

## *Celebrating the* 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *OXYGEN*

A play by Carl Djerassi and Roald Hoffmann

[Oxygen Anniversary Conversation](#) with Roald Hoffmann and Bassam Shakhashiri (May 2023)

Who gets credit for discovery in science? [The play OXYGEN](#) revolves around which of three famous scientists of the 1700s—Joseph Priestley, Antoine Lavoisier, or Carl Wilhelm Scheele—can truly lay claim to discovery of the essential gas. The play tackles an historical question but also examines the culture of research and the creativity involved in “doing science.” The story, reaching across three centuries, touches the role of women in science, and features centrally a woman to fall in love with, Marie-Anne Paulze-Lavoisier. Rich results can spring from a merger of arts, humanities, and sciences.

A staging of the play was conceived by the Wisconsin Initiative for Science Literacy (WISL) and produced by UW-Madison University Theatre in 2003, with support from Dean Phillip R. Certain and the College of Letters and Science.

### **Videos:**

[Watch the University Theatre production](#)  
[Director Norma Saldivar on the staging of the play](#)  
[An interview with playwright Carl Djerassi](#)  
[Playwright Roald Hoffmann on Madame Lavoisier](#)

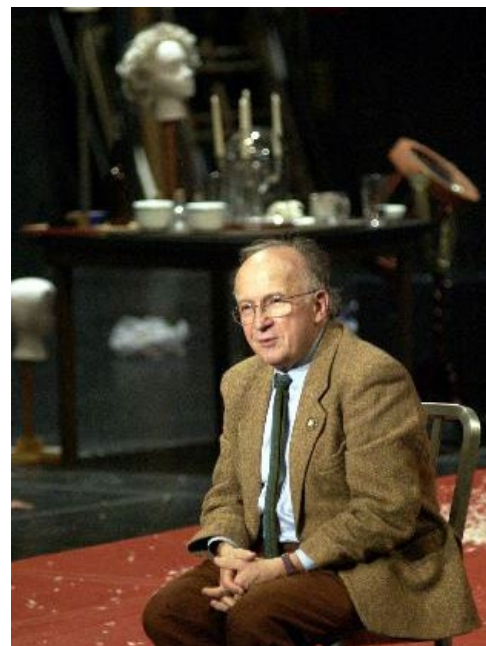
### **Supporting Material:**

[Classroom Teachers Study Guide by Djerassi & Hoffmann](#)  
[The Story of O by Roald Hoffmann](#)

### **Production Reviews and Press:**

[Review from the Journal of Chemical Education](#)  
[Writeup in the Wisconsin Academy magazine](#)  
[“Oxygen’ mixes elements of art, science,”](#)  
[On Campus, Feb. 27 – March 13, 2003](#)

[Other Productions of \*Oxygen\*](#)  
[Other Reviews](#)



### **About the Symposium**

In conjunction with the production of the play OXYGEN in Spring 2003, an Oxygen Symposium was held at the UW-Madison Department of Chemistry on March 29, presented by WISL. Other campus events were synchronized to celebrate oxygen and its discovery. UW Memorial Library displayed very rare chemistry texts of the original discoverers of oxygen, including works by Priestley and Scheele, and Lavoisier’s own copy of his influential book on chemistry printed in 1793. The library also displayed various literary works of the playwrights Djerassi and Hoffmann. In keeping with the multidisciplinary theme, Prof. Marc Fink and

members of the Pro Arte Quartet performed music by Mozart, a contemporary of the discoverers of oxygen. It was a piece that the aristocratic Madame and Monsieur Lavoisier might have enjoyed with their friends after a hard day in the lab.

[Symposium Poster](#)

[Full Symposium Program](#)

Press Release: [Free, Public Symposium on Oxygen](#)

Press Release: [Rare Texts Reveal the History of Oxygen's Discovery](#)



**More events:**

[Science Friday with Ira Flatow](#)

National Public Radio

Friday, February 13, 2004

[Recap of the radio show by Jason Socrates Bardi, the Scripps Research Institute](#)

American Association for the Advancement of Science Annual Meeting

Saturday, February 14, 2004

Seattle, WA

[It's All About Oxygen Symposium](#)

[Prof. Shakhshiri's Slides from the 2004 AAAS Symposium](#)

***About WISL***

The Wisconsin Initiative for Science Literacy is the research and public engagement group of Chemistry Professor Bassam Z. Shakhshiri. Our mission is to promote literacy in science, mathematics, and technology among the general public and to attract future generations to careers in research, teaching, and public service. We live our “Science is Fun” philosophy by engaging with individuals and groups, both locally and around the world. Our purpose is to trigger cerebral and emotional connections to heighten the joy of learning. A major goal is to promote progress in addressing the grand challenges that face society. We advocate to have both a skilled, creative, and productive work force and a citizenry able to judge the risks and enjoy the benefits of advances in science and technology. All must engage in respectful discourse on significant societal issues related to science, religion, politics, the economy, technology, and ethics. All for the common good.

WISL advocates for the exploration and establishment of links between science and the arts. Creativity, passion, and the urge for expression and exploration are essential human qualities that inspire science, the arts, and the humanities, and thus constitute a common bond among them. People can value, appreciate, and enjoy science without a deep understanding of specific details, just as they can appreciate music without a specialized knowledge of music theory, or appreciate literature, the theater, and the visual arts without being experts in those fields. Programs like the *Oxygen* play and symposium focus on the relationships, similarities, and differences in inquiry, creativity, and personal expression among scientists, artists, and humanists. A specific goal is to give musicians, artists, writers, and performers—present and future—an appreciation of science and enable them to see and understand the connections between science and the arts.

We advocate for working together with respect, trust, and confidence. We foster creativity and encourage skepticism, harmony, and dissonance. Let us work together to benefit our world.