



# The Mystery of Irma Vep and Other Plays

*Charles Ludlam*

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“Ludlam’s is a dazzling and significant body of work, and it should be accorded a place of greatest regard and honor in the American dramatic literary canon. The plays are funny, erudite, poetic, transgressive, erotic, moving, and so theatrical they seem the Platonic ideal of everything we mean when we use that word. The plays are the sublime expressions of what Ludlam insisted was not an aesthetic, but a moral vision: anti-Puritan, unsentimentally utopian, sexually destabilizing—a transporting, a transcendence by means of deflation, a joyous and subversive, even dangerous revelry leading to revelation, a wise and ecstatic celebration of the world.” –Tony Kushner (from his Preface)

Artistic director, playwright, director, designer and star of New York's acclaimed Ridiculous Theatrical Company, the late Charles Ludlam ransacked theatrical and literary history in an evolutionary quest for a modern art of stage comedy. His more than 30 plays are among the most thought-provoking entertainments in the modern repertoire. As Ludlam himself put it, "This is farce, not Sunday school." This collection includes an introduction by Tony Kushner alongside Ludlam's most famous and celebrated works for the stage:

*The Mystery of Irma Vep*: Ludlam's most famous play, this is a hilarious send up of Daphne de Maurier, Jane Eyre and Victorian cross dressing. One of the most produced plays in the United States, *The Mystery of Irma Vep* is “the most perfect expression of Ludlam’s approach to theatre: a play that simultaneously provokes terror, laughter and a grotesque mockery of all gender, literary and special boundaries” (*Village Voice*).

*Camille*: based on *La Dame aux Camélias*, this satirical take on the tubercular courtesan brings any audience “to unexpected heights of pathos and laughter” (*San Francisco Chronicle*).

*Galas*: the life of opera singer Maria Callas imagined as a modern tragedy, in which Ludlam himself assayed the part of the diva.

*Stage Blood*: Ludlam's take on Shakespeare, with actors putting on *Hamlet* both on stage and back stage; somehow, in this tragedy, everything comes out for the best.

*Bluebeard*: somewhat based on H.G. Wells' *Island of Dr. Moreau*, Bluebeard tells the story of a mad vivisectionist in search of a third sex.

**Charles Ludlam:** Artistic director, playwright, director, designer and star of New York’s acclaimed Ridiculous Theatrical Company. During his twenty years with the Ridiculous, he won Obie and Drama Desk awards as well as playwriting fellowships from the Guggenheim, Rockefeller and Ford foundations and the National Endowment for the Arts. His more than thirty plays are among the most thought-provoking entertainments in the modern repertoire and continue to be widely performed throughout the world.

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