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*Quiara Alegría Hudes*

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The 2012 recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

Somewhere in Philadelphia, Elliot has returned from Iraq and is struggling to find his place in the world. Somewhere in a chat room, recovering addicts forge an unbreakable bond of support and love. The boundaries of family and community are stretched across continents and cyberspace as birth families splinter and online families collide. *Water by the Spoonful* is a heartfelt and poetic meditation on lives on the brink of redemption and self-discovery during a time of heightened uncertainty. This cycle of three plays began with *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*, a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, and will conclude with *The Happiest Song Plays Last*, to be produced by the Goodman Theatre in 2013.

## Water by the Spoonful Details

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## From Reader Review Water by the Spoonful for online ebook

### **Nicki says**

Deals with the effects of drug addiction very honestly while maintaining addicts' humanity. The online world was particularly creative, staged as people in chairs doing every day activities like making coffee while speaking their written conversations on an online forum out loud. Here the dialogue between the recovering addicts was especially witty and full of heart. Enjoyed the play, though stories of recovering addicts have never touched me deeply enough to warrant more than 3-stars.

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### **Brina says**

Water by the Spoonful is Quiara Algeria Hudes Pulitzer winning play. Hudes had been producing plays since the age of fifteen and attended Brown University to study under the tutelage of Paula Vogel. Spoonful is part of Hudes' trilogy featuring Elliot Ortiz, an Iraq war veteran who has been coping with life since his discharge and his birth mother Odessa also known as Haiku mom who runs a chat room for recovering crack addicts. A powerful drama that runs the gamut of human emotions, Water by the Spoonful is a powerful piece of playwrighting.

Elliot Ortiz has been discharged from Iraq for six years. Working steadily at Subway, he lives in North Philadelphia among an extended family of aunts, uncles, and cousins. His closest family member is his cousin Yazmin, an adjunct professor of music at a nearby university. Although both in their twenties, both cousins have taken over as head of their family because many uncles are since deceased, including their aunt Ginny, Elliot's adoptive mother, who has just passed on. At the play's opening we meet the cousins as Elliot is still grappling with the demons of his Iraqi past and Yazmin struggling to keep him afloat.

Rather than a play in two acts, the play is fourteen scenes long as Hudes alternates between Elliot and Yazmin's reality with Odessa running her chat room. Odessa has been a failure as a mother, leaving Elliot to be raised by her sister Ginny, a pillar of the Philadelphia Puerto Rican community. Although a poor mother, Odessa has been sober for over six and has successfully moderated a chat room, saving hundreds of lives. We meet three such characters in Orangutan, Chutes and Ladders, and Fountainhead, all striving to be sober and amount to achieving happiness in their lives. Elliot can not fathom that his mother has created something positive and attempts to derail what she achieved. As a result Elliot appears in asides in the chat rooms with Yazmin attempting to dissuade him from crumbling Odessa's remade life.

Although a Pulitzer winner for its content matter about Iraqi veterans and drug rehabbers, I did not find Water by the Spoonful at quite the level as other Pulitzer winners that I have read. Yes, the story is powerful about people overcoming addiction and remaking their lives. I even found some of the interchanges in the chat rooms as well as the dialogue between Elliot and Yazmin comedic. Yet, with many characters and storylines, the play felt disjointed at times. I felt that if Hudes had focused on Elliot's relationship with Odessa and Ginny, that the play might have been even more powerful.

Quiara Alegria Hudes has brought the dangers of drug usage among veterans to the forefront in Water by the Spoonful. She navigates issues as PTSD, drug addiction, and adoption, as all some to a nexus in both Elliot and Odessa's lives. A Puerto Rican from Philadelphia, Hudes has chosen to write a trilogy of plays about issues close to her personally. Perhaps I would have known the story better if I started with Hudes' first

installment Elliot's Fugue. Water by the Spoonful on its own is powerful but the viewer meets the characters in the middle of their story. On its own, I rate Pulitzer winning Water by the Spoonful 3.75 stars. This rating may have been higher had I read its predecessor first.

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### **Rachelle Urist says**

Quiara Alegría Hudes is not a name I knew, but she won the 2012 Pulitzer prize for this play, Water by the Spoonful. It turns out she also wrote the book for In the Heights, and won a Tony nomination for it. The lyrics were written by Lin Manuel Miranda. I saw the show, but forgot that it was not Miranda who created the entire musical, as he did for Hamilton. Hudes has a unique mind. Her originality is rife with significance on many levels. While her non-linear style in this play makes for some confusion, it also adds richness, especially since midway through the play the story's meaning and import become crystal clear. She combines fourth-wall realism with uncanny, cyber-space realities whose pseudonyms (online usernames) and virtual locales are confounding, at first. Her virtual realities include folks with names such as "Fountainhead," "Chutes and Ladders," and "Orangutan." Eventually, we learn their real-world names and their connection to the characters who launch the show. The play is about family, addiction, loyalty and protection. It took me into places and people I would never otherwise encounter. Hudes is a young and a masterful playwright. Her hefty opus are the sweet fruit of her talent combined with her Puerto Rican heritage, tight family bonds, and her mother's encouragement to tell the family's stories.

2\_Elliot: A Soldier's Fugue is the first a trilogy of plays. This play was a 2007 finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. It's a good play, but not as complex or compelling as Water by the Spoonful. Hudes credits family members for inspiring some of the dialogue in the play. The play involves three generations of soldiers. Grandpa served in Korea, Pop in Vietnam, Elliot in Iraq. Elliot's mom, Ginny, Pop's wife, was an army nurse in Vietnam. That's where she met Pop. Some of the elders' memories seep into the dialogue in intriguing ways. Pop, for instance, recalls "poems" that his unit created to chant while marching. These include: "One two three four. / We're gonna jump on the count of four. / If I die when I hit the mud / Bury me with a case of bud / A case of bud and a bottle of rum / Drunk as hell in kingdom come. / Count off: One two three four." And "One two three four. / We're gonna charge on the count of four. If my heart begins to bleed / Bury me with a bag full a weed / A gag full a weed and a / Bottle of rum / Laugh at the devil in kingdom come. / Count off: One two three four."

The "fugue" of the title is a reflection of the verbal fugue here, consisting of four sets of intersecting stories. The playwright herself is an accomplished pianist. In this play, Grandpa is a flutist whose melodies, played for his fellow soldiers, encouraged or consoled them. With his playing, he taught them the difference between major and minor keys, and they learned to request something in the requisite key, depending on the situation. Grandpa muses: "of everything Bach wrote, it is the fugues. The fugue is like an argument. It starts in one voice. The voice is the melody, ... the statement. Another voice creeps up on the first one. Voice two responds to voice one. They tangle together. They argue, they become messy. They create dissonance. Two, three, four lines clashing. You think, good god, they'll never untie themselves. How did this mess get started in the first place? ...It's all about untying the knot. ... Major keys, minor keys, all at once on top of each other. ... In Korea my platoon fell in love with Bach. All night long, firing eight-inch howitzers into the evergreens. Flute is very soothing after the bombs settle down. They begged me to play. 'Hey, Ortiz, pull out that pipe!'

One reviewer wrote: "Pop is a naïve young man, who takes his father's flute with him to war though he knows not how to play, and eventually has his high spirits shattered as his tour drags on. ... Elliot copes with the new horrors of modern war. ...when wounded, he suddenly finds himself a hero, albeit a carefully-constructed hero, shaped and molded by reporters and TV producers to reflect a certain version of war and the American soldier.

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**Kelly says**

Pretty great. I have to admit. It's a pretty great play.

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**Nicole says**

This could easily turn into an after-school special but it never does. The playwright's empathy rings clear and true throughout and draws you into this small but strong Puerto Rican family.

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**Delara H F says**

I think it could have ended a bit sooner, somewhere I could rate it 5stars not 4!  
I loved the name it just perfectly matches with the whole play.

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**Jeff Arena says**

I think that when you read most great plays, you feel the love of the author for every character. Each character, no matter how flawed, is observed with care and compassion. So it is with Water by the Spoonful. The middle of a trilogy, it expands the community of the first play (Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue) in unexpected ways. It also develops a larger world view, using a simple and honest integration of online conversation. This play is full of feeling, an active plot, and layered themes.

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**Victoria says**

I feel kind of blasphemous saying this, but I thought this place was nice, but not as moving as I expected it to be. The ending was kind of anticlimactic to me. Still a good play, just not on my top ten of 2012.

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**Anna-Maria Morgenstern says**

I had to read thi for my American Literature class.

My rating might change, since we will talk about this play in class, and my opinion on it might be influenced by that!

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## **Si Squires-Kasten says**

Totally competent, totally mediocre.

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## **Perrin Pring says**

I'm not a play connoisseur, that said, I enjoyed Water by the Spoonful.

About a variety of characters attempts to overcome their past, Water by the Spoonful explores just how someone recovers from trauma. Following addicts and an American veteran, Water by the Spoonful does a good job of showing, rather than explaining. This may be something particular to well done plays, but Hudes doesn't waste words. The readers/viewers are given only what they need and nothing more. That said, I could feel the emotion of Water by the Spoonful, and I imagine it would be a heavy play to watch.

One of the things I enjoyed about the play was its diversity of characters. Each character comes from a different background and has a different story. While I couldn't personally relate to all of the character's experiences, I could relate to them as humans. That, in my mind, is the mark of a good writer.

Water by the Spoonful is a quick read. It's not terribly light, but it's worth your time.

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## **Dusty says**

This brilliant, Pulitzer-winning play touches on a lot of hot topics, including war, addiction, and Puerto Ricans' eternal struggle to claim their place in the US mainstream. But most importantly, it is a story about *family*--about honoring the bond to all the people that have raised and cared for you, about building a new family for yourself when your biological relatives have turned their backs on you.

Initially, the play is divided between two groups of characters. In the first group, we have Yazmin Ortiz, an adjunct music professor, and Yazmin's cousin, Elliot, who served in the Iraq War. Like the Puerto Rican family I married into, the Ortizes are a large, interconnected mess of people. Yazmin and Elliot are cousins, but Elliot claims two of Yazmin's aunts as his mother. As we learn, he is the biological son of one aunt, Odessa, but was raised by another aunt, Ginny. Exactly why Odessa gave Elliot up is revealed in a crucial, moving scene in the middle of the play, and I will not reveal it here. Suffice it to say, Yazmin's aunt/Elliot's adopted mom Ginny dies, and the event forces members of the family who have successfully avoided each other for a long time to clash and try to sort out their differences.

The second group of characters is comprised of crack addicts who support each other in an internet chatroom. Odessa is the chatroom moderator and the link between the family and internet scenes. Known to her addict friends as "Haikumom," Odessa is a wise, patient online presence who "censors" the other characters' obscene outbursts. Though we learn that several people have tried to find support in the chatroom environment, the play only introduces us to three characters in addition to Odessa/Haikumom. The first is Chutes&Ladders, a middle-aged African American IRS employee who seems to take pride in living an uneventful, passionless life without crack. Orangutan, a transnational adoptee, has returned to her country of birth, Japan, in an effort to reconnect with her birth parents -- an adventure Chutes&Ladders opposes because he cannot fathom undertaking it by himself (or sober). Fountainhead, a new addition to the group, is

a white, wealthy man who wants to recover from his addiction without revealing it to his wife or kids. Privileged and naïve, Fountainhead quickly becomes a punching bag for Chutes&Ladders and Orangutan, who believe that a person has to hit rock bottom before he can be serious about breaking the habit. They are probably right.

As the play progresses, the walls between these worlds break down. Odessa/Haikumom meets John/Fountainhead for a lunch that is interrupted by Yazmin and Elliot, Yazmin and Elliot log into the chatroom under Odessa's alias, etc. Along the way, we learn that Odessa and Elliot have both revealed to one of these worlds without anticipating that they will be discovered in the other, and Odessa decides to sell her computer--her best ally in her war against addiction--to buy flowers for Ginny's funeral. Selling the computer is a symbolic gesture that in the context of the play represents Odessa's "choice" between the biological family that sees her as a let-down and an addict and the makeshift, digital "family" that sees her as a martyr. Does Odessa make the right choice? I will leave it to you decide.

I read this play with the students in my "Literary Diversity" class. To be honest, I picked it in a hurry when I was planning the syllabus because I needed a play (not my area of expertise) and because the Ortiz family reminded me so much of my in-laws. However, reading it again these last few days with a group of other people and the chance to slow down and think about how it is put together has helped me appreciate it as a great story and a fine literary achievement. Like I said earlier, the play addresses timely topics, but it does so in a timeless way. The playwright, Quiara Alegría Hudes, is best known for her work on the Tony-winning musical *In the Heights*, but *Water by the Spoonful* confirms that she is far more than a one-hit wonder. The play is the second in a trilogy about the experiences of Elliot, a Puerto Rican man who fought a war for a country that barely recognizes his right to live in it, and I look forward to digging into the other two installments. In short, this is a great, teachable play, and one that I expect to revisit.

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### **Kaila Tacazon says**

I didn't really know what the play was trying to say while I was reading it, but after I let it digest and talked about it in class I think the play is about relief and resilience after trauma.

As a piece of prose, I really enjoyed the scene where the title is referenced. To me, the anecdote about feeding the water by a teaspoon and Elliot's sister dying from neglect somehow made what the rest of the characters were going through make sense to me.

There's also a lot of subtlety and meaning that can be taken from the expressionistic voice of this play, and I think that performed, this could be a beautiful piece.

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### **Dazz Ross says**

Well, I didn't expect this play to EMOTIONALLY WRECK ME AND HIT ME SO HARD, but here we are. Hudes' *Water by the Spoonful* is an emotional roller coaster with an amazing story, strong cast of characters, beautiful dialogue, and the opus of dramatic stakes that all came together to create a work I won't forget about in a while.

Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to add the other two plays in this trilogy to my TBR shelf and send an e-mail to my professor thanking him for making our Technical Production I class read this.

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## Kenny says

*Nobody can make you invisible but you.*

One of my reading goals this year is to read more play scripts, focusing on contemporary scripts. I've start this journey with ***Water By The Spoonful***. ***Water By The Spoonful***, the Pulitzer Prize winning play by Quiara Alegria Hudes, tells the parallel story of crack addiction and how it effects those around the user. Elliott, an ex-marine and caretaker of his mother, came back from Iraq with an injured leg, Trying to get his life together, and to take care of his ill mother, Elliott takes a job at a Subway. His cousin, Yazmin is an adjunct music professor at a local University. The two find that Elliott's mother has been sent to the hospital due to an illness, but she doesn't last long and quickly passes.

In the not so distant world exists a group of recovering addicts, who come together to get the support and strength they need to stay clean, in an online chat room. The drug of choice, crack cocaine. Orangutan, an adopted recovering addict from Asia, who is 95 days sober, Chutes&Ladders, a former user who has since settled down after losing touch with his family and who has become an IRS customer service representative, and Haiku-Mama, the moderator of the chat room who is the rock of support to all, except her family when they need her the most. Most recently, the funeral planning of her sister, Elliott's adoptive mother.

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While, ***Water By The Spoonful***. is a show of harsh reality, we've seen this before; there's nothing new here, nothing that is revelatory. Where Hudes succeeds, is in writing dialogue that is witty and heart wrenching. Hudes breathes new life into this 70's style drama. It's very dense, very rough, but is very real. Many people, unfortunately, will relate to the characters in this piece. Quiara Alegria Hudes' has written a script of nasty truth that can only help shine a light on the fact, that if you are struggling with a vice, you are not alone.

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