



## Mr. Universe & Other Plays

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From the acclaimed author of the novels *Dream Boy* and *Winter Birds* comes this quartet of plays, all already staged and all well received. Of the four pieces “The Borderland” is the most conventional, as married yuppies and a trailer trash couple square off on a stormy rural night in Georgia. Both this work and the title piece owe a singular debt to Tennessee Williams.

In “Mr. Universe” two New Orleans drag queens befriend a mute bodybuilder and a conflict between lust and tenderness builds. The author subverts time in “The Lizard of Tarsus” and “Math and Aftermath.” Set in a modern-day prison cell, “Tarsus” pits the apostle Paul as interrogator and Jesus as his suspect. Paul is relentless and his subject is evasive. It isn’t tremendously clear what the author intends, but the wordplay is dazzling throughout. Equally opaque in its sense of place and time is “Math” where porn film stars and producers gather on a Bikini Atoll beach on the eve of nuclear testing. A movie is shot and the characters, inexplicably blessed with hind and foresight, opine in ways both real and imaginary. It’s a fun, if perplexing, exercise. Both “Tarsus” and “Math” must surely benefit from the buttressing of a theater staging. “Mr. Universe” and “The Borderland” stand as an eloquent addendum to the author’s three fine novels. Kaye Gibbons, Reynolds Price, Craig Lucas and Romulus Linney provide erudite introductions.

PETER ROBERTSON (July / August 1998)

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