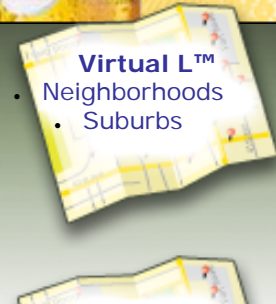


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### Passion Play: a cycle

A Biblical story restaged in three eras.

[Reviewed by Centerstage!](#) >>



**Venue:** [Goodman Theatre](#)  
170 N. Dearborn St.  
Chicago, IL 60601-3205 [Map](#)  
[it](#)

**Phone:** (312) 443-3800

**Tickets:** \$50+ (\$18.50-\$55)

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**Author**

Sarah Ruhl

**Company**

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**Related Info:**

[Official website](#)

**Performances**

**Runs September 15, 2007-October 21, 2007**

Friday 8 p.m.  
Saturday 2 p.m. & 8 p.m.  
Sunday 1:30 p.m. & 7:30 p.m.  
Wednesday 7:30 p.m.  
Thursday 1:30 p.m. & 7:30 p.m.

**Recommended a "Must See" Show**

In certain towns, and certain climates, theatre is at the burning center of public life. Why? Jesus. Certified genius Sarah Ruhl examines the manipulation of faith, via public ritual, for political profit, with three stagings of Christ's last days. Set in Elizabethan England, pre-World War II Germany, and Reagan-era South Dakota, the Goodman's production should wrap its audience in grandeur and pomp, showing off the persuasive power of theatre while giving it a spooky critique.

**Centerstage Show Review**

Reviewer: [Rosalind Cummings-Yeates](#)

Tuesday Oct 02, 2007

The most successful theater productions provoke thought as well as entertain. Using those criteria, The Goodman's "Passion Play: A Cycle in Three Parts" is stunningly successful. It takes the medieval tradition of passion plays, which re-trace the last days and resurrection of Jesus, and manages to make the events relevant, humorous and engaging. However, on other levels (such as accessibility and a well-paced story), the 3 1/2-hour-long drama falls short. For a generation whose attention span rarely extends beyond the quick hits of IMs and blogs, "Passion Play" presents a long-winded challenge.

Playwright and Wilmette native Sarah Ruhl proves that her MacArthur "genius" fellowship was well-earned with an inventive tale that connects characters in 16th-century England, 1930s Germany and '60s and '80s South Dakota. A fascinating examination of how actors are affected by their holy roles, the play illuminates how politics influences religion. Recurring characters include a hot-boy Jesus who's chased like a rock star and lusted after when his loincloth falls (and provides eye candy in a gratuitous full

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frontal nude scene), a Mary who hates to sleep alone and who's "never been with child but doesn't know why" and a Mary Magdalene that never seems to get any. Polly Noonan's Village Idiot stands out with childish honesty and wise observations.

All the players recreate versions of their roles in each act, traversing Elizabethan times, Hitler's Germany and Reagan-era America. The second act, set in Oberammergau, Germany (only 75 miles from Dachau and brimming with anti-Semitic undertones) works the best and boasts the most focused, emotional writing. Appearances by Queen Elizabeth, Hitler and Reagan help set a surreal tone, as each demonstrates how religion can be twisted to fit ideology. However, the play veers too much into whimsy at times (life-size fish appear in every act and are quite tedious by the last), making it hard to swallow in one night.

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