

## Advance Praise for Articulation

“Cesi’s plays are adventures in wordscapes that show us the ways we are and the ways we can be. Characters not often seen on screen, stage or page populate her scenes in situations that make these short plays eminently readable and relatable while being unapologetically unique. Lovers of theater and fiction alike will find much to cherish in this collection. Bravo!”

—Celeste Rita Baker, Author of *Back, Belly and Side*

“Cesi Davidson’s delightful and wise, *Articulation: Short Plays to Nourish Mind and Soul* illuminates the human condition. Her method: create non human beings ranging from those plucked from nursery rhymes to celestial beings to fruits, vegetables and animals and put them in distinctly human situations like Bo Peep losing her sheep because her husband sold them to bet on horses. What makes these plays particularly satisfying is Davidson’s ability to weave tough-minded outcomes like lost sheep and street violence with sympathetic characters and sly humor.”

—Daniel Judah Sklar, DJS, playwright, author of *Playmaking: Children Writing & Performing Their Own Plays*—Distinguished Book Award from The American Alliance for Theater & Education.

“In this collection, Cesi Davidson presents work that draws fantasy, fairy tale and fun to grapple with many human situations. A bird or a bunny or a banana may have dialogue in her stories as frequently as human characters. You never can predict the form of her storytelling, but you will always be moved.”

—Martha Wade Steketee, Research, Criticism,  
Dramaturgy, [www.urbanexcavations.com](http://www.urbanexcavations.com)

“Cesi Davidson’s short plays are swift but indelible, both light and enlightening, their profound human truths conveyed with power and originality. Each piece assembles an intriguing, often whimsical or fantastic cast of characters (a young man and his dream mothers, two guardians standing watch on a pregnant woman’s belly, a ripening banana and its peel...) and gives them unbridled voice. The result is a series of interactions that embody fresh takes on the conundrums, the alienations and vulnerabilities—including those of race and class and gender and sexuality—of contemporary life. We’re awakened to our own ability to express our experiences, to feel our pain and that of others, to persevere.”

—John Gould, Author of the Giller Prize shortlisted *Kilter: 55 Fictions*

“Intricate...at times humorous, at turns complex and serious. These are the short plays of an incredibly deft playwright. Cesi Davidson is a keen observer of human behavior and social issues juxtaposing fairy tales with twenty first century life, dreams weaving in and through time as well as social unrest and harmony. Some conjure up a painful history imbued with deep compassion and a questioning by the viewer of ‘where do we go from here?’ A few of them remind me of the great Harold Pinter and others in their playful absurdity bring to mind Ionesco. All are packed with a twist—a zag where you might expect a zig. Good art inspires personal and collective introspection and deep thought as well as joy. These plays certainly deliver.”

—Whitney Hamilton, Playwright/Screenwriter/novelist  
[Bjornquistfilms.com](http://Bjornquistfilms.com)

“SEE CESI DANCE...  
And the African joy of old  
Lights the room  
Open this Book  
And you might find yourself  
In a world where radish have souls  
AND TALK  
OR In a realm where  
Purity percentage of truth in Love  
Is the currency  
For longevity in Life  
Where writers fly...Daily  
And actors become borderless  
OPEN THIS BOOK  
AND ride the WORDWAVES  
OF ‘The Lorraine Hansberry’ of our time!”

—Kene Holliday, Actor...Director...Writer: Private  
Investigator, Tyler Hudson... *MATLOCK*...TV  
Jazz Soprano Saxophonist Sydney Bechet...  
*THE JOSEPHINE BAKER STORY*... FILM  
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# Conversation Pieces



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A Novella by Cynthia Ward



## About the Aqueduct Press Conversation Pieces Series

The feminist engaged with sf is passionately interested in challenging the way things are, passionately determined to understand how everything works. It is my constant sense of our feminist-sf present as a grand conversation that enables me to trace its existence into the past and from there see its trajectory extending into our future. A genealogy for feminist sf would not constitute a chart depicting direct lineages but would offer us an ever-shifting, fluid mosaic, the individual tiles of which we will probably only ever partially access. What could be more in the spirit of feminist sf than to conceptualize a genealogy that explicitly manifests our own communities across not only space but also time?

Aqueduct's small paperback series, *Conversation Pieces*, aims to both document and facilitate the "grand conversation." The *Conversation Pieces* series presents a wide variety of texts, including short fiction (which may not always be sf and may not necessarily even be feminist), essays, speeches, manifestoes, poetry, interviews, correspondence, and group discussions. Many of the texts are reprinted material, but some are new. The grand conversation reaches at least as far back as Mary Shelley and extends, in our speculations and visions, into the continually created future. In Jonathan Goldberg's words, "To look forward to the history that will be, one must look at and retell the history that has been told." And that is what *Conversation Pieces* is all about.

L. Timmel Duchamp

Jonathan Goldberg, "The History That Will Be" in Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero, eds., *Premodern Sexualities* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996)



Conversation Pieces  
Volume 71

ARTICULATION  
Short Plays to Nourish  
the Mind & Soul

by  
Cesi Davidson





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## Acknowledgments

My sister Cheryl told me I was funny. When it became apparent that I should write plays, I asked my cousin Mickey, a dancer and choreographer, for advice about next steps. She guided me to Woody King Jr.'s New Federal Theatre. Later, when I ventured uptown in New York City, I connected with Eddie Pomerantz and the Harlem Dramatic Writers. I valued the opportunities to write and share. My sister friend Celeste held my hand as I walked the sidewalks of Harlem looking for a nest to present my work. In the by and by, Celeste and her husband Richard Baker created a Harlem Renaissance Salon in their living room where actors read my plays. In the milieu of Richard's visual art, and with snacks and beverages, neighbors, friends, and fans found delight in listening to my stories. My sidewalk strolling for a more permanent home ended at the George Bruce Library. This New York Public Library, under the visionary leadership of Junelle Carter Bowman, recognized and embraced the importance of building a free public program for culturally responsive theatre in a neighborhood environment. Home Sweet Soulful Home. I made this enduring pledge to the audience:

You're invited after work, before dinner, after dinner, before the gym, after homework with the kids, on the way home, as you get off the bus, a few extra subway stops, or a short cab ride, for an hour of theatre. The price of admission is only your authentic self. You'll hear plays that will excite you, delight you, surprise you, heal you, soothe you, validate you, help you question, tickle your funny bone, scream with you, and perhaps kiss you goodnight. Leave your drama and enjoy our drama.

Many directors, actors, musicians, and dancers released their sweat birthing my plays. Here they are:

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The audience makes theatre possible. My dear audiences brought warmth, acceptance, and love. Thank you for the love. I love you back.

Cesi Davidson, September 2019

*For all I am and hope to become, I'm indebted to my parents  
Charles and Florence Davidson.*



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# FOREWORD

by Zachary Sklar

Oscar-nominated screenwriter for JFK  
(with Oliver Stone)

Prolific and visionary, Cesi Davidson is a unique artist. In less than a decade, she has written and produced more than two hundred Short Plays to Nourish the Mind and Soul. Some of Cesi's plays have been performed in Off Off Broadway theaters. As of 2019, her plays are in the fifth season of free dramatic readings at public libraries in New York City's Harlem community. Wildly imaginative, funny, disturbing, and touching, these plays have inspired an ongoing dialogue with Harlem residents about personal, political, and spiritual issues affecting individual lives and the collective life of the community. Cesi's work, though still evolving, has already carved out an important niche and made a major contribution to Harlem's legendary cultural tradition.

I first met Cesi seven years ago when she joined the Harlem Dramatic Writing Workshop, founded more than two decades ago by Edward Pomerantz and the Writers Guild East to offer free classes to adult Harlem writers. I was leading the screenwriting section, and Cesi wanted to adapt one of her plays into a movie. Quiet,

intelligent, and sensitive, Cesi had a sharp ear for dialogue and a fresh imagination bursting with ideas.

Cesi found a medium for her work in the Short Playwriting section led by Eddie Pomerantz. In the workshop's Playmaking section, led by Daniel Sklar, she further developed her own singular voice.

The outpouring of imaginative energy that followed was truly astonishing. With a full-time job and family responsibilities, Cesi awakened every day at 3 a.m. to write for several hours creating plays at a rapid pace. Cesi's work is not only prolific, but also wide-ranging in scope. And her remarkable productivity shows no signs of slowing down.

In these fanciful, often hilarious plays you will discover a fantastic variety of characters—familiar nursery-rhyme figures who work in a ninety-nine-cent store and bet on horses, bananas and radishes who discuss their ill-fated destinies, birds who sing songs of unrequited love, time travelers who skip about from the Caribbean present-day to slavery-era Virginia, bunnies who meet in support groups.

Many of the plays will have you laughing out loud. But they also explore serious issues and wrenching troubles. Little Bo Peep finds her marriage destroyed by the gambling habits of Big Man Blue. A bunny mother struggles to accept her gender-fluid son/daughter. A young man dreams of different incarnations of his drug-addicted mother, hoping for maternal love to conquer his pain. A traumatized African-American woman seeks to wash away the bloody stains of a racially motivated violent assault.

Cesi Davidson's plays are intended as metaphors to stir our emotions and provoke our thoughts. For those who haven't had the pleasure of seeing the plays in person, now this book provides a sampling of the exciting experience audiences have enjoyed and hopefully will continue to enjoy for years to come. Savor these plays. They offer true nourishment for the mind and soul.



## INTRODUCTION

I entered the world of dramatic writing unexpectedly but universe aligned. My career has centered around one focus: speech and language pathology; facilitating human development and the ability of individuals to communicate. Listen. Speak. Read. Write. I've been privileged to experience the vastness of individual triumphs and suffering. In the process, I've discovered that conversation is critical. It supports our socialization and uplifts us into our humanity. How fortuitous that my first venture into an anthology of my own writing should be published in a series entitled Conversation Pieces. I'm forever grateful to Aqueduct Press for including my work in their series.

Real life conversation requires a speaker and a listener. In the midst of our human struggles, we often forget that communication is a shared activity, the goal of which is to exchange meaning. Human beings, unlike computer programs, are physically unable to articulate exactly the same way every time. We are simply perfectly imperfect. That's okay. Rapid technology-mediated encounters, screen-to-screen interactions, and abbreviated texting seldom capture full intentions, emotionality, and truth.

A play lovingly forces us to live the moments of dialogue between characters. It gently forces perspective taking. We can live in worlds real and imaged. The events in the worlds advance through words triggering actions

and actions triggering words. Reading and imagining the life of the play is pure freedom. The drama can become a rehearsal for life.

My dear reader, my wish is that you'll read these plays in whatever way suits your mood and fancy. Each play represents an individual exploration of a story. Enjoy. And when you're finished, I'll have more for you. I offer you this taste.

Cesi

September 2019



# NURSERY RHYMES IN THE NINETY-NINE II

## Sweetable Cheatable

### Characters

Little Bo Peep: Shepherder, storekeeper, married to Big Man Blue

Big Man Blue: Freelance horn player, gambler, married to Little Bo Peep

### Setting

Rhyme Town. A “parallel world” inside the Village of Harlem. Interior of Little Bo Peep and Big Man Blue’s home. A ninety-nine cent store is on the ground level. Little Bo Peep is doing various storekeeping tasks including arranging merchandise, and counting money in the cash register. She frequently looks out of the windows.

(Lights Rise)

(Enter Big Man Blue carrying a newspaper.)

LITTLE BO PEEP: Where’ve you been Blue?

BIG MAN BLUE: Over on Sugar Hill.

LITTLE BO PEEP: With whom?

BIG MAN BLUE: Jack.

LITTLE BO PEEP: It's close to sundown. What were you and Jack doing together on Sugar Hill at this hour?

BIG MAN BLUE: Peep! You're asking me about my business. I don't like you asking me about my business.

LITTLE BO PEEP: You were supposed to help me with the inventory in the store. I have to go watch the kids for the Old Woman in the Shoe later. I can't finish the inventory today by myself.

BIG MAN BLUE: Finish it tomorrow.

LITTLE BO PEEP: It needs to get finished today. I have to place orders.

BIG MAN BLUE: I got caught up with things.

LITTLE BO PEEP: You're always "caught up."

BIG MAN BLUE: (Making notes on his newspaper.)  
The inventory doesn't matter.

LITTLE BO PEEP: What did you say?

BIG MAN BLUE: I'll help you in a few minutes.

LITTLE BO PEEP: Why was Jack with you?

(Pause)

He should have been helping Jill fetch some water.

BIG MAN BLUE: (Reading the paper)

*Hey diddle the cat and the fiddle, the cow jumped over the moon...*

LITTLE BO PEEP: Blue?

BIG MAN BLUE: They have their own marriage, and what they do is between them. Always in somebody's business Peep.

LITTLE BO PEEP: Jill's my friend.

BIG MAN BLUE: And Jack's my friend. I don't tell him how to handle his wife, and he doesn't tell me how to handle mine.

LITTLE BO PEEP: Jill has arthritis now. It's too painful for her to fetch water by herself and carry pails up and down Sugar Hill. Jack needs to help her.

BIG MAN BLUE: And you need to stay out of it.

LITTLE BO PEEP: Does Jill know her new pails came in?

BIG MAN BLUE: I didn't see her.

LITTLE BO BEEP: I hope she's okay.

(Looking out of the windows more intensely)

I ordered some special pails for her. They're made for lefties out of this new plastic material...very light weight. It'll take some stress off her shoulders and her back. The colors are so pretty...bright pastels. I thought the colors would help her feel happy.

BIG MAN BLUE: What did you make for my dinner?

LITTLE BO PEEP: Have you seen the sheep?

BIG MAN BLUE: (Drawing the curtains on the windows)  
No.

LITTLE BO PEEP: Leave the curtains open. There's still some daylight. And I want to keep an eye out for the sheep...they should have been home from the meadow by now.

BIG MAN BLUE: I don't want Peeping Tom looking through the windows.

LITTLE BO PEEP: (Opening the curtains again)  
Tom is harmless. He's just curious. Besides, there's nothing going on in here worth looking at.  
(Exit to kitchen.)

BIG MAN BLUE: (On the phone)  
Little Pig? Yeah... It's Big Man Blue. I want you to put one thousand Rhyme Town bit coins on All the King's Horses and All the King's Men to win. Yeah, I'm good for it...came into some cash... Besides, I'll be picking up cash from you later after the race. Jack tipped me. This is gonna pay off big.  
(Enter Little Bo Peep.)

LITTLE BO PEEP: The pudding and pie is almost ready.

BIG MAN BLUE: I'm sick of eating pudding and pie.

LITTLE BO PEEP: Georgie Porgie is stopping by.

BIG MAN BLUE: I don't want him over here anymore.

LITTLE BO PEEP: He's bringing over some  
photographs to show me from his trip with Puss 'n  
Boots.

BIG MAN BLUE: I said, "No."

LITTLE BO PEEP: He's just a friend, Blue. Can't I  
have any friends over, Blue?

BIG MAN BLUE: Sure. Little Miss Muffet... Invite  
Jill over...since you're so concerned about her. I'm  
eating out...I'll pick up a sandwich with Old King  
Cole at the castle.

LITTLE BO PEEP: Is that really where you're going?  
Let's not pretend, Blue. You were on the phone  
with one of the pigs, weren't you?

BIG MAN BLUE: (Arranging pails on the shelves)  
I'll help with some inventory before I leave.  
These are the pails for Jill? You can't charge ninety-  
nine cents for these. You need to mark up the prices.

LITTLE BO PEEP: This is a ninety-nine cents store.  
Everything needs to cost ninety-nine cents.

BIG MAN BLUE: And up. The sign on the store needs  
to say, "And Up." We keep around a few things  
that cost ninety-nine cents, but we make our money  
on the big-ticket items...up to ninety-nine dollars.

LITTLE BO PEEP: We never got into this business to  
cheat other nursery rhyme characters.

BIG MAN BLUE: Making money is not cheating.

LITTLE BO PEEP: Nursery rhyme characters our age have fixed incomes. They can't afford to pay outrageous prices for basic necessities.

BIG MAN BLUE: Which reminds me. Tell your friend Little Miss Muffet she needs to pay up her tab for the curds and whey.

LITTLE BO PEEP: She's having a hard time right now. Just diagnosed with diabetes.

BIG MAN BLUE: Not our problem. If she weren't sitting on her tuffet all day getting fat, maybe she wouldn't be sick.

LITTLE BO PEEP: (Looking out of the windows as she sings)

*Brooklyn Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down  
Brooklyn Bridge is falling down, my fair lady.*

*Take the keys and lock them up, lock them up, lock them up  
Take the keys and lock them up. My fair lady.*

BIG MAN BLUE: You haven't sung that song in a long time.

LITTLE BO PEEP: I haven't felt this way in a long time, or maybe I haven't wanted to admit it. Feeling hopeless...locked up. Let's not pretend.

BIG MAN BLUE: We're nursery rhyme characters... it's all about pretending.

LITTLE BO PEEP: You were on the phone with one of the three little pigs, weren't you?

BIG MAN BLUE: Why are you asking if you know?

LITTLE BO PEEP: Which one was it?

(Pause)

Which one?

BIG MAN BLUE: The one with the straw house.

LITTLE BO PEEP: The Big Bad Wolf is gonna to huff and puff and blow his house down and all of our money will be flying to every corner of Rhyme Town.

BIG MAN BLUE: You're exaggerating. Not gonna happen.

LITTLE BO PEEP: He's a bad pig. He was in the forest with the Big Bad Wolf when that poor little girl, Little Red Riding Hood was abducted on her way to grandma's house. All they ever found was a basket full of goodies. It's just a matter of time before the Big Bad Wolf...

BIG MAN BLUE: I don't owe you an explanation Peep.

LITTLE BO PEEP: I'm your wife. Do you owe me anything Blue?

BIG MAN BLUE: This time, the tip is gonna pay off. We're gonna win big. Jack got a new source.

LITTLE BO PEEP: (Looking out of the window)  
The sun's down. The sheep aren't back. You're not worried?

(Pause)

How did you get the money to give to the pig?

(Pause)

You're not going to the castle...you're going to the

Hey Diddle Race Track. How did you get money  
for the bet?

BIG MAN BLUE: I sold the sheep. We didn't need  
them. You didn't need them. You retired from  
sheep herding. They were more mouths to feed,  
taking up space, eating all the grass in the meadow.

LITTLE BO PEEP: Get them back.

BIG MAN BLUE: It's done, Bo Peep.

LITTLE BO PEEP: Bring my sheep home.

BIG MAN BLUE: I sold them to the butcher. They're  
muttonchops by now.

LITTLE BO PEEP: My sheep...my poor sheep...  
slaughtered...you take every joy I have... When  
you lost your own joy...playing your horn...you  
started chipping away every part of my world...  
everything that made me happy.

(Big Man Blue gathers a few things and prepares to leave.)

BIG MAN BLUE: *On the field the shepherd boy*

*Calling for his sheep*

*Plays this tune upon his horn*

*Calling them to sleep*

*Loo, loo, loo, loo*

*Loo, loo, loo, loo, loo*

Bad ass jammin with that tune back in the day.

Blowing til sunrise...

LITTLE BO PEEP: It was your tune that called me. I  
fell in love with you first through your tune.  
Cool Blue.



BIG MAN BLUE: *Loo, loo, loo, loo*

LITTLE BO PEEP: You could get down.

BIG MAN BLUE: Then the gigs for horn players dried up in Rhyme Town.

LITTLE BO PEEP: You never needed a gig for an excuse to play your tunes.

BIG MAN BLUE: Humpty... When Humpty Dumpty fell off the wall and shattered into pieces something inside me shattered too, and I couldn't put myself together again. You could never understand what that means to be so shattered inside that you're lost from yourself.

LITTLE BO PEEP: I do. We're not good for each other, Blue.

(Pause)

I'll pack a few of your things that you'll need right away. I'll send them to the Grimm Brothers.

BIG MAN BLUE: The Grimm brothers are on the other side of the enchanted forest. No nursery rhyme characters there.

LITTLE BO PEEP: There needs to be some distance between us. Maybe you can find yourself again, living with fairy tales. I can't hold on to you anymore. Holding on to you means letting go of me. Send for the rest of your things when you get settled. Try the wicked witch. She may have a cottage to rent. You should take your horn. Maybe you'll find the soul to play tunes again.

BIG MAN BLUE: I'm not going anywhere. You need me.

LITTLE BO PEEP: I need, no, I want, a nursery rhyme man who loves and cares for me. You sold my sheep. That man isn't you anymore. I've been walking on the edge of fantasy and reality with you for a long time.

BIG MAN BLUE: This is my house. I'm not going anywhere.

LITTLE BO PEEP: It was always your home. It was never your house. Mother Goose made sure of that.

BIG MAN BLUE: Why are you bringing up your mother?

LITTLE BO PEEP: She put my name on the deed for the store and the house. Only my name. I own this place.

BIG MAN BLUE: She wouldn't do that.

LITTLE BO PEEP: She would, and she did. Mother Goose told me, even women who are happy in a marriage should have an exit strategy. It's kind of like insurance. No nursery rhyme woman should feel locked up with a key.

(Pause)

Shouldn't you be getting to the racetrack?

BIG MAN BLUE: Yeah, and then I'll be back. You can't make me go.

LITTLE BO PEEP: I have some other insurance.

BIG MAN BLUE: What?

LITTLE BO PEEP: Georgie Porgie.

(Lights Out)

End of Play

## About the Author

Cesi (Cecelia) Davidson holds a doctorate degree in Speech Language Hearing Sciences from the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York. She has provided therapeutic services for children with communication and learning challenges for over thirty years. Playwriting emerged after years of dialogue as a therapist, mother, sister, friend, companion, and periods of spiritual introspection. She reimaged her experiences in order to create compelling stories for the stage, giving voice to her witness of human suffering and triumphs. Since beginning to write in 2009, she has written hundreds of plays demonstrating a broad range, fearless creativity, and cultural responsiveness. Her writing includes humorous explorations of personified objects to horrific stories of incest. Cesi is a producing artist. She's founder and curator of Short Plays to Nourish the Mind & Soul, free public theatre in New York City. Cesi is one of eight siblings, and the mother of two outstanding young men, Hannibal and Rahakmah Bryan. She is in a devoted relationship with her partner Edward Feeney.