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Northwest
THEATRE
REVIEW

Volume 7

1999

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NORTHWEST THEATRE REVIEW

Editor

George Caldwell
School of Music and Theatre Arts
Washington State University
Pullman, Washington 99164-2432
(509) 335-5682/335-7447 FAX: 509-335-4255
E-mail: caldwell@mail.wsu.edu

Special assistance provided by Barbara Jones, Theatre Program, Washington State University and the Law Offices of Dawn Reynolds, Pullman, Washington.

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Reimagining of Yup'ik and Inupiat Performance

THOMAS RICCIO

A few days after my arrival in August 1988 at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, I was asked if I would work with Tuma Theatre, an Alaska native theatre group. The offer baffled and intrigued me. I had left Chicago and work in the American regional theatre system out of disillusionment and artistic dissatisfaction. As the newly appointed assistant professor of Theatre, in such a unique and unusual place like Alaska, I saw an opportunity to reconsider my life, work, values and goals. Alaska native culture however, was as alien from my expectations, and mid-western inner-city, Italian-American Catholic background as one can get. If ever there were an unlikely person to work with such a group it was me. Intrigued by the opportunity of exploring another culture through its performance, I accepted, having no idea how or where to begin.

In the empty room given to me as my office there were several video tapes. Some were of previous Tuma Theatre productions, and the rest were of traditional native dancing. Tuma Theatre was organized in 1978 by a group of Eskimo and Indian students out of their need to meet and share dances and songs from their respective cultures. What I saw in the varied collection of video tapes seemed to suggest that the traditional and modern ways do not mix and are two separate realities. Were they judging themselves in terms of Western culture, accepting the categories and definitions of anthropology? Were they seeking to emulate a culture not theirs, rather than seeing, hearing, feeling, and expressing contemporary issues on their own, culturally inherent terms?

Alaska native people are both influenced and challenged by Western culture. Unfortunately, that influence has often been traumatizing and destructive. Today, Alaska native people find themselves existing in limbo between two cultures, a traditional and reassuring past and an alien and

THOMAS RICCIO is Associate Professor of the Theatre Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.

uncertain future. Their traditional culture, and cosmology, both deeply rooted in the stark physical beauty of the land, seems irrelevant in a world that values the immediate over the long term, change over balance, and individuality over communality.

Between these worlds, there is a great tension, with few devices by which Alaska native people can decipher, define and resolve who and where they are. Traditional performance reassures them of their past and maintains continuity with ancient values. The challenges of contemporary social, political and personal, life, however, all seemed beyond the capacity of traditional performance. As a result, to deal with contemporary issues, indigenous people often resort to the well-established mechanism of the Western performance tradition, often forsaking their own cultural point-of-view for an expression appropriate to their other, contemporary self and context. In so doing, they undermine themselves and their culture, unconsciously contributing to the demise of their own unique cultural legacy. As a result, both their traditions and those of the West, are deprived of their ancient insights and wisdom. Clearly, their performance is not some exotic "other," but a living, viable, transformable expression revealing startling new realities the Western mindset had historically chosen to overlook, patronize or marginalize.

To understand and work with Alaska native people is to witness the slow and painful swallowing of their culture by the West. We know it is happening, we see it, yet one feels helpless to do anything about it. There were fundamental questions that prefaced my work with Tuma. How does one preserve a culture? Should it be preserved? Change is inevitable in this increasingly interdependent world of the late twentieth century. Why shouldn't we let cultural progression or evolution take its course? Isn't history full of cultural assimilations, transformations, recombinations and extinctions? Who cares? Why care? Where do I fit in? Why and how should I react?

For whatever reason, for better or for worse, the dominant culture of the West, any cultural tradition, has had its way for the last thousand or so years. It is the culture that guides and shapes life on the planet in the late twentieth century. Today, the culture of the West, however, realizes there is nowhere else on earth to expand to. Now it turns inward, taking inventory in what it is, appreciating others, admitting wrongs and attempting to make amends. Western culture's strongest suit is its adaptability. The possibility of an emerging world culture, and the survival of the human race, will depend upon dialog and consideration of all the best humanity has to offer. The knowledge of Alaska native and other indigenous people the world over, needs to be a part of the emerging global dialogue. Their voices are critical to our continuing social evolution.

Unfortunately for Alaska natives and many other fragile indigenous cultures, the mechanisms of their transformation, absorption or destruction, are already in play. Each day an elder passes away, a part of humanity's legacy

passes from existence. It is as if we were watching a library burn. It is difficult to be a bystander. The question becomes how to best preserve the essence, on their terms, of an indigenous culture that offers centuries of existence and untold knowledge. In orally based and transmitted traditions, performance is both a record and key to their culture. It functions like a DNA braid of being, living on the earth, past, present, mind, spirit, and body. The earth still speaks through indigenous people, and their performance is a living text of their being, ways, history, and cosmology.

Watching those videos in my empty office forced me to reconsider my fundamental conceptions of what theatre and performance was, and how and why it functions. The axis of my reality had shifted, and I found myself at the beginning of a new path as a theatre artist and as a human being. I would never be the same. An opportunity had come, like all great things in life, by chance.

The Journey Begins

During the fall of 1988 UAF's Mike Gaffney, chair of the Alaska Native Studies department, and James Nageak, an Inupiat elder teaching in the Alaska Native Languages Department, led me to what little documentation existed on the subject Alaskan indigenous performance. As I was to discover, Alaska native performance was a rich terrain, one for which no coherent map existed. I would have to explore first hand, the geography of the performance culture, allowing it to take me where it would.

My journey began with the obvious, a library and museum study of anything relating to Alaska native people. The written record of Alaska native performance exists in fragments, scattered amid dry anthropological records, explorer's narratives, and a small amount of oral history transcripts. Video and audio tape recordings of contemporary festivals and dances were helpful, but only made me realize how the tradition had been transformed and how it presently existed as benign social events, far removed from the direct reference of their "savage," "primitive" or "heathen" ceremonial and ritual origins.

Few photographic or pictorial records of historical Alaska native performances exist. Those that do exist were generally staged by novelty-seeking white photographers, most notably, Edward Curtis. In my research, I did find performance artifacts to be in abundance, including masks, shamans' costumes, drums, puppets, dance sticks and fans, and totems. Unfortunately, any detailed indication of their function and meaning was scant. A wonderful resource was Edward Nelson, the indefatigable Smithsonian botanist, who in the late 19th Century became Alaska's great recorder of Alaska native lifestyles and collector of artifacts. However, like other early white recorders, Nelson generally did not comprehend the complex meaning and context of the numerous masks and performances he witnessed nor of the regalia he acquired.

What began to emerge from the research were bits and pieces of a puzzle. As a fuller picture emerged, however, I had to resist the urge to place the puzzle together with categories of definition, classification, and organization that were the inclination of my cultural tradition and training. Patience and respect were required I had to remind myself often to not condition the material with my own expectations but rather allow what I found to speak for itself. A fine balance between enthusiasm and caution was necessary. Anthropological research was one tool that helped to identify and record traditional performance occurrences, but it was only the entry point and the means to an end. My primary objective was to define the meaning, motivation, and methods of how to create Alaska native theatre. To do so, I had to pursue an essence and not the detail. It was in that essence, that I sensed what was important for Tuma. The detail would come later. Anthropology and traditional performance expression were but means by which the group would reimagine the traditional methods and expression, providing context from which to extrapolate the creation of a contemporary Alaska native performance idiom.

To prepare further I became a student of Alaska native dance, an activity that later proved to be a surprise catalyst to my understanding of the culture. The drum beat sent their cultural rhythms through my body. By dancing the stories of hunters, animals, and mythology, by transforming from hunter to walrus to moon to snowfall, I understood their culture in a way that no words can explain and only personal experience can teach. The heartbeat-like rhythm pounded out on drums stretched with walrus stomach, emotion-evoking throat singing, and a strict pattern of repeated mimetic movements combined to create a trance-like pathway to the Yup'ik and Inupiat Eskimo world view. Learning Yup'ik and Inupiat dance also went far to demonstrate my sincerity and commitment to learn of their performance tradition. Though not able to speak more than a few words of their verbal language, I could speak their language of dance. During one dancing session with dancers on St. Lawrence Island, an elder sat pointing at me, and chuckling. I had just danced a walrus dance, and I thought he was making fun of me. Through a translator I asked for an explanation and the reply was: "He can't believe how you can dance so good like an Eskimo. When he sees you dancing he says "It is like watching the Disney Channel!"

Mike Gaffney made the 1988-89 Tuma Theatre budget available for me to travel throughout Alaska to meet and work with native elders, dance groups, and anyone else who had anything to do with Alaska native performance. My work with Tuma demanded time and personal adjustment. I resolved that my work with Tuma had to be thorough, not only for myself, but also in response to the responsibility given me. My first year I traveled over six thousand miles without leaving the state of Alaska, to remote villages such as Chevak, Hooper Bay, Savoonga, Toksook Bay, Minto, and Gamble, meeting with elders, conducting interviews, dancing and singing. My objective was to record and develop a broad sense of performance styles, history, and methods.

My travel to villages was a pathway to understanding the context and function of traditional Alaskan Eskimo performance. Their rituals, ceremonies, and festivals evolved out of the necessity of survival and was a practical tool by which to shape and guide their existence. Inseparable, implied, and ingrained within their performance are their land, lifestyle, and spirits. It is performance that brought traditional historical and to lesser degree contemporary, Inupiat and Yup'ik people back to a rhythmic and spiritual dialogue with their part of the earth. Dance movements are memoirs of the animals, the elements, and their life. Their performance is simultaneously a metaphoric and metaphysical context for their daily existence with the earth and a participation in a spirit reality that, by its intent and expression, asserts living in balance and harmony with their community of place. It is a community that includes the human, animal, elemental, spiritual, and ancestral.

I flew in flimsy, noisy six-seat planes, often blown side ways by strong Arctic cross winds, traveling over hundreds of miles of unending white tundra or the ice floe-filled Bering Sea. Each journey ended on yet another gravel runway that suddenly appeared out of a vast whiteness surrounded a cluster of hundred or so houses, a church and a school. Standing alone on the tundra of Toksook Bay, overlooking the Bering Sea surrounded by vast and deep quiet, provided me with an understanding about the Yup'ik and Inupiat cultures, and myself, that will forever live with me. In the world view of the Alaskan Eskimo the earth is the measure of all things, and, by extension humans belong to the earth. In stark contrast, the Western world view, maintains humans are the measure of all things. This cultural view creates a disconnection from the ways of the earth, one that rejects the idea of interdependence with the earth, and between the animal and spirit world. The Western world view holds that humankind is central and the earth is secondary and subservient. Likewise, in the drama of Western culture, the earth and the spirit world it embodies, is but a backdrop for human action, ignored altogether, or exploited as a convenient antagonist. Traditional Alaskan native belief considers the individual differently, as someone who is part of a whole. A whole greater than what was physically comprehensible.

Being part of a whole is central to an Alaskan native cosmological view. Every thing is connected, all things are spiritually invested and transformational. The individual performer then, is a part of the whole, able to transform into an animal or spirit, becoming another part of the whole to which the performer belongs. To disrespect the earth, its elements or its animals, is to do harm to oneself. Traditional Alaskan Eskimo performance remains a means of recognizing and maintaining a sense of cosmological whole, both spiritual and material. Respecting and giving thanks to the earth, the animals and the spirits was standard text to Yup'ik and Inupiat performance. [Riccio, 1991: 14]

In a land of such extremes and experiences, every event, every moment, became a revelation. My most basic perceptions altered. Alaskan Eskimo

lands are blanketed with snow nine to ten months a year. The treeless, barren tundra is swept with constant blowing wind and the ever changing sky melds white, gray and blue into a horizon of sea or land. Distance is immense, disorienting, and distorted. Ordinary perceptions are easily altered to accept reality and illusion as one. The Western sense of time is rendered irrelevant on the tundra. Instead it is the rhythm of the all encompassing and mighty earth dictating the course of a day's events. Daily events, like those of the Eskimo hunter are not influenced by a wristwatch, but by the changing tides, light, sky, winds, and seasons. The call of a bird may indicate the approach of fish, seal or walrus. The sea's stillness or change in smell indicates the approach of a whale. In villages the rhythm of the earth is accepted and adjusted to—it can be no other way. Once, I was unable to leave St. Lawrence Island because of a snow storm lasting several days. It was mid-May and the storm had been unusual for that time of year. "This year we had two winters," an elder Jimmy Toolie shrugged. "We'll just do some more dancing, that's all." Snow covered entire houses to their peaks, and stairs, carved in the snow, descended from a level near the roof to a house's doorway. They adjusted to the inconvenience without much difficulty or complaint.

The final portion of my research focused on the post-contact experiences of Alaskan natives. By virtue of their isolation and remoteness, the Yup'ik and Inupiat people experienced late contact with Western culture. Unlike the Native Americans of the contiguous United States, the brunt of Alaska's colonization occurred during the early twentieth century. Today, the majority of Alaska's approximately 75,000 native people live in small villages. The Aleut, Yup'ik and Inupiat Eskimos of Alaska inhabit over one hundred villages along the Arctic ocean and Bering Sea. The Athabaskan Indians, along with a scattering of interior Eskimo villages, dot the great interior of Alaska with villages. The Aleut, Chilkat, Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian Indians populate the southern areas of the state.

Many of the villages were built only after church, governmental, and educational pressures forced the nomadic Eskimo and Athabaskan Indian to settle permanently. The time of missionary fervor and settlement occurred during the late 19th and early 20th Century on the heels of fur trading, whaling, and gold expeditions. To forestall competition over a limited and isolated population, Alaska's Christian missionaries each agreed to limit their activities to specific villages and to recognize the sovereignty of the other's sphere of influence. As a consequence many villages today bear the indelible religious, cultural, and social mark of the church that missionized them. In those villages with Anglican churches, such as Savoonga on St. Lawrence Island, it is not unusual to find people with names like Cedric or Nathaniel, eighteenth century English names reflecting the influence of the Anglican church, particularly author's names found in hymnals.

The effect the missionaries had on the social, religious and cultural life of a small village unit varied. Some churches did not allow traditional drumming or even the speaking of traditional languages, claiming it was the

manifestation of the devil. To the colonizers, the alien, back-of-the-throat sounds of native languages inspired fear and associations with the wide-spread and influential practice of shamanism. As a consequence, the legacy of early missionary work still scars the Alaska native population today. There are several villages where few if any are able to speak their native language. Other villages such as Kipnuk and Buckland have lost their drumming and singing tradition. Many religious groups today acknowledge the misguided missionary zeal of the past and have made a variety of gestures of reconciliation and forgiveness. Atrophy over three generations, however, has broken the fragile continuity of oral tradition. Some Alaska natives are trying to recover their heritage, while others are overwhelmed by the task.

The events thrust upon a few generations have exacted a heavy toll on the fragile orally transferred traditions of Alaska native people. The forced break in oral transference and traditional performance practice is symptomatic of a fundamental reordering and conversion of indigenous people to an inorganic and alien world view. For the Yup'ik and Inupiat the forced colonization of the mind, body and spirit has induced self-loathing, confusion, depression, and trauma. The result has been a tremendous social, political, and cultural upheaval, that in turn has given rise to drug, alcohol, and domestic abuse. For example, the native people of Alaska have one of the highest infant mortality, fetal alcohol syndrome, spousal abuse, and teenage suicide rates in the nation.

Going to an Inupiat village today one might see the bones of a recently landed whale littering the ground outside of a school's computer lab, or a hunter flipping through fifty channels on his satellite, cable-linked television as his wife butchers a seal on the nearby kitchen floor. Despite the modern manifestations of satellite dishes, electric generators, and pre-fab bungalow houses built (and mortgaged) by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), village life has remained fundamentally as it has for thousands of years. Central to village life and its economic, social, political and cultural life, is the subsistence lifestyle. Alaska natives have retained their ancient birthright of hunting and gathering long after the Native Americans of the "lower 48." For the Alaska native, subsistence lifestyle is more than a way of life, it is a way of being and integral to their identity. It organizes, identifies, and perpetuates their culture. It has accordingly influenced the substance and form of their cultural performance.

The predicament of being in two worlds simultaneously is the source of their culture shock. The ancient world, which gave their life meaning and order, vanishes a little more with each passing day. The younger generations, attracted and influenced by the hipness, fashion, and glamour of the West, have for the most part, forsaken their traditional folk ways. Many of the native students at the University of Alaska do not know where or how they fit in. The Western culture simultaneously excludes and overwhelms them. For many young people, the elders and traditional ways are seen as either alien, irrelevant, or simply old fashioned, and as a consequence, the youth are

caught in the middle with few options or guidance. Despite Western culture's onslaught, a renewed awareness of traditional values and ways has emerged, and with that a developing sense of cultural re-evaluation and renewal. Like waking from a bad dream or recovering from an injury, Alaska native people, both young and old, are beginning to re-evaluate their ancient ways as a source of strength and identity.

In an odd twist of history and fate, an institution of Western culture, the University of Alaska, with Tuma Theatre, its Native Language Center, the Alaska Native Studies Department, Rural Student Services, and the Art Department, has found itself in the unusual position of being a tradition bearer and caretaker of Alaskan native culture. At the university many Native students learn to dance traditionally, speak their native languages, study native stories, meet with elders or carve a native mask. Tuma Theatre became a gathering point for the evolution and reimagining of Inupiat and Yup'ik performance culture.

The Practical Work Begins

When I began teaching Tuma Theatre classes in the fall of 1989 I knew enough about Alaska native performance and culture to acknowledge I knew very little. How was I to convey, within the context of an educational institution defined by Western cultural expectations, categories, analysis, and sense of reality, the performance of a culture reflecting such a different world view? The task of shaping and articulating all of what I had experienced and researched during the previous year into some sort of academic program while remaining truthful to the culture, was daunting. I could not help but feeling awkward being a non-native person presenting and teaching native culture. Was I nothing more than a latter day neo-colonialist? Was my effort yet another instance of a meddling white man thinking he knew a better way native people should do things? At the same time, would it be right to stand to the side and do nothing? There is a fine line between helping and harming.

Before teaching my first Tuma Theater class I developed a set of principles—a kind of navigational instruments for uncharted waters—inspired by Alaska native values.

The working principles (in no particular order):

- 1) Do not to presume to know, nor try to be an insider.
- 2) We have gathered to learn and explore their culture together.
- 3) We are all equal participants.
- 4) We must all endeavor to be informed, honest and sensitive to one another.
- 5) Differences will arise.
- 6) We all have a responsibility to one another and to the work.

- 7) The work is guided by consensus.
- 8) The work is as big or as small as we are.
- 9) We must all be willing to make mistakes
- 10) We must not be troubled about being corrected.
- 11) Authority is derived from trust and respect.
- 12) We are on a journey of sharing, working, and discovering together.

The first Tuma Theatre class I taught consisted of thirteen Yupik and Inupiat Eskimo, two Athabaskan Indians, and five non-natives (white students). On the first day of class I led the students in a group warm-up exercise to get an idea of how people moved. It soon became obvious the Western theatre styled stretching and vocal warm-up was absurdly inappropriate for the objectives and type of performance work we were preparing for. I stopped the warm-up and said: This is wrong. I don't know what we should be doing but this is wrong. We must create an Alaskan Native warm-up. The students looking puzzled, stood awkwardly. In the bodies of the native students were well springs of traditional culture and performance. The challenge was how to draw it out of them, how to learn from it, and then how to assist in the shaping of a contemporary performance expression.

The Ritual Preparation

The Alaska native students in the class had varying degrees of traditional song and dance knowledge. There were also, among the Yupik and Inupiat, five men who came from villages and were their families primary subsistence hunters. As an assignment the entire class was asked to present three traditional Alaska native movements. What traditional meant remained for them to determine.

At our next session each student presented their traditional movements. The Yupik and Inupiat are generally very shy people—so much so most of the women and many of the men in the class would not look at me directly. The avoidance of eye contact was in deference to my position and age. With this in mind I anticipated the presentation to be difficult, but a necessary first step. To my astonishment their shyness evaporated when presenting their traditional movements. It was as if they were not alone in front of the group, but rather performing with their culture. Many of the movements presented were lifestyle and subsistence hunting related, the majority of which existed, in one form or other, in their extensive traditional dance vocabulary. Mimetic movements portraying hunting, fishing, traveling, searching kayaking, and fire making were prominent. Other animal movements included walrus, seal, raven, grizzly bear, eagle, and whale. A smaller number of movements depicted natural events such as the northern lights, the wind, the horizon, walking across ice, and giving thanks to the spirits.

Through a process of group discussion several of the movements were discarded while other movements were consolidated or refined; those remaining were organized into a sequence to serve as a warm-up. A warm-up that was not only physical and vocal, but also, as it turned out, an evocation of their culture and spirituality. As the warm-up evolved through the following months it became known as the Ritual Preparation or Emmo, named for a fictive character we developed and whose story it had become. The Ritual Preparation was both a ritual and a story—the story of Emmo from the village of Emmonak, who travels and transforms freely from animal to bird to human as s/he hunts, mashes, and fishes among other things.

The evolution of our ritual preparation into the story of Emmo was significant and indicative of the Yupik and Inupiat cultural tendency of relating experiences in story form. Traditional stories, legends, and myths are central to their oral history tradition and the primary vehicle of historical and educational transference between generations. Animal-human transformations and supernatural occurrences fill traditional Yupik and Inupiat stories. Beside encoding myth and cosmology, stories also efficiently conveyed practical information regarding geography, climate, subsistence lifestyle, and cultural values. Their telling was also a social event enjoying a central place within their culture. Without our devising it, our Emmo diagrammed a hunter-gather performance narrative befitting the efficiency of the culture that inspired it.

The Ritual Preparation evolved into an ideal physical and vocal preparation warm-up. In addition to the function of a Western theatre warm-up that emphasized technical development and control of the body, voice, imagination, and expression, the Ritual Preparation would also serve as a window to the Alaska native world view. The preparation not only readied the performers physically and imaginatively for the group's work, it also provided the very tangible and culturally appropriate means by which to re-establishing a very immediate interaction with their culture. The Ritual Preparation became a kind of proving ground, reference point, and prototype for the reimagining of Yup'ik and Inupiat performance. Each movement, idea, sound, and transition of the Ritual Preparation provoked questions demanding exploration. For instance, the transformation of humans to animals implied another world view, which meant exploring human/animal relationships, animal spirits and guides, which in turn begged questions about the spiritual transmutability between things, which informed how the performer and group expressed this awareness in movement, rhythm, and voice. The creation of the Ritual Preparation provided an outline for the group with my role being articulator and facilitator. The Ritual Preparation taught us how to see and listen and be aware in a different way. It told us what needed exploration as it gave us the tools by which to explore.

The process of the Ritual Preparation creation revealed to the group a subtle, yet significant, experiential cultural understanding. Each element of the Ritual preparation became greater than its simple action; each was an

organic and integral part of the Yup'ik and Inupiat way of looking at the world. The experiential unfolding of the Yup'ik and Inupiat cultures became an act of homage and rediscovery.

The Ritual Preparation established Tuma's working methodology. Some to the key functions, insights, and principles established by the Ritual Preparation were:

- 1) Compact and efficient way of identifying and demonstrating to a group its own unique performance cultural language.
- 2) Focuses the work of the group.
- 3) A non-production, non-result oriented project that was allowed to evolve and change, establishing the foundation for important working principles.
- 4) Belongs to the group and was not for public consumption.
- 5) Establishes a group performance vocabulary and style.
- 6) Establishes and encourages open debate and interaction.
- 7) Establishes and encourages interaction with their performance culture—making it participatory and malleable rather than simply served and fixed.
- 8) Establishes an atmosphere and method of working unique to the group and to the cultural context.
- 9) Establishes a critical framework to which subsequent work could refer.
- 10) Encourages and develops an ensemble and rhythmic sensibility.
- 11) Develops a technical ability for quick rhythmic and movement transitions.
- 12) Created a story line, and in a sense a group myth, that lived in each member of the group.
- 13) Establishes a creative working methodology between participants and between the director and participants.
- 14) Establishes and explores culturally specific rhythms.

Elemental Rhythm

The traditional Yupik and Inupiat tambourine drum served as a natural accompaniment to the ritual preparation. Soon however, it became apparent some participants were more familiar and comfortable with the beat than others. Some, non-native and native participants alike, did not know how to dance traditionally, and for them the beat and its movement coordination were awkward. Rhythm awareness seemed intimidating and foreign, presenting a disparity between those that could and could not dance. Rhythm was central not only to the traditional dance and performance to which our work referred but also to understanding the reality in which the Yupik and

Inupiat people lived. A way for each participant to share and participate in the beat had to be found,

Central to the class explorations and becoming a reference point for all of Tuma's subsequent work was the traditional Yup'ik iambic two beat and the Inupiat three-beat. These simple, heartbeat-inspired rhythms, are implicit to all traditional Yup'ik and Inupiat dance movement and song/chant expression. Indeed it was difficult, if not impossible to separate the rhythm from their dance and song—they are parts of the same whole. The rhythms are what charged the movements and vocal expressions with life. These elemental rhythms also served as a pathway to the land and Yupik and Inupiat cultures that evolved from the land.

The plaintive rhythms, reflective of the land they have lived on for thousands of years, are in a sense, the heartbeat of their part of the earth. The endlessly repeating rhythm of the waves of the Bering Sea; the simple calm of the open tundra; the gentle sloping hills or distant mountains; or slow paced village life, lives in the plaintive rhythms. The rhythms, in their simplicity and repetition, portray a cycle of life, despite modernity. The simplicity of the rhythm is apparent in the way the Eskimo communicate, think, act, and interact, it is a part of how they perceive and live in the world, how they live with their land. It is a continuous and endlessly cyclical mnemonic of their life on a land. It is the expression of their land. Its expression is a dialogue, celebration, and identification.

Through a variety of exercises and improvisational scenarios we explored the basic drum rhythms of the Yup'ik and Inupiat. We referred to these basic rhythms as the "elemental rhythms." For those in the group whom were non-native, Athabaskan Indian or Eskimo coming from villages that lost their drumming tradition, the elemental rhythm explorations were emotionally affecting. The elemental rhythm exercises evoked a direct, intuitive, and emotive reactions that revealed a world view I have come to call "rhythm reality." It is a reality outside of time, logic, past and present. It is where the unconscious and conscious, the internal and external blend into one continuum.

It was interesting to see a Inupiat or Yupik from a village where the dance traditions have remained strong next to someone who lost their rhythm tradition generations ago. Like the non-Eskimos in the group those who have lost their drumming were awkward and self-conscious, a vital contact and inter-relationship with their land and existence seemed missing. For lack of a strong traditional and rhythmic reference point those from non-drumming (which means also non-singing and dancing) villages were generally the most removed from the lifestyles of traditional subsistence observance and understanding. It is as if they are somehow more Western in their thinking and lifestyle.

Our rhythm explorations and accompaniment went far to establish a rhythmical infrastructure to serve all subsequent vocal, instrumental, and

movement explorations and expressions. The elemental rhythm provided not only a way of moving, but also a way of seeing, being, and experiencing. The elemental rhythm became part of us, it didn't matter if the drum was pounding it out, implied in a chant or implicit in a movement, it became the ether that we shared.

Hitting Sticks, Healing Sticks

While working on the development of the Ritual Preparation I observed how those dancing traditionally would wear winter gloves or hold a handkerchief in each hand while they danced. The holding of handkerchief, traditional dance fans or wearing of gloves was in keeping with the Yupik and Inupiat belief of a person being more vulnerable when dancing. The palms of the hands were how unwanted spirits might enter a person, or possibly how a person's soul might escape, while dancing. As I watched the dancers holding their gloves I recalled the ornate and feathered dance stick the Yupik and Inupiat I had seen used during traditional dance performances. Held to either accompany or lead the beat, the Eskimo believed the rhythm lived in the stick. The feathers attached to the stick represents the breath of the beat.

By the next session I had acquired a pair of dowel sticks—each two feet in length—for each of the participants. The sticks immediately became incorporated into the development of the Preparation. The sticks would later become integral elements in the exploration of our work, as props, musical instruments, and mnemonic devices. The sticks addressed several needs simultaneously: 1) covered the palms, referring to and satisfying traditional needs; 2) gave the rhythm (symbolically and literally) to each participant; 3) made rhythm pro-active and participatory; 4) provided a group shared point of focus, interplay, and communication; 5) and it provided an important tool of performance expression and exploration.

The sticks also proved to establish democratic sensibility, making everyone equal, for in traditional culture women seldom drum, the rhythm being the domain of the men. By giving all participants, male and female alike, assertive and shy, the capacity to create rhythm, we made a small but significant decision. Though participating in the realm of traditional culture, but we were doing it as it applied to modern needs and circumstances.

Beyond the work directly related to the development of the ritual preparation the sticks proved an excellent tool for physical and imaginative exploration. Apparent immediately, was the stick's ability to extend the sphere of expression of performer. Taking a larger space was an especially important psychological step for the native participants who are otherwise physically and socially reticent. By expanding and extending the physical self they gained personal confidence as they explored a very new sense of how to use, relate, and express themselves in space. Subtle cultural and socially bound codes of space expanded. Complementing our mask work, the sticks served

the function of freeing the participants of their performance inhibitions while expanding their expressiveness.

Wilma Brown, an Inupiat from the village of White Mountain, was initially quiet and shy to a point of making others in the group uncomfortable. Through the use of stick exploration exercises she suddenly blossomed with self-confidence and expression. Her transformation was startling, but not an exception among the native students. Wilma's transformation, like that of others, went beyond performance applicability and significantly affected their social and personal development. Wilma has, since graduation from UAF (as a biology major) developed one-woman performances and continued her performance work with Silimuit, a Greenland Inuit group.

Imagination exercises introduced the transformational abilities of the sticks into lasers, magic wands, and talking sticks. Through other exercises they used their sticks as paint brushes to paint their homes, people they knew, the character of the various seasons, dogs, village details, and the tundra landscape. Beginning with exercises relating to environments and situations familiar to them, they imaginatively moved through a series of events from a traditional story. Such exercises were an unexpected boon for non-native students, allowing them an opportunity to leave themselves to gain insight into the Alaska native experience. For non-native participant such as Megan Evans, a former lawyer from California, these exercises forced her to vicariously consider native lifestyle and ways. Her perceptions sensitized her insights into the culture and native classmates and gave depth to her understanding of cultural rhythm and movements. The stick explorations also included personal expression work. Some exercises required the participants to use the sticks to express a wide variety of emotion. One exercise asked them to create a song of the four seasons sung with their sticks, body, and voice. Other exercises used the sticks to express the feelings they felt at that particular moment.

Expressing feeling so openly was a large step for the native participants. The expressiveness of the non-native students served as example, encouragement, and catalyst for comparatively shy native students. The decision to expand efforts and interpretation of traditional expressiveness was deliberate. Western styled individual expressiveness was seen as a tool by which the native students could explore themselves and their culture. Stepping outside of themselves enabled them to see themselves and their culture with greater objectivity and appreciation.

Drawing on the rich mimetic dance and cultural traditions of the Yupik and Inupiat, an entire series of exercises developed movement scenarios. Some scenarios required an appreciation of water and sky and moving to the cleansing the body with chilling wind and then warm sun; the night time and darkness comes, the moon shines then wanes, the stars appear and twinkle, the earth falls asleep, then the sticks fall asleep. We learned from an Athabaskau, Paul Mountain, about a recently revived and formerly secret funeral ceremony called the "Stick Dance." During the annual ceremony

Athabaskans from several Yukon river villages gather to honor the recently deceased using sacred healing sticks to accompany their mourning songs. Traditionally, the dead, upon hearing the sticks would go on to their final resting. In an exploratory exercise, conducted with honor and respect, group members evoked the memory of their deceased ancestors with the stick beat and individualized song. With exercises like these the sticks gradually became integrated with our performance work in a manner consistent with the cultural context we were expressing.

Traditional Yup'ik belief maintains all things are alive and have a spirit known as a yuaa." Over time the sticks themselves came to life, their spirits realized and endowed with power. The process of how the sticks became integrated into the work and into the traditional performance context was significant, guiding subsequent adaptations of traditional elements into a contemporary theatre context. Tuma participants eventually individualized their sticks with carvings, markings, beads, and feathers, reflecting the empowerment and spirit realization of the sticks. Through practice we came to understand, firsthand, the power of the medicine stick, divining rod, dance stick, and magic wand that are a part of so many cultures. The sticks became, in a sense, ritualistically endowed through our explorations and applications—the spirit alive within them.

Several stick Ritual Performance explorations also found their way into our performances. In *The Child From the Sea*, (produced by Tuma in March 1992), non-native Anthony Rivard, a former North Slope oil rig roughneck, evolved the aural and visual expressions of a herd of caribou. Anthony had observational experience of caribou and their behavior because of his time spent in the woods and on the tundra as a hunter. His ability to talk across cultural boundaries about the animals and hunting greatly enhanced the closeness of the group.

In other instances stick explorations evolved into more specific props. Tuma's (March 1991) production of *Qayaq: The Magical Man* for instance initiated bird, fish, seal, kayaking, and ocean wave expressions originally using sticks and later replaced with actual props. The influence of the sticks was apparent in the performer's sense of confidence, expressiveness, and expansiveness in space. The performer's larger than life movements extended into the performance space serving appropriately the mythic-symbolic-spiritual performance expression of Alaska native people.

Animals & Humans

Identification with animals is a significant part of Yupik and Inupiat traditional dance performance, cosmology, and lifestyle. Realizing the significance and respect given animals and birds in the Yupik and Inupiat cultures it was necessary to investigate carefully and fully, how and why to perform animals and birds. It was natural for animal and bird movements to figure significantly in our class explorations and the Ritual Preparation.

Most of the native participants had close, life-long interactions with the birds and animals so integral to their lifestyle. The observational opportunity and intimate knowledge of tundra birds and animals the Eskimos take for granted is difficult for non-natives to appreciate. Those who did not live and depend on a subsistence lifestyle can never really understand the special relationship of growing up on a barren landscape and sharing the land with birds and animals. Only by being lived is such understanding gained. To Western thinking animals are inferior others that either must serve or be controlled by humans. Western ideology, specifically the Judeo-Christian tradition, assumes an inherent differentiation between humans and animals and focuses on the explanation of the relationship between originally independent parts. It holds that humans have souls and the ability to attain salvation, whereas animals do not. (Fienup-Riordan 1994:48)

For Alaska natives, still primarily hunters and gatherers, the characteristics of the birds and animals of their respective areas were made familiar through seasonal observations. The relationship between animals and humans, however, was more than just that of familiarity and subsistence interaction. Over the course of several millennia the Yupik and Inupiat had evolved a highly intricate cosmological interaction with the animals. The differentiation of persons into humans and non-humans was for Eskimo peoples at the foundation of social life. The Yupiit believed all humans and animals—both male and female, living and the dead-shared personhood; however, within this category they distinguished human and non-human persons. (Fienup-Riordan 1994: 48) So important was their relationship with the animals that all major performance ceremonies and rituals dealt, in varying ways, with the continuity or relationship between the human and animal worlds. In this way both living and dead human and non-human persons were an integral part of the endless, an historical, and perpetual cycle of birth, death, and rebirth reciprocity.

The relationship between humans and animals was viewed as a collaboration with the animals giving themselves to the hunters in response to the hunters' respectful treatment. (Fienup-Riordan 1994:50)

Many of the rules and rituals guiding Yupik and Inupiat life in traditional times derived from their relationship between humans and animals. Animals were aware of human actions and some were said to be able to hear humans talking about them. Reflecting this belief, Yupik and Inupiat mythology is full of occurrences where humans transform into animal form and humans into animals. It is also believed that in early days all animate beings had a dual existence, becoming at will either like a man or the animal forms they now wear; if an animal wished to assume its human form, the forearm, wing, or other limb was raised and pushed up the muzzle or beak as if it were a mask, and the creature became manlike in form and features. (Nelson 1899:394)

Within the Alaska native cosmological context, to perform an animal was to co-habituate with it—to understand it, to have a dialogue with it—

and to vicariously become it. The forms of the Eskimo world were transformable, its categories permeable. Performing an animal would, for a Yupik or Inupiat performer, be no more unusual than a Western actor performing another person—for the birds and animals were "people," too. Each animal had a soul, personality, and feelings unique to who they were, how they related to the environment, and what they did. They were characters in every sense worthy of dramatization.

Traditionally animal identification extended beyond the context of performance and into daily life. Birds and animals could be called to assist a person in a time of need or to lend them certain characteristics. Traditionally animal totems, amulets, and body markings lent a person certain animal or bird attributes—for instance wearing an eagle's claw for bravery or keen eyesight. Until the 1920's the Inupiat men belonging to the walrus clan wore labrets, pieces of walrus ivory pierced into their cheeks, to emulate and identify with their primary subsistence animal. By emulating the animal they honored and symbolically became it.

David Salmon, an Athabaskan elder from Fort Yukon, spoke to the Tuma group about animals and how identification remained strong to this day. I belong to the beaver people, and other people are always kidding us because we live in long wooden houses by the river. But were persistent, hard-working people, too... Them Caribou people are always on the move, they can never sit still, so I never lend nothing to a Caribou person, because you never know when you'll see them again. And the salmon people, they are stubborn... I don't know how people come to be like certain animals. It all happened a long time ago before anybody can remember anymore. I just know that people are still that way. (Salmon, interviewed 10.12.92) Many of the native students (Eskimo and Indian) in the Tuma group claimed traditional clan identification with animals such as the wolf, walrus, bear or beaver.

As a part of the development of the Ritual Preparation each participant identified and explored the expression of their clan or "power" animal. Many native students (Indian and Eskimo) knew their animal identification, those that did not called elders in their village to find out. Participants not having an animal clan identification discovered their "power" animal through a process of drum induced trance. Once determined, each participant explored and created a story dance, a sequence of animal movements and sounds, for presentation. The dances were performed independently or as a part of the Ritual Preparation. Eventually each participant developed a clan or power animal dance for a land and sea mammal and bird. Often these animals would provide a resource of movement during Tuma explorations, story telling and performances with casting of certain roles determined by a performer's animal. Performers became, in a sense, authorities and representatives of their respective animals. Their power or clan animal informed all of their performance, be it human character or an animal not their own. The animal(s) would provide a point-of-view and

reference point for the group member's performance. Human and animal movements melded to express the unique world view of Alaska native people.

Among many Eskimos the wolf and bear hold a position of significance and respect. Because of the numerous parallels between the social, hunting, and rearing habits, the wolf has a position of special reverence. Paul Jumbo, a leading personality in the development of Tuma Theatre, is from Toksook Bay, a Yupik village in southwest Alaska. His grandmother, who was training as a shaman when the missionaries came, raised him believing his ancestors were wolves. Having wolves as ancestors was something he never questioned nor thought unusual. Paul wrote and co-directed *Utelmun (Going Home)* for Tuma in 1992. In the performance he played a contemporary native boys grandfather who came to teach the ancient ways of the ancestors. Throughout the performance the grandfather character comes to the boy as a wolf-human—transforming between his animal and human form—and being of both worlds simultaneously.

Similarly, the Inupiat believe at one time all humans were wolves and when the world turned upside down those wolves unable to return to the underworld became humans. "The Eagle-Wolf Messengers Feast," possibly the most significant and pervasive ceremony of Inupiat Alaska, builds on this belief. Known as the Kiviq, and revived in 1988 in Barrow, the feast celebrates and vividly illustrates the cycle of human-animal reciprocity and interrelationship. The feast is essentially a gathering of humans to pay homage to the Eagle mother (a universal spirit representing nature) and return the soul of her son to her. The soul of the son is a stand-in for all the game caught within the past year. The Festival, in its many and various manifestations throughout Eskimo Alaska, include many dances in which the performers portray wolves.

Tuma Theatres production of *The Eagles Gift* (March 1993) revived and elaborated on several of the wolf dances and animal/human characters inhabiting the original myth. In the myth the wolves teach the hunter how to dance, marking the origin of dance and song and how it came to humanity. The beat of the Inupiat drum is the heartbeat of the Eagle Mother—it is her gift to humanity. In order to keep the Eagle Mother well, humans must continue to beat their drums, dance, and sing. Simply and effectively asserted by this ceremony is the inter-active reciprocity of animal and human worlds.

Such an interplay between human and animal form caused no difficulty for our audiences to understand. The children in attendance especially appreciated the transmutability between human and animal forms, finding it easy to accept humans with animal characteristics, the stock and trade of children's theatre and cartoons. Some non-native adults did find difficulty in accepting the human-animal transmutability; generally their difficulty centered on not understanding the how or why of the transformation. Within the performance of *Utelmun* as with other Tuma Theatre performances, an undifferentiated universe was presented, in which the boundaries between human and non-human, the spiritual and the material, were continuously

shifting and permeable. The interplay between animal and humans is, in a sense, the objective and inspiration of the performance event.

Simple technical proficiency, based on mimetic movements and cultural rhythm awareness, was only a starting point for our animal performance work. However, such Western based theatre performance methods and techniques soon showed their limits. A very different set of objectives demanded the definition of a working methodology radically different from the way Western theatre operated. Tuma Theatre was not just about performing. It was about fundamental conceptions of self and one's relationship to the world. The Western conception of performance implicitly conceived the world as consisting of separate, hierarchical, definable entities, where the performer becomes an other through a process of analytical, rational or emotionally motivated techniques. In contrast, Tuma Theatre performed animals in contribution to a well-established, culturally informed performance language context. Animals were familiar, accessible, and respected equals, not an other. To perform an animal the performer becomes a part of an interchangeable and interdependent whole.

Shaman as Performance Model

Traditional beliefs maintain that an animal gives something of themselves to the person performing them. Its sound, its way of walking, talking, looking, being, and it's special powers. The giving of attributes and the transformation of human performer into animal is no where better revealed than in the performance of the angalkuq—the shaman. The angalkuq had several animal helping spirits at their disposal with each animal or bird lending the shaman a spiritual or physical attribute. These spirits were both animal and bird—though ancestral spirits would also assist—and called into service as needed to combat illness, seek game, divine, or do battle with evil spirits. The fantastical Yupik spirit mask combines human, animal, bird, and symbolical configurations to vividly illustrate the integrative and transmutable sensibility of their shaman. The shaman was in the service of their community—their shamanic performance a pragmatic act of aid for the community. Within the performance the angalkuq might travel to the moon, become an eagle, go to the bottom of the ocean, become a caribou, or go to the land of the dead. The function of the angalkuq's performance was to facilitate transformation and maintain connection between the human-animal-spirit realms. All other performance expressions, whether including the angalkuq or not, were recapitulations of the angalkuq's function.

The leading of their community to becoming a greater part of themselves marked the significance of the shamans performance. The shaman's role was that of spiritual boundary crosser, experts in traveling and perception of greater realities, connecting with and transforming self into other spirits and non-temporal universals. Their expertise and value to their community lay in their ability to rupture the boundaries of ordinary reality and material

form and participate in the historical, endless cycle of existence as to assist in and address the needs of the temporal reality.

Performance was for the angalkuq, a channel to tap into a greater power, to gain understanding, perspective, knowledge, and comfort. This ancient understanding offered a knowledge, guidance, adjustment, and continuity to its community. It is a function of performance our contemporary world has grown away from or completely forgotten. Out of its traditional context and bereft of its spiritual initiations, Tuma Theatre found in the function, methods, and expression of the angalkuq a model that could guide, inspire, and inform all of our subsequent explorations and performances

Body as Script & the Mythology of Movement

Each culture has or specifically creates coded movement as a consequence of its social interactions, relationship to the earth, its climate, and other creatures. Some cultures rigidly adhere to these coded movements as sacred (given to them by the ancestors, spirits, or gods) and by expressing them provide a window to the sacred and/or mythological. These coded movements become both mnemonics and living, participatory pathways to a culture's origins. In a sense the coded movements of the human body are a living expression of a culture's mythology. Those cultures living more closely with their environment are generally more connected to such movement coding. The body was the primary way of relating to their part of the earth and their existence. The coding also provided a device by which oral cultural traditions could remember through the body. What anthropologists refer to as 'orally transmitted cultures' would be more aptly termed 'oral/movement' cultures.

Within some cultures the coded movements have evolved into highly detailed artistic forms, retaining and recognizing, in some sense, the relationship a people once had with their part of the earth. It is interesting to consider the performance expressions of Noh Theatre, Kathakali, the Beijing Opera, yoga, Tai chi, and ballet as formalized, codified, and reimagined coded movements from an earlier, and now removed interaction with the earth. Through codification these performance expressions hold, in the human body, their mythology and ancient connection with their indigenous place and way of being.

Alaskan Eskimo dance is unique among indigenous people in the degree it applies illustrative movements and gestures—the Eskimo themselves refer to it as story dancing. The movement vocabulary of the Inupiat and Yupik dance traditions are very similar, sometimes identical and often interchangeable. Inupiat dance, however is performed standing and can move across the floor, whereas Yupik dance requires its male dancers to sit on their legs as the women dance in place behind them.

Yupik and Inupiat dance movements illustrate a full range of expressions and feelings such as looking, hearing, eating, walking, hunting, joy, age,

surprise, talking, birds, seals, mountains, walrus, raven, northern lights. The mimetic quality of the dances evolves from the pragmatism of their traditional hunting and gathering existence. Dances told stories by movement for education, reflection, commentary, and in celebration of community. Dance stories are as vital to the transmission of Alaska Eskimo culture as is their oral story telling tradition. What oral stories could not convey the body conveyed in sensory terms, using rhythm, gesture, and performance. Dance enabled the Alaskan Eskimo to participate in their tradition proactively with the dancer understanding, and personally expressing the rhythm and interplay between human, animal, and spirit worlds. Dances were not the domain of specialist or artists, but rather something an entire community shared.

Entire multi-dimensional stories can be performed with one dancer taking on all of a story's components. For example, one Yupik dance tells the story of a hunter spotting a goose while hunting. The dance begins with a hunter traveling, then performing a beautiful day, the sun and wind. A goose, identified in the air, immediately and easily the performer transforms into a goose. Within the next move the performer transforms into a hunter and shoots the goose with bow and arrow, only to transform back to the goose and illustrate the wounded and falling bird. The dance ends with the hunter dancing happily and giving thanks to the day and the owner of the universe. The easy transmutability between human, animal, and element vividly portrays interconnectedness of their hunting and gathering cosmology and morality. Implied also is the ability of taking on multiple perspectives. In this way traditional dance transfers by representing, in immediate and practical terms, a deeply encoded way of life. The dance of the Yupik and Inupiat people is efficient, simple, entertaining, and practical, serving many functions at once, reflecting its origins and how a nomadic, hunting and gathering people had to be.

In keeping with its hunting-gathering origins, which mandated adaptability, many recently created dances have incorporated expressions of operating a boat's outboard motor, use of a rifle, playing basketball, and their enthusiasm for professional boxing. Their dance is not only a way of reflecting traditional events but also a way of incorporating new events into their own cultural context. Constant, however is the ever present, always organizing traditional dance rhythm.

The question confronting Tuma was: How do we access the rich, expressive dance tradition for theatrical application? Yupik and Inupiat dance movements communicate well within in their homogenous cultural context where the community understands, in a deeply ingrained way, the meaning and references encoded by their dances. But in order for these cultures to have a dialogue with other cultures—namely modern Western culture—some sort of adjustment of the performance language had to take place. Flexibility and enlargement of performance language would be necessary to meet the challenges of expressing themselves to a larger cultural context. A

reimagining their tradition would be necessary to address the issues facing contemporary Eskimo existence on its own terms. By breaking dance movements free from their traditional performance context we were able to identify a performance vocabulary. The movements, once freed, took on a malleable, recombinant life of their own. Defining Yupik and Inupiat dance forms was the first step towards retro-fitting traditional dance forms, allowing for contemporary theatrical expression.

The freeing of dance forms would prove to be both theatrically expressive and psychological liberating. The cultural and social trauma the Eskimo experienced when confronted with Western culture had forced their traditional expressions into a defensive role of self-preservation. As cultural repositories their dance traditions became emotional, psychological, and at times politically charged signifiers of cultural identity. By freeing the movements from their traditional context, and making them viable vehicles of self and cultural expression, the movements expanded and defined itself in a modern context on its own terms.

Colonialized cultures often define their general and vague idea of traditional around the time when their cultures bore the brunt of initial and traumatizing colonialization. The defining of cultural self in the face of an alien cultural invasion generally took the form of freezing their identity in song, dance, regalia, ceremony, and thinking. Tradition, as expressed in performance, became a necessary means by which to hold a cultures identity. Through time, however, a cultures idea of tradition became some sort of ideal. Traditional cultures tried to freeze time as a way of preserving self and culture, but by doing so denied themselves cultural evolution. For this reason the form, function, and context the Eskimo tradition was, and to an extent remains, essentially sacrosanct. In a way they had done what they often time resented outsiders for—they romanticized their own culture and identity.

As the class explorations and development of the Ritual Preparation continued, it became evident the movements most resonant were those drawn from the traditional dance vocabulary. These coded movements provided an alphabet readily available to our work. Led by those students having traditional dance experience, and drawing on my own dance experience, the group began a study of identifying hundreds of dance expressions. These expressions became known as elemental forms. By way of group sharing, research (via video tape and elders) and exploration the Tuma group defined the movements by separating these forms from their story dance context. Possibly the single most important influence in defining the elemental forms was that of Theresa John, an Yupik from Toksook Bay and instructor at the University. She is the most knowledgeable resource of Yupik dance in the state and I am deeply indebted to her guidance, insights, and continuing support in the evolution of Tuma Theatre.

What Tuma proposed by the separating out of the elemental forms was a dynamic altering, if not revolution, of traditional dance form conception and application. The elemental forms, once freed from their traditional

dance context, took on a life of their own and created something new. They became suddenly accessible and distinct expressive tools at the service of the individual performer and culture simultaneously. Rather than simply walking across the stage floor, for example, the Tuma performer would use one of the travel elemental forms to express emotion and situation. The rhythmically styled dance-theatre that emerged pushed the traditional performance idiom into a larger space—literally and expressively. It freed movements once contained by dance tradition and allowed the performers to enter a new performance space (i.e., theatre) with infinite potential. With a new understanding and application of traditional movements Tuma found a language by which to speak to a broader, contemporary audience while remaining firmly rooted in the tradition that fostered it.

The dance-theatre stylization evolved from the elemental forms maintained and highlighted many essential aspects of traditional dance. The performer, like the metaphoric performance space, was particular and archetypal simultaneously. The dance movements were concurrently in the present, past and future, implying a cyclical rather a linear reality.

The easy transformational ability of humans changing into animals, then expressing a commentary of the action, and then performing the wind or northern lights, demonstrated an easy inter-changeability and interconnectedness of all things.

Critics of Tuma, Eskimos, whites, and anthropologists among them, would cite the re-tooled application of Eskimo dance expression as being not traditional," therefore not being really Eskimo, even though made from the culture and by its members. Re-working images of self and culture through performance invariably elicited strong responses, some disapproving, but generally approving.

Extracted from their dance story context, each form identifies a distinct emotional and communicative expression. Often the group would improvisationally play with the forms to tell a story of their own making. Exercises included stories being told verbally with the performers responding with the creation of a dance based on the elemental form vocabulary. The list of Elemental Forms grows each year with the addition of new ones and the creation of others.

Two of Tuma's performances *Naam/Genehu* (*I don't know/Whatever* 1996) and *Yupik Arnaq* (*Yupik Woman* 1997) were developed entirely by a direct story telling technique. In *Naam/Genehu* two Athabaskan elders from the village of Minto were invited to UAF as Elders in Residence. The elders, Evelyne Alexander and Ruth Grant (86 and 64 years old respectively), told stories to the Tuma group. Their stories raised questions, which in turn, provoked more stories and soon themes, situations, and characters evolved creating a historical and mythological frame work for the performance. With the guidance of the elders, the Tuma performers evolved the performance, shaping characters and interactions to the needs of the stories and through

discussion with the Tuma performers. The performance came to life in stages with the initial rough outline gaining greater detail, songs and dances. The elders were on stage during public performances, story telling, dancing, singing, performing characters, and commenting on the performance as it unfolded. Because of their age and inexperience as theatre performers, the elders sometimes forgot lines or the sequence of the stories. This fact and who they were as personalities, was worked into the texture of the performance with the Tuma performers occasionally helping the women along. As a consequence the performance took on an informal, spontaneous, and communal feel befitting its cultural context. The performance was similar to how elders would tell stories to their children and grandchildren at summer fish camp. In a sense the audience (both native and non-native) vicariously became an Athabaskan community. Evelyne would often surprise the performers by expanding on her stories, or launch into a never before rehearsed story, advice, or song during performance. Such occurrences were surprising and remarkable. After one such occasion, Evelyne simply remarked It just come to me. Maybe it is my ancestors. They think you should know that story.

Yupik Arnaq was similarly developed, however with only one performer, Theresa John, who was also the source material. To develop the performance Theresa (a Yupik from the village of Toksook Bay) provided both personal and cultural source material. The performance was shaped through a several month process of discussions and performance explorations. During the process others would attend rehearsals, offering comments and suggestions. My role during the process progressed from that of interviewer to dramaturg, then director. Having known her for nearly ten years our rehearsals were often debates regarding a wide range of topics, including personal, political, cultural, racial, and gender issues. For a Yupik to perform a one-person show was a tradition breaking. Being communal and consensus in social orientation, the Yupik frown upon individuals stepping out of the crowd. It is culturally ingrained that such action is arrogant. For a woman to do so was especially provocative within its cultural context. However, for Theresa those culturally imposed restrictions needed to be broken in order to address the issues of how individual, modern Yupik (men and women) struggle to live in two worlds. Like *Naam/Genehu*, the performance was well received by both native and non-native audiences. *Yupik Arnaq* was viewed by many Yupiks as an important declaration of Yupik culture and the under appreciated role of women. Other issues raised by the performance included how images, stories, and ideas of the Yupik people have been appropriated and mis-represented by anthropologist and others who seek to exploit the culture for their own gain.

Sound, Space and Emotion

Tuma Theatre explored ancient Yupik, Inupiat, Athabaskan, and Inuit languages for their literal meanings and for how each specific language

formulated its sounds of the mouth, throat and articulators to convey emotion and ideas. English, albeit the lingua franca of the class, was recognized within our performance context as a power language with much political, social, and cultural baggage. It was a language to be used with sensitivity and consciousness and not simply as the most convenient communicator.

Need English be included in an Alaska native performance? How and why? Tuma performances such as *Child From the Sea* used no English at all. The use of English leads the audience to certain assumptions and expectations. It brackets a performance within a rational and linear perspective thereby subverting the affective, atmospheric understanding required for the presentation of the Alaska native world view. In Paul Jumbo's *Uletmun* the modern Young Eskimo man only spoke English which demonstrated his removal from the ancient ways of his Yup'ik-only speaking grandfather. Ultimately, it was the emotions communicated through sound and movement that brought the Young Man, Grandfather, and the Animals together. When the Young Hunter found himself confused by the modern world at the end of "Qayaq," the utterance of spoken English came, after nearly an hour into the performance, like a shock, slashing the atmosphere like a knife. It was exactly the effect we had hoped for.

On the most obvious level the use of a native tongue offered a certain sound poetry. Alaska native languages use the mouth and back of the throat to produce many unique sounds unfamiliar to many and seldom heard in public. *The Eagle's Gift* included the use of Greenland Inuit, spoken by exchange student Karen Kielsen; Athabaskan, spoken by Paul Mountain; Yup'ik spoken by Theresa John, Ringo Jimmy, and Esther Stauffer; and Inupiaq, spoken by Wilma Brown. The performers not understanding each other's language was inconsequential to the creation and maintenance of the performance atmosphere. In *Inua*, produced by Tuma in 1995, the Tuma performers experimented with English and applied it from a native point-of-view. This approach neutralized the English language's baggage, putting it on equal terms (for those not speaking a native tongue) with the indigenous languages used, and significantly opened English to new expressive possibility.

The choice of using a native tongue in performance, even though the majority of the audience could not understand one, was deliberate if not provocative. The gesture of having Paul Jumbo in *Uletmun* or Paul Mountain in *The Eagle's Gift* speak entire monologues in Yupik and Athabaskan respectively, politically and artistically demonstrated that the performance was on in native terms, and that the audience must go to the performance because the performance will not come to them. For native speakers the use of native tongues on a public stage was a source of pride, implied their language and culture were flourishing and on equal footing with English. The use of native languages prompted Tuma theatre member Melanie Brown, an Inupiaq raised in Anchorage, to learn her ancestral tongue. Others, such as non-native Geoffrey Stauffer have gone on to become fluent in Yup'ik.

For some native students speaking in their native tongue was simply more comfortable. One assignment asked students to tell a story told to them by an elder. Yupik Erna Hooper became very stiff and tense when it was her turn to speak before the group. After a few difficult sentences I asked her to tell the story in Yupik. Suddenly her entire body and emotional range opened. Initially her hands were stiff at her side and her head bowed. When she began speaking Yupik, however, she cracked a big smile, was gesticulating, and began illustrating all of the actions of the story. She told the group later that she doesn't feel alone when speaking Yupik: It is like my grandma and ancestors are with me. Repeatedly Tumas native participants proved their comfort and emotional connectedness while using their native tongue on stage.

Chant is a fundamental emotional expression of Alaska native people. With few exceptions, chants are pure sounds with no cognitive meaning. Meaning comes through emotional connection, physical evocation, and repetition. Many songs of Alaska natives are simply pure sound chants without any literal meaning; those songs having descriptive words also have substantial chant choruses. Chanting allows for a direct emotional communication between the performers and audience. Chant is a pre-cognitive communication both highly personal and communal (using and reaffirming sounds particular to the culture). Quite literally chant allows one person to vibrate another. Chant allows the performer to speak pure and direct feelings to another human being. The repetitive, cyclical movement of chant is also significant for two reasons: 1) it evokes cyclical world view and 2) allows for the performer to evolve a physical/emotional connection and depth of expression. Chant expressions, like the dance movements of the Yupik and Inupiat, find their origin in daily and subsistence activity. Many chant sounds and patterns echo animal grunts, sound of the wind, sea, or subsistence activity. Many geographically and culturally specific chants were incorporated into the Ritual Preparation and figured prominently in Tuma Theatre performances. The most frequently used Yup'ik and Inupiat chant sounds included:

Yuu-yu rru-u u

Unga ya ha ha

Ya Ya raa raa

Nga a-ya ya ya

U-u-hu a-nga gu-u

Aa-ya-i-ya-a nga ya-i-ya-a

Tuma productions also applied chant sound as a way to identify or emotionally qualify a moment. This type of vocal commenting went far to add a musical texture and emotional complexity to the performances. It also was a way to tell the story across cultures—the communication was pure, direct and beyond cultural qualifiers. During Tumas production of *Imua*

(1995), Theresa John and I performed the roles of the angalkuq (shaman) who facilitated the telling of nine stories. Throughout the performance Theresa and I would comment on the action by using sounds and chants. At times the use of pure sounds, such as *li-yi-yi-yi-yi!* in disapproval of a character's action, would be unrehearsed, coming randomly and improvisationally, as inspired by the performance. Because of Theresa's knowledge of Yupik she would often comment, in Yup'ik, on the action from the side while I would chant or vocalize a commentary using chant. This application of native language, chant, and sound added texture, and gave expression to spontaneity.

Place and Expression

The dance traditions of the Yupik and Inupiat were strongly influenced by the cramped quarters of a village ceremonial house, known variously as the *Kashim*, *Qasigi*, or men's house. These semi-subterranean houses were where the community gathered, performing a wide range of social, ceremonial, and ritual practices during the long and dark winter.

Because of the lack of architecturally supportive material on the treeless tundra these houses were small. The smallness was, however, compatible to the small hunting groups that organized the Yupik and Inupiat. With driftwood from the Yukon river the Yupik created roof beams. The Inupiat, bow head whalers, used the ribs of the world's largest animal for roof supports to enable them to build larger ceremonial houses. Being in a traditional Inupiat ceremonial house was like being in the belly of a whale, their primary subsistence food.

Performance for the Yup'ik and Inupiat people is a transformational space where for a moment the wholeness of reality is exposed and celebrated. Traditional ceremonial houses of both the Yupik and Inupiat were less metaphors and more manifestations of the Alaskan Eskimo universe. Their womb-like nature was both practical and in keeping with origin myths of people coming from the earth as wolves. To enter a traditional ceremonial house a person had to crawl on all fours through an Arctic entry before standing up in the community house—a reminder of their animal to human transformation. One can imagine the impression such an entrance had considering the only illumination was a flickering fire or seal oil lamp and everyone entering had animal fur parkas. The smoke hole represented the upper world, the fire pit the lower world, the ceremonial house itself was the human world. The three levels symbolizing their cosmological belief in three parallel realities and how though performance there is an interplay between these realities. Traditionally built ceremonial houses have not existed since the late 1970s, having been replaced by village community halls and school gymnasiums.

Tuma Theatre adopted the traditional ceremonial house as its practical and metaphoric performance space model. The studio space, which exists in the basement of the Fine Arts Building, was stripped of its ceiling tiles and painted black. It was in this dark, womb-like space that most of our

exploratory and training work occurred. In contrast, the University of Alaska mainstage theater is a capacious 420 seat proscenium theatre highly inappropriate for the performance requirements of Tuma. Wooden risers were brought onto the stage (with painted curtains behind them) to establish an intimate 200 seat performance space conducive to Tuma's culturally specific expression. The average performance space created was approximately 14 feet by 14 feet and surrounded, depending upon the performance, on either three or four sides by audience.

Like its inspiration and traditional model, Tuma Theatre performances stressed an intimacy, comfort, and interaction with its community. To help facilitate this the tiered seating units were without chairs for the first three rows. The top row had chairs for those, generally older people, who need the back support. The padded open seating was by its nature informal, creating a familiar, open, and village-like atmosphere. The lack of seating structure motivated more interaction between audience members who could lounge, adjust, and hold their children informally. The movements and comments of audience members along with the occasional cries of children became a part of the performance atmosphere.

Tuma performances highlighted either direct or indirect audience interaction. Josh Weiser developed a traditional Raven character which became a prominent part of both *Qayaq* and *Uletmun*. Playing the Raven trickster (a creator figure for Alaska native people) he intervened variously throughout both productions serving as motivator, trouble maker, and action manipulator. Establishing a link with the audience he would often play tricks, improvisationally entertain, and guide the performance action.

The trapped stage floor of the UAF theatre provided an opportunity for Tuma performances to include a central fire pit and a variety other floor entrances. The use of a central fire pit and such floor entrances were highly theatrical and expressed the transformational and multiple levels of reality that underlay the performance. We used a fog machine and lights for our fire pit, leaving room, as in traditional Kashims, for performers to enter and exit from the pit. The Tuma performances *Qayaq: The Magical Man* (1991), *Child From the Sea* (1992), *Uletmun* (1992), *Eagle's Gift* (1993) and *Inua* (1995) all extensively applied the use of the fire pit and other "animal" or "spirit" holes representing pathways to other realities in the Yup'ik and Inupiat world view. The use of so many floor holes for entrances were also practical, for it allowed for the quick and fluid entrance/exit of performers when no standing scenery existed. Its inspiration however, came from the Yup'ik belief that shamans flew into the sky to star which were actually holes in the sky. Entering the hole the shaman would find themselves in a parallel world spirit Kashim where every action had a direct effect on what happen in the human village. For the Tuma performer entering though the floor holes, the performance space was the Kashim existing through the stars. It was a place of origins. Whatever happen in this kashim happened on earth.

In keeping with this transformational quality stage actions lived in the shadows. Though using modern electrical lighting instruments the feel of mystery and unreality, similar to what we speculated it was like to watch a traditional performance in a fire-lit kashim, was affected by lighting that was generally low in intensity and positioned at severe angles. Light shift motivation often related to emotional or spiritual changes in the action—that being the story line we wished the audience to follow. Location shifts were also highlighted and as a consequence location, time and space melded.

To address the needs of this kind of theatre lighting designer Kade Mendelowitz, set and lighting designer Hugh Hall, and costume designer Tara Maginnis evolved a Tuma Theatre style. The style was not only revealed in how things appeared on stage but just as significantly included how they conceptualized and worked with the performance evolution process. Tuma performance rehearsals would begin with either a group of stories or simply ideas. Though discussion and rehearsal attendance the designers would work with the group and become a part of the consensus. The exchange of ideas and suggestions between the performers and designers was encouraged and often proved fruitful.

The use of flown in objects, as if from the upper world, further elaborated on the performance tradition of things "flying" from the other world. Traditionally a sinew rope coated with soot to disguise it was stretch across a kashim. On the rope elaborately carved birds or other objects would theatrically fly across the kashim to the amazement of spectators. In traditional times the Yup'ik and Inupiat also used sophisticated puppets in performance. For *Qayaq* designer Hugh Hall re-created an elaborate multi-tiered "heaven" modeled on those used for traditional Yup'ik ceremonies. Constructed of feathers, sinew, and wood, the "heaven" was attached to the wrist of the lead drummer and danced with the rhythm of the beat. All Tuma performances, except *Naam/Gen Enu* (1996) have variously applied flown objects, puppets, and carved figures.

The Tuma Theatre style, like traditional performance rituals and ceremonies, has generally stressed the highly theatrical and at times visually fantastical. Props, costume, and mask were the primary devices used by Tuma with the communication emphasizing the performer and their vocal, movement, and spiritual totality. The performance The thematic emphasis pervading the performance is transformation. Nothing is as it seems to be, everything is simultaneously what it is, yet at the same time something greater. Every prop, mask, dance movement, word or chant aspires to an essence of its meaning. The simplicity, grounded in pragmatism and a clarity of purpose, is the ideal way to suggest the greater complexity of their transformational and dynamically interconnected world view.

The Continuum

For the Yupik and Inupiat, the braid of meaning-reality-context, has remained as they have, as a part of the earth they inhabit. They, like other

indigenous people, recognize that they remain a part of something greater than themselves. The forms and meanings of what surrounds them are a part of them. It through their performance expression they recognize and celebrate that sense of greater belonging. Performance is a moment of magic by which to glimpse the ephemeral and ineffable wonders of a greater whole we know but will never understand.

When I accepted my position at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, I had no idea what I was getting into. In a way I still do not fully understand what it is I do. And maybe that is as it should be. In this way I will always stay alert in respect for the mystery surrounding me. Though the work presented above may seem logical and systematic in progression, it was not. How does one reveal on paper the personal interactions, contradictions, frustrations, joys, revelations, and instinct that was all a part of Tuma. The work is not done, nor can it ever be done. That is the humility revealed by the work. I am only a part of something much greater than I will ever know. Tuma theatre was but one manifestation of the cyclical continuum of the Yup'ik and Inupiat people.

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The 1998 Oregon Shakespeare Festival

ED BOWEN

For artists and audience members devoted to theatre in the Northwest, the opening of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival summer season in Ashland is an occasion as significant as a November election, a ribbon cutting ceremony for a civic project, or the beginning of a prolonged dry season. Barry Johnson's July review in *The Oregonian* of this past year's new summer season provided the first peek at Artistic Director Libby Appel's second full season. His comments, however, were only a single perspective and, while often insightful, the occasion and the Festival is deserving of more attention. *The Oregonian*, for stories of larger significance, often provides a summary of comments from other writers around the state and across the nation. A broader perspective on the artistic achievements of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival seems appropriate and would, I believe, give us an even greater sense of pride in what I have often called "one of Oregon's greatest natural resources." In lieu of that state and national perspective, I would like to give another view of four productions in the past summer season in Ashland. My intent is not to disagree with Mr. Johnson, for I often find myself supporting his views. I believe he is a strong supporter of theatre. However, I sometimes feel that in his efforts to be positive and supportive of a struggling art form, he sacrifices his sharp critical eye. In Portland, where much of the theatre is still at a semi-professional level, I believe Mr. Johnson's approach is the right one. In the case of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, however, I think there needs to be a different set of standards. OSF in the last decade has moved to a new level in regard to the expectations of the company. Strong actors from a national pool and directors and designers of even international renown demand that this company begin to be held to higher standards. We must look at this company in terms of how it measures up to other regional companies, and to major companies in the international theatre centers of New York and London. Barry Johnson's review, while giving a nodding acknowledgment to the scope of OSF's reputation, still

ED BOWEN is Associate Professor of the Department of Performing and Fine Arts, University of Portland, Oregon.

approaches the season with a more local flavor. I would like to offer another perspective on some of the work of last season at Ashland.

First, credit must go to Libby Appel for recapturing what I think of as the "glory years" of Ashland in the late '70s and early '80s. The energy and art that came out of those years were truly remarkable. Part of this was provided by the addition of the state-of-the-art Angus Bowmer Theatre and the more intimate Black Swan. Suddenly, the quaint and curious company that did the Bard's plays on a replica of The Globe had the resources and the talent to move to another artistic level. Appel came to Ashland with a sense of the traditions and production values on which OSF established its reputation. Under the guidance of previous Artistic Director Henry Woronicz who had the difficult job of replacing the nearly legendary AD, Jerry Turner, some of that was being left behind. Woronicz was an actor and his attention seemed focused on their heir concerns. To his credit, he began to deepen the acting pool and, more importantly, began to move east of the Rocky Mountains in search of strong directors, who had always appeared to be inferior to the level of designers. Those very design elements, however, appeared to become a lower priority under Woronicz's tenure. For a number of years under his leadership, I cringed every time I saw another show featuring a stage full of Clint Eastwood black or brown leather cattle rustler's coats. Color and exotic shapes became, in both costumes and scenery, uninspired and repetitive. Appel arrived three seasons ago and remembered the important role artists like Richard Hay and Jeannie Davidson played in establishing Ashland's national reputation. Under Appel's leadership, current resident designers, William Bloodgood and Debra Dryden, "apprentices" of Hay and Davidson, have re-energized the contribution of those visual elements. New audiences are impressed and old-timers relish the Renaissance.

Appel also continued to expand the directing pool, as Johnson notes. Of particular excitement this past summer was the work of Michael Donald Edwards. His contemporary *Henry IV, Part 1* was a boldly accessible effort. It did, however, come at some expense to the play. This is what must be understood whenever bold chances are made. Not only did Edwards' production fail to alter "impressions of main characters or deepen your understanding of the text," as Johnson stated, but his approach served, at times, to completely undercut character. Prince Hal was made to transform from his Jaggeresque pose as the rebellious son to that of a buttoned-up gold-leafed military officer in an instant. The result was that we were given no hint of his nobility in the former guise, and no hint of the impact of his previous lifestyle in the latter. Falstaff, as surrogate father to Hal in the first half of the play, also seemed to have been lost behind the "Jerry Garcia" surface of paisley and pop culture in the production. In the play both of these elements serve as important aspects and influences of Shakespeare's "model king." It will be intriguing to see how Appel takes on the challenge of trying to carry us along the journey of this trilogy as she will direct *Henry IV, Part 2*. Perhaps continuity of casting, with the able Dan Donahue in the

role of Hal, and John Prybl as Falstaff will help bridge whatever gap has been created by this past season's memorable offering.

For many seasons in Ashland I have been a fan of the work of Jim Edmondson, as both actor and director. In 1995, I had the pleasure of observing and working with him, as I was assistant director for his production of *The Comedy of Errors* here in Portland. I am always impressed by Edmondson's careful research, attention to detail, and sense of humanity in his dealing with the play and the players. His production of *Cymbeline* was no different. As he himself said, in an interview session with him this last summer, "it is a very big play." Long, dense, and demanding for both artist and audience, it is a very rough play to make work. Edmondson worked meticulously to capture as much of the play as one can hope to grasp in a single effort. His choice in editing, his keeping characters in view at times they are referred to, or thoughtfully reintroducing characters who have been absent from the stage for a period of time all helped us to follow the twists and turns of this fairy tale. Again, however, all of Edmondson's care came at some expense. While the final scene certainly has the makings of comedy and laughter, it seems the less intriguing choice and robs the play of its romantic spirit. As so often happens in the cavernous outdoor theatre in Ashland, deeply personal human emotions are lost and the audience viewing this production, I think, went out of the theatre without the sense of wonder and joy in the successions of reunions and reconciliations that resolve the play. To play against the obviously easy comic exaggeration of that scene is an immense challenge, especially outdoors, but it would have been well worth the effort and truer to what, I believe, was Shakespeare's intent.

The Comedy of Errors as Barry Johnson mentioned, is a play widely open to conceptual interpretation. This past year's production started with such high hopes; however, the first of several errors began with the dropping of the famed Elizabethan flag that announces the beginning of every play. Visually, it was lively and beautiful, and colorful; everything a comedy of this sort should be. What it wasn't was clever. Ken Albers, whose direction I enjoyed in last season's *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and earlier in his production of Feydeau's *A Flea in her Ear*, seemed to distrust the Bard and instead decided to depend on costumes and properties to satisfy his audience. It was silly, but it was seldom surprising; it was exaggerated, but was seldom committed to. The exception was actress Catherine Lynn Davis as one of the two female Dromios. She was a joy from her first entrance to her last bow. Her goals were clear and she played her part for dear life; that is the stuff of comedy.

Barry Johnson stated that last year's season "doesn't try to challenge its audience; it wants to enchant it." What he didn't tell us was at what cost to the richness of the plays are we "enchanted." I believe that in some cases it was dear. The Oregon Shakespeare Festival, as a Tony award recipient and one of the most successful regional theatres in the country, needs to look to challenging while enchanting. That needs to be the Artistic Director's next goal. Libby Appel has done much to restore to their rightful place the visual

artists of the theatre in Ashland. She has kept the acting company strong, and she continued to reach out to directors of national and international repute. The danger is in what those directors do with this new found richness of which Ashland is so capable. Art is not just knowing what to create, it is also knowing when to stop. It is not just to provide but to provoke. This past summer was rich, bold, and active, but its highly reflective surface often hid the hearts of the characters and the plays. I challenge Libby Appel to sustain a Festival that can unify actors, directors and designers so as to give us everything these great plays deserve. It is possible!

Susanna Rowson and *Slaves in Algiers*: A Struggle for Women's Freedom

TERESA L. WOLF

The curtain closes on the premiere performance of the new play *Slaves in Algiers; or, A Struggle for Freedom*. The applause fades and the prompter signals frantically to a young woman backstage. The woman, Susanna Haswell Rowson, is the playwright responsible for this new theatre piece and has also just performed the role of its heroine, Olivia, in its successful debut. She catches her breath, steps into the light, and addresses her epilogue to the audience, taking these last few moments to articulate once more the issues of liberty, particularly women's liberty, which have been the theme of the evening's entertainment.

In this scenario, we catch a glimpse of Susanna Rowson as both professional actress and published playwright. Her claim to these qualifications alone would render the woman impressive enough. To hear a litany of her other accomplishments is to be amazed that one woman could amass such an extensive and varied body of work. In all, Susanna Rowson, "...published (eight) novels, two sets of fictional sketches, seven theatrical works, two collections of poetry, six pedagogical works, many occasional pieces and song lyrics, and contributed to two periodicals" (Tompkin's "Susanna Rowson" 30). In addition, she spent the final twenty-seven years of her life as administrator and teacher in the select girls' boarding school which she founded in Boston. Finally, one learns that Rowson achieved all of this in post-revolutionary America—the late eighteenth century, an historical moment when a woman's place was very closely proscribed and religiously enforced. As suggested by Dorothy Weil, "The modern reaction to such a career for a woman is to ask 'Way back then?'" (1) One quickly realizes that there is much to respect, and much to learn, about this woman referred to by various scholars as "the first American woman of letters," a "pioneer of the stage and . . . the first American woman playwright," and "America's first professional author."

Despite such a legacy, Rowson's life and work had largely passed into oblivion. Recent scholarship, inspired by feminist rediscovery of previously

TERESA L. WOLF recently received her Master of Arts in Theatre Arts and Drama at Washington State University and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of English at the same institution.

ignored women's texts, has begun to bring her literary and dramatic works once again to the forefront. One of the earliest of these "rediscoveries" of Rowson is Weil's *In Defense of Women: Susanna Rowson*, published in 1976. In 1985, Jane Tompkins made an impassioned argument concerning Rowson at a convention of the Modern Language Association, later published as an essay in *The (Other) Traditions*. Tompkins provides compelling evidence that Rowson, rather than Charles Brockden Brown, should be accorded the title "Father of the American Novel," despite the fact that "the terminology of literary history is made for describing men, not women." While much of the recent scholarship has focused on her novels, this essay will look primarily at Rowson's only extant play, *Slaves in Algiers; or, A Struggle for Freedom*.

An attempt to understand the depth and strength of Rowson's work requires an extended analysis of the cultural and historical milieu in which she wrote, performed, and taught. In the case of *Slaves in Algiers*, such a study necessitates an examination of the elements of Rowson's historical moment which may have influenced her choice and treatment of subject matter. As suggested previously, a brief study of Rowson's life is a worthwhile pursuit in this instance. Several uncommon experiences and circumstances make her life a unique site for the exploration of her primary themes—nationalism, liberty, women's rights—and render her a unique spokeswoman for her ideological messages. Here we can examine Rowson's own encounters with captivity, both literal and figurative: her captivity in the hands of American forces during the revolution, her captivity in an unhappy and unproductive marriage, her captivity within a society which was not structured to accommodate and encourage her considerable gifts and ambitions. Each of these forms of bondage can be seen as informing her literary work both directly and in more subtle fashion. Certainly, a connection can be seen between Rowson's experiences and her decision to write about white slavery in *Algiers*, appropriating current political events as a metaphor for the restriction of human rights in general, and the rights of women in particular.

Tompkins suggests a related approach to literature in her *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction*. Although she does not discuss Rowson's work specifically in this book, she does work with other "neglected texts" and authors from 1790 through 1860, acknowledging that her book involves "a redefinition of literature and literary study, for it sees literary texts not as works of art embodying enduring themes in complex forms, but as attempts to redefine the social order." She believes that literary texts should be studied, because "they offer powerful examples of the way a culture thinks about itself, articulating and proposing solutions for the problems that shape a particular historical moment" (xi). She elaborates further on her approach to texts commonly dismissed as "sensational," "sentimental," or "trivial":

In order to understand these neglected texts, that is, to see them, insofar as possible, as they were seen in the moment of their emergence, not as degraded attempts to pander to the prejudices of the multitude, but as providing men and women with a means of ordering the world they inhabited, one has to have a grasp of the cultural realities that made these novels mean-

ingful. Thus, rather than asking how a given text handled the questions which have recently concerned modern critics—questions about the self, the body, the possibilities of knowledge, the limits of language—I have discussed the works . . . in relation to the religious beliefs, social practices, and economic and political circumstances that produced them. History is invoked here not, as in previous historical criticism, as a backdrop against which one can admire the artist's skill in transforming the raw materials of reality into art, but as the only way of accounting for the enormous impact of works whose force escapes the modern reader, unless he or she makes the effort to recapture the world view they sprang from and which they helped to shape. (xii-xiii)

I will explore Rowson's play, then, from a similar theoretical standpoint, examining the world view prevalent at the time of its writing and Rowson's response to the world as she encountered it, focusing primarily on her interrogation of the "captivities" which impacted virtually every woman in the eighteenth century.

Finally, a close reading of the play itself will reveal the specific ways in which Rowson "articulat(ed) and propos(ed) solutions" for the problems that were shaping her particular historical moment. As noted by Mary Anne Schofield, Rowson did not have at her disposal the rhetoric that twentieth-century audiences have come to recognize as "feminist" (34). To find a stage or a voice for her ideologies, it was necessary to provide her thoughts with a guise which rendered them palatable to the male and female audiences of her day. One of the strategies that she utilized was the development of plot and characters which could carry the message in an entertaining and unobtrusive manner. A most serendipitous effect of that strategy is the fact that Rowson created female characters who are much more than the tools or toys of men. These female characters, initiating much of the action in her play, were surely uncommon entities on the late eighteenth-century stage. Rowson succeeded in creating a feminine consciousness in her characters, separate from the thoughts and motivations of the male characters with whom they coexisted.

The Life of Susanna Rowson

Susanna was born in England in 1762, her mother dying shortly after her birth. Some accounts indicate that her father was in England at her birth, and that he had time to bury his wife and have his infant daughter christened before being called to Massachusetts in service of the British Royal Navy.² Others suggest that Lieutenant Haswell had been called to the colonies before the birth of his daughter, and that the child was entrusted to a nurse by her dying mother.³ In either case, Susanna's father appears to have spent five years in America, retrieving his daughter only after remarrying a woman "somewhat older . . . and much wealthier" than he (Turner 7).

The next several years were pleasant ones, marked by opportunity for educational improvement. Susanna did not remain untouched, however, by the growing revolutionary fervor in her adopted home. She was tutored by James Otis, brother of Mercy Otis Warren who would eventually be one of Rowson's contemporary playwrighting colleagues. Otis gave Susanna opportu-

nities which were uncommon for a young woman in that age. It is entirely possible that her experiences during this time led to her later determination to provide a similarly excellent education for other young women. "Under his guidance, Susanna moved from her numbers and letters to Greek and Latin. By her teens, she was reading Aristophanes, Enripides and Plautus in the original and relishing unexpurgated versions of Shakespeare and his fellow Elizabethan dramatists. It was a heady mix in an era when a girl was considered learned if she could read her prayerbook" (Turner 8). In addition to being a fine tutor, Otis was also a "controversial patriot" (Parker 4) and one of the "fiery agitators for the Revolution" (Turner 8). Eventually, Susanna would be unable to maintain a peaceful coexistence with the loyalist and revolutionary elements in her young life.

As tensions increased, life became more difficult for the Haswell family. Her father remained in what had been the family's home for twelve years, after other loyalists had fled to England. His marriage to an American woman, and the birth of their two sons in America, contributed to his conflicted feelings. "His position thus resembled that of countless others who retained their fidelity to the crown while keeping quietly at home, neither speaking out against their rebel neighbors nor taking up arms to defend their point of view" (Parker 5-6). The time came when it was impossible to remain uncommitted, however, and events occurred which have direct bearing on Susanna's later choice to write of captivity and bondage; the family was taken prisoner by rebel forces and were held in "quasi-confinement" for several years (Turner 9). While the strain of these years cannot be denied—her father and stepmother both sustained serious illness, and Susanna found it necessary at one point to bury a young British soldier who had stumbled into her garden and died of his battle wounds—Rowson later recalled these years with positive feelings of gratitude and nostalgia:

Then it was that the benevolence and philanthropy which so eminently distinguish the sons and daughters of Columbia, made an indelible impression on my heart; an impression which neither time nor chance can obliterate; for while their political principles obliged them to afflict, the humanity, the Christian like benevolence of their souls, incited them to wipe the tears of sorrow from the eyes of my parents, to mitigate their sufferings and render those afflictions in some measure supportable. (Nason 83)

Such sentiments expressed later in her life help to explain why Rowson, rather than spending the rest of her life in resentment of the nation that had taken her a prisoner of war, returned to that country and devoted herself to creating highly patriotic and nationalistic literature in its name.

The Haswells were moved from one place of confinement to another, in increasingly bleak conditions, until May 1778, when Susanna's father received permission to take his family to Nova Scotia, where they were exchanged for an American captain who had been held captive by the British. The family returned to England, where Susanna remained until adulthood.

Certainly Rowson's experiences in America during these formative years of her life had lasting effects which later appeared as influences in her artis-

tic endeavors. "Despite her youth, Susanna Haswell felt acutely a division of loyalties in the war, and this conflict of feeling so affected her imagination that she became one of the first novelists to depict the American Revolution in fiction, using the war as background for four of her later novels" (Parker 5). Parker also suggests that "more significantly, these years in the Massachusetts colony, despite the wartime misfortunes, had taught her to respect Americans. When she returned in later years as an entertainer, she confidently knew her audience" (8). Amelia Howe Kritzer, in "Playing with Republican Motherhood: Self-Representation in Plays by Susanna Haswell Rowson and Judith Sargent Murray," goes so far as to suggest that Rowson may have been so committed to her adopted country at this point that she experienced her "forced residence in England during the Revolution . . . as a form of captivity" (165).

Susanna worked as a governess in England, possibly for Georgina, Duchess of Devonshire. Her father was living in near poverty, and Turner recounts an episode in which Susanna managed to gain access to the court and to the Prince Regent who would one day be King George IV. Here she "flirted, cozened, cajoled, and promised" until she had secured the pension for which her father had been waiting for many years (9). Once her father's future was secure, she disappeared from the court and once again pursued her own ambitions. This account perhaps illustrates one instance in which Rowson appropriated the rituals and conventions of the existing patriarchy, to reach what she perceived to be a just end.

Such an enterprising picture of this young woman makes it all the more difficult to understand her next series of choices, having to do specifically with marriage. Turner reports that "Susanna's fancy was taken by William Rowson, an aging, paunchy bandsman with impressive mustachios, and a resplendent uniform, who courted her with coronet flourishes. After their marriage, Susanna came out of her musical dream to discover that she'd wed an alcoholic trumpeter who believed in *wifely* fidelity, but saw no reason to carry that precept so far as to interfere with his *own* pleasures" (10). Parker offers the explanation that "she may have married as a result of parental pressure, or her efforts to support herself may not have succeeded as she had hoped, leading her to seek marriage for economic support" (10). Again, either explanation seems strained, given the independence and resourcefulness which had been displayed by Susanna thus far—she had, in fact, already published her first novel, *Victoria*, prior to her marriage—but it is difficult for the twentieth-century mind to fathom the economic and social restrictions bearing upon a woman in 1786. Parker offers further support for her argument in the form of an excerpt from Rowson's novel *Sarah* (1813) which has been represented as autobiographical:

I found I must accede to his proposals, or be thrown on the world, censured by my relations, robbed of my good name, and being poor, open to the pursuits and insults of the profligate. One thing which encouraged me to hope I might be tolerably happy in this union was—though my heart felt no strong emotions in his favor, it was totally free from all partiality towards any

other. He always appeared good-humored and obliging; and though his mind was not cultivated, I thought time might improve him in that particular. (quoted on 11)

Unfortunately for Susanna, time did not improve William Rowson "in that particular," or indeed in any other. If economic security had been a motivating factor in the marriage, the effort had been in vain, for Rowson failed again and again in business, from the hardware trade to the stage. Throughout their marriage Susanna provided the motivation and the income which kept them going, thanks to her publications, the theatre engagements which she secured, and eventually her ladies' academy in Boston.

While it is impossible to conjecture regarding Susanna's possible emotional attachment to William, it is feasible to examine the options for divorce open, or closed, to an unhappy wife in this time period. Sara M. Evans recounts and incident in the colonies in 1778. Two neighbor women caught their friend Martha Air's husband quite literally in the act of fornication with another woman. They confronted him, at which point he got up from the floor, "put his nakedness before (their) faces, and went away," claiming that one woman was as good to him as another" (42-43). Martha Air sued her husband for divorce, marking a dramatic change from former practice. However, at that point, the chances of a woman being granted a divorce on the grounds of her husband's adultery alone were slim. A woman's infidelity was more than enough reason for her husband to be granted a divorce, but a woman must be able to prove additional grounds before having any hope of the courts ruling in her favor. By the early nineteenth century, "Courts remained reluctant to grant divorce, but began to recognize male as well as female adultery as a valid complaint" (Evans 63). In Rowson's lifetime laws remained in effect which rendered women legally nonexistent upon their marriages. While Susanna may at some point have been able to secure a divorce, she did not live in a society friendly to women who pursued such measures. Whatever her reasoning, she chose to remain married to William until her death. She did not bypass opportunities to express her unhappiness, however. Referring again to her novel *Sarah*, many perceive this quotation from the book's title page as pertaining to her own marriage: "Do not marry a fool; for he is continually doing absurd and disagreeable things, for no other reason but to shew he dares do them" (quoted in Parker 11).

William's business failures proved the impetus for Susanna's return to America. Their declining assets and his bleak employment prospects had led both to the stage, probably with provincial companies outside of London. Thomas Wignell was recruiting a company of actors for his New Theatre in Philadelphia, and he hired not only William and Susanna but also William's sister Charlotte. Though Wignell felt fortunate at having signed a company for his new theatre, he was shocked by the abysmal performance given by his company on the eve of their departure for America. William was drunk and "less than inspiring musically," while Susanna was "plainly terrified . . . (and) difficult to hear" (Turner 12). Unfortunately, the remainder of the company were "even less effective." Wignell spent the sea voyage re-

hearing his company endlessly in an effort to remedy his mistake. Susanna proved her mettle once again, as she "improved markedly, concentrating her excellent mind on the new career which Williams' improvident ebullience had marked out for them" (12). Parker adds that "Susanna supplemented her rather average ability for acting, singing, and pantomime with a conscientious effort at learning her parts and attending rehearsals, behavior which distinguished her from many of her colleagues" (12).

The company arrived in Philadelphia in the fall of 1793, but was prevented from opening their new theatre by an outbreak of yellow fever. In early 1794 where Susanna had a successful first season playing thirty-five roles to "enthusiastic and demonstrative audiences" (Parker 15). In this same year she wrote *Slaves in Algiers*, which was performed and published in Philadelphia.

Susanna's play drew the venom of at least one reviewer—William Cobbett, best-known by the pen name "Peter Porcupine." David A. Wilson writes in his introduction to *Peter Porcupine in America: Pamphlets on Republicanism and Revolution* that Cobbett, an Englishman, was "iconoclastic, egotistical and arrogant, often outrageous, and usually entertaining . . . one of the most powerful political writers in the English-speaking world during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries" (1). Cobbett's clash with Rowson began when he took issue with editor Samuel Harrison Smith of *American Monthly Review*. Smith had "praised Cobbett's 'magical pen' and his satirical skills . . . (but) also criticized Cobbett's grammar and commented on the 'tyranny' of the British government—hitting two very sensitive nerves" (Wilson 119). Cobbett, vowing revenge, published "A Kick for a Bite; or, Review Upon Review" in 1795, using the name Peter Porcupine for the first time.

Cobbett's first strategy was to critique Smith's own literary style, thereby attempting to prove him incompetent to judge the writing of others. He then proposed to show Smith how a proper review *should* be written, taking as his subject matter "the roman-drama-poetic works of Mrs. S. Rowson, of the New Theatre, Philadelphia" (Cobbett 21). Cobbett certainly displays his "satirical skills" in attacking Rowson's work, producing a virtual litany of derogatory comments thinly disguised as high regard, and seeming to be far more concerned with her feminist ideology than with the quality of her literary work. Wilson, in fact, comments that "Cobbett's critique is a useful source on the origins of American feminism" (119). Cobbett quotes most extensively from Rowson's epilogue, recounting lines such as "Women were born for universal sway / Men to adore, be silent, and obey" (*Slaves* 78). Cobbett retorts:

Sentiments like these could not be otherwise than well-received in a country, where the authority of the wife is so unequivocally acknowledged, that the reformers of the reformed church, having been obliged (for fear of losing all their custom) to raze the odious word *obey* from their marriage service. I almost wonder they had not imposed it upon the husband . . . (Cobbett 23-24)

Cobbett here takes issue with a greater female constituency than just one woman. A regard for marriage as a relationship based upon emotion and

companionship, rather than economic convenience, was gaining strength. In July 1792 an article in the *Lady's Magazine* entitled "Matrimonial Republican" argued:

I object to the word 'obey' in the marriage service because it is a general word, without limitations or definition. . . . The obedience between man and wife, I conceive, is, or ought to be mutual. Marriage ought never to be considered as a contract between a superior and an inferior, but a reciprocal union of interest, an implied partnership of interests, where all differences are accommodated by conference.⁴

Likewise Judith Sargent Murray, another of the "small but important" group of women writing for the colonial and post-revolutionary theatre⁵, proposed a republican ideal of marriage as "Mutual esteem, mutual friendship, mutual confidence, *begirt about by mutual forbearance*" (Evans 63).

Cobbett goes on to postulate "strange misgivings" which he intended to be disparaging comments upon the possibility of women participating in politics, but which today seem oddly prescient:

I do not know how it is, but I have strange misgivings hanging about in my mind, that the whole moral as well as political world is going to experience a revolution. Who knows but our present house of Representatives, for instance, may be succeeded by members of the other sex? . . . If the speaker should happen to be with child that would be nothing odd to us, who have so long been accustomed to the sight . . . (24)

Cobbett's comments sparked the beginning of a heated "pamphlet war" between himself and John Swanwick, "Philadelphia radical and pioneer of female education" (Wilson 120). Some believe that *Slaves in Algiers* remained popular on the stage for as long as it did precisely because of the controversy kept alive by the dueling pamphleteers. In his *Memoir of Mrs. Susanna Rowson*, published in 1870, Elias Nason recounts Rowson's own reply to Cobbett's criticism. She addresses primarily his contentions that her "sudden conversion to republicanism," as he called it, was less than genuine. He goes so far as to accuse her of what "rhetoricians call a *strong hyperbole*, and that plain folk call a *d—d lie*" (Cobbett 25). Rowson answers with a "slight sketch of (her) private history," explaining the events of her early life, recounted previously in this essay. She concludes:

Is it then wonderful, that accustomed from the days of childhood, to think of America and its inhabitants with affection, linked to them by many near connections and sincerely attached to them from principles of gratitude that I should offer the most ardent prayers for a continuation of their prosperity, or that feeling the benign influence of the blessings of peace and liberty, here so eminently enjoyed, I should wish that influence extended throughout every nation under heaven. (Nason 84-85)

Nason notes that Cobbett's criticism did not abate, but observes, "It does not appear that Mrs. Rowson took any farther notice of her ungenerous countryman. Her life was her reply" (85).

She continued to write and to perform, always "concerned with the force and fate of women," producing at least five more original plays between 1794 and 1810 (Schofield 33). Eventually, however, Susanna looked to leave the precarious existence of the stage and to pursue her interests and goals in the arena of women's education. She performed her farewell benefit in

April 1797 and pursued plans to open her female academy. Turner notes that Boston in the early nineteenth century was "working very hard to maintain its reputation as a staid, proper town with a blue-nose morality and little respect for 'play-actresses'" (15). Despite all of this, and in spite of her "unconventional marital arrangement"—William at this point was living elsewhere in the city and had presented his illegitimate son to his wife to raise—Susanna Rowson commanded enough respect that her academy enjoyed great success. "Her school became a haven for the city's elite with Boston's bluest bloods sending their daughters to Susanna Haswell Rowson, daughter of a deported Tory and a former actress, to be polished and educated for society" (Turner 16).

Rowson realized her dream of advancing the cause of women's education. She provided her students with the training that she had been fortunate to receive under the tutelage of James Otis, and which she believed to be the right and privilege of every woman. Sometime during the Revolutionary War, Judith Sargent Murray penned these questions:

Is it upon mature consideration we adopt the idea, that nature is thus partial in her distributions? Is it indeed a fact that she hath yielded to one half the human species so unquestionable a mental superiority? . . . Yet it may be questioned, from what source doth this superiority, in this determining faculty of the soul (the judgement) proceed? May we not trace its source in the difference of education and continued advantages? (Flexner 16)

By 1797 and continuing into the early nineteenth century, Rowson and others like her were beginning to make a difference in the education and training available to young women in this country.

Slaves in Algiers; or, A Struggle for Freedom

Slaves in Algiers is not considered simply the first dramatic piece to take as its subject matter the conflict between America and pirates of the Barbary states of North Africa; it is commonly considered the best of the lot (Meserve 47). The conflict, in which pirates from the North African states of Algeria, Morocco, Tunis, and Tripoli had been exacting payments for safe passage and ransoms for prisoners, eventually drew the interest of other playwrights and novelists. Other pieces dealing with the Barbary conflict include: *The Fall of Algiers*, by John Howard Payne (1825), *The Siege of Tripoli*, by Mordecai Noah (1820), and *The American Captive*, by James Ellison (1811).⁶ These plays were all published after the situation had become an official military confrontation in 1801, and are generally considered imitations of Rowson's earlier work. In addition, several captivity narratives were published by individuals who had been held captive in North Africa, including *History of the captivity and sufferings of Mrs. Maria Martin, who was six years a slave in Algiers* (1807) and *A Journal of the Captivity and Sufferings of John Foss: several years a prisoner at Algiers*

(1798). Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive* (1797) is an early work of American fiction detailing the "Life and Adventures of Doctor Urdike Underhill:

Six Years a Prisoner Among the Algerines." Many of these texts use the circumstances of white slavery among the North Africans to make an argument against slavery in America. These authors point out the hypocrisy of moral outrage over the slavery of Americans across the world, coupled with unconcerned tolerance for the slavery and mistreatment of members of the human race within America's borders. The most striking difference between these works and Rowson's is that she is the only author to appropriate the events on the Mediterranean as a metaphor for the circumstances of women in America.

Rowson's play, as might be expected of a farce with musical interludes, contains few realistic depictions of the plight of the actual captives in Algiers. In contrast, Tyler's narrative contains the following grimly realistic scene:

... after they had stripped the sufferer naked except a cloth around the loins, they inserted the iron pointed stake into the lower termination of the vertebrae, and thence forced it up near his back bone until it appeared between his shoulders; with devilish ingenuity contriving to avoid the vital parts. The stake was then raised into the air, and the suffering wretch exposed to the view of the assembly, writhing in all the contortions of insupportable agony. How long he lived I cannot tell; I never gave but one look at him; one was enough to appal a New England heart. (Tyler 149)⁷

Instead, Rowson seizes upon this set of contemporary events to make her feminist point; her theme, according to Sally Burke, is "political and sexual liberty for both genders" (18). Rowson serves her political events with a heavy side-helping of irony, alternately teasing and chastising the patriarchal sensibilities of her audience. She manages to manipulate the American outrage at the thought of white slavery, and apply it instead to the fact of female oppression.

The play opens in an apartment in the palace of the Dey, the Algerian royalty. Fetnah, a young Jewish woman, has recently been given to the Dey by her parents—"who loved gold better than they did their child." Her father, Ben Hassan, has turned his daughter over to the ruler to secure his own favor in the palace. The audience views Fetnah from the first moments of the play as property, not only enslaved sexually by the Dey in his harem, but traded for profit by her own father. Abhorrent as this might seem to a modern reader, the concept of women as property could not have seemed terribly foreign to a member of a late eighteenth-century audience. We hear Fetnah as Rowson's mouthpiece, as she attempts to convince a fellow member of the harem that liberty is far more valuable than any material wonders of the Dey's palace. She argues:

Why do you talk of my being a favourite; is the poor bird that is confined in a cage (because a favourite with its enslaver) consoled for the loss of freedom. No! tho' its prison is of golden wire, its food delicious, and it is overwhelm'd with caresses, its little heart still pants for liberty: gladly would it seek the fields of air, and even perched up on a naked bough, exulting, carol forth its song, nor once regret the splendid house of bondage. (6)

Fetnah goes on to describe the fear and loathing that she feels when confronted with the Dey's sexual advances, which she has thus far been successful in evading. Rowson makes her case for women's sexual autonomy, com-

plete with phallic imagery. Fetnah declares that, when the Dey attempts to make love to her, "if it were not for fear of his huge scymetar, I shou'd burst out a laughing in his face" (6). She goes on to describe a recent incident in which she was summoned to the Dey's chambers, where he angrily commanded that she love him, as he had "condescended" to request her love. When she once more rebuffed his advances, she had reason to fear that she might be killed (or sexually violated) in answer to her refusal. "When I saw the scymetar half drawn, I caught hold of his arm. —Oh! good my lord, said I, pray do not kill a poor little girl like me, send me home again, and bestow your favor on some other, who make think splendor a compensation for the loss of liberty" (8). Advanced though her notions of liberty may be, Fetnah is reduced to playing the "poor little girl" in order to survive in this masculinized environment.

In the second act of the play, she further describes the sexual bondage she feels in the palace, referring to the "great, black, goggle-eyed creatures, that are posted here and there to watch us" (31)—slaves whose sole employment is to watch over the harem, the sexual property of the Dey.

Fetnah goes on to explain to her fellow slave that she was not born in Algiers but in England, that her father was a Jew and that he brought her to live in Algiers before she was old enough to remember their arrival. She explains that, in addition to a "natural antipathy" to the manners and religion of the Moors, she has also been receiving instruction for the past few months from a woman who had been captured by her father's corsairs. This woman, Rebecca Constant, had "nourished in (Fetnah's) mind the love of liberty, and taught (her), woman was never formed to be the abject slave of man." Rebecca taught her further that, "Nature made us equal with them, and gave us the power to render ourselves superior" (9). When asked what nation this woman comes from, Fetnah replies that, "She came from that land, where virtue in either sex is the only mark of superiority—She was an American." One can sense Rowson's delightful irony as she paints America as a feminist utopia, a land where all women are free, at perfect liberty, and utterly equal with men. A modern reader can imagine the equal measures of entertainment and discomfort experienced by Rowson's audience, confronted by the utopian vision while fully aware of the existent reality.

The following scene introduces this paragon of virtue, Rebecca Constant. She is discovered in Ben Hassan's home, where she is still enslaved. She is reading to comfort herself and to draw strength, possibly against further phallic threats. She reads, "The soul, secure in its existence, smiles / At the drawn dagger, and defies its point" (10). The scene proceeds with Ben Hassan making his entrance and, in fact, proposing that Rebecca become one of his wives. He invokes the name of "liberty," claiming that Algerian law gives him "liberty in love," prompting Rebecca's righteous indignation:

Hold, Hassan; prostitute not the sacred word by applying it to licentiousness; the sons and daughters of liberty, take justice, truth, and mercy for their leaders, when they life under her glorious banners. (13)

Hassan, of course, fails to make his case with Rebecca, and reveals to the audience that he is keeping her enslaved even though her ransom has arrived and she should be free along with her young son. Further, we learn that Hassan has entered deceitfully into an agreement to assist the young Americans, Frederic and Henry, with their plan to escape Algiers. He has agreed to accept their money and provide them with a ship, but plans instead to betray them to the Dey.

Rowson appears to make a concession to the sensitivities of her audience by allowing the escape plan to be spearheaded by the young male captives. "Don't be concerned," she seems to be saying. "Even though the women seem to be the primary characters in this piece, even though they seem to be in control of the action, the men are still in charge." While the men function as mastheads, the women of the play make things happen. Burke asserts that the men claim superiority in words, while the women demonstrate it by their deeds.

The next female characters introduced are Zoriana, daughter of the Dey who has converted to Christianity and is assisting the men with their escape plan, and Olivia, the betrothed of Henry. Neither Henry nor Olivia are aware that the other has been taken captive. Olivia's father, as well, is a captive, "thrown into a dungeon . . . (and) secluded from the cheering light of heaven" (20). Zoriana is attempting to include Olivia in the escape plot, and Olivia is willing only if her father can be rescued as well.

Frederic and Henry are engaged in conversation in the final scene of the first act. Zoriana, it seems, has fallen in love with Henry, unaware that he and Olivia are betrothed. The two men are attempting to decide how to handle the situation, wary of telling Zoriana the truth for fear that she will withdraw her help if she knows that Henry is unavailable. Frederic indicates that Henry should string her along until her purpose has been served, then tell her the truth and "turn over the fair Moriscan to me." Henry thinks better of his intentions, saying, "It would be barbarous to impose on her generous nature—What?—avail myself of her liberality to obtain my own freedom; take her from her country and friends, and then sacrifice her a victim to ingratitude, and disappointed love." Frederic encourages his friend to take a more pragmatic, and self-serving view: "Tush, man, women's hearts are not so easily broken, we may, perhaps give them a slight wound now and then, but they are seldom or never incurable" (24). Frederic's attitude seems to echo that of an eighteenth-century man—perhaps William Rowson?—who believes that his employment is the pursuit of his own pleasure, while his wife's is to continue in forbearance.

Finally the lovers are united when Zoriana arranges a meeting with Henry in the gardens of the palace and brings Olivia along with her. She is shocked and disappointed to find that they are engaged, but does not withdraw her offer of assistance. She makes a generous speech pledging that her utmost wishes will be fulfilled by seeing him free and happy, while informing the audience in an aside that she is perfectly miserable. Zoriana continually

reminds the audience that her unselfish behavior is a result of her rejection of her own religion and her conversion to Christianity.

In an even greater show of selflessness, Olivia chooses to remain behind when the other slaves make their escape. In fear that their plan may be discovered and the captives punished or killed, she determines that she will remain to placate the Dey's wrath. Despite the best laid plans of her fiancé, Olivia decides to follow her own instincts and do what she can to assure the safety of her father and Henry. Her ultimate plan is to commit suicide after marrying the Dey, thus saving her loved ones and preserving herself from sexual degradation,

Olivia's actions are an example of Schofield's view that each woman in the cast of *Slaves* subverts a traditional role. Olivia does not follow Henry's instructions meekly, but makes her own decision to lay down her life for the safety of the others. Schofield asserts that "The conclusion is not brought about by traditional male control; instead it is initiated and followed through entirely by women. For the women of *Slaves*, freedom is the right to have control over the disposal of one's person" (35).

That conclusion is reached in the third act of the operetta. The escape plan has been set in place—safely, it is hoped, since Frederic has left the untrustworthy Ben Hassan out of their plans. A new companion, Sebastian, shares Frederic's belittling attitude toward women. When Fetnah arrives at their hiding place, dressed as a boy and determined to assist with and participate in the escape, he responds:

Bravo! Excellent! Bravissimo!—Why, 'tis a little body; but ecod, she's a devil of a spirit.—It's a fine thing to meet with a woman that has a little fire in her composition. I never much liked your milk-and-water ladies; to be sure, they are easily managed—but your spirited lasses require taming; they make a man look about him—dear, sweet, angry creatures, here's their health. (47)

Rowson does not let either Frederic or Sebastian get away with their just punishments.

Although Fetnah, Frederic's "sweet little infidel," has promised to leave the country with him, she reconsiders at play's end and chooses to remain with her father once he is "poor and forsaken." Little is made of Frederic's loss; Fetnah makes a quick "good-bye" and crosses to her father. Rowson leaves him, perhaps, to ponder a heart which is "slightly wounded" but never incurable. Sebastian, thinking that he has rescued Rebecca and will be rewarded with sweet feminine kisses, finds instead that he has rescued Ben Hassan in drag. Burke sees Rowson here as "satiriz(ing) the proclivity of the male gaze to create the woman it wishes to perceive" (20). Indeed, Sebastian in his urgency to kiss her "cherry lips" refuses to acknowledge that he has "rescued" a man even after he has removed the veil from Hassan's disguise and viewed his long beard.

The climax is reached; the captives' plan is discovered and thwarted, interrupting the wedding of Olivia and the Dey. Rebecca has discovered her

ransom money, left behind by Hassan, and bravely comes into the Dey's apartment to procure the freedom of the slaves. The Dey refuses to accept ransom money for Olivia and threatens to "wreak vengeance" on any who stand in the way of his wishes. As a general slave revolt results in the overthrow of the Dey and the release of all the captives, Rebecca and Constant, Olivia's father, discover that each is the other's long-lost spouse, separated from one another during the Revolutionary War. This plot twist is reminiscent of Rowson's comments in her memoirs regarding the sorrow that she experienced at being separated from the "companions of her early years" by the war and her return to England (Nason 83). Olivia is Rebecca's daughter, and the two are reunited. Kritzer interprets this reunion as Rowson's return to her adopted homeland. She posits, "Rebecca Constant . . . displays all the characteristics of the symbolic figure of Columbia. In this light, the separation from her mother endured by Olivia (who was acted by Rowson herself) as a result of events during the Revolution, and the joyful reunion with her mother at the end, take on a poignant personal significance" (165).

Thus Susanna Rowson's play—perhaps melodramatic, perhaps sentimental, perhaps artificial when perceived by a modern audience—gains power and potency when seen in the context of the post-Revolutionary era in which she lived. *Slaves in Algiers*, like her other works, is a response to the specific opportunities and restraints of life as she encountered it. She utilized the experiences of her own life and the political events which had caught the attention of her potential audience. Clothing it all in the popular ballad-opera form of the day, she achieved a hearing for her feminist ideals and ideologies, considered tremendously radical in that era. Within the various captivities which she experienced in her lifetime, Susanna Rowson negotiated a safe place for herself—and not a safe place only, but a place in which she could pursue her art and effectively advance the cause of women's liberty in which she so strongly believed.

Notes

1. Patricia Parker refers to Rowson in the preface to her book as "the first American woman of letters," basing the reference to the fact the Rowson wrote *Charlotte Temple*, "the earliest American bestseller." In *Forgotten Leading Ladies of the American Theatre*, Mary M. Turner notes that, although Rowson's novels have been "put aside," her pioneering efforts on the stage and as "the first American woman playwright" will remain a "permanent memorial." As discussed later in this essay, Jane Tompkins argues for Rowson's place as the first professional American author in her essay, "Susanna Rowson, Father of the American Novel."

2. This version of Susanna's story appears in Patricia L. Parker's *Susanna Rowson* of the "Twayne's United States Authors Series." See pp. 1-24 for Parker's entire account of Rowson's life.

3. These details appear in Mary M. Turner's chapter "The Playwrights," from *Forgotten Leading Ladies of the American Theatre*.

4. This passage is quoted in Sara M. Evans' *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America*, p.63. She, in turn, credits *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* by Mary Beth Norton.

5. See Mary Anne Schofield, "The Happy Revolution: Colonial Women and the Eighteenth-Century Theatre." She counts Rowson, Sargent Murray, and Otis Warren among the "small but

important group" and notes, "when one considers the monetary, educational, political, and sexual obstacles that had to be overcome before they could even approach the stage, it is a wonder that any feminine theatre existed at all."

6. See Sally Burke, "Pioneers and Prototypes: America's First Feminist Playwrights."

7. In Don L. Cook's preface to this edition of *The Algerine Captive*, he indicates that "it is rare that Tyler's mood becomes so serious." The fact remains, however, that Tyler does include realistic and frightening scenes like this one in his tale. Cook indicates that among the topics which command Tyler's "solemn regard" is "compassion for the enslaved, either white or black." Tyler was also apparently motivated by abduction of his great-uncle, who was captured by Barbary pirates and never seen again (Cook 8-9).

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Theatre: The Essential Liberal Art

THOMAS H. GRESSLER

Justifying the existence of an entity that has existed since the beginning of humankind's communal events seems curious at least. Nevertheless a reader constantly discovers contemporary theatre workers and critics making fervent arguments toward that goal. The fact that they still feel the necessity to vindicate their art indicates that they have not yet succeeded. Unless I am truly paranoid or overly sensitive to subtext, I hear cries in the wilderness in the quotes below.

Theatre activity of whatever kind—from the remotest degree of audience participation to the deep commitment of the director and/or producer—is potentially the most humanizing, the most life-enhancing, the most spirit-freing of all possible activities. It requires commitment and involvement at every level; it demands concentration and attention; it stretches the mind and the heart.

—Very Mowry Roberts

Not merely a distraction, theatre is a necessity, a form of collective questioning in which society can play out its myths relatively free from the real world, and can express its most fundamental dramas without risking its very existence.

—Caelle Breton

Although it may be a sad commentary on the human race's refusal to esteem the one art form that most truly and immediately reflects itself, and although it would be far simpler to leave the field and the species to its seemingly genetic self-destructive tendencies, still most theatre people, especially theatre educators, refuse to give in. If there is to be any degree of improvement in society's acceptance of this most difficult and dangerous of art forms, then that change must begin in the country's educational establishments.

Young people, born with innate mimetic and theatrical abilities, are more open to artistic suggestion than older people. Reasons are not difficult to find. Citing a study by Stephen Joseph, Douglas Bailey wrote, "Ever-increasing emphasis on materiality and technological developments have cause [adults today] to lose sight of broad human values.' Sociologists," Bailey

THOMAS H. GRESSLER is Professor of Theatre, Linfield College, Oregon.

continued, "feel many people have lost their sense of communal purpose, and are losing their sense of the values of life itself." (Bailey 88) Psychologist David Kolb added, "Western industrialized societies have nearly run amok in their embrace of the extroverted materialism of relevance, ignoring and even actively denying the meaning of religious, humanistic, and spiritual ideas." (Kolb 227)

Contemporary adults, steeped in the materialistic quests of generations, are only now beginning to realize that spirituality, ethics, orders of higher thought, respect for the very physical world in which we all live must take a greater proportion of our energies, must arouse a greater amount of respect and reverence if the race is to survive at all, not to mention surviving with grace and nobility. The rise of the Righteous Right, the fact of global environmental conferences, New Age beliefs, countless publications geared toward recovering a sense of one's self, all may be indicators that a glimmer of realization has begun.

Artists and teachers are bulwarks, safeguards against society's ignorance. They are, have been and forever will be in the minority. Their views will always challenge, and at times even fly in the face of prevailing majority opinion. That is not to claim that at times artists and teachers cannot be as pig-headed as those they criticize; but at their best they can open up the heavens. Without such strivers after truth in all its forms, no society will ever grow in maturity and grace, insight and compassion.

Arts programs, after all, are not graduating mill workers, doctors, lawyers, construction managers, for all their essential contributions. Rather, they graduate artists, moralists, ethicists, historical commentators, mystics, social critics. "The sciences and mathematics and history really only give us a prelude for doing something." The arts "allow us to think about the higher values of life in a very tangible way." (Mandle 17) Most societies, after they are assured of the basic necessities for existence, develop a yearning for finer things—typically taking form in the arts.

It is, after all, probably "useless to try to defend drama on the basis of immediate utility. It ultimately must be valued for its capacity to improve the quality of life—by increasing our sensitivity to our surroundings, by sharpening our perceptions, by reshaping our values so that moral and societal concerns take precedence over materialistic goals." (Brockett 4) Theatre educators might be well served if they embraced this larger picture of their discipline.

Theatre is not only fun and games; those who seek fun and games need only switch on their television sets—equivalent of those baby rattles to keep the children quiet. Live theatre may well occupy the central position in any student's or society's search for truth and vitality and that recognition should excite anyone involved in this crazy, venerable art.

Teachers of theatre already are in an enviable position in this quest. They already work in a discipline that, even from primary schools forward, is an

excellent method of teaching. Teachers throughout the world know that theatre naturally involves students, interests them in the subject matter, leads them to see its relevance to the world around them, and motivates them to learn more. Theatre teachers in higher education already work in the one art that seems so lifelike that people confuse it with reality; one which exists on the premise that the search for truth is its penultimate quest and reason for existing.

With these observations as a background, I would like to suggest that theatre is the essential liberal art. The discussion that follows traces the reasons I think this is so.

Theatre is perhaps the essential liberal art, because it is the most wholly integrated liberal art.

A. Theatre is the only liberal arts discipline that touches on nearly every other liberal arts discipline.

All educational theatre people know that the making of theatre requires the incorporation and integration of knowledge from a wide range of liberal arts disciplines, like psychology, literature, sociology, philosophy, history, aesthetics, computer science, visual art, communication arts, music, movement and dance. Two or three months after the process is begun, the audience is added. The range of disciplines incorporated into the theatrical mix at that time would have to include business management, public relations and promotions, accounting and group psychology. Modern scientific and psychological methods "have become part of actor training. . . . management and marketing techniques are vital to the bringing together of writer, performer and audience. . . . In one way or another, the theatre eventually brings all disciplines together in a cohesive whole." (Stroot 2) "The arts [including theatre] represent, by their nature, an interaction with other subject matters because their. . . content spans all of life and touches every area of human existence." (Pennsylvania Department of Education 18)

B. It requires the integration of the knowledge from other fields into the knowledge of the various theatre sub-disciplines, and the integration of these sub-disciplines of the theatre as well.

So, within the discipline itself, and in its relationship to nearly all other liberal arts disciplines, theatre is by its very nature interdependent. "You cannot be in dance," for example, "without knowing music, visual art and theatre." (Ririe 25) A habitat "revealed in biology class can become the given circumstances for a character in a play. A philosophical tenet can be transformed by an actor into a point of view for a character. A course in physics opens the door to lighting possibilities." (Morrison n.p.) Theatre requires integration of all its parts in order for the end result to communicate to an audience.

It is "...easy to appreciate the value of theatre to a liberal arts education, as theatre is by nature a collaborative art form, inherently interdisciplinary in its dependence on elements from all areas of the creative arts; movement, gesture and composition from dance, texture and design from the visual arts, and rhythm and voice from music. What is perhaps less obvious, is that through these interdisciplinary collaborations, the theatre regularly provides a concrete liberal arts experience relevant to virtually every subject taught on campus." (Stroot 1)

This interdisciplinary, wholly integrated approach will become even more crucial in the next century because "Individual academic disciplines as we know them will continue to become less important, giving way to the 'new disciplines,' areas of knowledge and concern born at the edges of what we now know, and spring from the connectedness and interdependence of what exists." (Wills 6)

C. Theatre requires that each student works toward integrating all of the above into his own self-concept, finding his place among life's limitless possibilities.

Not only does theatre touch upon and depend upon knowledge of several other academic disciplines, not only does it require the subsequent application of specialized theatre skills to this base knowledge in order to communicate the play's major ideas, not only does theatre naturally conform to one of the most respected models for learning, but finally it requires the integration of all of this with the actual person doing the activity. As Professor Kolb wrote, learning "involves the integrated functioning of the total organism—thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving." (Kolb 31)

It takes only a few meetings or rehearsals or directing classes for a student to discover that everything in the theatre is connected to something else. Every detail that exists by opening night has had a long (and often tortuous) history that almost inevitably relied on the input of several people throughout several weeks. This applies to the artistic process as well as the backstage and administrative process. Let me offer a practical example.

If a student does not complete a critical press release by the time of the photo shoot, the photo shoot may have to be canceled. But that means that the local photographer and the college PR person need to be notified. Their schedules are disrupted. The photographer may not be available again when the release will be ready. The costumer and her helpers have come into work over the last two week ends to make certain the costumes for the photo shoot would be ready in time. Now they are angry. The actors all had arranged to leave their classes 10 minutes early in order to have enough time to get into costume and make up. Now they are embarrassed and their professors leery of these strange theatre people. The make up artist made a special trip to some local theatre to borrow a substitute wig for the shoot. She also arranged to have a baby sitter come early so she could be at the theatre to help with the make up and wig. She is furious. I can guarantee that no student, after being faced with the combined wrath and disappointment of all of these people, will ever again misunderstand the intricacy and mutual inter-dependency of each element of theatre production.

Theatre is based naturally on two of the most compelling educational theories:

A. It is the only liberal arts discipline that is based almost entirely in the experiential learning approach to education (Kolb).

Theatre not only manages to delve into several of the liberal arts disciplines in every show it produces, more importantly it requires students to learn experientially. Theatre requires hands-on experience. The *nexus* for learning is *action*, doing something with the objects or object substitutes. (Kolb 14) Theatre cannot be done in a lecture hall. "The way of the artist has historically been experiential." (Doan)

By its nature theatre adheres closely to Kolb's theory of learning; experience leads to data gathering which leads to an experimental product which leads to further refinement which leads to a new, more informed experience which starts the process over again. Each production worker, regardless of task, goes through that Kolbian process. And the wonder of it is that no teacher has to figure out or plan "experiences" to make certain that students go through each step; the requisite process of creating theatre does it naturally, easily, completely. As James DeYoung said, "One of the significant advantages of practicum experiences is that the actual contact with a real problem can motivate the student to do more and better work in the process of solving it than he or she might have done in a more traditional classroom setting." We now know that good motivation "makes practicum education pedagogically superior." De Young cites the ancient Chinese proverb:

I hear; I forget.

I see; I remember.

I do; I understand. (DeYoung 3)

B. It is the only liberal arts discipline that requires the use of all the students' many intelligences (Gardner).

American education for decades has emphasized the scientific-based logic/rational intellectual process, assuming that that process really defined the human animal. Yet, at the core "of liberal education and the art of the theatre is the process of becoming human through the development of values, attitudes, a myriad of skills, empathy, honesty, and hope. In many ways, it seems as if the science of education has encouraged us to abandon these goals as primary to the educational process in favor of more measurable outcomes." (Doan.)

Theatre courses and activities, fortunately, utilize each student's several intelligences with the goal of integrating them all into a sensitive and value-conscious human being. Over four years of study and active participation, theatre students explore the widest possible range of intellectual endeavors, explore each several times, emphasizing their interpersonal skills because of the inherently collaborative nature of the theatre-making process.

Other essential contributions:

A. Theatre is the only discipline that requires the student to deal consciously and publicly with her emotional life.

To this day the vast majority of classes, courses and disciplines circumvent talk about the emotional life. Only acting requires that the student actually become viscerally aware of her own emotions as they are reflected in the emotional life of the character. There is simply no way to separate entirely the emotional lives of character and actor: every character must be portrayed *through* another human being—the actor. Finding the truth of the character's emotional life forces the student to confront her own.

It is no surprise that litigation-leery teachers and administrators avoid dealing with the emotional lives of their students. This is a tremendously sensitive and dangerous area for both student and teacher. Young people whose emotional lives still come in huge, fluctuating waves must discipline themselves strongly in order to tap what is honest and appropriate and to avoid those areas which may be too painful or harmful. The director and acting teacher also must be aware of the sensitivity of the situation. Requiring that actors "personalize," that is, draw from their own lives, experiences, memories, identifications etc. in order to infuse each moment on stage with honesty, does not mean requiring actors to be honest regardless of personal danger or price. The more mature students, those whose self-image is fairly stable and under control, may fear little in revealing themselves in all their facets. Others may fear revealing anything at all about themselves. This latter actor may not convince the audience much, but her personal space must be protected nevertheless.

The point is that all art requires flirting with the emotional make up of artist and spectator. Because of its immediacy, its public nature, because it demands so much of the performers' emotional lives, theatre may be the most invasive of all the arts in terms of privacy. That inherent demand and risk must be respected. It also must be allowed room to speak honestly.

It was heartening at the last meeting of our college's General Education Committee to hear so many voices urging the college to require some sort of creative effort/class/project from every student before graduating. There seemed to be widespread acceptance that non-linear thinking, experience in creative problem solving, skills in many ways of "knowing" were important to students who will be facing the 21st Century. Faced with the national trend to cut all arts programs, the assembly felt that the students who enter college were being exposed only to linear thinking processes and consequently their lives were increasingly narrowed. They seemed less able to take chances, try new things, be intellectually courageous, think on grander or multiple levels. Exposure to arts activities was one way to combat this rigidification of American youth. Exposure to arts activities demands a confrontation with one's emotional life. Although this confrontation must be undertaken gingerly and with considerable respect for privacy and

emotional safety, it must be undertaken. The growth of human beings in wisdom, self-knowledge and compassion emanates more from the heart than the brain.

B. Theatre is one of the few disciplines that requires the students to disclose publicly their discoveries about their studies and themselves.

By its nature theatre seeks immediate feedback, which pressures the students to seek excellence. The feedback which is required to complete the educational process is also the sword which could demolish one's pride and faith in one's self. In this kind of crucible few students wish to seem inept. In my experience this promise of public disclosure creates a working environment high in energy and motivation, concentration and determination. Failures seem even more devastating; successes even more ecstatic.

Few audience members realize that in an excellent production each and everything they see or hear has been weighed against many options and then chosen, selected out of many options in order to communicate a particular idea, feeling or mood. It is a thought worth pondering: *Every detail in a theatre performance, whether seen or heard, has been deliberately chosen.* No wonder theatre-making is so time and energy-consuming. It would not be out of line to suggest that a cast, artistic staff and production crew for any average sized show would make altogether literally thousands of individual and group decisions, everything from the choice of the play to the particular hardware that will be saved after striking the set after the show.

C. Theatre services the other liberal arts through the choice of plays.

Not only does theatre touch upon and utilize the many disciplines that comprise a liberal arts education, but also it can dramatize stories that focus on the interests of specific disciplines. For example, sociology majors would be especially interested in *Equus* or *Extremities*; environmental biology students in *The Jeremiah*; science and religion majors in *Galileo*; literature majors in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, language major in *El Grande de Coca Cola*; political science majors in *All The King's Men*; history and religion major in *Tartuffe* or *Mandragola*. The potential list of discipline-related plays seems endless. In viewing these plays these liberal arts students enter, if only for a short time, into a fictitious situation directly pertaining to their course of study; it becomes for them a linchpin, a common reference point and experience for future discussions. Students are drawn into the dynamic of Galileo's trial and understand that important moment in history in a more direct and heartfelt way than even a film could provide. Students attending *Extremities* are forced to decide if punishing the would-be rapist is the right and human thing to do. And since all theatre distills experience in order to present far more life in those two hours upon the stage than could be lived during the same period in everyday life, these students are exposed to and learn more than would be possible in any two-hour lecture. Thus theatre serves those professors and classes that may at first seem not at all connected to the theatre

experience. At the same time it helps the campus formulate its overall image of itself. As a cultural laboratory, then, "the theatre is a multi-dimensional, concrete realization of the liberal arts ideal." (Stroot 3)

D. Theatre provides one of the most life-like educational experiences in that its method of working is very similar to the work methods of the real world, with all its project-orientation, compromise, relativism, collaboration.

As Howard Gardner noted, "rarely if ever do productive humans work alone. . . ." In fact "most productive human work takes place when individuals are engaged in meaningful and relatively complex projects, which take place over time, are engaging and motivational, and lead to the development of understanding and skill." (Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences* 224.) The artistic product is impossible without the formulation of some kind of integrating social unit. It is paradoxical, said Gardner, "that most students take hundreds of tests within school but that, once they have left school, they are almost never tested again.") The practice of making theatre coincides with this description of productive work in all ways. Theatre-making is the process of creating a naturally engaging, complex project over a period of several weeks, leading via Kolb's experiential learning process, to individual and group understanding and increased skills in many areas. Moreover, "There are no laboratories that work more completely with creativity than the existing theatre." (Blanning 6)

This group process working toward a complex product requires the adoption of what Ty Marshall, our designer, calls a "kind-sorta" approach to life. That is, when students ask for definitive answers to artistic or hypothetical questions—and we all would prefer definitive answers because they're so easy—he often answers with "kinda-sorta." He means that there are many ways to look at anything, many options for answers. None of them may be "the" answer; none may be the "right" or "wrong" answer. But every one of the answers has strengths and weaknesses. The one selected will be the best one found to address most of the requirements of the situation. In directing class my equivalent phrase is, "it depends." Of course down stage center is the strongest position *unless*. . . . There are many "unlesses."

• As Kolb observed, ideas are not fixed or immutable; therefore, fixed answers to standard problems are no longer a viable life approach. We all would live at least easier if the answers to life and art were handed to us in a neat notebook and our only requirement was that we follow them page by page. Pursuing "outcomes" as if they were the final answers to life, however, is "maladaptive. . ." in the sense that "failure to modify ideas and habits as a result of experience is maladaptive." (Kolb 26) Not to mention boring.

Life is a process and there are no set answers. The old saying, "The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry" is closer to the reality of life. The structurelessness of modern life has been treated amply by modern dramatists and artists. The sooner and more certainly we understand that life offers far more questions than answers, that everything is relative, that no answer

answers completely, that each set of circumstances for each individual is unique and that creating unique answers for each singular situation is the task of everyone all the time, the better prepared we are for the real world.

Marcia Morrison said, "I am even more sure. . . that a liberal arts education does more to make one unsure than anything else. But that's OK. After all, life-long self-learning and reevaluation are two of the most important by-products of theatre." (Morrison) As Robert Collander, a banker, said when addressing the annual meeting of the Association of American Colleges, "The free mind thrives on the world's experience *with all its contradictions.*" [Emphasis added] (Collander 3)

So, theatre is "essential" because it offers an educational institution the only viable and long-lived paradigm for the theory of what a liberal arts education is supposed to be doing.

Many other liberal arts disciplines offer portions of this outline; some few teachers in other areas try to incorporate even more. Only theatre in all its ramifications covers the entire gamut. As Howard Gardner summarizes the argument, "Whereas interaction with physical objects seems to require primarily primitive mechanisms, and scientific reasoning emphasizes complex forms of discrimination and symbolic operations, the theatre arts have the unique property of drawing broadly and fully upon all systems at each stage of development. Objects are treated as objects and as symbols; individuals are seen in their simplicity and their complexity; symbol systems are drawn on for their formal properties, their elementary perceptual features, and their intricate nuances, details, references, and subject matter." (Gardner, *Arts*, 173)

Thus, if the highest purpose of a liberal arts education is the synthesis of its many disciplines with the student's understanding of the self and the relation of that self in the world, then I truly believe that theatre might be fairly called the quintessential liberal art, that it is potentially more growth-inducing, more intrinsically educational than any other discipline for the goal of integrating the human being. Theatre's "very nature coincides with the goals of liberal education and its full realization on a liberal arts campus is the most accurate reflection of those goals." (Gressler, "Liberal Arts = Theatre..." 4) It really is overwhelming when one considers the talents, skills and discipline required to do theatre well; and to do it well each time, in the present, publicly.

There are very few liberal arts disciplines that require the professor and students to display publicly what they are teaching and learning, to expect people to pay for that privilege, and to provide an experience that is worthy of everyone's time, effort, money.

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Libby: The Story of a Theatre Tour to Alaska's Pribilof Islands

ELIZABETH WARE

with excerpts from the script *Libby* by David Edgecombe

Based on the book *Libby: The Alaskan Diaries and Letters of Libby Beaman*
by Betty John

Published by Council Oak Books, Tulsa

The first acquaintance I had with the book *Libby* came in the summer of 1992, when my husband, David Edgecombe, and I were working with the Chamber Drama Theatre in Vladivostok, Russia. Neither of us spoke Russian, making television and radio nearly useless as entertainment outlets. Thanks to "care packages" delivered by relatives we were supplied with a steady stream of diversions throughout our three month stay. When my mother, Adele Ware arrived, she came armed with the requested jars of peanut butter, doses of antibiotics, and new reading materials; among them a book about an early visitor to Alaska which would have a profound effect on our lives.

I began reading the book mid-way through our Russian adventure. To say that daily living for us was a challenge would be a great understatement. Shopping for scant groceries, washing clothes for a family of five by hand, keeping up with our infant daughter's diapers, coping with water restrictions, and learning the intricacies of a professional Russian theatre were beginning to take their toll on my outlook. I began reading *Libby* and realized I didn't really have it so bad.

Libby, the Alaska Diaries and Letters of Libby Beaman, 1879-1880, as presented by her Granddaughter Betty John was first published in 1987. As the title suggests it is based on diaries, letters, and the oral history passed through three

ELIZABETH WARE is a professional actress and an adjunct professor at the University of Alaska, Anchorage.

generations of women. A Washington D.C. socialite, Elizabeth Beaman accompanied her husband to the Pribilof Islands in 1879. John Beaman was an assistant government agent appointed by President Hayes to oversee the lucrative fur seal harvest. As one of the first American women in the Bering Sea region, Libby tells a passionate story of adventure, wonder at the beauty and cruelty of nature, and life-threatening heroism.

Libby was developed into a one-woman performance piece for the University of Alaska Anchorage Women's History Month by my husband, David Edgecombe. It played for a nine week extended run at Cyrano's Playhouse in downtown Anchorage during March, June and July of 1998. Larry Mercurieff, past city manager of St. Paul on the Pribilofs, attended the opening night performance. Through his persistent encouragement the production of *Libby* was invited to be performed where Elizabeth Beaman had explored one hundred and twenty years before. This narrative recounts the experience of touring this play to Alaska's Pribilof Islands in July, 1998. The events of the present are contrasted with excerpts from the play which appear in italics.

Two tiny pin dots; the Seal Islands; the islands of St. Paul and St. George in the Bering Sea; the Pribilofs. Two thousand two hundred fifty nautical miles from San Francisco, more than five thousand miles from home...almost, but not quite within the Arctic Circle. My husband John Warren Beaman and I are aboard the S.S. St. Paul. We boarded the St. Paul in San Francisco this afternoon, May 9th, 1879. Although the ship will not depart for twenty-four hours, we take our cabins early to start working on our sea legs. She is the very latest type of sailing vessel, with an auxiliary engine in case the sails fail.

We moved to Alaska in 1990 from Indiana, where I was a member of the resident acting company of the Indiana Shakespeare Festival. In the eight years we have been here I have worked as an adjunct instructor at the University of Alaska Anchorage in the Departments of Theatre and Dance and Communication. My theatre work has increasingly centered on the Eccentric Theatre Company, the resident company at Cyrano's Playhouse. Anchorage supports an enthusiastic arts community, and Cyrano's is well-respected throughout the state. It seemed the natural venue to nurture *Libby*.

I was born Elizabeth Gertrude Dubois, 1844, in Washington D.C. In spite of what I say, my parents think I am beautiful. My sister, Carrie, was truly beautiful; I by comparison, am good looking. I wear clothes well - always the latest fashion - not out of vanity, but because I am comfortable when well dressed. And though I've been the rebel of our set about so many silly feminine restrictions - I've not gone mannish like Cousin Fanny Chase. I prefer to win my rebellion while remaining entirely feminine.

David Edgecombe is an Associate Professor in the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Alaska Anchorage. As a professional he is chiefly a director, and I have worked with him on countless productions in our twenty-three years together. He is rarely daunted by the ambitious and

the unconventional, so he tackled this adaptation with characteristic high energy and organizational aplomb.

My husband John...how can I describe him? He was born John Warren Beaman, 1844, in Amherst, Massachusetts. His father and his grandfather before him were ministers in the First Congregational Church. Even his mother's father was a Congregational minister. In fact, every male in his family on both sides had been Congregational ministers for three generations...including the dogs, I suspect. Everyone naturally assumed that he would follow in their footsteps, but when the war ended...., he decided to study for a career in engineering. Has he regretted this decision? He has never complained.

We returned from the Pribilofs with renewed enthusiasm for "The Libby Project," as we have come to call it, and with a deeper understanding and affection for this unique island. We were a party of five: David and me, Jerry and Sandy Harper, who own Cyrano's Playhouse and Jill Fitcher, our stage manager. Cathy Gleason, producer of *Inside Alaska* for the CBS affiliate in Anchorage and cameraman Jordan Placie followed a day later. I had never traveled with an entourage before!

The television show will feature Libby on Saint Paul and the many complex issues that make up life in the Pribilofs today. I can't even pretend to understand the politics, environmental issues and cultural complexities on the island. It does seem that *Libby* got people talking though, and maybe opened some hearts and minds.

The letter sent, I watch from the deck as a cutter breaks the sun's path back to San Francisco while we cut cleanly through the great swells out the Golden Gate. I am going on, not back, but on, into my vast unknown.

Flying out on a Reeve Aleutian Airways TurboProp took about two and a half hours with a short stop in Dillingham. We had been warned that landing on St. Paul was "interesting" so we were prepared for almost anything. The landing turned out to be unremarkable, although the thick fog prevented us, and presumably the pilot, from seeing the runway until we were on it.

We have been sailing through banks of fog that open and close and I begin to lose track of the days again. There is a faint odor of land, though none is in sight yet. But birds come out to greet us, and they are a welcome diversion. They wheel about the mainmast by the thousands—terns and auklets, gannets and gulls and many others I don't recognize. Then the words we've been longing to hear:

"LAND HO! LAND HO!"

Slowly I am able to discern shapes in the fog—sharp contours at opposition to the boiling clouds. St. Paul Island!—the Pribilofs!—We have arrived!

Our arrangement was to give two performances of *Libby* with all the proceeds going to the Pribilof Islands Stewardship Program in exchange for



room and board for the five of us for five days. The Alaska Humanities Forum also provided support for Jerry and Sandy Harper to conduct post-performance discussions. We arrived on a Thursday afternoon. Performances were scheduled for Friday and Sunday evening in the community hall, a gymnasium sized room with a stage at one end and an echo all over. David had sent a list in advance of furniture pieces we would need. The production was designed to tour, so we were very flexible in our requirements and expectations. We bounced around town in a pick-up with Karin Holser, a volunteer with Fish and Wildlife, to load the pieces she had located: a free standing globe of the world, a table and chair, footlocker, and cot.

Back at the community hall the decision was finally made to use the stage. I had been advocating setting up on the floor in a thrust configuration. The elevated stage seemed distant and impersonal. The only illumination on the floor was from fluorescents overhead and some disco lights left over from a dance. I was persuaded to opt for the stage. Lighting options weren't much of an improvement; PAR lamps on two household-style reostats at the side of the stage. The electrician, who doubles as St. Paul's current city manager, helped us get them all working.

There is a great deal of settling in to be done. Government House is very cramped. The walls are paper thin, the floors creak, and the furnishings....well, let's just say they're rustic. I have brought a few things from home to make our bedroom more comfortable, and even some things to help civilize the sitting room. I'm glad, however, I left my Limoges tea service in Washington. Here we drink our tea in glasses, like the Russians, with water heated in a samovar. This may be a custom I'll introduce to Washington society!

Audiences for both performances were made up of tourists, Aleuts and seasonal workers, government agents and scientists. There were about fifty at each performance. Everyone was extremely appreciative and very responsive during the performance and went out of their way to say something

nice afterwards. One Aleut woman said to me "I'm glad you talked back to The Boss." She was referring to the Senior Agent.

As we approached the table, a new man entered the saloon. Almost as tall as John—who is six feet—and though in civilian attire, he had a military air about him. He commanded attention. I felt John stiffen slightly. The newcomer came directly to John—"Well, Beaman, you did bring your wife, after all. I should like to meet her." At this John introduced me to his immediate superior officer, the Treasury Department Senior Agent, the man we will share our lives with for the next two years. John introduced him by name, but I shall never name him. He will remain the Senior Agent, no matter what happens.

... He is, John tells me, only forty two. I had thought him older. He is dark and sports a sharp goatee. His blue-grey eyes are penetrating, but reveal nothing—his air of superiority, however, reveals a great deal. Perhaps it is a false bravado—so many arrogant men are insecure under the surface, don't you think? He was at Bull Run and Antietam and acquired the rank of colonel. He served after the war in the Government Printing Office. He was appointed special agent to the Pribilofs last year. He seems to be longing for something—companionship?—adventure?—a bicarbonate?! Maybe it is indigestion! At any rate, that's the Senior Agent.

The current Senior Agent, David Cornnany is an unassuming, soft-spoken man, and wasn't offended by my interpretation of his predecessor. He has been at his post for six years and he read Betty John's book before he started working on St. Paul. He said that Libby's perspective affected his own approach to his job. He seems to be a bridge-builder. He told me that his goal is to be the last non-Native government agent in the Pribilofs.

We were disappointed that more Aleuts didn't attend the performances. Contrary to what Larry Mercurieff had led us to believe, many of the people on St. Paul don't care for the book. They would prefer not to be reminded of those times. Larry was impressed with the sensitive depiction of the Aleuts in the adaptation. Those who saw the play were also enthusiastic, but many people, understandably, chose not to attend. After talking in depth with Larry and others I have come to the realization that the Aleuts are among the most oppressed of all native groups. The wounds haven't healed yet. The Russians enslaved and practiced genocide on them. The Americans weren't much better; forcing the men away from their families to work the seal harvest, stripping them of whatever traditions they had left. It's a familiar story. The shocking part is that the abuse continued well into this century. The Aleuts won their right to vote in 1966, the commercial seal harvest didn't end until 1984, and even today the government oversees management of the seals. It is required that an agent of the United States government has to be present at all the subsistence harvests on the island. Naturally, there's quite a lot of resentment.

On the positive side, everyone we met on the island, Aleuts and whites, were wonderful to us. Many Aleuts chose not to attend the production, but they went out of their way to greet us as we walked around the village, inviting

us in to their homes to share a soda, shouting "Hello Libby!" from porches and offering advice on what we should see during our visit. Larry Mercurieff is a deeply spiritual and passionate advocate for St. Paul and its people. He is charming, articulate, and smart. He is the ideal spokesman and spends his time off the island heading up the Bering Sea Coalition, a lobby group focusing on environmental issues in the region. I think he saw in *Libby* a small step toward a healing process for his people.

There are many people on St. Paul who are dedicated to protecting the Pribilofs. Their love for their work is evident. Our host was the Pribilof Islands Stewardship Program, an organization dedicated to educating the children of St. Paul and St. George. The children learn traditional ways of taking care of their islands and work with the scientists to alleviate some of the profound environmental problems. The organization is directed by Debbie Bourdukofsky, a beautiful, serene, well-spoken Aleut woman who is passionate about the island and her work. She organized our visit and was the first to show us the performance space. She told us right off that she doesn't like the book. I appreciated her candor. This was the first inkling we got that the book wasn't generally loved by the Pribilovians.

We met three of the young people participating in the Stewardship Program. Candace Stepetin is a college student at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. After she finishes school she wants to come back to St. Paul to work. Samantha Zacharof is a teenager. She wants to teach the Aleut language in St. Paul when she grows up. She asked me if I liked being an actor. She seemed fascinated by the play, sitting at the base of the stage for both performances. When I got to the part in the performance where I describe seeing the seals for the first time, her eyes shone with recognition. Her friend is Curtis Melovidov who is about twelve years old. Everyone told me that he will be the village shaman when he grows up. We saw him at work for the Stewardship Program, helping at the seal harvest, and dressed as an acolyte for the services in the Orthodox Church. He and the other children are very involved with life on their island.

At first they just stare at me, silent, afraid to test their meager English, but soon their desire for candy overcomes their shyness. They begin to repeat words after me...soon whole families begin to show up and I hear a chorus of answers as I hold objects up for them to identify. In all honesty, the natives teach me more than I teach them. They are kind, direct and honest. There are no locks in St. Paul, they don't need them. I who was at first suspicious, feel part of their community now. I wish I had the time to share all that I have learned: practical knowledge of life in the Arctic...their deep reverence for God and nature. In a very short time I have made some of the best friends of my life.

Even though I saw more seals and birds than I ever imagined, we were continually reminded that the numbers are way down compared to twenty years ago. A lot of factors have contributed to the decline including overfishing, global warming and pollution. The Pribilofs are a thorn in many politicians' sides. Several people we talked to expressed great frustration in getting Washington's attention.

It's not surprising that funding for research is dwindling. Bruce Robson, a marine biologist based in Seattle has been working each summer documenting entanglement incidences among the fur seals, and with the help of Samantha and the other kids, freeing seals that have become entangled in castoff nets and packing materials. It is a serious problem. Bruce's funding has been cut to the point that for the summer of 1998 he was only able to spend ten days on the island. David Cormany was very interested in the prospect of us performing *Libby* in Washington D.C. He thinks it might serve to open a dialogue and focus attention on the Pribilofs. Imagine—a "Libby Lobby!"

We were asked if we would like to see a harvest. Everyone said yes without any hesitation. I admit I had some qualms, but for the sake of method acting I went along. We had to get permits from the tribal government and were warned not to bring cameras. The Aleuts conduct subsistence harvests every day except Sunday from mid-June through the first week of August. They are allowed to take 2,000 male seals between the ages of one and three from both St. Paul and St. George. In actuality, they take about 1,200. The demand for seal meat is dying off with the elders and very few crafts using the skins have survived to the present day. One person told us that the kids would rather eat hot dogs. We asked several people what the seal meat tasted like...whites aren't supposed to eat it since it is a subsistence product. We got a lot of differing opinions from "it's like the sweetest, tenderest beef" to "it tastes like leather and gives you the runs!"



But, all the same, I shall never get used to the idea of killing these beautiful animals for fur. In the midst of life we are in death. Though I am spared the actual sight of the slaughter, the noise is so terrible that I am constantly reminded of what is going on. It's awful. The whole idea upsets me, and I am in a state of nerves that has me worried. I must have visualized some sort of slaughter to get the pelts, but I never dreamed that it would take place so close at hand.

Larry picked us up about 9:00 in the morning on the appointed day. We drove to a rookery not far from the village, joining a parade of pick-ups and a flatbed truck bouncing over the tundra. It was misting and foggy but warm. The vehicles lined up facing a flat grassy area with a gentle rise behind and beyond that rise was the beach. The state appointed veterinarian, David Cormany, and a few volunteers with the stewardship program were the only white people on the field. Everyone else was Aleut, men, boys, girls and women, about thirty people in all. The foreman was shouting orders and several men and children disappeared over the hill. He turned and saw us and demanded to know who we were. We said we were "with Larry" and that seemed to satisfy him.

In a very short time a herd of about 150 seals came "galumphing" over the hill; a round-up if you will, with the Aleuts chasing them on foot and shouting. They herded the seals into a clump at the right of the field. The children were in charge of keeping the herd under control. Occasionally a renegade would try to make a break for the beach, and a few times a stampede looked like it was forming, but the kids were able to keep them calm for the most part.

They go to the bachelor parade grounds and carefully select those seals they feel have the most perfect pelts. The Aleuts carefully prod these animals away from the others with huge, hardwood clubs, pushing the seals always toward a path that eventually leads to the killing ground directly behind the village. Often during the drives, pelts are torn or wounds are discovered that render the animal useless. These seals are left to die or find their own way back to the sea. Once at the killing ground, they are allowed to rest for a short time. This improves the quality of the pelts. Then a few well-directed blows on the skull finish the job.

They began by cutting about twenty seals from the herd. The men rattled empty gas cans on the ends of their hickory clubs and drove the seals near another group of men who were all holding clubs. Each man singled out a seal and hit it deftly on the top of the skull. I saw very few missed swings...their aim was true. There was an audible cracking sound as the club met its target and the seal simply fell limp on the grass. Within seconds the felled seals were skinned, gutted, and the usable parts were put into plastic bags and loaded on to the flatbed. After the first twenty had been culled, another group was cut from the herd. Out of each group of twenty they harvested about 5 or 6 seals. Those who made it past the gauntlet continued on over the rise and back on to the beach. They took about 40 seals that morning and the whole process lasted about an hour. The vet monitored temperatures, the agent kept count on a clipboard, and everyone else pitched in

with the cleaning...except us, of course...we just watched. I expected to be more troubled by this experience. Seeing the seals go limp was shocking at first, and I felt my eyes welling up. But everything was well-organized, quick and businesslike, and I found myself admiring the economy of the operation.

It's a dirty, disquieting job...it can't help but get to the men...John has to be right there on the field in the thick of it. He comes in splattered with blood and dung, reeking of decaying carcasses. I sometimes think I shall go mad from the noise. The men tell me it is more likely I'll go mad from the silence in winter, when everything, including the sea is frozen solid and the only sound is the wind howling out of Siberia.

That afternoon we had an even more memorable experience. Let me preface it by saying that everyone we met was eager to show us "their" St. Paul Island. Larry took us to a sacred place; Debbie showed us the stewardship program facilities; Karin showed us the kayaks she and the kids were making using driftwood they scrounge on the beaches, just as the Aleuts have done for thousands of years. We even went on a bird and wildflower tour with the local tour director and several tourist birders who could debate for hours (literally hours) whether the sandpiper they were seeing through their scope had four bands or three.

St. Paul Island is a kaleidoscope of color. Flowers everywhere—poppies of all kinds, wild roses, ranunculus, wild mustard, lupine, painted daisies, violas and violets, ...and tall ferns that seem almost tropical.

Terry Spraecker the vet offered us the most unique view of St. Paul, however, and I am indebted to him for life.

As if on cue the fog lifts. I see snowcapped peaks...deep violet shadows against soft pink sand dunes ending abruptly at cliffs. Below are shelves of rock undercut by waves. On these rocks and on the beaches are thousands and thousands of seals. From this distance they appear to be inky blobs restlessly swaying between the water and the land. My wildest imagining never prepared me for such a sight.

Terry Spraecker is on the faculty at Colorado State University in Ft. Collins. For many years he has been in charge of monitoring the seal harvest to ensure that the animals are not over-stressed. He tracks their temperatures and has the authority to halt the harvest if the seals get too hot. This job with the government supports his primary interest which is conducting research on pup mortality. He saw the show on Sunday night and loved it. He invited us to come with him the next day to "get a closer look at the seals." This was an experience that he really wanted me to have as I develop Libby's character—method acting again! We eagerly accepted his invitation and at 1:00 in the afternoon we drove with him to Northeast Point to one of the island's largest breeding rookeries. Over a portion of it is a catwalk; a suspended crawlway about eight feet above the beach made up of 2x12's strung between 2 x 4 towers extending the length of the beach for about a quarter mile. He gave us all kneepads and instructions to keep our wits about us.

First we had to walk to the ladder, a distance of about 50 feet through an area guarded by young bulls without harems which he referred to as "wannabes." The bulls stake out territory whether they have any cows or not, and most of these wannabes will have harems in the next year or so. They are very territorial and it was a little scary walking through them, but they just coughed and moved out of the way. Terry was armed with a long bamboo pole. If a bull were to get too aggressive, a nudge from that pole would keep them under control. Luckily he didn't have to demonstrate this and we made our way slowly and without incident to the ladder. Once up on the catwalk we crawled in single file out about 200 yards until we were in the midst of the rookery.

There are many kinds of seals—hair, harp, barking—sea lions, sea cows, and walruses—all related. The fur seals belong exclusively to the Pribilofs. Our two islands—St. Paul and St. George—because of their isolation, moist climate, and configuration of their shores - seem to have been particularly designed by the Creator for the propagation of the fur seal. Each of our seals (except for the bulls, who fast all summer) eats about 25 pounds of fish each day. There are more than four and a half million seals in the Pribilofs. That means our seals eat 50,000 tons of fish a day. The season is 120 days long, so that is 6 million tons of fish taken from these waters annually! More, I warrant, than the whole population of the United States eats in the same length of time, and this in an area of only a few square miles! The idea is staggering.

The bulls are about six feet long and have a five foot girth. They weigh about 500 pounds when they first haul up in May, but since they fast for more than 12 weeks they lose considerable weight, and considerable patience with each passing day.

The noise can only be described as cacophony. Bleats from the pups, barking, honking, roaring, and a weird sound like air being released from a tire by the bulls, a different kind of barking from the cows. We were in their midst, and at first they didn't like it a bit, especially the bulls. From our vantage we could easily see how the rookery was laid out. Each bull guarded a circular area about 15 feet in diameter where he kept watch over his harem of three to ten cows. Most of the cows had pups. Interspersed in these harems were nurseries where a tangle of twenty or thirty pups waited for their mothers to return from their hunting forays in the sea. After a cow gives birth she stays and nurses the pup for about 5 days, then she leaves the pup for a week while she hunts in the sea. When she returns she searches the beach, barking her special bark, until her pup answers her. Each cow and pup have their own unique call, and once she has found her baby, she verifies the pup's identity through smell and then allows the famished pup to nurse. Baby seals are never adopted by a nursing cow. If a cow fails to return from the sea, the pup will starve to death. I witnessed a reunion of a cow and a pup from my perch on the catwalk. It's difficult not to personify these



animals, and their coming together seemed almost scripted, like a scene from the end of a Shirley Temple movie! We also watched a birth. Jerry Harper remarked after that event that in that single day we had seen the whole life-cycle of the Northern Fur Seal.

My attention is diverted by a third bull. He has taken advantage of the fight to steal the object of their affections for his own harem. I realize too late that his harem is no more than ten feet from where I am sitting. He plops her down as I quickly vacate my ledge for higher ground. What I witness now defies description. The cow slithers up and down beside this new bull. They fondle each other, and the expression of passion and desire in their eyes is...it's human! In spite of myself, I watch, fascinated. I can't help it.

I was gratified to see that Libby had been correct in many ways with her description of the island and the seals. We will be correcting some of what she missed and adding more details about the seals in future performances. I don't want Libby to become my Count of Monte Cristo, but I am looking forward to performing it for the next year at least. I think it sends an important message. I hope we can arrange a tour to Washington D.C. I hope it can help to make a difference.

Finally, I wish our child could know the ways of life far removed from Washington. Life on the Pribilofs is so different—the customs, languages, the food and clothing. I feel honored to have been introduced to this other way of life, to have seen merit in other ways of being, to have been accepted by people so different from me. This morning, as we sail out the harbor the island looms like a misty silhouette. Then, all too quickly, it falls over the edge of the world, sliding into the sunlight. We are left alone on the vast sea, between ports, between the chapters of our lives.

Libby will embark on a national tour in May 1999 to promote the second printing of the book. A performance can be arranged by contacting the author of this article c/o Department of Theatre and Dance, University of Alaska Anchorage, 3211 Providence Dr., Anchorage, AK 99508.