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# HIGHLIGHTS



*Avery (Ivette Deltoro), Alice (Lillian Bogovich) and Catherine (Kristin Brownstone) connect across generations. Show photos by Taylor Sanders.*

A companion guide to *Rapture, Blister, Burn*

by Gina Gionfriddo, May 18-June 18, 2017



*Gwen (Deb Anderson) and Catherine (Kristin Brownstone) eye the road not taken: in life and love.*

## Synopsis

Catherine wants what her friend Gwen has: a husband and children. Maybe. Gwen wants to be what Catherine is: a famous academic and cultural pundit. Toss in Catherine's widowed but feisty mother, a young former stripper, Gwen's flawed husband, feminist theory, Dr. Phil and lots of martinis, and you have the makings of this unflinching, witty look at modern gender politics and the pain and frustrations we go through to find happiness. A Pulitzer Prize nominee and *New York Times* Critics' Pick. *This production is sponsored by Nancy B. Coleman and Paul M. Resch.*

## Characters

**Catherine Croll (Kristin Brownstone):** Catherine, in her early 40s, is a spirited author and teacher with an emphasis on gender roles. She has returned to the New England town where her grad-school friend Gwen lives with husband Don ... who happens to have a past with Catherine.

**Alice Croll (Lillian Bogovich):** Catherine's mother, Alice, is warm-hearted, straight-talking, and determined not to let a recent health scare put a damper on her life.

**Avery Willard (Ivette Deltoro):** Fired as Gwen's babysitter when she comes over with a black eye, Avery is a sassy, know-it-all 21-year-old, making reality TV with her boyfriend and trying to find her way.

**Gwen Harper (Deb Anderson):** Quick to state that she finds fulfillment as a wife and mother, Gwen nevertheless holds other ambitions—and admits to more than a little dissatisfaction with her current situation.

**Don Harper (Erik Gandolfi):** Affable and humorous, Don is a college dean who provides counseling to students even as he veers off his own path.

## About the playwright

Like the irreverent Avery in *Rapture*, playwright Gina Gionfriddo never thought of herself as a feminist when she was younger. Gionfriddo imagined feminism was “something that we’ve moved beyond,” she told the *Phoenix New Times*. “I went to a women’s college but I really did not want to engage with the idea that women had any disadvantages—in the workplace or in life.” As she grew older, she began to read the great feminist writings, and her views evolved. “There are many, many battles left to fight,” she said.

Today, Gionfriddo’s plays often explore the struggles and triumphs of modern women of many generations. Her characters discuss marriage and career. “Having it all.” Pornography. Violence. How reality TV treats women. How men treat women. She has described her 2009 play *Becky Shaw* as a story about being 35 years old, and *Rapture* about being 40-45. Both scripts were finalists for the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

An American writer who grew up in Washington, D.C., and has an MFA in playwriting from Brown University, Gionfriddo has also taught playwriting and written for television. She has penned several episodes for the *Law & Order* series, as well as one for *House of Cards*, and served as executive story editor and producer for *Law & Order*.

*Rapture* premiered Off-Broadway in 2012 at Playwrights Horizons, starring Amy Brenneman and Lee Tergesen. Gionfriddo’s other plays include *After Ashley* and *U.S. Drag*.



Gina Gionfriddo.

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## Our director

Virginia Drake has a well-deserved niche at City Lights as the director of some of our most *human* shows: the characters are so real they could stroll right off the stage, and the moments are full of heart. Last season she directed the wonderfully quirky *Tigers Be Still*, and before that she helmed equally fine productions of *Art*, *The Language Archive*, *Smell of the Kill*, *Hedda Gabler*, *First Day of School* and *August: Osage County*.

In addition, Virginia has directed at TheatreWorks and Santa Clara University, as well as at Los Altos Stage Company, where her shows have included *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, *On Golden Pond*, *Circle Mirror Transformation* and *Doubt*.

An emerita faculty member at West Valley College, she is a member of Actors’ Equity Association, with an MFA in Acting from Stanford University and a BA in Dramatic Art from U.C. Davis.

Virginia also lends her vocal skills to San Jose’s Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library, where she records audio books for Books Aloud Inc.



Virginia Drake.

## Who's who in Rapture, Blister, Burn

You don't need to be a scholar of feminism—or even have read *The Feminine Mystique*—to understand and appreciate the debate in this play. Still, you may want to know more about some of the names that get bandied about. We're here to help.



Betty Friedan (second from left) being interviewed by a journalist (left) with fellow feminists Barbara Ireton and Marguerite Rawalt.

**Phyllis Schlafly:** A conservative activist and author who helped bring down the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in the 1970s, Schlafly also campaigned against Communism, abortion and sex education. When she died at 92 in 2016, the *New York Times* called her “‘First Lady’ of a Political March to the Right.”

**Betty Friedan:** The 20th-century feminist was an ERA supporter, the first president of the National Organization for Women, and the author of 1963's *The Feminine Mystique*. That influential book famously described housewives' discontent and boredom as “the problem that has no name,” and is credited with kicking off the second wave of feminism.

**Anita Bryant:** Beauty queen and brand ambassador for orange juice, she is more well known (and

notorious) for her 1970s advocacy against gay rights, which didn't help her singing career. Besides being ridiculed on *Saturday Night Live*, she also scored a mention in the movie *Airplane!* When passengers on the fictional flight suffered visible and audible digestive difficulties, Leslie Nielsen's character responded, “I haven't seen anything like this since the Anita Bryant concert.”

**Dr. Phil:** The Oklahoman talk-show host and psychologist went from *Oprah* appearances to his own show. His book *Love Smart: Find the One You Want—Fix The One You Got* includes the quote “Men are not all that complicated. You could read them like a book if you had a few very basic instructions and understandings.”

**Rousseau:** Enlightened? You tell us. This 18th-century philosopher was a big-shot in the Enlightenment age ... whose view of society included limiting women to home and hearth. In *Emile, or On Education* (1762), he wrote of women: “Formed to obey a creature so imperfect as man, a creature often vicious and always faulty, she should early learn to submit to injustice and to suffer the wrongs inflicted on her by her husband without complaint.”

**William Blake:** A British nonconformist and radical writer, he penned poems including positively revolutionary writings protesting the way King George was treating those American colonies. Many modern scholars have also found themes of equal rights and even feminism in the works of Blake, who was also said to be influenced by Mary Wollstonecraft, author of 1792's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.



Anita Bryant in 1971.

**Nancy Friday:** *My Secret Garden: Women's Sexual Fantasies* and its sequel, *Forbidden Flowers*, are among the books published by this American author, a pioneer of women's eroticism. She said one of the themes she heard most was women's guilt feelings about sex.

**Dario Argento:** An Italian director of horror and thriller films whose influences include the Brothers Grimm and Edgar Allan Poe. His titles include *The Bird With the Crystal Plumage* (1971), *The Stendhal Syndrome* (1996) and *Mother of Tears* (2007).

**Carol Clover:** Clover approaches horror films from a different perspective; she's a U.C. Berkeley professor of film studies and the author of 1992's *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. In the book, she coined the term "final girl" to refer to the last female standing in these movies. Who lives, who dies, who tells your story? The final girl is the one who survives to spread the tale.

## Is feminism cool again?

In *Rapture*, young Avery doesn't have much use for the first and second waves of feminism, which started in the 19th century and the 1960s, respectively. They seem as remote to her as hoop skirts and Twiggy. But relating to Beyoncé and Emma Watson may be an easier task. Lately, the media has seen a veritable wave of articles and op-eds declaring that feminism is cool again, questioning whether that's a good thing, and just generally chiming in on the topic.. Here are some headlines and links:

**When everyone is a feminist, is anyone?**  
-The Guardian, Nov. 24, 2014

**Will young celebrities  
make feminism 'cool'?**  
-Fortune, Sept. 23, 2014

**March, Huddle,  
Fight: Why Feminism  
Is Back in a Big Way**  
-New York Times,  
March 31, 2017

**Fast Feminism, Cheap Talk**  
-Bitch Magazine, April 13, 2017

Beyoncé explains why she performed  
in front of the word 'feminist'  
-The Independent, April 5, 2016

**Ivanka Trump Says Her Father Donald Is a 'Feminist'**  
-TIME Magazine, July 3, 2016

***Rapture, Blister, Burn***  
**by Gina Gionfriddo**

City Lights Theater Company presents *Rapture, Blister, Burn* from May 18-June 18, 2017.  
Shows are Thursday-Saturday at 8 p.m., Sundays at 2 p.m. (no show May 21).  
The theater is at 529 S. Second St. in San Jose. Details: [cltc.org](http://cltc.org), 408-295-4200.

Director: **Virginia Drake**

Scenic Design/Production Manager/Technical Director: **Ron Gasparinetti**

Lighting Design: **Nick Kumamoto**

Costume Design: **Jane Lambert**

Sound Design: **George Psarras**

Properties Designer: **Christina Sturken**

Stage Manager: **Ben Hemmen**

Master Electrician: **Joseph Hidde**

**Featuring: Kristin Brownstone, Lillian Bogovich, Ivette Deltoro,  
Deb Anderson and Erik Gandolfi**

*Highlights* is researched and written by City Lights dramaturg Rebecca Wallace.  
Read past issues, and a digital version of this issue, at [cltc.org/highlights](http://cltc.org/highlights).