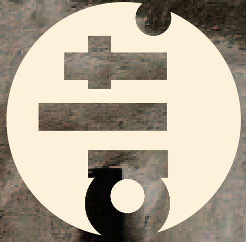
VOL. 7, NO. 2 DECEMBER 2009 $5.00



# theatre

cultural diversity and the stage

Teesri Duniya
THEATRE

www.teesriduniya.com

Teesri Duniya Theatre
presents
**The Last 15 Seconds**
created by The MT Space
directed by Majdi Bou-Matar

He spent his life promoting Islam to the West and was killed by an Islamic extremist

**Featuring** : Trevor Copp, Anne-Marie Donovan, Nada Humsi, Pam Patel, Alan K. Sapp
**Lighting Design :** Kari Kokko/ **Set and Costume Design** : Sheree Tams/ **Video image** : Rob Ring/ **Original Composition** : Nick Storring

Using movement, dance, video, vocals and text, this multi-media play explores the topic of terrorism. It starts from the tragic death of Syrian-American filmmaker Mustapha Akkad and his daughter Rima in a series of co-ordinated attacks that hit three prominent hotels in the Jordanian capital Amman in 2005. The work constructs an imagined physical and verbal dialogue between Mustapha Akkad and Rawad Jassem Mohammad Abed, the suicide bomber who carried out the explosion. The work also looks at the imagined lives and memories of both the victim and his killer as they revisit each other's lives after their fatal encounter.

MAY 2010, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY. THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR THEATRE RESEARCH
AT THE CONGRESS OF THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES.

Cole Foundation
Patrimoine canadien Canadian Heritage
Québec
Montréal
Canada Council for the Arts Conseil des Arts du Canada

alt.theatre
cultural diversity and the stage
Vol. 7, No. 2 DECEMBER 2009

"Never Again" **4**
Editorial by Edward Little

A view from the diaspora **11**
Lisa Ndejuru reflects on Jennifer Capraru's report on Isôko's production of *The Monument* in Rwanda (*alt.theatre* Vol. 6.3).

A Theatrical *Awda:* Palestine, *Sahmatah*, Refugees, and Going Home **16**
Samer Al-Saber explores the political and emotional power of theatre through *Sahmatah*—a play that faces head-on the 1948 catastrophe of Palestine on a very personal level.

Excavating Yesterday: The Birth, Growth, and Evolution of a Resident Artist in the Downtown Eastside **24**
Savannah Walling reflects on her personal and professional journey as an artist in and of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

Writing Peace: Can art be a powerful tool in building peace in the context of *Truth and Treason*? **29**
In the winning essay of Teesri Duniya's "Writing Peace Contest," high school student Nicholas Backman muses on how art can build peace through the evocation of compassion.

Dispatch **33**
*It Happened in a Tent*
Alex Bulmer on the Theatre Centre/Abit Omen/Die In Debt production of *The Book of Judith*.

Book Review **34**
Rob Nunn reviews the second volume of *Staging Coyote's Dream: An Anthology of First Nations Drama in English*, edited by Monique Mojica and Ric Knowles.

Subscribe NOW!

Subscribe to *alt.theatre* and receive 4 issues a year of Canada's only magazine tackling politics, cultural plurality, social activism, and the stage. For over ten years, *alt.theatre* has provided a forum for artists, activists, academics, and others interested in issues of cultural diversity, including

- New and alternative directions in theatre and dramaturgy;
- Profiles of artists, companies, current practices, and influences;
- Critical reviews of books, plays, and productions;
- Comparative analyses of national and international approaches to cultural diversity and the arts.

**Order online**
www.teesriduniya.com/alttheatre.html
or 514 848 0238

TEESRI DUNIYA THEATRE
1006 Rue de la Montagne, Suite 111, Montreal, QC H3G 1Y7


# Upcoming in alt.theatre

**Guest Editorial** on theatre and politics by **Rahul Varma**

**Elizabeth Courtney** on Victoria-based Lina de Guevara's Puente Theatre co-production of *Algarabia*

DISPATCH
**Adrienne Wong** on *The Wrecking Ball* and cuts to arts funding in B.C.

BOOK REVIEW
**Armand Ruffo** reviews two volumes about De-ba-jeh-mu-jig Theatre Group: *Where Stories Meet: An Oral History* and *Stories from the Bush: The Woodland Plays.*

*alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage*
is published quarterly by

Teesri Duniya
THEATRE

"Change the World, One Play at a Time"

EDITOR IN CHIEF
**Edward Little**

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
**Denis Salter**

EDITORIAL BOARD
**Edward Little, Denis Salter, Rahul Varma, Lina de Guevara, Shelley Scott, and Nina Lee Aquino**

CONTRIBUTORS
**Samer Al-Saber, Nicholas Backman, Alex Bulmer, Edward Little, Lisa Ndejuru, Rob Nunn, and Savannah Walling.**

MARKETING & SALES
**Linda Levesque**

GRAPHIC DESIGN
**ATELIER 6/ DFIGRAPHIK.CA**

COVER PHOTO
**Terry Hughes**
Abdelghafour Elaaziz as Omar Abdul Ahad, Christine Aubin Khalifah as Nahla Abdul Ahad in the world premiere of *Truth and Treason* by Rahul Varma. Teesri Duniya Theatre, Montreal, September 2009.

COPY EDITOR
**Colette Stoeber**

***alt.theatre:cultural diversity and the stage*** is Canada's only professional journal examining intersections between politics, cultural plurality, social activism, and the stage. Our readership includes theatre practitioners, academics, plus others interested in issues pertaining to arts and cultural diversity.

***alt.theatre*** welcomes suggestions or proposals for interviews, news, pieces of self-reflection, analytical articles, and reviews of books, plays, and performances.

Founded in 1998, ***alt.theatre*** is published quarterly by Teesri Duniya Theatre—an intercultural theatre company with a mandate to produce socially engaged theatre that reflects Canada's social and cultural diversity. ***alt.theatre*** is indexed in the MLA International Bibliography.

Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec / National Library of Canada ISSN 1481-0506

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT**
**TEESRI DUNIYA THEATRE**
1006 Rue de la Montagne, Suite 111
Montreal, QC H3G 1Y7
Tel: 514. 848. 0238
email: info@teesriduniya.com
website: www.teesriduniya.com

We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts which last year invested $20.1 million in writing and publishing throughout Canada.

Canada Council for the Arts Conseil des Arts du Canada

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Magazine Fund toward our editorial and production costs.

Canadian Heritage Patrimoine canadien

Canada

# "Never Again"

by Edward Little

© David Ward / Rehearsal for "Congo Drama," directed by Ally Ntumba

Dear Reader,

It's been a while since I wrote to you about our project, Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide, and Other Human Rights Violations. Maybe you recall that just over a year ago I wrote an editorial reflecting on this work.[1] I was on the banks of Montreal's historic Lachine Canal thinking about tensions between the need for action and the potential for hubris in our project's aspirations towards a culture of "never again" when I came across a *sign* lashed to the railing of the canal. Endorsed with the Parks Canada logo, the sign suggested I use my cellphone to hear the story of the Redpath Sugar Factory—located on the other side of the canal and recently converted into luxury condos. My cell phone "tour" championed a decidedly reductive, neoliberal, ahistorical worldview. Parks Canada had *contracted out,* to a US-based company, their curatorial responsibilities to *educate* us about what had been a hugely influential and powerful financial empire—entirely without reference to power, racial politics, economics, distribution of wealth, or the labour and living conditions of its workers. This was done on the watch of a government agency charged with safeguarding our heritage and promoting understanding—in a national park running through the heart of a major Canadian centre for immigration and asylum.

© David Ward / Lisa Ndejuru at the conference

The Life Stories project is now in its third year. This past November, we hosted the conference, "Remembering War, Genocide and Other Human Rights Violations: Oral History, New Media, and the Arts" at Concordia University in Montreal.[2] The event was an opportunity for academics, artists, and activists working in alliances across a range of sectors and disciplines to share ideas, practices, and strategic initiatives. Many of the presenters spoke of their experience working with projects that must balance the complexities of commemoration with factors such as "compassion fatigue," outsider intervention, and the physical and psychological risks associated with premature promotion of reconciliation or forgiveness. Most of the presenters shared a belief that commemoration—if it is to avoid an inward-looking historical focus that risks perpetuating trauma—must be somehow linked to a forward-looking engagement with "never again."

Keynote speaker Lorne Shirinian spoke of the essential need for difficult stories to be told. Shirinian is the child of one of the Armenian Georgetown Boys—orphaned male children who were sent to Canada to escape the 1915 genocide. As an academic, poet, playwright, and activist, Shirinian's life's work has focused on the Armenian Genocide and its aftermath. He spoke of the crucial role of stories as a means of converting private history into public knowledge. He shared his conviction that pain and grief *can* be tolerated and made meaningful as stories. He poignantly noted that traditional Armenian folktales always began, "once there was and was not"—an enduring encapsulation of transiency, testimony, and genocide denial.

The second keynote speaker was psychologist and playwright Henry Greenspan. His work with Holocaust survivors spans two decades and involves sustained dialogue through a process of interviews and re-interviews. Greenspan spoke of the essential need to break ritualized distinctions between tellers and listeners so that we may become *partners* in conversation. While Greenspan reiterated the importance of stories, he noted that they invariably involve compromise—they can never communicate a totally disintegrated human reality. As he has been told time and time again, "What I have told you is not it." He stressed that the legacy of these stories must be political action.

Speakers from Project Refuge—an initiative providing temporary shelter and services to individuals seeking asylum in Montreal—reported a dramatic *decrease* in residents as a result of recent changes to Canada's refugee system. On July 15, 2009, Canada's minister of immigration, Jason Kenney, introduced new visa requirements for Mexican and Czech citizens—ostensibly in a bid to stem a surge in refugee claims from those countries. On July 23, 2009, Kenney removed an exception clause in the Safe Third Country Agreement. The original clause had been written to allow people seeking refuge from countries under a temporary suspension of removal (TSR) to land in the US on their way to making a refugee claim at a Canadian land border. TSR exceptions refer to dangerous conditions that make it impossible to ensure the safety of persons returned to their country of origin. The removal of this exception clause means that legitimate refugees from Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Iraq, Zimbabwe—in fleeing for their lives—may no longer seek immediate safe passage through the largest nation on our continent.

© David Ward / Henry Greenspan at the conference

While the conference bore witness to horrific cruelty and suffering—a substantial amount of it relayed through direct experience—I suspect that for many the primary message was the unshakeable determination, courage, and faith in action embodied by so many of those present. In this regard, the pulse of the conference struck me as in time with that of the international grassroots movement seeking to pressure governments to establish Ministries of Peace. For Canada's part, on September 30, 2009, backbencher NDP MP Bill Siksay presented a private member's bill calling on the House of Commons to establish a Federal Department of Peace to be headed by a minister who would sit in Cabinet. As Linda McQuaig has commented, "private members bills rarely pass," particularly when "they challenge the orthodoxy of the military-industrial academic establishment." McQuaig also points out that dueling and slavery were once socially acceptable practices, and that that while the idea of a Department of Peace may sound utopian—"mushy and soft-hearted" as she puts it—"it is actually a deeply, subtly revolutionary idea, in that it threatens to undermine the war-oriented mindset that dominates our culture."[3] Recently, Bill C-447 passed an important milestone when it achieved the requisite numbers of co-seconders that will permit it to go to second reading.[4]

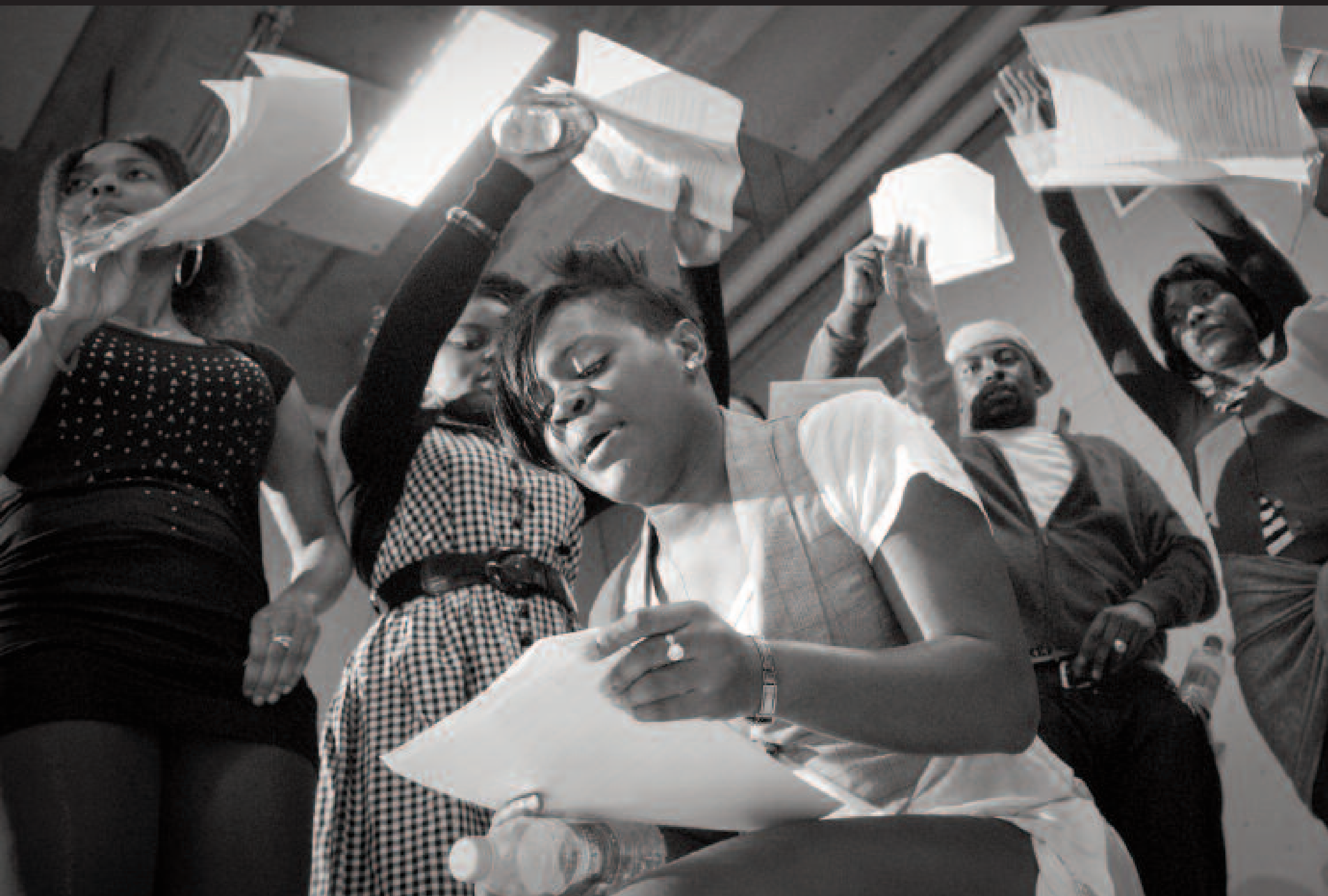
The conference also allowed those of us in the Oral History and Performance (OHP) working group—one of the seven research groups that make up the Life Stories project—to experience each other's work in a public setting.[5] We're working on a number of separate research-creation performance projects.

Sandeep Bhagwati's "Gesturing within a Realm of Shadows" studies moments of social and cultural rupture and displacement in the gestures, facial expressions, and body language of videotaped Life Stories interviewees. These moments—embodied by actors working through a creative process of imitation, analysis, and synthesis—are the basis of a performance text that focuses on the visceral "essence of displacement: a body, displaced into a new social and cultural environment, does not remain the same body. Its very gestures, its most embodied language is taken over by the will to survive, re-modeled to conform, fit in, even basically communicate in this strange new world."[6] Sandeep avoids incorporating words or language from the interviews so as to eschew what Richard Sennett characterizes as the "Tyranny of Intimacy"—the shutting down of dialogue that can occur as a result of "survivor's bias," or the emotional authority of a confessional mode proceeding from "I am here, this has happened to me." Sandeep's project speaks both to Greenspan's call to dismantle the ritualized roles of teller and listener and to his observation that the stories are never "it"—they are always merely traces that must forever *gesture* beyond themselves (my emphasis).

The OHP Playback Theatre Ensemble, working in partnership with Nisha Sajnani of Creative Alternatives, draws on expertise in theatre, group facilitation, community counseling, and drama therapy.[7] The ensemble is developing approaches that combine collective interviewing / story-gathering with debriefing for interviewers and interviewees. Playback typically involves a member of the

© David Ward / Rehearsal for "Congo Drama," directed by Ally Ntumba

audience telling a story that is then "played back" by actors improvising under the direction of a "Conductor." Traditionally, the performers work to shut down "self-talk"—to put aside their personal responses to the stories told in order to concentrate on listening deeply to the story and playing it back "objectively." The OHP group is developing an "Overture" technique that requires the ensemble to first respond with resonant moments of experience or empathy drawn from their *own* lives *before* attempting to represent the recounted story. This technique demands a more complex approach to deep listening to both self and the other. It foregrounds the potential for both positive and negative implications proceeding from personal subject positions relating to bias, assumption, and judgment. The Overture requires that each member of the ensemble attempt to *meet* the teller *in* the story rather than simply playing it back—to approach, in Greenspan's words, becoming "partners in a conversation."



The OHP's "Untold Histories" project is forging alliances with artists and communities not otherwise represented by the six other working groups of the Life Stories project.[8] Led by Rahul Varma of Teesri Duniya Theatre, "Untold Histories" has to date collected and staged stories from various Armenian, Iranian, Chilean, South Asian, and First Nations perspectives.[9] The primary thrust of this project is on issues of social justice—whose stories are being told, who is telling them, in what contexts are they being told, and to what social and political ends. The project involves progressive levels of presentation—each involving audience feedback, reworking by the artists, and re-presentation. Currently, the stories are being presented by emerging and community artists to variously constituted community audiences. The next phase of the work will involve dramaturgical selection and shaping by Rahul as playwright for presentation as a fully mounted professional production by Teesri Duniya Theatre.

"Stories Scorched from the Desert Sun" is a work-in-progress by OHP artist-in-residence, Hourig Attarian, and artist-educator-dramaturge Rachael Van Fossen.[10] The project—drawing on oral history interviews conducted by Hourig—uses three voices to tell the stories of several girls who lived through the horrors of war and genocide in different places and times:[11] Pergrouhi in 1915 Turkey—a child of barely six, who, alone and unable to comprehend her loss, sleeps for several nights in a field beside the body of her murdered Armenian mother; Pergrouhi as a ninety-year-old woman—recalling the events; Hourig herself and her friend Hermig in Beirut in 1975—two children of the Armenian diaspora on the cusp of puberty living on the same street while the religious and ethnic violence of the civil war erupts around them; Hourig and Hermig as adults—recalling the deportation stories of grandparents and great-aunts and the trauma of their own experience of war. The script adhered to the convention that all words spoken by the characters would be taken verbatim from original sources—with the important exception that recollections of the past could be altered, when deemed dramaturgically advantageous, to allow a character to speak as if in the present. The structure of the piece presented at the conference shifted between scripted narrative commentary by Hourig and Rachael as creators, and the performance by the three characters.

As performance research-creation, "Stories Scorched from the Desert Sun" focuses on ethical problems and dramaturgical solutions in the translation of written accounts of oral history into a performative mode with an enhanced capacity to contribute to a culture of "never again." As Hourig puts it, "The importance of these stories is all about memory against forgetting, public truth-telling, knowing and understanding our past, doing justice to the stories and to the people involved, but at the same time, it is also crucially about healing and creating awareness."[12]

Evoking the power and immediacy of theatre to speak instances of graphic violence and trauma carries a risk that the audience will become captive in a counterproductive experience of sensationalized or eroticized violence. To counteract this—in addition to the theatricalized narrative context provided by Rachael and Hourig—the project adopts a Brechtian "reporting" style that supports a "more muted," less emotional approach to the more graphic elements. As Rachael describes it, the actor playing Young Pergrouhi speaks "as a curious young girl simply reporting the facts of the discovery of her mother's body. Her playable action became 'I am trying to figure this out as I am speaking,' with an absence of sentiment." As this particular story is told, Young Pergrouhi and Old Pergrouhi share the telling, the ninety years between them working to ensure that, in Hourig's words, "the story does not get bogged down in the violence and the trauma, because *that* is not the message, that is not where I want the story to stagnate. I also do not want us, as an audience, as readers, listeners to be caught in that voyeuristic and grotesque trapping."

Other members of the OHP presented research in a number of other areas concerned with strengthening a culture of "never again." Lorna Roth looked at instances of "cognitive dissonance" in "reconciliation" films. She focused on the transformational potential of moments that break the narrative to arrest habitual thought in ways that create dialogical spaces of emptiness—pre-conditions for truly affective relationships. Warren Linds looked at how the Viewpoints Theatre approach to *performing polarities* with Israeli and Palestinian youth is leading participants to a deeper critical analysis of the intentions and values behind strategies of "talking nice, talking tough, and reflective dialogue (often simply listening in order to 'reload')."[13] The objective is to move towards "Generative Dialogue"—an approach encouraging direct action on multiple personal, social, local, and political levels. Tim Schwab looked at interactive uses of video—how video, film, photos, and other media artifacts are being archived, accessed, and subsequently "sampled" and reconfigured in creative ways. This work addresses ethical questions concerning the use of artifacts created by perpetrators.

The relationships between our conference, oral history, performance, and a culture of "never again" were very much on my mind recently when I went to hear David Fennario read his new play "Bolsheviki"—a theatrical monologue based on an interview and driven by David's need to speak out

on Canada's war in Afghanistan. The reading was a benefit for Montreal's Immigrant Workers Association. It was held in a Church basement in Pointe St. Charles—the same Church where Algerian refugee Abdelkader Belaouni spent almost four years in sanctuary.[14] Fennario—esteemed as a kind of Poet Laureate of the people of "the Point"—was introduced by two young women who spoke of growing up in the neighbourhood, of having to read *Balconville* in school, and of the subsequent profound and enduring effect that David's plays have had on their lives.

"Bolsheviki" is the story of Rosie, a World War I veteran deeply politicized by his experience of the horrors of trench warfare as told to Jerry Nines, a "skinny-ass-23-year-old" wet-behind-the-ears reporter. The play is set in the present in a hotel bar on Remembrance Day—the same bar where Rosie first told his story to Jerry who now tells the story to us. David made the transition from oral history to performance seem so easy. Across more than ninety years, Rosie's words echo with the hopes, dreams, fears, and ultimate disillusionment of a generation of young men. Rosie's earthy and poetic expression, his particular and peculiar use of stories and words as a means of coping—a way to speak the unspeakable—ring true and summon my memories of men like Rosie.

"Bolsheviki" is ostensibly a play about yesterday, yet the spectre of today's wars haunt the script. Afghanistan is mentioned only twice—once at the beginning and once at the end of the play. When the reading was over—in spite of the audience's obvious deep respect for David's craft—there were no questions about staging, theatrical technique, authorial intention, or lines between verbatim interview and dramatic adaptation. The audience wanted to talk about the implications of the work—"How can we be against the war in Afghanistan, *and* support the men who fight that war?" I was reminded of David's reasons for leaving mainstream theatre to work in community settings—and of the very Canadian line about going to see a fight and having a hockey game break out.

I went to hear a play reading and a public discussion broke out.

In Hope,
Ted

NOTES

1 Little, Edward. "Potential Impact." *alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage* 6.1 (2008): 4-7.

2 Co-sponsored by the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling, November 5-8, 2009.

3 McQuaig, Linda. "Why not a federal Department of Peace? It's a great idea." *CCPA Monitor* 16.6 (2009): 5.

4 For more information on Bill C-447 visit: www.departmentofpeace.ca

5 The OHP is led by Edward Little and consists of community partners Nisha Sajnani (Creative Alternatives) and Rahul Varma (Teesri Duniya Theatre); Sandeep Bhagwati (Theatre and Music); Steve High (Oral History); Warren Linds (Applied Human Sciences); Lorna Roth and Timothy Schwab (Communications Studies); Alan Wong (Ph.D. candidate); Hourig Attarian (2008-2009 artist-in-residence); and Ally Ntumba (2009-2010 artist-in-residence). For more information visit: www.lifestoriesmontreal.ca

6 All quotes from Bhagwati, Sandeep. "Gesturing within a Realm of Shadows." (Unpublished paper). Concordia University, November 5-8, 2009.

7 The other members of the Playback ensemble presenting at the conference were Warren Linds and Alan Wong from the OHP, with community members Laura Mora, Lisa Ndejeru, and Deborah Simon. See also www.creative-alternatives.ca

8 The seven research clusters that make up the Life Stories project are the Cambodian Working Group, the Refugee Youth Working Group, the Great Lakes of Africa Working Group, the Haiti Working Group, the Holocaust Working Group, the Education Working Group, and the Oral History and Performance Working Group.

9 Two works from Untold Histories were presented at the conference: a performance-video piece by Iran artist Shahrzad Arshadi entitled "Red Names and *Je Me Souviens*" and a work-in-progress by Gilda Monreal drawing on interviews she conducted with Chilean Refugees.

10 Hourig is the 2008-2009 OHP artist-in-residence. Her first encounter with the Life Stories project occurred as a result of outreach by Rahul Varma as part of the Untold Histories project. Ally Ntumba, our 2009-2010 artist-in-residence, is working on a community-engaged participatory theatre piece ("Congo Drama") with Congolese youth from the neighbourhood of Montreal North.

11 The interviews are published in Attarian, H. and Yogurtian, H. "Survivor stories, surviving narratives: Autobiography, memory and trauma across generations." *Girlhood: Redefining the limits*. Ed. Y. Jiwani, C. Steenbergen, and C. Mitchell. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2006: 13-34.

12 All quotations from Attarian, H., and Van Fossen, R. "Stories Scorched from the Desert Sun: Testimony as Process." (Unpublished paper) Concordia University, November 5-8, 2009.

13 From my own notes of the conference.

14 Belaouni was granted permission to remain in Canada on October 26, 2009.

© David Ward / Playback Theatre Ensemble l to r Chu-lynne Ng, Warren Linds, Deborah Simon.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

From: Vancouver Moving Theatre ←vancouvermovingtheatre@shaw.ca→
Date: 2009/11/5
Subject: from savannah, Alt.theatre, letter to the editor
To: Edward Little ←elittle@alcor.concordia.ca→

Hi Ted,
Enjoyed reading the recent issue (September) – including your very thought-provoking editorial.
Found a lot to think about in the article "All White All Right? Vancouver Theatre Artists Talk about Vancouver's Monochrome Stages." Lots of important points raised that need to be heard and heeded.
But the article effectively "disappeared" the creative contributions of Vancouver companies who regularly feature performing artists from a variety of cultural backgrounds on their stages (including the Firehall Arts Centre, urban ink and Vancouver Moving Theatre) and it "disappeared" the artists who have been performing on these stages, doing exciting and important work.

The picture is not monochrome. There's tons of room for improvement in the city's arts scene, but Vancouver's stages are not all monochrome.

Savannah Walling
Artistic Director
Vancouver Moving Theatre

# A VIEW *from the diaspora*

by Lisa Ndejuru

The theatre troupe Isôko[1] has undertaken important work in Rwanda. In her report in *alt.theatre* entitled "Memory, Memorial, and the Monument" describing Isôko's first project—a translation of Canadian playwright Colleen Wagner's play *The Monument*—the group's founder and artistic director Jennifer Capraru shared some of her experiences and reflections.

I met Jennifer in 2006 shortly after her return from Rwanda where she had served as part of the production crew for *Shake Hands with the Devil*, the Canadian film based on General Roméo Dallaire's 1994 experiences during the genocide of the Tutsi. She attended a fundraiser for our Rwandan community centre in Montreal. Later she told me over tea how she felt she soon would be heading back to Rwanda.

She did go back, and eventually brought into being a professional touring production of *The Monument* in Rwanda. Earlier, when Jennifer sent me a copy of the play, I read it through in both French and English and was unable to imagine how far she would be able take it, especially in view of the daunting realities on the ground. "One of our main challenges was a complete lack of infrastructure," she wrote. "You want lights—make them, you want actors—train them; posters might be printed in Nairobi [Kenya, two countries away], and only one actual theatre [building] exists" (22).

I appreciate many aspects of her published report—for example, the sensitive ethical considerations around the issue of aesthetic representation of the corpses meant to evoke the monument in question. In her role as props mistress, Jennifer "painstakingly buried, dug up, replaced, sanded, painted, burned, tore, and melted items ranging from a night dress, to a baby's blanket, to a crucifix, to a pair of spectacles, to a school uniform, to a battered identity card bearing the tribal designation of Tutsi." All this in an effort to "individualize each dead girl and take her as far away as theatrically possible from the piles of corpses we have seen too often as they are bulldozed into mass graves in Bosnia, Darfur, Congo, or Poland," experiences that "somehow over time managed to lose their shocking resonance" (20).

I understand Jennifer's quest for the "right amount of distance from trauma" and grin with her as she tells of coming to terms with Rwandan audiences' rigid demands for realism. I remember choreographing for and performing with ISANGANO—a cultural group of young Rwandan Montrealers. When we performed traditional dances in traditional ways, audiences jumped to their feet, singing, laughing, clapping, dancing. But deviations from the usual were greeted with polite, measured glances and patient silence. In a milieu where little or no value is placed on individual self-expression, it is not easy to discern the real value and impact of something new. (I grin again because the silent treatment we experienced may have been in part a comment on the quality of our work.)

I remember tears of joy and frustration when I first saw a pre-colonial Rwandan play, written in Burundi by a Rwandan author of the diaspora, performed in Montreal by a Rwandan-Canadian troupe. Representations of us—by us—were and still are so very rare. What a relief to discover that one does indeed leave a trace in the theatrical mirror! And how strange to experience a mostly-Rwandan audience I thought I knew laughing uproariously at that play in places my Western-shaped mind could not begin to consider amusing.

What if. . . ? This is where artists and cultural workers can make their most potent contribution: to open a window for a glimpse of a different future or a taste of some new possibility. Such well-placed what-ifs? may be just what it takes to propel us toward the place we need to be next.

Heroically transporting *The Monument* across oceans and daring to bridge cultural divides has resulted in a theatrical tour de force. But even more important is Isôko's long-term commitment to seed and nurture creative imaginations and train Rwandan authors, actors, and playwrights: a long, arduous, loving process. I believe that even more than the play itself, this will be Jennifer's enduring contribution to "healing" and "reconciliation."

Did inviting me to provide this reflection carry an assumption that as a Rwandan woman I know things non-Rwandans or non-females can't know? I hope not. I don't live in Rwanda. I have not seen *The Monument* in performance. I cannot speak for anyone but myself. But Jennifer's report raises serious issues that I have been working with and thinking about for years, and I do welcome this opportunity to be part of an important discussion.

As a community organizer and community arts practitioner, I am in awe of the magnitude of creative effort expended by Isôko. As a theatre lover, I can't imagine more pertinent subject matter.

But as a Western-educated mental health professional of African origin I have concerns.

> In Rwanda today, the play's central theme of the challenges inherent in forgiveness is intimate to citizens, as they struggle daily to find paths towards healing. But unlike the films they may have seen or worked in—set in Rwanda 1994 and made by France, England, or Canada, featuring white male saviours in the eye of the conflict—in The Monument they were seeing women, their own African folk up on stage performing their nation's story, in their own language Kinyarwanda. And there were no heroes or Hollywood endings. (22)

*Were power and resources shared with Rwandans in meaningful, difficult ways? Whose vision is it, anyway?*

When we allow ourselves to imagine things differently, we just may catch a glimpse of how to change things around, how to reorient or re-value ourselves, our families, and our community. Imagination. That place of infinite possibility. In the face of oppression and violence our power to move beyond a cycle of violence, and into a mode of co-creation can wither.

Jennifer's critique of Hollywood and the entrenched power of white men is apt. However, although it is noteworthy that she/they/I are women, this hardly is the key issue. She has told us *why* this particular play. She has told us *why then* and *why there*. But she does not reveal much about who took the fundamental decisions and on what basis this strategic creative control was

exercised. Were power and resources shared with Rwandans in meaningful, difficult ways? Whose vision is it, anyway?

I am a deeply involved volunteer with a five-year university-community project called *Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide and Other Human Rights Violations*.[2] The project is meant to operate on the basis of university-community and interviewer-interviewee shared authority. My concerns about this big oral history project mirror those I have about Isôko.

Most of us are fascinated by survivors who have returned from the abyss. (I am not a genocide survivor.) From our position of privilege we are compelled to "help." I worry that my own engagements with survivors may legitimize processes that at their core treat people primarily as research fodder, as prospective recipients of what I have predetermined would meet their needs, or as a means for educational and professional advancement. Our bundle of twenty first-century post-violence good intentions echo the Christian missionary era of the first half of the twentieth century and the "international development" era of the second half.

Could it be that such efforts express more about our own need to find explanations, agency, and meaningful employment than about meeting real needs of those we purport to be helping?

Within the *Montreal Life Stories* project I am well-encouraged to do the research and make other contributions I find important. But with one foot in the Rwandan-Canadian community and one in Canadian academia, it is a difficult dance indeed. How can one function with integrity as a research-creator working with my community's stories of pain and loss, their continuing struggles, and their unresolved fears? Perhaps it would be seen as betrayal and exploitation if my efforts should lead to personal recognition, advancement, enhanced security. Perhaps I would inadvertently undermine my own credibility within the community while trying to do good.

What is the place of our community's struggles in the broader North American and global contexts? Where is common ground for linking the advancement of our community to a larger one? What can I give back? Good intentions are not enough.

Both of my Rwandan grandfathers were administrators under Belgian colonial rule. They were part of a social class called "les évolués" (the evolved.) Two generations later, from the perspective of my own German and Canadian acculturation and Western education, I am acutely sensitive to the destructive inequalities and imbalances flowing from privilege and power.

Jennifer worked with local Rwandans and I would have loved to hear their voices in the report, to better understand their contributions, initiatives, role in decision making, and the risks they took to help realize the project. I wish she had told us more about "the excellent discussions of what theatre was, what it was for, and why we were doing it in their country." Jennifer wrote that she "learned a great deal from the audience." What were those learnings?

I worry about the pain. A post-trauma audience is vulnerable and easily abused. I am troubled by Jennifer's comment that ethical considerations have been left to individual discretion, apparently with no one well-positioned and empowered to hold colleagues accountable. She wrote that her "audience was one with little theatre culture, but slowly healing wounds that would be prodded by the incendiary dialogue the characters spat at each other as they fought for moral and physical supremacy against a background of ethnic hatred" (18). She said she wants "to pick our audience up by the throat" (14).

What is the value of applying theatrical shock treatment to a trauma victim? Both trauma and victimhood are about powerlessness, senselessness, helplessness. In contrast, healing is about rebuilding a sense of trust, a measure of security, and finding enough safety to be able to take healthy risks again.

*Both trauma and victimhood are about powerlessness, senselessness, helplessness. In contrast, healing is about rebuilding a sense of trust, a measure of security, and finding enough safety to be able to take healthy risks again.*

I think of one young survivor I know in Montreal telling me how he feels isolated, vulnerable, and threatened because he is a living, breathing reminder of a past neither side of Rwanda's muted, ongoing struggle cares to remember. Would he be a good candidate for being "picked up by the throat"?

I think of another survivor, scoffing at all our carryings-on around the annual genocide commemoration. A special time to remember genocide, he believes, could lead to amnesia all the other days of the year. I flinched as he told me how self-consciously he re-rips his old emotional wounds, "bleeding" whenever he feels himself beginning to let go of his traumatic past or, God forbid, he feels himself healing a little.

I picture him as I re-read the report, and reread the play itself. Yes, I agree with Jennifer that theatre could be and sometimes is a great gift in the midst of such pain. But, remembering my scoffer, I have been feeling uneasy about parts of her work.

What I do appreciate about the play (and Jennifer's report) is its position against perpetual victimhood. I find interesting her assertion that seeing its own history on the stage might help a brutalized nation struggling to heal itself. Like a public vaccination campaign, in the right setting a theatrical production could allow survivor-spectators to maintain a safe distance while being "innoculated." Witnessing on stage a victim-perpetrator relationship and dramatizations of complex themes like guilt, truth-telling and the need to "re-member" (to put the pieces back together) might help audiences clarify their feelings. But the notion of pushing a passive audience's defensive mechanisms to the breaking point without also providing skilled facilitation to integrate or reorganize in more efficient, inclusive ways seems dangerous at best.

In *community empowerment* or *playback theatre* there is a principle of showing or giving back to an actively participating teller from the audience. In *psychodrama*, a group or therapist(s) respond to a protagonist's need by embodying and maybe even working together to resolve core conflicts. In *theatre of the oppressed*, power struggles and inequalities are teased out, symbolized, and acted upon. Each form illustrates the therapeutic and edifying benefits of an audience sharing stories and reclaiming some of the action, participating creatively instead of merely consuming a crafted artistic offering about fictitious characters.

In each case what is ultimately key is availability and agency. Availability refers to openness to what life has to offer, in contrast to being blocked and unreceptive around traumatized, unresolved pieces of the self. Agency is about awareness, empowerment, and healing.

In my own practice I have found the healing effect to be optimal in workshop settings and believe this is the case at least in part because participants usually are "primed," entering the process with a particular intention and openness. Any theatrical experience framed as having to do with healing (and "forgiveness"!) would benefit from careful consideration of how the event could be positioned effectively and what the participants' expectations are.

From the report it seems clear that Isôko's mixed team of artists is experiencing personal healing as they work together to create a piece of beauty, addressing within themselves and each other the issues raised. Not clear is to what extent healing occurs in audiences.

I would have liked to read much more about the discussion sessions at the end of presentations, and would like to know whether any have been taped or transcribed. Are these sessions designed to be opportunities to process, heal, and understand? Do they lead to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of and by this unique people and circumstance? Has there been follow-up? The report led me to believe that the play's audiences consisted primarily of genocide victims and just a few perpetrators, but perhaps that was not the case. Having worked in Rwanda, Jennifer may have better knowledge than I concerning how people identify and coexist, but I am imagining that different publics would have different needs and interests and thus have shown varying responses to the work. I wonder how those factors were apparent during the post-play discussions she surprisingly likens to *gachacha* tribunals.

I seesaw back and forth in my thoughts, appreciating on one hand the alignment of the play with the situation and on the other feeling very uncomfortable with such notions as picking up audiences by the throat.

I reflected about *The Monument* with one of my aunts, expressing my own discomfort over the idea of dramatizing the unearthing of human bones. She told me of a survivor she knows in her Ottawa community who goes into an utterly lonely, painful place whenever the brutal killing of her son is hinted at. Then for days, weeks, sometimes months at a time, that woman is immobilized by a consuming rage.

Jennifer is treading on dangerous ground. We need to know more about her own motivations, her ethical reflections, and the "healing aspects" of this work for herself. I respect her comment that she intends to focus more closely on questions of impact and to learn how to ask them more effectively.

Post-genocide Rwanda feels a bit like a new frontier—a Wild West—with scores of groups, organizations, and individuals arriving to "help," carrying their unique bags of motivations, assumptions, agendas, history, and needs. As

with our own *Montreal Life Stories* project, I am uneasy about the tendency to home in on victims and treat them, or anyone, as capital. I am so concerned about the easy assumption that our own good intentions alone will provide sufficient justification, authority, and means for doing the right thing in a complex and fraught situation. Who will ensure that such interventions ultimately foster equality, creativity, initiative, autonomy, health?

*At issue—as the play, the process, and my reflections all suggest—is the creation of a gritty, imperfect, attainable coexistence.*

Finally, a comment about the notion of forgiveness. "Something unspeakable has happened, so let's all get together now and fix it," is what many seem to be saying, especially outsiders. (What kind of person would doubt the righteousness of forgiveness, truth, and reconciliation?) But the genocide in Rwanda was no schoolyard fight. Fix it? What would that look like? Perhaps the Rwandan imperative is not sweeping reconciliation and forgiveness. Nothing quite so grand and disincarnate. Not yet. Not now.

At issue—as the play, the process, and my reflections all suggest—is the creation of a gritty, imperfect, attainable coexistence.

I am grateful for this opportunity to reflect on Isôko, although my respect for how hard it is to create something good leads me to dread offering such pointed criticism. My hope is that these thoughts may add a little to the struggle to build the common good while nurturing enduring relationships of care.

## NOTES

1 The troupe chose to name itself Isôko, the Kinyarwanda word for "source." Its mission is to create modern theatre for social harmony and cultural growth in Rwanda. As per the troupe's Website, Isôko is an international company founded on July 4, 2008, and based in Kigali. Its mission is to use contemporary theatre to contribute to civil society, social development, and creative economy in Rwanda. Isôko is founded in the spirit of intercultural exchange, to celebrate Rwandan artists and to further the work of global peace building while promoting equality for women and girls.

2 www.histoiresdeviemontreal.ca

## WORK CITED

Capraru, Jennifer. "Memory, Memorial, and *The Monument*: Contested Memories in Rwanda, A Field Report." *alt.theatre* 6.3 (2009): 14-23.

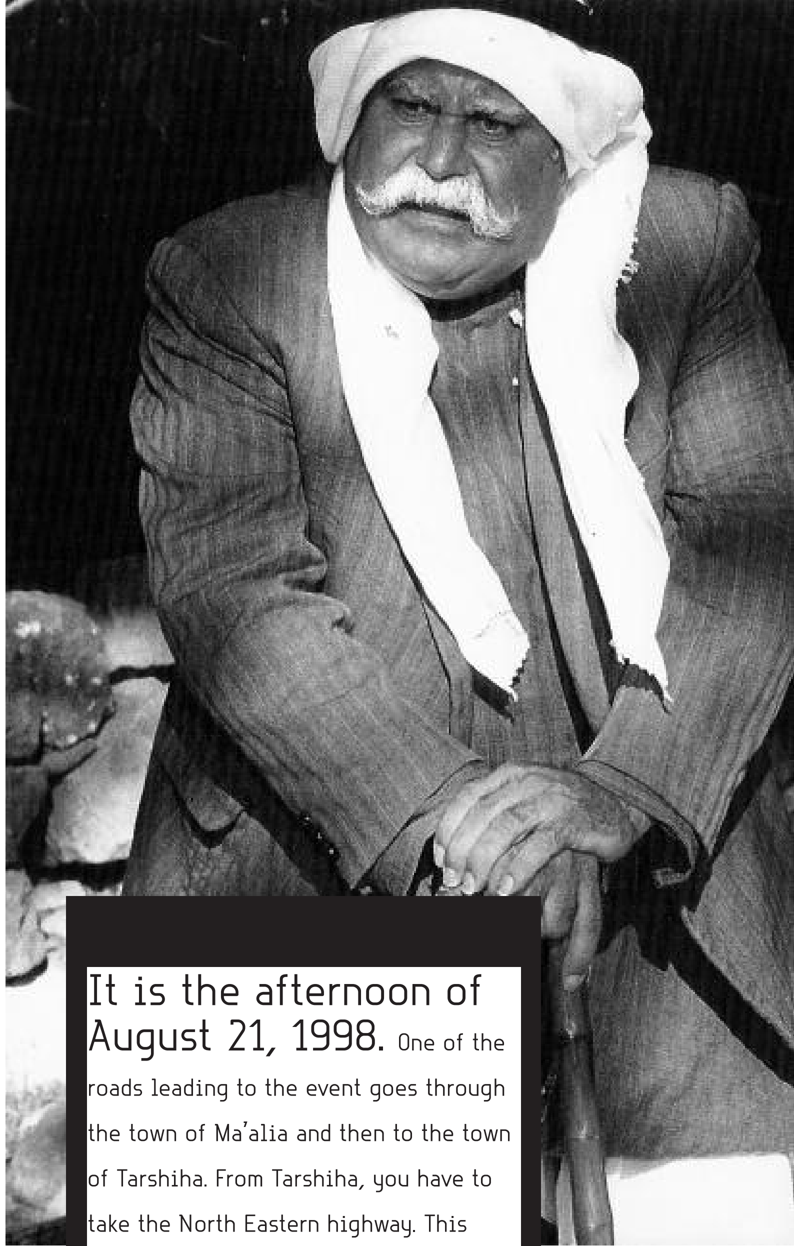
BIO

**Lisa Ndejuru** WAS BORN IN BUTARE, ATTENDED SCHOOL IN COLOGNE, AND HAS LIVED IN MONTREAL FOR MOST OF HER LIFE. SHE IS A PROFESSIONAL INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY COUNSELOR, IS EXPERIENCED IN DIALOGUE AS COMMUNITY ART AND EMPOWERMENT, PLAYBACK THEATRE, AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION/MEDIATION, AND IS TRAINING AS A PROFESSIONAL PSYCHODRAMATIST. SHE IS A MEMBER OF THE *MONTREAL LIFE STORIES* PROJECT AND IS DEVELOPING A PHD PROPOSAL INCORPORATING MANY OF THE THEMES INCLUDED IN HER REFLECTIONS ABOVE.

# A THEATRICAL *AWDA*:

## Palestine, *Sahmatah,* Refugees, and Going Home

by Samer Al-Saber



© Fuad Awad / Lutuf Nuwayser as Abu Sohail

It is the afternoon of August 21, 1998. One of the roads leading to the event goes through the town of Ma'alia and then to the town of Tarshiha. From Tarshiha, you have to take the North Eastern highway. This high area, encompassing the winding roads, includes the village of Buqay'a in the east and the village of Suhmatah in the west. To reach the intended site, you have to find a small sandy road lined on both sides with fig and olive trees. At one point, you are stopped by two young men and a girl who say, "Welcome! Go on until you reach the parking area."[1] Depending on when you have arrived, the site might be empty—apart from the many stones, grass, and trees—or full of people sitting on bare ground, blankets, and white plastic chairs. An observant traveler might have noticed a sign along the way that reads—in Arabic, Hebrew, and English—"This is a Historical Site."[2]

What is this place? What kind of history does the site tell? Why have people made their way here? Who are these people?

If you happen to have joined the event in progress, you would realize you are witnessing a theatrical event: Two actors, almost entirely surrounded by an audience, are interacting as if they are remembering a distant past— at times reliving it. In the audience, you might notice someone beside you reacting with the typical Palestinian gesture of grabbing one's chin and saying, "Mmm...mmm!!" At other moments, audience members may laugh merrily or their eyes may well up silently with tears (Mast interview).

The event you are witnessing is a performance of *Sahmatah: Memory of Stones*,[3] produced by Haifa's Al-Midan Theatre, directed by Hanna Eady, co-authored by Edward Mast and Eady, and performed by local actors Loutuf Nuwayser and Mysara Masri. The play opened on August 22, 1998, and continues to be remounted today. Arabic newspapers in the region lauded this play as a milestone. One reviewer stated,

> When the actor Loutuf Nuwayser spoke his last line in the play—"Goodbye, if you kindly will"—as tears (which were real) filled his eyes, buried emotions surfaced for everyone in the audience of refugees, artists, journalists, and guests. Their reactions varied—some broke down in tears; others, lost in the moment, strongly applauded; and some stood up out of respect for the play's political stance as well as the wonderful performances. (Qibty and Khoury, my translation)

The play tells the story of the 1948 catastrophe of Palestine. It begins with an old man wandering through an unrecognizable space, nothing more than trees and some stones. This grandfather figure begins to identify the space:

> Ibrahim El Khalil's house. Ahmad Khalil's house. So, As'ad Zidan lived....here...The church was over that way, next to the mosque, and this was El Haj Hashim's house. And here was his son's house...right next door...The Mukhtar's house must be in this area...By the pomegranate field. (Eady and Mast 1)[4]

The audience gradually recognizes that the old man is attempting to explain to his uninterested grandson that the rubble on which they stand was once the living village of Suhmatah. In 1948, this village had a population of 1311, with 288 houses, 17,056 dunums of land, one mosque, one church, and two schools. Of the total land area, 3290 dunums were planted with cereal and another 2110 with olive trees. Only 135 of them were built up.[5] This village was not unique: it reflected the general characteristics of Palestinian society at the time. Although many people lived in major cities such as Yafa, Haifa, Hebron and Lyd, many others populated the villages, where agriculture was the primary source of income.

From the opening of the play, authors Mast and Eady present two competing historical narratives. The old man claims that Suhmatah is his home, his son's home, and the home of the grandson standing before him. To his chagrin, the grandson counters that he is from the city of Haifa, not what appears to be a bunch of stones scattered in the midst of the herding grounds from the neighbouring Jewish settlements, Ma'a lot and Hosen.[6] This intergenerational rift thrusts the discussion into a historical debate between a young Palestinian man, educated in the Israeli school system, and his grandfather, who witnessed the catastrophic events of 1948.

On the one hand, the year 1948 commemorates the birth of Israel. The young character, Habeeb, states, "Israel has been good to us...Jobs, schools, electricity, running water... Was it really so great here? Before the change? In your one room schoolhouse with your donkeys and your wooden plows? Was it really wonderful?" (5). At the same time, 1948 commemorates the death of historic Palestine as the indigenous population of all biblical religions knew it. The grandfather responds, "We ate what we grew. We didn't need much money, we traded and we lived. We had hard times, but we weren't slaves to anybody" (6). Habeeb disagrees with the seeming nostalgia of this narrative. His 1948 was a year of shame: "We started a war and then ran away. My ancestors, most of them. So everyone lives in Lebanon or Amman and complains that they don't live here. When they ran away. That's your Arab history. Am I supposed to be proud of that?" Habeeb eventually ceases his assault on his grandfather's untold story, and then he asks in earnest, "Tell me please. What happened to Suhmatah?" (8)

When asked this, the grandfather begins to tell his version of history, recounting the stories of the villagers—an oral history of the destruction of the village:

October 28, 1948: Abu Mysa and his wife are sitting under their big olive tree, fighting over whether Abu Mysa can reach a big ripe olive, which is far too high for him. Against his wife's wishes, he climbs until he is an arm's reach from this perfect olive—then he hears military airplanes as they pass the village, heading north. Soon after, a nearby village is hit.

The same day: a little boy by the name of Anwar sees a cloud of dust in the distance. He asks his father, Abu Anwar, about it. Abu Anwar, understanding what is really happening, asks the boy to go bring as much bread as possible from home. The cloud of dust dissipates to reveal a line of villagers carrying their possessions on their back. They shout to Abu Anwar: "Prepare yourself, today it's us, tomorrow it will be your turn" (12).

October 30, 1948: Abu Ayeman burns all the belongings he cannot take with him: "Nothing stays for them" (15).

Abu Saalem witnesses the death of his own son: "Saalem!!!!! Son, wake up! Come on Habibi!

You still asleep? OK, I'll go get some work done and get back before sunrise. Okay? Don't leave the house, they say the army is rounding up young handsome men. Like you. You stay here. Sleep until I come back." (19) Abu Saalem sings a lullaby over the body of his son.

Umm Omar fights her neighbours to run towards her injured son. They don't let her. He is eventually picked up and taken outside the borders of the village by a Druze man. The son survives. The ill mother will later be rounded up on Christmas Eve of 1948 in a military truck and end up in a refugee camp. Here, she will soon die due to the harsh weather conditions.

For three years after these events, the village was populated by Jewish immigrants. When the indigenous inhabitants attempted to come back, they were prevented or shot at. When the immigrants moved to the newly built settlement of Hosen, Suhmatah was bulldozed and destroyed.

THESE STORIES ARE NOT WORKS OF FICTION. THEY ARE CORROBORATED THROUGH EXTENSIVE RESEARCH ON THE HISTORY OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE AND THE EVENTS OF 1948.

These stories are not works of fiction. They are corroborated through extensive research on the history of the Palestinian people and the events of 1948. The work of a number of new Israeli and Palestinian historians has been instrumental in authenticating and legitimizing these stories. The authors of *Palestinians: The Making of a People*, Baruch Kimmerling and Joel Migdal, for example, describe the gravity of these historic events:

> Between the last month of 1947 and the first four-and-a-half months of 1948, the Palestinian Arab community would cease to exist as a social and political entity: a process that neither Jew nor Arab foresaw in the tumultuous years of World War II. More than 350 villages would vanish, urban life would all but evaporate—war and exodus reducing Jaffa's population from 70,000-80,000 Palestinians to a remnant of 3,000-4,000—and 500,000 to 1,000,000 Palestinians would become refugees. (135)

This perspective, in spite of its horrific statistics, is conservative. Ilan Pappé estimates that there were at least 418 villages destroyed by the end of 1948. More importantly, he notes that the systematic destruction of the villages and the depopulation of the cities were intentional. He relies on Israeli archival materials that include minutes of meetings with future prime minister David Ben Gurion, biographies of key Zionist personalities, and testimonies of soldiers who participated in depopulation operations. Suhmatah was destroyed in the well-documented *Operation Hiram*.

In his remarkable book, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Pappé outlines the catastrophic events that began in late 1947, including several references to Suhmatah. Pappé's historical account reveals that at the very moment that Abu Mysa was reaching for his ripe olive, "The Israeli air bombardments were massive and caused considerable amount of 'Collateral Damage' to the Palestinian villages. Some villages suffered more than others from heavy pounding: Rama, Suhmata, Malkiyya, and kfar Bir'im. Only Rama was left intact; the other three were occupied and destroyed" (Pappé 181). At the moment that Abu Saalem was telling his son to stay at home because the army was rounding up the young handsome men, as Pappé reports, the Jewish armies were searching out Palestinian men of military age whose names were known to the military through pre-war intelligence reports and executing them. Furthermore, Pappé reveals records of Israeli army patrols that explicitly note the attempts of Palestinians to return home. According to these reports, they were "successfully shot at" (Pappé 189).

The making of the 1998 theatrical event *Sahmatah* began when Hanna Eady, a Palestinian artist living in Seattle, called Ed Mast, also a Seattle resident. In 1995, Eady had a clear proposal. He would travel to the West Bank and Israel to interview the residents about the developing peace process and the existing conflict for the sole purpose of creating a play.

When Eady came back, the project had changed.[7] Seventy-two-year-old Abu Soheil, the neighbour he'd known for over forty years in his own village, Buqay'a, had taken him to the site of Suhmatah. Eady learned that his neighbours, along with many others he knew intimately, were not from Buqay'a, as he had always thought. They were from a fenced-off piece of land that had lain deserted all these years. In his interviews with Abu Soheil and many others, they walked through the site of the destroyed village. Abu Soheil identified the two remaining walls of the church, the unidentifiable remains of the mosque, and the various houses of the inhabitants of the village.

As I later watched the videos of these interviews, I could not help but wonder about the emotional resonance of that site of memory. The journey was a sharp reminder of the second part of the play's title: *Memory of Stones*. The footage is raw, unedited, and spontaneous. Abu Soheil walks through the village as though it was all still there. As he enters the site that was once the church, he crosses his heart. At the cemetery, he diligently places a tombstone at the grave it belonged to. He "walks the village," bringing it back to life, as he points with his cane at the various parts of it, including areas covered up by soil and pine trees.[8]

In their review of the play, Tariq Al-Qibty and Jackie Khoury report that the pine trees were planted by the Jewish National Fund. The JNF Website sentimentalizes the trees:

> Israel is one of only two countries in the world that entered the 21st century with a net gain in its number of trees. But Israel was not blessed with natural forests; its forests are *all hand-planted*. When the pioneers of the State arrived, they were greeted by barren land. *To claim the land that had been purchased with the coins collected in JNF blue and white pushkes*, the next order of business was to plant trees among the rocky hillsides and sandy soil. (my emphasis)

One must ask: Were the lands of Suhmatah and hundreds of other villages, some documented and others not, purchased using donations from the historic charity boxes of the JNF? And were the donations meant to displace a people in the name of afforestation? To understand the deliberate erasure of Suhmatah, we must consider Pappé's sobering statement about the new-born state's anti-repatriation policy:

> The first level was national, introduced in August 1948 by an Israeli governmental decision to destroy all the evicted villages and transform them into new settlements and natural forests. The second level was diplomatic, whereby strenuous efforts were made to avert the growing international pressure on Israel to allow the return of refugees. (188)

This idea of the refugee raises the question: If Abu Soheil was living five minutes away from his village, his house, and the land he owned (as was the character of the grandfather in the play) how could he be called a refugee?

In reality, both Abu Soheil and the character he inspired *are* refugees. Israel made a concerted and substantial effort to prevent Palestinians from returning home, including the escapees who remained within the borders of the state to be. The newly created state declared martial law throughout the land. In addition, its government created one of the most ingenious and infamous laws in the history of the conflict: The Law of Absented Properties of 1950. Through this Law, Palestinians prohibited from going home were referred to as present-absentees or internal refugees. Due to their forced absence, their land was confiscated. Kimmerling and Migdal report that at least 40 percent of Arab Land was confiscated in this way (161).

In 1996, Eady and Mast created *Sahmatah* based on the interviews and the journeys into the village site. The play was performed in English in Seattle in the same year. After each performance, the team held a post-show discussion. During the month-long run of the production, many Palestinians in Seattle showed up to speak of their experience of the Nakba. They took out the keys to their homes and the deeds to their lands. Mast said, "Some of these people were showing up for the first time. We had never met them before." Roberta Penn's review in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, entitled "Village's tale of oppression strikes universal chord," stated that *Sahmatah* "[was] a tragic story much like any other tale of indigenous people being ousted from their land in the name of greed, politics, or progress." She also noted the importance of the post-show discussions as "tempers and temperatures [were] sure to rise."

During the period that *Sahmatah* was developed, presented, translated, and then re-produced, the Oslo peace process was underway. Most people will remember the historic Rabin/Arafat handshake on the front lawn of the White House. At the time, there was a sense of renewed hope for some Palestinians and Israelis. Even though there were detractors on both sides of the conflict, many thought that peace was possible. But discerning critics knew otherwise. The handshake and the exchange of the letters of mutual recognition seriously damaged the future of the Palestinian people. In his book, *The Israel - Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War*, James Gelvin puts it succinctly:

> By recognizing Israel, Palestinians conceded that close to 80 percent of historic Palestine—the territory within the pre-1967 boundaries of Israel—would forever remain off the bargaining table. This meant that all future territorial adjustments would come from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The territory controlled by Israel could only get larger; the territory controlled by the Palestinians could only get smaller. (Gelvin 233)

With the peace agreements underway, *Sahmatah* played in Palestine. The play was presented to the very present-absentees it represented, as they were living on the still existing land of the village of Suhmatah. Actor Loutuf Nuwayser played Abu-Soheil, as the old man sat in the audience and witnessed the Nakba all over again. The piece clearly struck an emotional chord with its audience. In Eady's closing statement of the evening, speaking to an audience of people "he grew up knowing and not knowing" ("Awakening History"), he struggled with tears that rendered him inarticulate. The press, the authors, and the audience described the night as magical and timely as the performance operated on several intertwining levels.[9]

First, the play was an act of resistance to a peace process that ignored the rights of the people of Suhmatah and most Palestinians in the diaspora. In the play's program, Eady's poetic statement reminded the audience of the gravity of this theatrical event. He likened the village to a helpless victim, buried alive for fifty years. He demanded, "Kill the victim so it will rest forever, or give her life as a reward for her insistence on living." In his symbolic universe, this play is a testimony: "Suhmatah is alive...In the heart of every [Suhmati]" (my translation). Most importantly, he linked the creation and the performance of the play to the illusory peace process. In a personal interview, he asked, "Who are the Israelis making

EADY'S COMMEMORATION OF THE CRIME WAS NOT INTENDED TO DERAIL A SUCCESSFUL PEACE PROCESS; RATHER, HE PRESENTED THE MISSING PIECES OF THE PUZZLE STARTING WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE.

peace with? Arafat? The stones? When are they going to make peace with the people?" His program notes further emphasize his stance against the then ongoing Oslo peace process,

> I ask myself and I ask you to recall the memory in order to revive those deprived of life for over half a century, those who died with sorrow in their hearts. All you and they need to do is to exhume the graves, so the smell of the crime will surface. No one will have peace without my peace. My peace will occur upon my return home and my home's return to me. (My translation)

Eady's commemoration of the crime was not intended to derail a successful peace process; rather, he presented the missing pieces of the puzzle starting with the Palestinian people. Many political scientists, historians, and critics tend to agree. Pappé recently made a statement that supports Eady's passionate argument:

> Ever since 1948 the peace process in Palestine has failed, largely because it bypassed the issue of the Palestinian refugees. Therefore it would be futile to continue in the same effort, without addressing the overall relationship between Jews and Palestinians, beginning with the need for Israel to acknowledge its own accountability for the 1948 "ethnic cleansing." ("Real Road" 252)

The Oslo peace accords were based on the premise that Israelis and Palestinians did not trust each other enough to address the key issues of the conflict. If the parties were to take confidence-building steps, they would slowly work towards Israel's disengagement from the occupied territories. Nowhere in the agreements were the rights of internal refugees going to be addressed, even if the peace process were to succeed. The play indicated these accords were doomed long before the Palestinian second intifada of the year 2000.

On a second level, the performance reasserted the presence of a local theatrical movement that addressed local issues. *Sahmatah* appeared on the scene in the midst of a local cultural movement. A year earlier, Habeeb Boulos wrote an article in the journal *Literary, Cultural and Public Stances* (*Mawaqif* in Arabic) outlining the crisis of local Palestinian theatre. He concluded that theatre is distant from its audience because of its choices of plays and complex stage craft. He suggested that local artists misunderstood the function and the civic responsibility of the theatre. Accordingly, the purpose of theatre is not simply to entertain: theatre should provoke and inspire debate and discussion of relevant educational and political matters.

In addition, he felt that theatre must stem from the historical moment and the outcome of a people's collective experience. As the Israeli celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the Jewish state approached, Palestinians felt the lack of local cultural machinery in the face of Israel's state-sponsored celebrations. Then Prime Minister Netanyahu extended the "independence day" celebration from one day to three days, making the oncoming date impossible to ignore. As the date approached, one year after Habeeb's article, preparations were underway to commemorate the Nakba in the Westbank and Gaza. On May 14, 1998, Charles M. Sennott of the *Boston Globe* reported,

> The Palestinian commemorations, expected to reach a peak today with marches by 1 million people throughout the West Bank and Gaza to mark the May 14 anniversary of Israel's creation, are largely somber and defiant, in contrast with Israel's "Jubilee," which has been celebrated with fireworks, military displays, and gala events. ... Most of the children wore signs indicating the name of the villages their families left behind. When asked where they are from, most of the children quickly answer the names of these villages, which most have never seen but only heard about from their grandparents.

In early 1998, Eady knocked on the door of the Arab Theatre of Israel in Haifa. The theatre was in shambles. According to the play's program notes, the previous administration had failed to provide relevant programming to sustain the operations of the theatre and the treasury was nearly empty. The notes state, "a few months ago, the theatre faced the danger of closure and the end of its project—cultural production for the Arab public in general and the artistic and theatrical milieu in particular" (my translation). The directors took credit for transforming this theatre into a thriving cultural centre. One contribution to this transformation was Mast's playwriting workshop, which the theatre hoped would support, as Mast stated, "the ongoing task of stimulating native Palestinian expression through the theatre" (Interview). Of greater importance was the production of *Sahmatah*, which the theatre slotted as the season opener. The directors suggest that *Sahmatah* is "a specific example of a larger case, for it presents the macro through the details of the micro. What happened in Suhmatah occurred in every location where a Palestinian village suffered the atrocities of the 1948 Nakba, and the fate of Suhmatah is the fate of 418 destroyed villages" (my translation).

In a sense, the play not only marked a new beginning for the theatre, it also suggested a path out of an artistic crisis that the theatre community and the culture at large clearly felt. Furthermore, the play supported the theatre as it shaped its new direction. This new identity continues to be expressed in the theatre's literature. At the time of this writing, the Arabic pages of their Website state their aim to "revive the culture and heritage

of Palestine as it was before 1948 and as it continues to be throughout the land, within Palestinian territories, the Arab world, and the rest of the world." Furthermore, the site outlines specific goals, including reaching Palestinians within Israel, making a home for Palestinian artists, and building a theatrical institution for Palestinian heritage. These goals were met through various productions in the last ten years. This new direction was exemplified in the change of the name of the theatre from the Arab Theatre of Israel to Al-Midan Theatre, a thoroughly Arabic name meaning a public square or a forum.

On a third level, the play supported an ongoing process of de-Israelization within the Arab population of Israel. In effect, the play re-Palestinizes this population. In his article on the process of making the play, Mast noted a significant change in the script from the 1996 Seattle production to the 1998 production. For this new production, the playwrights added "a new element to the script, based on Hanna's own life. Hanna's wife, Karen, is a Jewish woman from California...In the revised play, the grandson not only wants to join the Israeli army, but now, also has an Israeli fiancé." ("Awakening History" 123) The play addressed issues that concerned the Israelization of Palestinians as they were educated, worked, lived, and married in Israel. After fifty years of such interaction, and to some degree normalization, the play was indirectly addressing the question: How Israeli are the Palestinians within the current state of Israel?

At a crucial moment in the play, Habeeb tells his grandfather that having learned the stories, he can no longer marry his fiancé. The Israelized character cannot overcome the injustice of 1948. This reaction suggests that the sectoralism of the country is not easily ignored. In his study on the subject, Muhammad Amarra noted that in an era of peace, the Palestinian minority in Israel is likely to demand some changes to their status within the country:

> Simultaneous with an era of peace, the Arabs will have vigorous demands for full equality, including changing the character of the Jewish state to one which is a state for all of its citizens. The Jews will claim that the concession made in the withdrawing from the West Bank and Gaza is the end of Jewish concessions. In parallel, the Arabs in Israel will feel and will claim that the concession is a historic one: i.e. conceding more than 80 per cent of Mandatory Palestine will be perceived as the maximum concession that the Palestinians could have made. (Amarra 256)

At this theatrical event, with the peace process in the backdrop, the beginnings of these issues were active forces in the story line and the reception of the peace. Israeli Palestinians in the audience, along with the characters and the makers of the play, demonstrated their displeasure with the agreements long before the dawn of the era of peace. Samia Abu Ghazala, the granddaughter of two Suhmatis, stated after the performance, "I was quite touched by the play and I better understood what I've heard before. I've certainly been convinced by the opinions and stories, especially since the play deals with the contradictions between the grandson and the grandfather. The grandfather succeeded in convincing the grandson of his life story" (Qibty and Khoury).

When faced with the prospect of a failed peace process and the total loss of their rights to their land, the people of the village enacted a symbolic return to their village, an *awda*. They chose to witness their trauma once again. In this instance the theatre acted as an intermediary between the past and the present, the possession and the dispossessed, and, more importantly, as a site for the transfer of memory to the next generation as children and grandchildren participated in this act of remembering. The theatre also functioned as a site for the preservation of oral history and a place from which functional peace could occur. The grandfather instructs Habeeb on his road map to peace:

> It takes work. It takes them not denying [the nakba]. They can't bring the dead back to life, but they can admit what happened and that it should not have happened... Admitting is something. And maybe someday they could do one little thing, one small speck of a thing, which may or may not change anything but may still be worth doing. One tiny thing: Ask for forgiveness. (27)

The play continues to be remounted in Israel and this message continues to echo in the Palestinian public sphere.

The echoes of the grandfather's message of reconciliation remind me of an essay Edward Said wrote for Arabic newspapers in 1995. He entitled the essay "How Much for How Long?" He discussed the issue of moral responsibility and the importance of public debate in the overcoming of collective trauma. From the dropping of the atomic bomb, to the firebombing of Tokyo, to the Holocaust, to the dispossession of the native Indians, to the Nakba, many wrongdoings have been committed and collective traumas continue occur in the name of virtue or progress. Said asked germane questions: "How long after a collective injustice was committed does it need to be atoned for? And how much atonement is required?" (11) He suggested that a healthy public debate among scholars, intellectuals, advocates, and politicians is the first step towards an answer. "The past has to be uncovered if it has been hidden; responsibility for wrong doing has to be assigned and volunteered, denied or affirmed; proposals for atonement, reparation, or restitution have to be brought forward, analyzed, debated if in the past silence has prevailed" (12).

If anything, the production of *Sahmatah* was a step towards uncovering a silenced past and provoking debate. On the fiftieth anniversary of the Nakba, critics insisted it was time to remember

THE THEATRE ACTED AS AN INTER-MEDIARY BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE PRESENT, THE POSSESSION AND THE DISPOSSESSED, AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, AS A SITE FOR THE TRANSFER OF MEMORY TO THE NEXT GENERATION

loudly. Boulos called it a "scream of protest." Natour asked, "Have we been awakened by the shudders of the fig leaves?" And in the conclusion of his review, Walid Al Fahoom changed the last line of the play from "goodbye" to "see you next time."

© Fuad Awad / A new generation of Palestinians ask questions about the Nakba

## NOTES

[1] My translation. I took this account of "getting there" from Salman Natour's article in *Al-Sunnara*.

[2] As I saw on the video of the original trip that Eady took with Abu-Soheil.

[3] The play's title is spelled slightly differently from the name of the village. Mast explained the authors attempted to make the title easier to pronounce for an American audience. From here on, I refer to the play as *Sahmatah*.

[4] All quotes from the play are from this text.

[5] All facts and statistics on Suhmatah were drawn from www.palestineremembered.com

[6] These settlements are now best described as towns. Ma'a lot-Tarashiha is a recognized city that has a majority Jewish population and a minority of Arab Christians and Muslims.

[7] Mast describes how the play came about in "*Sahmatah*: Awakening History."

[8] Seven one hour videos were filmed over a period of several days in Hi8 format.

[9] This account of the after-effects of the event comes from a special insert to the daily newspaper *Kul Al-Arab*, 28 August 1998.

## WORKS CITED


Al-Fahoom, Walid. "*Sahmatah*, I don't say goodbye, but rather, 'til next time." *Al-Itihad* 24 August 1998.

Al-Midan Theatre. *Suhmatah Event Program*. 21 August 1998.

Amarra, Mohammed. "The Collective Identity of Arabs in Israel in an Era of Peace". *The Israeli Palestinians: An Arab Minority in the Jewish State*. Ed. Alexander Bligh. London: Frank Cass, 2003.

Boulos, Habib. "The Enthusiastic Reception of the Play, *Sahmatah*." *Mawaqif* 18/19 (1999): 27-34.

Eady, Hanna. Personal interview. 1 May 2009.

Eady, Hanna, and Edward Mast. "Sahmatah." Unpublished manuscript.

Gelvin, James L. *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Kimmerling, Baruch, and Joel S. Migdal. *Palestinians: The Making of a People*. New York: Free Press, 1993.

Mast, Edward. Personal interview. 8 May 1998.

———. "*Sahmatah*: Awakening History." *The Drama Review* 44.3 (2000): 113-130.

Natour, Salman. "Have we been awakened by the shudder of fig leaves?" *Al-Sunnara* 28 August 1998.

Pappé, Ilan. "The Real Road Map to Peace: International Dimensions of the Internal Refugee Question." *Catastrophe Remembered: Palestine, Israel and the Internal Refugees: Essays in Memory of Edward W. Said (1935-2003)*. London: Zed Books, 2005.

———. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2006.

Penn, Roberta. "Village's tale of oppression strikes universal chord." *Seattle Post Intelligencer* 25 March 1996.

Qibty, Tariq, and Jackie Khoury. "The Return to *Sahmatah*." *Al-Sunarra* 28 August 1998.

Said, Edward W. "How Much for How Long?" *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2000.

Sennott, Charles, M. "Arabs March, Recalling '48 Flight." *Boston Globe* 14 May 1998.

www.jnf.org/work-we-do/our-projects/forestry-ecology

www.palestineremembered.com


## BIO


**Samer Al-Saber** IS A DIRECTOR, PERFORMER, AND PLAYWRIGHT, AND A PHD STUDENT IN THEATRE HISTORY AND CRITICISM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF DRAMA. HE OBTAINED HIS MFA IN DIRECTING FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY AND HIS BA FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA. HIS GENERAL ACADEMIC AREAS OF INTEREST INCLUDE THE TRADITION OF THE ARABIAN NIGHTS, ARAB NATIONALISM, REFUGEE CRISES, NEWS PERFORMANCE, POLITICAL RHETORIC, AND CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE EASTERN THEATRE.

# *Excavating Yesterday*

## THE BIRTH, GROWTH, AND EVOLUTION OF A RESIDENT ARTIST IN THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE.

*by Savannah Walling with contributions by Terry Hunter*

*All things however they flourish*
*Turn and go home to the root*
*From which they sprang*
– TAO TE CHING

Sifting through shifting landscapes of memory, I unearth evidence of our journey—shards of creation, ancestral and artistic trace-lines, social and political forces…Terry's farm-instructing, music theatre-loving grandparents who worked alongside residents of the Saskatchewan Red Pheasant Reserve… My Oklahoma grandparents who farmed next door to Comanche neighbours…Whispers of civil wars, massacres, family feuds, addiction, and interracial marriage. Growing up under a nuclear cloud on a continent shaped and influenced by Aboriginal ideas and a host of cultural influences, we inherited from our ancestors a profound belief in the golden rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

The narrative of our history emerges out of all of these intersections with the community in which we've been planted for thirty years—a spit of land on Burrard Inlet known as the Downtown Eastside

The tipping point of this history was our 1973 move into this, Vancouver's oldest neighbourhood—and most misunderstood. Its historic borders were the waters of Burrard Inlet on the north, tidal streams flowing through gullies east and west (today's Campbell and Carrall streets), and the tidal flats of False Creek on the south. Overlapping mini-communities of Gastown, Main and Hastings corridors, Chinatown, North of Hastings (Japantown), and Strathcona rest on unceded Coast Salish territory. This is the place that gave birth to our company, Vancouver Moving Theatre, and its interdisciplinary and community-engaged art practice.

Shift forward thirty years to the critical tipping point that moved us onto an entirely new level of engagement with the Downtown Eastside. In 2002, all of our experiences of the previous thirty years—and our history of living and working in this place—led to an invitation from the Carnegie Community Centre to partner to produce a community play for, with, and about the Downtown Eastside: one that would celebrate its struggles and triumphs in a process that built bridges between groups within the community. As artists within our community, we would become truly artists *of* the community.

**The seeds of our artistic practice were planted in this stew: our fascination with interdisciplinary creation; our commitment to bridging barriers between cultures; our desire to connect artistic practice with community.**

© David Cooper / Terry Hunter and Savannah Walling

So how did we get from there to here?

When Terry and I arrived in the Downtown Eastside back in the early 1970s, we encountered a very different world than it is today. Back then we saw a residential community with a dynamic retail strip centered around Woodward's retail and grocery store, lots of mom and pop stores serving the mostly low-income locals, and long-standing cultural centres. No visible homeless were evident, nor were illegal drugs used openly on the streets—in fact, locals were concerned about bars over-serving beer to their patrons.

Our arrival coincided with a whole slew of local victories, in particular, the defeat of a plan to wipe out the neighbourhood with an eight-lane freeway. This victory changed national housing policy, turned around years of civic neglect, and resulted in innovative social and cooperative housing and new, revitalized community and cultural centres. But we didn't know any of these stories when we arrived. We only knew we had found an affordable home and rehearsal space, a community that welcomed and respected diversity, and a steaming stew of cultural aromas.

Ancestors of today's Coast Salish people have used this spit of land for thousands of years. There's still a strong First Nations presence here; the Downtown Eastside is called the largest urban reserve in Canada. It's also home to North America's second largest historical Chinatown. Almost half of the area's population is a visible minority, and it's been home to cultural festivals, feasts, celebrations, and ceremonies—Chinese New Year's Parades, Japanese Bon dances, taiko drumming, rhythm and blues, gospel, and Coast Salish, pan-Indian, and Ukrainian cultural events.

The seeds of our artistic practice were planted in this stew: our fascination with interdisciplinary creation; our commitment to bridging barriers between cultures; our desire to connect artistic practice with community. Our home community in turn shaped our practice and who we are. Witnessing the annual return of Chinese Lion Dancers on the streets of Chinatown, for instance—who arrived to bring blessings to the

community and frighten away evil forces—inspired us to take our work into the streets.

When Terry and I began our lifelong partnership, our shared love of music and dancing set in motion a long line of collaborative interdisciplinary explorations in companies we co-founded: two years of the Mime Caravan (with Doug Vernon); seven years of Terminal City Dance (with Karen Jamieson and others) and over twenty-five years of Vancouver Moving Theatre. From day one, we strove to break down boundaries between music, dance and theatre; bridge artistic disciplines and cultural traditions; create accessible art; step through imaginary fourth walls to interact directly with spectators and communities; take theatre out of the studio and into the streets and community; participate in places of celebration where people gather in a spirit of peace and hope for the future.

Blown north to Vancouver's inner city by the winds of the Vietnam War, I blended personal passions with local inspiration. I researched Asian practices of combining dance, live music, and mask with European popular theatre practices (from masques, mumming, and Commedia Dell'Arte to seventeenth-century fool literature). Inspired by Korean and taiko drum dancing and studies in Afro-Caribbean percussion, Terry developed his own style of drumming and moving at the same time. Out of these fusions emerged productions we toured around the world.

"Drum Mother," an audience-interactive character who danced and played music on large drums built into her red hoop-skirt, was launched at the Chinatown New Year's Parade. She then led 30,000 people in the 1984 Vancouver Peace March, before touring across Canada with the Festival Characters.

*Samarambi: Pounding of the Heart*, a non-verbal street drama that enacted a ceremony of conflict and resolution between forces dangerously out of balance, premiered during a six-month residency at Expo 86 on the fringes of Chinatown. We incorporated space for audience-interactive improvisations into the tightly composed structure performed by masked archetypal characters—two danced on stilts, one utilized extra vocal techniques on a portable sound-system built into her costume, and all performed live music.

Three blocks from our home—in tandem with drum dance training we provided for dance students in the Main Dance performance training program—we created "Blood Music." The choreography of this drum dance, which premiered in Korea, was inspired by the very simple rhythms of life without which we would all die: our hearts beating and pumping waves of blood, our lungs breathing, and the ebb and flow of the sea.

Combining research on the physics of sound with long-standing interest in Asian performance forms, we developed an introduction to drum dancing—a global approach to performer training in which physical, musical, mental, and spiritual exercises cultivate total presence, impelling participants beyond their preconceived limitations. In these workshops for young and old, we applied equal attention to process and product to create warm, supportive atmospheres—an important building block for the community-engaged projects in our future.

All these creations grew out of the soil of the Downtown Eastside, were shaped by its cultural winds, and shared locally before taking off around the world. For fifteen years, we continuously departed from this neigbourhood to tour Canada and the world. Along the way—earning a living by the skin of our teeth—we learned our craft as artist-producer-performers and worked with a series of ensembles.

Our work was originally funded as a dance company, but as it began to develop, Canada Council dance juries could not see enough of the dance component and cut us off (1984). We supported ourselves touring BC schools and international festivals. For a brief renaissance, we—and a few other companies who didn't fit the disciplinary corrals—were jointly funded in a special initiative supported by the Dance and Theatre Offices of the Canada Council (1989-1991).

This enabled us to develop *The House of Memory* for the small city of Nelson, our first community residency prototype combining performance, teaching, and community feeling. We brought an original script to the community with "baskets" for local participation and provided two weeks of skill-building workshops for fifty community members, young and old, who were integrated into a production featuring archetypal characters, stilt and drum dancing, and clowning.

© Dan Bushnell

By the early 1990s, we'd been off on tours for so long that we'd fallen "off the radar." Most of our Vancouver peers and home community didn't know what we did. The funding scene was changing. As interdisciplinary artists, we were never easy to assess—dancers called us actors and actors considered us dancers. Arts funding was shrinking as the federal government's debt load soared, so disciplinary camps were "circling their wagons." We didn't fit established categories. By 1991, Canada Council's Dance and Theatre Section's joint support for interdisciplinary companies was drying up (and soon discontinued); so did support for national touring ensembles of physical theatre, dance, and mime. The City of Vancouver discontinued support towards the touring activities of local companies. We could no longer afford to maintain and train a year-round ensemble.

Like peers across Canada, we developed new survival strategies, turning to one-man shows and projects. Partnerships allowed us to pursue cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural, and inter-provincial collaborations, such as *The Good Person of Setzuan* (staged in parks with Ruby Slippers and Touchstone Theatre), *Tales from the Ramayana* (with Mandala Arts), and *Luigi's Kitchen* (with Alberta's Trickster Theatre)—all rehearsed and/or performed in Vancouver's East End.

© Jan Rusz / Terry Hunter (Drum Mother), Savannah Walling (Chamelea), Richard Fowler (Ama)

In contrast to community-engaged artists who view themselves as social engineers working to create a more perfect society, I see myself as joining other Downtown Eastside gardeners to cultivate a healthy garden that grows a variety of healthy plants.

Over the course of our art-making journeys on the margins, we encountered criticism from a variety of directions. Some of it made sense; we agreed with it. But sometimes we were mystified. Slowly we realized that redefining the arts is a political act: we can measure the strength of our visions by the strength of the resistance we arouse. We stumbled into high art taboos against popular entertainment; assumptions that accessible art is second class fare for second class minds; biases that expensive concert venues determine artistic worth; fears that collaborative script development dilutes artistic standards. We encountered distrust of the human capacity to think and create in images; devaluation of ancient art forms in favour of fast, new, disposable art; bias against non-linear narrative structures. The act of naming forces that devalued us and our practice was empowering.

Because we didn't fit into other categories, we've carved out our own identity, located artistic ancestors, and educated bookers and audiences. Like other artists on the margins, we've wrestled with "soft" censorship imposed by governmental, marketing, and corporate forces who decide which images, stories, and ideas deserve support. Labelling, censoring, dismissing, dividing, and erasing—these are deadly techniques to silence our voices and paralyze our courage.

During these challenging transition years, our home community was transforming. During the 1980s, over a thousand SRO hotel rooms were converted as landlords geared up for Expo 86. In Expo's aftermath, our community gained a reputation as Canada's poorest urban postal code. During the 1990s, Woodwards—the main social and shopping area—closed. Globalization of the illegal and legal drug trades, downsizing of the mental hospitals, the loss of resource industry jobs, cuts in corporate taxes, offshoring work to third world countries, welfare reduction policies, loss of affordable housing—all of these correlated with the emergence of visible and extreme poverty, a swelling survival sex trade, addiction and property crime, and a new open-air drive-by drug market.

Our Downtown Eastside home continues to be a vital, functioning, culturally and socially diverse, stable neighbourhood. Unlike the media portrayal, most of its 16,000 residents are hardworking and honest, struggling to survive with dignity. But we face the same huge problems faced by inner city and rural communities all over the world. Residents are displaced as the gap increases

between rich and poor; globalization moves jobs and resources from our home communities and fractures local connections; rapid gentrification and externally imposed development threaten the distinctive heritage, character and scale of communities.

As our six-year-old son's passion for history led to homeschooling, a new "apprenticeship" began: learning to listen, to be life-long learners, to guide while being led. During our years of raising Montana Blu in this neighbourhood, we looked for opportunities to nourish local connections and plant deeper roots. Terry started a percussion ensemble for local kids and a community marimba ensemble. We taught drum dancing every season at Main Dance school down the street. We volunteered to perform in local events. Finally, in 1999, we initiated the Strathcona Artist at Home Festival. This festival opened a huge and very rich vein: the history, culture, struggles, and story of the Downtown Eastside, Vancouver's original townsite. The more we learned, the more we participated in local events, the more involved, connected, and committed we became.

The Downtown Eastside is our home. We live here because we like our neighbours' compassion, courage, and diversity and the neighbourhood's values, history, art forms, and cultures; its human scale and character; the physical beauty of its buildings and bits of green space. To build healthy communities, we're all needed. Over the last ten years, Terry and I have taken small steps we know how to take—creating art that excites us, involves and engages people from our community, and challenges negative stereotypes. We learn about the neighborhood and share what we learn.

In contrast to community-engaged artists who view themselves as social engineers working to create a more perfect society, I see myself as joining other Downtown Eastside gardeners to cultivate a healthy garden that grows a variety of healthy plants. I do it through art because I'm an artist. Because of my family's history of civil war and internal feuds, my childhood exposure to racist and Communist-phobic values, my dislike of coercive child-rearing techniques, I distrust goals to manipulate or change other people for "their own good"—no matter how praiseworthy the intentions. I believe the roots of hatred, poisonous pedagogy, and totalitarianism are firmly planted in the soil of coercion. For me, it's a big enough task to respect, take seriously, listen to, and do my best to support those with whom I live and work, regardless of their background and skill level.

And so in 2002 came the invitation to celebrate our community—in partnership with Carnegie Community Centre—through a Downtown Eastside community play. This was a project on a scale far larger than any we had ever undertaken. Although we'd produced many interdisciplinary shows, a neighbourhood mini-festival, and small scale educational and community residencies, this would be our first experience of creating a play with community input from start to finish, and which would be performed by as many people as cared to participate.

We knew we had experience organizing complex, multilayered collaborations with co-producing partners. We knew our home community has tremendous talent. We knew the community's challenges have been sensationalized in the media and its great gifts ignored. We also knew the task was too big, the time line too short, the resources in place insufficient and we would have to "learn on the job."

But the wealth of our shared history within and with the community overcame these doubts. As Downtown Eastside gardeners of the arts, we stepped forward to embrace the opportunity to cultivate and nourish, to give back to our community. Our decision to accept this invitation came down to this: we owed the Downtown Eastside community a huge debt of gratitude. It was our turn to serve to the best of our ability.

BIO

**Savannah Walling** IS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF VANCOUVER MOVING THEATRE, A PROFESSIONAL INTERDISCIPLINARY ARTS COMPANY SHE CO-FOUNDED TWENTY-THREE YEARS AGO WITH EXECUTIVE PRODUCER AND HUSBAND TERRY HUNTER. THE SMALL COMPANY CREATES REPERTOIRE IN COLLABORATION WITH ARTISTS FROM MANY GENRES, TECHNIQUES, AND CULTURAL TRADITIONS; PRODUCES AN ANNUAL MULTIDISCIPLINARY FESTIVAL; AND DEVELOPS EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES. AFTER TOURING INTERNATIONALLY FOR FIFTEEN YEARS WITH MASK DANCE-DRAMAS AND DRUM DANCES, THEN PRODUCING ORIGINAL PLAYS AND ADAPTATIONS OF CLASSIC TEXTS, THEY CURRENTLY FOCUS ON COMMUNITY-ENGAGED CULTURAL PROJECTS WITH AND FOR THEIR DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE INNER-CITY HOME.

**In September 2009, Teesri Duniya Theatre opened its twenty-ninth season with the premiere of**

# Truth and Treason

Rahul Varma's new play exploring the terrorism of war unleashed by the war on terrorism. Events surrounding the production included "Bridges of Hope," an exhibition by painter Jaswant Guzder and photographer Phil Carpenter; "Dialogues for Peace," a series of facilitated public discussions; and "Writing Peace," a high school essay contest encouraging students to attend live theatre and add their voices to contemporary social debate.

The contest was open to all high school students under nineteen years of age in Quebec. Their topics of choice were "How can theatre help shape humanity" or "Can art be a powerful tool building peace?" Twenty-nine students took part in the contest.

**The winning essay, by Nicholas Backman, is presented here.**

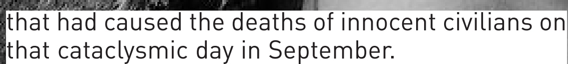
© Terry Hughes / Abdelghafour Elaaziz, Christine Aubin Khalifah

# Writing Peace

Can art be a powerful tool in building peace in the context of *Truth and Treason*?

The day that changed the course of the entire twenty-first century is nothing more than a blur in my sixteen-year-old memory. I wasn't old enough at the time to understand what had happened, just a few hours' drive away, in New York City. There was no attempt to shield me from the truth. I remember sitting in a black leather armchair in my grandparents' living room, watching the events of September 11, 2001, unfold in slow motion on CNN. At first, there were far more questions than answers. The United States of America, the most powerful nation in the world, had been brought to its knees by terrorists. The aura of invincibility that had shrouded America since the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. in 1991 had been destroyed, in one fell swoop. When the vultures of the mainstream media uncovered the story that an organization of Islamic terrorists was behind the 9/11 attacks, the War on Terror began.

How did we allow ourselves to become so deluded, in the first place, that we forgot the principle that is most treasured in Western society: that peace, with no exception, is always greater than war? In hindsight, it's easy to point fingers and to lay the blame on the Bush regime, on the Republican voters, or on the mainstream media that was so gung-ho for a war in the Middle East in the first place. But the truth is that at the time, most people I knew wanted to see America exact vengeance on the network of Islamic terrorists



that had caused the deaths of innocent civilians on that cataclysmic day in September.

We were bloodthirsty for revenge. The pervading opinion at the time was that "if we don't show them that they can't mess with America, they'll bomb the hell out of us again." The trouble, of course, was defining exactly who was responsible for the attacks. Remember how Osama bin Laden was public enemy number one in America for a brief period, before bin Laden's disturbing links to the Bush regime surfaced? Eight years later, after the deaths of countless innocent civilians whose only crime was to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, what does America have to show for it? As the War in Iraq, a heavy burden on the taxpayer, drags on pointlessly, where is Osama bin Laden?

*Truth and Treason* is a shocking, jarring portrayal of contemporary Iraq. The once-great city of Baghdad, now a shell of its former self, lies in ruins with a completely disillusioned populace and a corrupt government. The truth, which many people still find difficult to accept, is that the real victims of the Iraq War are the innocent civilians whose lives have been shattered by death and destruction. What I found profoundly disturbing about *Truth and Treason* is that the Americans, who we generally perceive as our allies and as the defenders of justice and democracy, have committed acts of treachery on the same scale as the September 11 attacks over the course of their conflict with the Middle Eastern states. Nahla Abdul Ahad witnesses her young daughter Ghazal's death at the hands of American soldiers at a checkpoint. The disturbing reality is that every day, unpardonable atrocities involving human beings as innocent as Ghazal are condoned. In times of war, the veneer of civilization that separates mankind from beasts wears off as soldiers are conditioned to lose their humanity. Whether it's the American soldiers' written testimonies confessing their war crimes, or the inhuman treatment of Ghazal and her father at the checkpoint, *Truth and Treason* paints an alarming picture of the Occupation of Iraq.

© Terry Hughes

I read somewhere that the Iraq War is referred to by the US military as *Operation Iraqi Freedom.* Is it necessary for the soldiers to justify a war that has caused an estimated 1.2 million deaths in Iraq in this way? The bitter irony is that the chances of the US occupation leading to a proclaimed peace is on par with the probability of weapons of mass destruction existing in Iraq. For a nation with a bloodstained past and a twenty-first century marred by interminable internal and external conflicts, the American occupation can hardly be welcomed by the Iraqi civilians. The greatest tragedy is the estimated five million Iraqi children who have been orphaned during the US occupation. How is it possible for the Americans to justify what amounts to genocide?

The reality is that ignorance is what prevents the average American from understanding the plight of Iraq. As long as the Iraqis can be stereotyped and inaccurately pigeonholed as Islamic extremists who were responsible for 9/11, Americans will not feel any remorse for their deaths.

When I read the proposed essay topics for the "Writing Peace" contest, my first reaction was of cynicism. When contemplating the atrocities committed by people all around the globe, it's difficult to keep faith in humanity. We are all capable of acts of incredible barbarity and cruelty. We are all capable of becoming as desensitized to the horrors of war as Commander Hektor Frank. Yet as I thought further about the essay topics, I realized that I was wrong. There is one emotion powerful enough to repress our instincts of savagery. It is compassion.

For soldiers to kill in cold blood, they must be perfectly devoid of compassion for their enemy. If each American soldier felt compassion and empathy for the Iraqi civilians, it would be impossible to motivate them to fight in Iraq. Instead, like Edward in *Truth and Treason*, they would refuse to fight on. For peace to be achieved, it is necessary to make humans feel compassion for one another, regardless of race or religion.

There is no better way of reaching out to people to convey emotions and beliefs than through art. For a bridge of compassion to be built over the great void separating Americans from Iraqis, there must be solid foundations of mutual understanding.

How can a play like *Truth and Treason* affect people's sense of compassion? In our society we have a wealth of information in newspapers and on the Internet. Written testimonies and harrowing reports on the turbulence of the Iraq War are only a click of a button away. However, it is hard to feel strong emotions unless one is affected visually. The power of theatre is that it transports its spectators into a different environment. Anyone who sees the tragedy of Iraq with their own eyes will not fail to be affected emotively.

There may be cause for hope after all.

© Terry Hughes / l to r. Sarah Garton Stanley, Karim Babin, Alex Ivanovici, Christine Aubin Khalifah, Charley Hausknost, Abdelghafour Elaaziz.

BIO

**Nicholas Backman** IS A STUDENT AT SELWYN HOUSE SCHOOL IN WESTMOUNT, QUEBEC. HIS INTERESTS INCLUDE BASEBALL, CURLING, AND LANGUAGE STUDIES. HE HAS PARTICIPATED IN A MODEL UN CLUB FOR TWO YEARS.

## What Happened in a Tent

Last May, I travelled from my UK home to Toronto to play the choir leader in *The Book of Judith* — a new Theatre Centre/Abit Omen/Die In Debt production. The inspiration for the show came in 2005, when Toronto-based theatre revolutionary Michael Rubenfeld met author, lecturer, and community mobilizer Judith Snow, a revolutionary quadriplegic woman. Asked to find Judith a lover, Michael chose instead to make her a play (possibly not what Judith had in mind... ) and so their relationship grew and the play developed, blurring the lines between reality and performance.

The recent production, performed revival style in a tent, included Rubenfeld as "preacher man," a gospel-like choir of disabled and nondisabled people, a toy organ, a glockenspiel, and a ukulele. Suffice it to say the play was, at times, very funny. It was also very poignant; it questioned ideas of ignorance, love, prejudice, and discomfort without apology or compromise.

I first heard about a Judith Snow inspired piece in 2006 (in its early stages called *Suck and Blow*) through a friend of mine in the Toronto disability community. Knowing that Judith Snow—an artist, writer, and influential voice of inclusion and equality—was bringing her politics and creativity to the Toronto stage was interesting, to say the least.

In 2008 my friend, Sarah Stanley told me of her involvements as director and co-writer in what had grown into *The Book of Judith* and asked if I'd like to come on board in the role of choir leader. I was thrilled. Not only was I entirely certain and excited by the combined brilliance of Sarah and Judith (two women I'd greatly admired), but I also felt a vital personal opportunity to re-introduce myself to my home city in a way that could bring two essential worlds of mine together— the disability community and the theatre community— through the diverse make-up of both cast and audience.

The experience re-ignited my love of performance and re-invigorated my faith in the impact of live theatre. For me, someone who has "migrated" to the world of disability over the past several years through sight loss, the show held real personal significance.

I would say, however, that the impact and genius of this show go well beyond the personal. It reflects and thrives on the ideals of what I understand to be inclusive and community-engaged theatre. It's what happens when the individuals in a creative process each influence the shaping and making of the product, rather than finding ways to "reasonably adjust" or fit people into a set way of working. It involves a true recognition of the performer as a unique and vital contributor. It also involves genuine engagement with community and audience, inviting both to play an active role in the development of ideas and the life of each performance.

*The Book of Judith* needed the "audience" as much as it needed the "performers." The diversity of people who filled our tent, ate bread with us, sang songs, and shouted "Judith Snow" made this one of the most essential pieces of theatre I've experienced in many years.

Alex Bulmer

BIO

ALEX BULMER IS A WRITER, ACTOR, AND TEACHER. SHE HAS WORKED WITH SEVERAL CANADIAN AND UK BASED COMPANIES, COMMUNITY GROUPS, AND COLLEGES. RECENTLY, ALEX EARNED THE ABI MEDIA INTERNATIONAL AWARD FOR ARTS AND INCLUSION WITH HER ADAPTATION OF *THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME* (BBC RADIO DRAMA). SHE IS CURRENTLY WRITING WITH CROSS LAB DRAMA AND IS LITERARY MANAGER FOR THE UK'S DISABLED-LED GRAEAE THEATRE COMPANY. ALEX LIVES IN NORTH LONDON WITH HER PARTNER AND HER GUIDE DOG

# BOOK REVIEW

by Rob Nunn

**STAGING COYOTE'S DREAM:**
**AN ANTHOLOGY OF FIRST NATIONS DRAMA IN ENGLISH, Volume II.**

Edited by Monique Mojica and Ric Knowles.
Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2009. Pp. 384.

The second volume of ***STAGING COYOTE'S DREAM:*** *An Anthology of First Nations Drama in English,* edited by Monique Mojica and Ric Knowles, carries on the task of anthologizing drama by Native playwrights begun in the first volume, published in 2003.

The editors begin their introduction by recalling Tomson Highway's words from the 1980s: "[B]efore the healing can take place, the poison must first be exposed." They note, "Twenty years later, we are still waiting for the healing to take place"(iii). But they argue very eloquently that the very act of performing a play by Aboriginals for an Aboriginal audience "can [. . .] impact on audiences, body to body," (iv) and if it cannot actually effect healing, it can physically enact its possibility.

Inevitably, all the plays address the damage inflicted on the indigenous people of this continent through colonization, racism, forced assimilation, and outright destruction of life. There is no play in this collection in which people are living lives untouched by racism. Simple enjoyment of life and positive outlook, when they appear at all, only exist as hard-won victories over great obstacles. Likewise, none of these plays celebrates an unbroken tradition: connections with the culture and spirituality of the past only come about through an effort to overcome terrible ruptures. As the editors write in their introduction, "Doing Aboriginal theatre is about translation, building bridges, making reconnections. Each tiny fragment of research and creation contributes, accumulates, and adds up to something with which the disconnect brought on by *la conquista* can be healed" (iii). A brief survey of the plays illustrates the wide range of variations on the dominant theme.

*Please Do Not Touch the Indians* by Joseph A. Dandurand begins disarmingly with a series of delightful scenes in which a wooden Indian couple secretly mocks a succession of white tourists who snap their picture. I have a feeling that Native audiences would have a good idea of where this play is heading. And I also suspect, based on my own experience of reading the script, that a non-Native spectator would be blind-sided. By its end, the easily mocked racism of the tourists has morphed into interwoven stories of three deaths by hanging and a massacre described in harrowing detail. The three spirit characters who interact with the couple—Sister Coyote, Brother Raven, and Mister Wolf—are delightful clowns, but eventually the play turns a dark corner and each in turn narrates how they became spirits. Sister Coyote was a child in a Catholic residential school who ended her suffering by committing suicide; Brother Raven was a child in a foster home who ended his suffering by committing suicide; and Mister Wolf was a prisoner who suffered death by hanging. Wooden Indian Woman narrates the massacre of her village, her escape into the woods with her baby, and how she unintentionally suffocated her child to prevent its cries from giving their hiding place away to the soldiers hunting for them.

*The Scrubbing Project* by the Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble (Jani Lauzon, Monique Mojica, and Michelle St. John) leaps back and forth between goofy farce and deadly serious drama from beginning to end. The project was inspired by memories of shame over dark skin and of futile attempts to lighten it—hence "scrubbing." It addresses the internalized racism that gives lighter skin its allure. And this outrageous mixture of farce and tragedy takes us all the way from obsession over skin colour to anxiety over mixed blood to evocations of massacre and genocide. The parody AA meeting of the Living with Genocide Support Group is typical of the clash of farce and seriousness:

> I'm known as Dove of the Dandelions and I'm proud to be here among my fellow survivors. I've been living with genocide for four hundred years, and coming to group off and on for about two hundred. Not all of my symptoms are under control: turning white helped, but I keep hearing voices. (339)

If I understand the Rabbinical concept of *Midrash* correctly, it holds that the meaning of a sacred text is inexhaustible: that is, there will always be new meanings to be discovered. Something like that seems to be happening with two plays the editors have placed side by side, *Trail of the Otter* by Muriel Miguel and *Governor of the Dew: A Memorial to Nostalgia and Desire* by Floyd Favel, which are based on the same traditional Cree story. An aquatic animal, an otter in one and a beaver in the other, takes a human woman into his home to be his wife. There she becomes sick and must return to the human world. But the two plays find very different meanings in the story. *Trail of the Otter* is a parable about same-sex desire. Otter tells a story about a lesbian woman, whose lover abandons her and returns to the straight world because she doesn't "want to be known as one of those women" (183). Eventually, the latter falls in love again and this time stays in the world of the "otters." Otter ends her story with a rowdy celebration of two-spirited love. In *Governor of the Dew*, an old beaver comes to an elderly Native woman and begs her to listen to his story: he too brought a human woman into his world who sickened and returned to the human world. But her sickness remained behind and killed all of the beaver's people, sparing only him. The old woman to whom he tells his story has seen her children move to the city, where her grandchildren have fallen prey to addiction and prostitution, and none are left to carry on the beliefs of the ancestors. Together they grieve. In this play, the story is a parable of the catastrophic impact of colonization. Even the frame narration is a lament:

> I think that is how the story goes.
> It's been so long since I heard it,
> Before I became a man
> In this whorehouse of the world.
>
> The people who told this story
> are now gone to the spirit world.
> The life that I remember is now gone.

A life of simple pleasures;
Like the delight in a visitor,
Sharing a cup of tea, a cigarette.

That is how it was back then. (203)

In their first volume of this anthology, the editors made the important point that Native theatre artists work together as a community: after mentioning the pioneers of the *naissance* of Native theatre—such as Spiderwoman Theater, Native Earth Performing Arts, and De–Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group—they wrote, "[T]he artists who started these theatres and others across the continent continue to work together, acting in or directing one another's shows, listening to one another's voices, learning from and influencing one another, and teaching new generations of Native theatre artists [. . . ] They are still very much inventing themselves as Native theatre artists, and inventing and evolving [. . .] a powerful tradition of Native theatre" (vii).

This spirit of collaboration and evolving tradition is as evident in the second volume as it was in the first. Muriel Miguel, one of the three sisters who founded Spiderwoman Theatre, contributes *Trail of the Otter*. Her daughter Murielle Borst contributes *More Than Feathers and Beads*. Her niece, Monique Mojica, co-edits the volume and is one of the three members of Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble, co-creators of *The Scrubbing Project*. Muriel Miguel directed the show. Floyd Favel, author of *Governor of the Dew*, is a long-time collaborator with Monique Mojica on a project to develop a "Native Performance Culture" on the basis of traditional Native storytelling and ritual performance. Monique Mojica performed in the play. In the background is Muriel Miguel's association with the Open Theatre and Floyd Favel's studies with Jerzy Grotowski. Thus the work of these theatre artists represents a *métissage* of Native tradition and avant-garde theatre and theory.

All the plays in the volume, whether directly related or not, share a common aesthetic rooted in storytelling, ritual, and the avant-garde. Transformation figures prominently, as it does in Native stories. Actors transform from character to character; characters transform; the mood of a play transforms abruptly from farce to tragedy and back again. There is a striking lack of kitchen sink realism. Even *Annie Mae's Movement*, by Yvette Nolan, for all its naturalistic dialogue, is far removed from realism, for all the male characters are played by the same actor and they all merge into one other-than-human person—the Rugaru, a traditional Algonquian cannibalistic spirit.

Space considerations prevent me from discussing the other plays in the volume: *The Indian Medicine Shows* by Daniel David Moses; three one-woman shows: *Path with No Moccasins* by Shirley Cheechoo, *More Than Feathers and Beads* by Murielle Borst, and *Confessions of an Indian Cowboy* by Margo Kane; and *Burning Vision* by Marie Clements. They too share the common elements mentioned above: the painful theme of *la conquista* and a performance style derived from traditional storytelling and modern theatricality. The plays in this collection may possess the potential for healing, which the editors speak of in their introduction, for an Aboriginal spectator; I couldn't say. For myself, a member of the settler culture, the predominant response is sorrow and shame.

## WORK CITED

Mojica, Monique and Ric Knowles, eds. *Staging Coyote's Dream*: *An Anthology of First Nations Drama in English*, Vol. 1. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2003.

BIO

**Robert Nunn** TAUGHT DRAMATIC LITERATURE AND THEORY AND THEATRE HISTORY AT BROCK UNIVERSITY UNTIL HIS RETIREMENT IN 2000. HE HAS PUBLISHED NUMEROUS ESSAYS ON CANADIAN PLAYS AND PLAYWRIGHTS, INCLUDING HRANT ALIANAK, DAVID FENNARIO, DAVID FRENCH, SHARON POLLOCK, JUDITH THOMPSON, AND DREW HAYDEN TAYLOR, ON WHOSE WORK HE RECENTLY EDITED A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS. HE WAS CO-EDITOR OF *THEATRE RESEARCH IN CANADA/RECHERCHES THÉÂTRALES AU CANADA* FROM 1993 TO 1996.

THÉÂTRE REPERCUSSION THEATRE

CONSEIL DES **ARTS** DE **MONTRÉAL**

LE CONSEIL DES ARTS DE MONTRÉAL EN TOURNÉE AND REPERCUSSION THEATRE PRESENT

## 2010 SHAKESPEARE-IN-THE-PARK TOUR

Two feuding families. Forbidden love between their teenage offspring. ***Romeo and Juliet*** is one of Shakespeare's greatest and most popular plays with all the elements of a blockbuster. Duels. Untimely deaths. Low comedy. High drama. Bumbling nurses. Fumbling priests. Potions that work too well. Poisons that work even better. All fuelled by the mad, intoxicating fury of teenage love, whose passion inflamed a city and has enthralled audiences for more than 500 years. Why such undying appeal? Ask any teenager. Or better still, their parents.

**"MY ONLY LOVE SPRUNG FROM MY ONLY HATE"** – *Romeo and Juliet*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

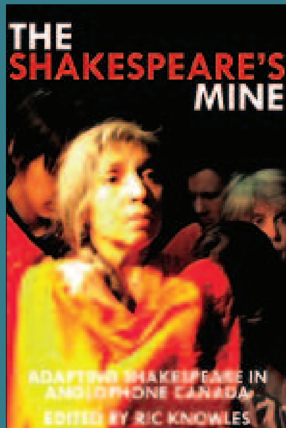
# romeo & juliet

JULY 29 TO AUGUST 22, 2010

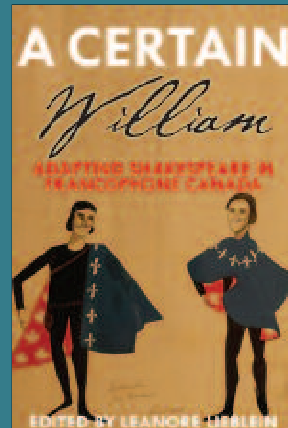
WWW.REPERCUSSIONTHEATRE.COM

# ADAPTING SHAKESPEARE

## TWO VOLUMES OF ANGLOPHONE AND FRANCOPHONE ADAPTATIONS OF THE BARD



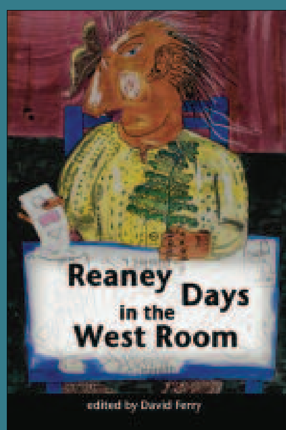

Claiming the right to the language of Shakespeare and the power that it represents in our culture, this collection of Anglophone Canadian adaptations manages to talk back to that authority in some surprising ways.



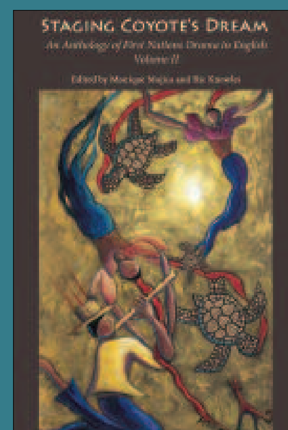

A collection of plays by some of Francophone Canada's most distinguished playwrights, chronicling their fraught and changing relationship with Shakespeare. These plays emerge from a context in which language is tied to both personal and political identity.

# STELLAR COLLECTIONS

## THE WORKS OF JAMES REANEY AND PREMIER FIRST NATIONS PLAYWRIGHTS




A collection of dramatic writing by three-time Governor General's Literary Award-winning writer James Reaney. Includes: The Killdeer; Names and Nicknames; Listen to the Wind; St. Nicholas Hotel, The Donellys, Part Two; Gyroscope; Alice Through the Looking Glass; and Zamorna! and the House by the Churchyard.




This second volume of Staging Coyote's Dream is an all-new anthology of First Nations drama in English. Featuring plays by Shirley Cheechoo, Daniel David Moses, Murielle Borst, Yvette Nolan, Muriel Miguel, Floyd Favel, Margo Kane, Marie Clements, Joseph A. Dandurand, and the Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble.

www.playwrightscanada.com

**PLAYWRIGHTS CANADA PRESS**