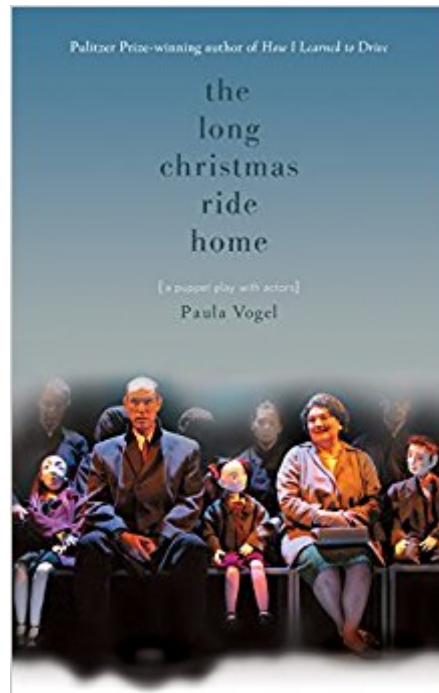




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# The Long Christmas Ride Home



## Synopsis

“Brilliant . . . even more ambitious than Vogel’s *How I Learned to Drive* . . . it covers more ground and is bolder in its storytelling. Vogel’s language is at its most poetic, eloquent and elegiac. In fact, its vivid imagery rivals the prose style of any great American short story writer. The play sounds like it might have been adapted from a beautiful, undiscovered novella.” •New Haven Register “One of the most absorbing evenings of theatre to come along in some time.” •Variety Past and present collide on a snowy Christmas Eve for a troubled family of five. Humorous and heart-wrenching, this beautifully written play proves that magic can be found in the simplest breaths of life. Combining the elements of No theatre and Bunraku with contemporary Western sensibilities, Vogel’s *Ride* is a mesmerizing homage to the works of Thornton Wilder, including *Our Town*. A moving and memorable study of the American family careening near the edge of oblivion. Paula Vogel’s plays include *The Baltimore Waltz*, *Mineola Twins*, *Hot*, *Throbbing*, *Desdemona*, and *Baby Makes Seven*, among others. Ms. Vogel will be the resident playwright during the Signature Theatre’s 2004-05 season dedicated to her works. She has taught at Brown University in the MFA playwriting program since 1985.

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## Customer Reviews

Everybody views holidays through their own prism. Paula Vogel, whose body of work substantially focuses on family trauma, sees Christmas through the prism of fights, resentments, estrangement, and sexual alienation. Nobody who's seenÃ   Â How I Learned to DriveÃ   Â will be surprised by the themes of this play. What will surprise them is the form. This play takes elements of Bunraku puppet plays and Japanese Noh theatre and folds them into the sort of Christmas pageant a local church would stage, short on technical know-how and long on love. But instead of a celebration of Baby Jesus, this play dissects the way harsh words thrown out flippantly can come back into a person's life years later. Unforgiving and unsentimental, though not entirely without hope, Vogel here presents us a Christmas where three children make decisions that will resonate through the rest of their lives. At an estimate, this play would probably run to about forty-five minutes in performance. But because of the special technical needs, the script runs a little longer than that might normally require. And because this play is so emotionally dense, reading it can be a downright brutal experience. I recommend breaking the reading into two or three segments, even though you could read the whole thing in ninety minutes or less. In her notes, Vogel recommends not producing this play during December. I recommend also not reading it during that time. But if you are a lover of theatre--not Broadway spectaculars, but the spontaneous, human-driven theatre that got many of us into the art form to start with--this play wrings out the full range of human emotion and rewards you with the catharsis Aristotle loved so much. A rich, difficult, but rewarding theatrical experience. Not for people weaned on the simplicity of TV, but if you are unafraid of the emotional possibilities of human performance, this play has a great deal to offer to audiences and producers alike.

I loved this! When I saw she was using puppets, I mistakenly assumed this play was going to be sweet and precious. WRONG! She really tackles some touch subjects in an original and engaging way. I understand the play was influenced by Thornton Wilder's short play THE LONG CHRISTMAS DINNER, which helps me to appreciate the original from a different perspective.

My girlfriend and I read this in about an hour, and we were both impressed and moved by the clearly autobiographical expressions Paula Vogel shared and exercised. There is wonderful theatricality to

be read (and seen if lucky) in the Bunraku-style puppets exemplifying the vision of her seminal anti-war and fuzzy Christmas ride home with her brother, sister and parents. In many respects this is a heavily therapeutic work, almost something Ms. Vogel had been needing to present. The urgency to share her painful upbringing and the deep wounds that helped carve herself and her siblings proves startling when imagining the three children as puppets, beholden to their parent's traumatic relationship, trapped in cars and apartments, suffering so greatly on a night others are seemingly so happy. In conclusion it cannot be stressed enough how amazing it is to experience an artist's deepest, most painful and most loving visions of their life. It is what all artists strive for. In *The Long Christmas Ride Home*, Ms. Vogel shared her great love and pain, communicating them to me with pathos and wit. It is to be noted that in the version I read - no the Dramatists Play Service one - there is a collection of letters she received from her brother Carl, which were as interesting and moving as the play itself.

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