best play and best actress (May Louise Parker), it also won Daniel Sullivan an award for Best Director. These three highly respected categories resulted in *Proof* becoming a "must-see" drama.

In 2001, *Proof*'s continuing success led to the Pulitzer Prize for Best Drama. Other awards that were received are a Guggenheim Foundation grant, the Helen Merrill Playwright Award, and the Joseph Kesselring Prize for Drama.

Characters

Catherine: Catherine is brilliant young mathematician who is mourning the death of her father, Robert, another brilliant mathematician. She does not know how to handle the death and his long descent into insanity. She is unsure as to whether or not she has inherited her father's mental illness as well as his genius.

Harold: Harold (Hal) Dobbs, a student of Robert's, has volunteered to go through the journals of his late teacher. Hal is researching the last work of Robert to see if Robert had any new discoveries or had been working on any problems that could be useful to the mathematics department and be could be published. Hal and Catherine become romantically involved, after which she gives Hal a mathematical "proof" that Hal assumes is Robert's work.

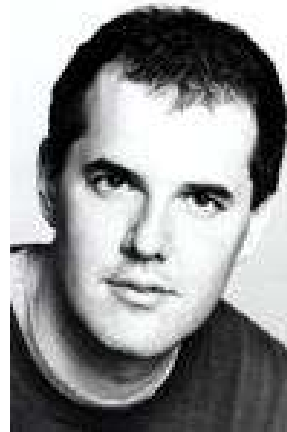
Claire: Claire, Catherine's sister from New York, has returned for the funeral and fears for her sister's sanity. She tries to convince Catherine to move to New York with her.

Robert: Robert is the father of Catherine and Claire. He was a brilliant mathematician and teacher. His mental "machinery," as he called it, near the end of his life was breaking down. Instead of putting Robert into an institution, Catherine cared for him in their home. For the last few years of Robert's life, though not completely sane, he still wrote in his notebooks.

The Plot: Catherine claims that she is in fact the author of the "proof" and her sister, Claire, questions whether or not it is Catherine's insanity that is driving her to make this claim. Because Hal also questions Catherine's claim that the proof is hers, she decides to move to New York with Claire. On the eve of the expected departure Hal arrives with proof that the "proof" was indeed written by Catherine and he asks her to stay in Chicago – which she does.

The author

Born in Chicago, David Auburn grew up between Columbus, Ohio and Arkansas. As a child, theatre was an extracurricular activity for him. He returned to Chicago as a university student, where he began working with a group that performed improvisation and sketch comedy.



He was chosen to be a part of Stephen Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment writing fellowship. His acceptance into this fellowship set him out on a new path of learning how to write movies. After the fellowship ended, he decided he would rather be a playwright in New York, where he joined the playwriting program at Julliard.

In 1997, his first play, *Skyscraper*, opened off Broadway. The run was short, but Manhattan Theatre Company saw it and told him to send them his next script. That script was *Proof*, which opened with Mary Louise Parker in May of 2000. In 2001, *Proof* was the recipient of the Tony Award for Best Play.

Two Proofs

Mark S. P. Turvin, reviewing a production of *Proof* for the script's publishers, calls the title of this work a "triple-entendre." It would be suffice to say that this triple-entendre constitutes the essence of theme and argument in Auburn's text. Throughout the work, the audience, as well as the characters, are forced over and over to question what and whom they should believe, what forms of information are worthy of trust -- in short, what constitutes a valid proof of truth? Throughout the play, two types of "proof," namely mathematical or scientific proof, and the proof, if any, which is created by trusting another person, are contrasted. The mathematical proof which is central to the plot brings these two into sharp relief.