

STUDY GUIDE

THE REPERTORY THEATRE OF ST. LOUIS



BY THOMAS GIBBONS

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Words to the Wise



Bee-luther-hatchee. My mama used to use that word when I was a little girl. Lord knows where she picked it up—I never heard it from anyone else. I loved the sound of it, the feelin' it made inside me. And I'd misbehave just to get her to say it. She knew what I was up to—it was a game we played. She'd look at me with big, wide eyes. If you ain't careful, she'd say, you gone end up in Bee-luther-hatchee. Where's that, Mama, I'd ask. Is that someplace like hell? Never you mind, she'd say, and give me a kiss.

But once, I remember, she told me somethin' different. Her face got sad, and her voice was quiet and far off.

Hell ain't the last stop on the track, she said. Most folks think so, but they're wrong. After the passengers get off, after the conductor turns the lights out and leaves... you just stay on the train, gal. Bee-luther-hatchee is the next stop after hell. —Libby Price, *Bee-luther-hatchee*

bee-luther-hatchee—n. (1920s–1940s) *a far-away, damnable place; the next station after the stop for the biblical hell; an absurd place or an ironic situation located in a particular place; a mythical place.* Example: “He always be over in Bee-luther-hatchee or somewhere.” —*Juba to Five: A Dictionary of African-American Slang*

Who's W H O

Libby Price is an elderly African-American woman whose life story, the memoir *Bee-luther-hatchee*, is at the center of the play.

Shelita Burns is a young New York editor who is enjoying great success with her recently-launched book series, *Rediscovered Voices*, featuring African-American writers.

The Interviewer from “The Times” is presumably reporting for *The New York Times*.

Anna is Shelita's friend and colleague in the publishing world.

Robert, a figure in Libby's memoir, is a banker in the South with secrets in his past.

Sister Margaret is the director of Green Lane Residence, the retirement center where Shelita goes to meet Libby.

Sean Leonard is a middle-aged writer and teacher.

Belittled—In accepting a major book award on behalf of Libby, Shelita reminds the audience that many great works of literature have been belittled or put down, simply because they were written by people of color.

Heed—Shelita claims that her book series forces people to heed or listen to the voices of writers who have previously been silenced by racism.

Zora Neale Hurston—Shelita's senior thesis was on this acclaimed African-American who wrote stories, novels, anthropological folklore and autobiography.

Langston Hughes—This Missouri native wrote extensively on the African-American experience, crafting poetry, novels, short stories, plays and autobiography, along with television and radio scripts.

Nella Larsen—The first African-American woman to win the coveted Guggenheim fellowship for creative writing. Larsen was a writer in the literary movement known as the Harlem Renaissance and dealt with issues of gender and racial identity.

Marita Bonner—Bonner published short stories and essays from 1924 to 1941 in *Opportunity*, *The Crisis*, *Black Life* and other magazines, sometimes as “Joseph Marce Andrew.” Her writing deals with issues of race, gender and class.

Jesse Redmon Fauset—Another female writer of the Harlem Renaissance, Fauset broke new ground by serving as the literary editor of the magazine, *The Crisis*.

Collective consciousness—Shelita contends that taking away a people's literature is destructive to this sense of shared identity.

Random House—Directly after college, Shelita worked at this, one of the world's largest and best-known publishers of both fiction and nonfiction.

Over the transom—Shelita uses this publishing term to say that *Bee-luther-hatchee* was sent to her without prior arrangement or contact with the author.

Memoir—A specific form of autobiography, this kind of writing relies on personal experience as the fuel for the narrative but generally is intended to reveal as much about the society in which the author lives as it is the individual writer.

J.D. Salinger—Shelita defends Libby's requests for privacy, citing this author of *Catcher in the Rye* who is known for his extreme reclusion.

Pynchon—This American novelist, known for his complex plots and themes, won the National Book Award in 1973.

Mobile—Libby lists this southwestern Alabama town as one of her destinations.

Tallahassee—Libby also spent time in this capital city of Florida.

New Orleans, Natchitoches, Rosepine—These Louisiana locations are all stops along Libby's long journey.

Norfolk—Travel takes Libby to this Virginia city.

Pen names—Authors who want to protect their identities sometimes use these false names for publishing. An example is the writer O. Henry, whose real name was William Sidney Porter.

Charlotte—The largest city in North Carolina, Charlotte is near the South Carolina border.

Nancy Drew—Shelita jokingly refers to herself as this fictional young detective.



W.E.B. DuBois

Reverend King—Robert reassures Libby that the work of civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King will make life easier for her in the South.

Hoax—This is an act intended to deceive or trick.

Rush Limbaugh—This conservative white author and radio talk show host is known for making statements with racist implications.

Ku Klux Klan—Known simply as "the Klan" in the play, this white supremacist group has a history of violence towards African Americans and Jews.

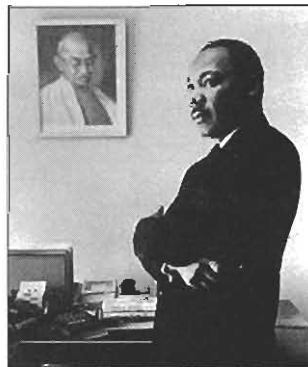
King Lear—A Shakespearean play, this work tells the story of an aging king who brings about his own ruin by dividing his kingdom.

Remaindered—Books that are published but do not sell well are remaindered, or sold at severely reduced prices.

Huckleberry Finn—Shelita refers to this controversial Mark Twain novel about the relationship between a young white boy and a runaway slave.

Amos 'n' Andy—A popular radio and television show from the 1930s through the 1950s, this program was protested by the NAACP for promoting racial stereotypes.

W.E.B. DuBois—Shelita was inspired to create the *Rediscovered Voices* series by the writing of DuBois, one of the most influential black leaders of the first half of the 20th Century. DuBois shared in the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored



Martin Luther King, Jr.

People, or NAACP and served as its director of research and editor of its magazine, *The Crisis*, until 1934.

Upper West Side—Sean presumes that Shelita lives in this trendy, "up and coming" area of New York City.

The Famine—Sean's great-

grandfather came from Ireland during the deadly potato famine from 1845–1850 which killed more than 1 million Irish from starvation or disease.

Atone—Sean believes that his father behaved as he did in hopes of righting past wrongs, or atoning for mistakes.

Advance—In the publishing world, this is the amount of money paid to an author before he or she completes a book.

Galley—A galley is a typeset version of a book that is proofread for errors before the text is formatted into bound pages.

Sign a book or author—From a publisher's perspective, this means to get an author or book under contract—not to get an autograph.

Royalties—An author may receive royalties or a share of the proceeds resulting from the sale of a book.

Slave narrative—These nonfiction works tell the story of African-American slaves, sometimes through their own writing, but also through the recording of their spoken histories.

Big Houses—Shelita and Anna's discussion of the "big houses" refers to major publishing houses such as Simon & Schuster, Doubleday and Scholastic.

University Press—These publishing houses are under the supervision of an academic institution and publish primarily scholarly, nonfiction works.

What's the Story?

Shelita Burns has it all. A Princeton graduate, she is young, attractive and fiercely intelligent. She is a successful editor at Transit Press in New York and seeing a life-long dream fulfilled—a series of narratives, *Rediscovered Voices*, celebrating “the black voice from our arrival in America to the present.” “For three hundred years the African American voice has been silenced in this country. Many profound works of literature have been ignored, ridiculed, belittled—or never allowed to see the light of day at all. The purpose of the series is to reclaim those works from the silence,” Shelita tells us in *Bee-luther-hatchee*. The series is a huge success and she has scored her biggest coup yet: the best-selling memoir of Libby Price, a 72-year-old black woman with an incredible story.

Everything that Shelita touches is golden. She is interviewed by the *New York Times*, offered a job at a large publishing house, and Libby's book, *Bee-luther-hatchee*, has readers and critics spellbound. It has just won the coveted Haywood Award for non-fiction. Shelita longs to meet Libby who

has made this all possible—this woman who has written a book that has spoken to Shelita's very soul. But Libby has guarded her precious privacy— she has kept out of the public eye and has refused to be photographed or interviewed.

Prompted by a need that she can't even fully understand herself, Shelita journeys to the North Carolina nursing home to meet this reclusive author and celebrate the book's success. But she is met with a dead end—there is no Libby Price at that home nor seemingly anywhere else. The only evidence of her existence at all is a trail of letters with a post office box address.

After being confronted by many dead ends, Shelita makes one final trip to Charlotte seeking a private meeting with the author without press coverage. This face-to-face meeting with the author rocks her world—the real author of the memoir turns out to be nothing like the myth.

This synopsis was originally printed by Meadow Brook Theatre, Rochester, Michigan.

*“But for every life that's
recorded in words,
printed, made
tangible...
there are a thousand
unwritten lives
intersecting it.
Each one a separate
truth, leading to
its own ending.”*



1954 In *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the U.S. Supreme Court bans segregation in public schools.



1955 A bus boycott is launched December 1 in Montgomery, Alabama after an

African American woman, Rosa Parks, is arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white person.

1956 After more than a year of boycotting the buses and a legal fight, the Montgomery buses desegregate on December 21.

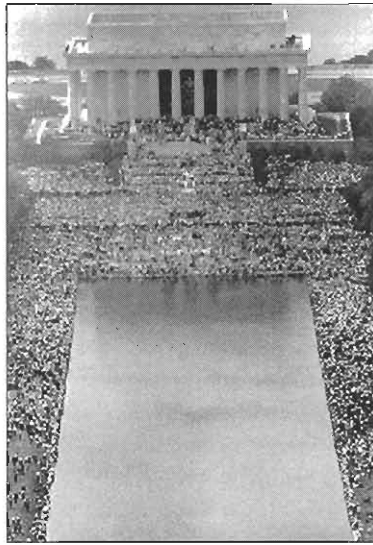


1957 At previously all-white Central High in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1,000 paratroopers are called by President Eisenhower to restore order and escort nine black students to class.

1960 The sit-in protest movement begins in February at a Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina and spreads across the nation.



1961 Freedom rides begin from Washington, D.C. with groups of black and white people riding buses through the South to challenge segregation.



Owning the Past

In *Bee-luther-hatchee*, Shelita Burns tells another character, "First we have to own our past. By telling our story." Following is a small portion of that story—a timeline of major events in the African American struggle for civil rights.

1962 Two people are killed, and many are injured in riots as James Meredith is enrolled as the first African American at the University of Mississippi.



1963 Police arrest Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other ministers demonstrating in Birmingham, Alabama and then turn fire

hoses and police dogs on the marchers.

Medgar Evers, NAACP leader, is murdered June 12 as he enters his home in Jackson, Mississippi.



250,000 people attend the March on Washington, D.C. urging support for pending civil-rights legislation. The event was highlighted by King's "I have a dream" speech.

Four girls are killed September 15 in the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.

1964 Three civil-rights workers are murdered in Mississippi.

President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964 on July 2.



1965 Malcolm X is murdered February 21. Three men are convicted of his murder.

President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act of 1965 on August 6. The act, which King sought, authorized federal examiners to register qualified voters and suspended devices such as literacy tests that aimed to prevent African Americans from voting.

Watts riots August 11–16 leave 34 dead in Los Angeles.

1968 The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. is assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee unleashing violence in more than 100 cities.

A False Note

"Because you should have known. If what you say is true, you should have detected a false note. But you believed it."

—Sean Leonard *Bee-luther-hatchee*

Another "Aboriginal" Creator Admits A Hoax

Associated Press, Friday, March 14, 1997

Less than a week after an acclaimed Aboriginal painter was revealed to be white, the author of the award-winning autobiography of an Aboriginal woman reveals he is a white man who made it all up.

Australia's literary establishment was embarrassed and angered by the revelation yesterday that *My Own Sweet Time*—believed to be the autobiography of Wanda Koolmatric—was written by Leon Carmen, a 47-year-old white man living in Sydney.

When released in 1995, the book won critical acclaim and a national literary award as the best work by an Australian woman writer.

"As we now discover, it is a pack of lies because it is actually a fiction and not autobiographical, which I think immediately devalues its literary merit," said Lydia Miller, director of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board.

Miller accepted the 1996 Dobbie Award on behalf of the absent "Wanda Koolmatric," said to be overseas at the time. The publisher of *My Own Sweet*

Time, Magabala Books, has received grants from the arts board, the Western Australian state government and Australian federal government.

The disclosure was the second such hoax to rock the arts community in a week. Last Friday, Aborigines and some museum curators and gallery owners were angered to learn that acclaimed Aboriginal painter "Eddie Burrup" is really an 82-year-old woman of Irish descent, Elizabeth Durack. Carmen, revealing his hoax in an interview published in yesterday's *Telegraph Mirror*, said he had written under the name of Wanda Koolmatric to break into the Australian literary scene.

Voicing a claim made by some other white male writers, Carmen said politically correct publishers and awards judges discriminate against white men in favor of female, Aboriginal and immigrant-descended writers.

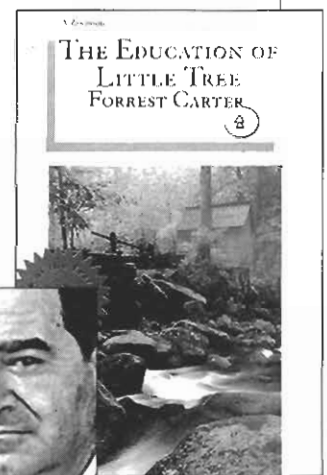


Thaloo for White Ant by "Eddie Burrup"

This is not an isolated incident. The later part of the twentieth century saw an explosion in interest in literature written by ethnic authors. In our own country, we saw a new interest in Native American, Asian, African American and other ethnic literature. The market was no longer cornered by a small group of literary giants. Step aside Toni Morrison and Alice Walker—now there was a new generation of black female authors. This was a generation that would shatter the myths of what literature should look like and what readers wanted. This was a generation that would open editors' eyes and send them fighting to find the next big name in literature. And big they were. This group included the likes of Terry McMillan whose *Waiting to*

Exhale sold 1.75 million copies and remained on the *New York Times* Best Sellers list for 24 weeks, Yolanda Joe, Sheneska Jackson, Dawn Turner Trice, Diane McKinney-Whetstone, Pearl Cleage and the list goes on and on. This explosion was not isolated to African American literature—it spanned across cultural boundaries. Such authors as N. Scott Momaday and books such as *Touch the Earth: a Self-Portrait of Indian Existence* compiled by T.C. McLuhan hit the shelves.

The stage was set. Unfortunately, with this new interest, the frauds came out of the woodwork. Perhaps one of the most notorious is *The Education of Little Tree: A True Story* by Forrest Carter.



Author and speechwriter Asa "Forrest" Carter

The University of New Mexico, with virtually no promotion, published *The Education of Little Tree* in 1976. Slowly but surely it found a foothold—an audience—and was embraced by the educational community. It became a way for us to teach our children about Indian culture and values and was included in the curriculum of public schools. By the spring of 1991, this autobiography of a Cherokee Indian's childhood was on top of the *New York Times* nonfiction bestseller list. So what's the problem with this celebration of Native American lifestyle and values with its strong environmental message? Well the problem lies in Forrest Carter. In sharp contrast to what the "autobiography" leads us to believe, Forrest Carter was not an orphan at five, nor raised by his grandparents, or even an "unlettered" cowboy. In fact he wasn't Forrest Carter at all. As it turns out Forrest Carter is really Asa Carter. Name sound familiar? It should. Remember Alabama Governor George Wallace and his famous catchphrase "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever"? Asa Carter was the speechwriter who penned that battle cry for Wallace's 1962 inaugural gubernatorial speech. Yes, the same Asa Carter who prior to joining Wallace's campaign had shot two men in a dispute over money. The same white supremacist editor whose publication was being distributed during the time he was writing *Little Tree*. The same man who founded his own Ku Klux Klan organization that shared his violent predisposition. "In one eighteen-month period his followers joined in the stoning of Autherine Lucy on the University of Alabama campus, assaulted black singer Nat King Cole on a Birmingham stage, beat Birmingham civil rights activist Fred Shuttlesworth and stabbed his wife, and, in what was billed as a warning to potential black 'trouble-makers,' castrated a randomly-chosen, slightly retarded black handyman," recounts Dan Carter in his George Wallace biography.

Hardly the author you would expect to be on our children's "must read list." When Dan Carter, a professor at Emory University, revealed this fraud to the world in 1991, it naturally caused quite a stir. Some say Asa Carter mellowed over the years—but dying from choking on food and clotted blood after a fistfight is hardly consistent with this theory. Some say he made a remarkable turnaround and his novels should be read for their own merits. Others feel that *The Education of Little Tree*, *The Outlaw Josey Wales* and all of his other novels are just thinly veiled white supremacist propaganda obsessed with racial purity. In the end, though, none of this mattered—the book was reclassified from non-fiction to fiction and made the leap from one best seller list to another.

Next enters Susan Jeffers, the author of the beautifully illustrated children's book, *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky*. This "Message from Chief Seattle" also had its time in the sun—more than 19 weeks on the best-seller lists and chosen by the American Booksellers Association as "the book we most enjoyed selling in 1991." And yes you guessed it—these supposed words of wisdom from Suquamish leader Seattle are a work of fiction with origins like *Little Tree* in the environmentally sensitive 1970's. Is Susan Jeffers also a charlatan? Though she is responsible for some rewriting, the real credit goes to University of Texas professor, Ted Perry. Perry was commissioned to write a documentary film on the environment and ran across a disputed version of a speech that was attributed to Seattle. With a bit of rewriting to express the needed environmentally sensitive sentiments, a speech

was born that would later become the source for *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky*.

Like *The Education of Little Tree*, exposure of the controversy concerning the book's origins did little to quell its popularity. In the midst of its glory at the top of the best-seller lists, the editors deftly reclassified it from non-fiction to another category: advice, how-to and miscellaneous. Like *Little Tree* the editors secured endorsements from Native Americans —this time from Jewell Praying Wolf James, Seattle's great grandnephew. He thanked the publisher for "taking our famous chief's words and transforming them into an experience all can use to stimulate an awareness of a natural world that is rapidly losing its beauty." *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky* continued to sell and all is well—or is it?

Is it possible for people of different ethnic backgrounds to tell each other's stories "truthfully?" Can a 47-year-old white man living in Sydney recount the life of an Aboriginal woman? Can a white supremacist tell the tale of an orphaned Cherokee boy? Perhaps we need to ask, "should they?" In *Bee-luther-batchee* Sean asks, "Why is the author more important than the words?" Can a

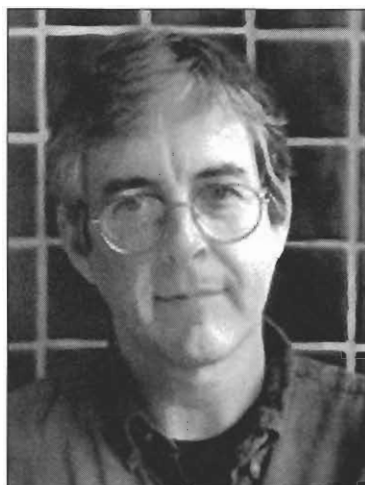


story be read for its own merits independent of its author's identity? Do African Americans have a monopoly on African American stories and Native Americans on Native American ones? Is this cultural theft or blurring the lines between truth and the imagination? It will take us years to unravel this conundrum if it is even possible to do so.

This article is reprinted courtesy of Meadow Brook Theatre, Rochester, Michigan.

Bio & Beyond

Mr. Gibbons attended Villanova University, where he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Liberal Arts. He has been awarded three playwriting fellowships from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and has been a playwright in residence at Interact Theatre Company since 1993. Works produced by Interact include *Bee-luther-hatchee*, *Black Russian*, *6221*, and *Axis*



Sally, which received the Roger L. Stevens Award from The Fund for New American Plays. His other works include *Pretending to America*, *Homer*, which was voted "Best New Play" of the New Play Festival and published in *Dramatics*, and *The Exhibition*, which appears in the anthologies *Best Short Plays: 1981* and *Private Lives, Public Voices*.

Characters in Thomas Gibbons' plays look uncomfortably at one another across chasms of race, gender, age and ideology. Mr. Gibbons's plays are about real politics and their effect on real people. *6221* revisits the MOVE bombing in Philadelphia. *Black Russian* follows a bitter African American agriculturist to the less-than-utopia of the Soviet Union and examines his relationship with his mixed-race child, who wants to return to the county his father turned his back on. Rather than relying on the significant gravity of these events to make his plays theatrical, Mr. Gibbons makes what's at stake in his work intensely personal. The characters' anger, betrayal and loss are shared by the audience, who watch the dream worlds of the characters crumble in the self-interest of the "real world." In writing about *Bee-luther-hatchee*, Gibbons had this to say:

Bee-luther-hatchee has a surprise—a huge surprise. I hope—embedded in it, which makes writing about it a little tricky. I can say that it deals

with questions of artistic license, "authenticity," and the intersection of race and art. These are questions I've had to confront because, although I'm white (Irish-American, to claim my specific hyphenation), I've written several plays containing African-American characters and dealing with what are generally

thought of (though not by me) as African-American issues. I've been asked frequently, "Why do you do that?" and, less frequently, "What gives you the right?"

This play grew out of my desire to explore those questions—and, more specifically, the attitudes and assumptions that underlie them. These assumptions, it seems to me, lead directly to a much larger question: Do we inhabit the same universe, although viewing it from different perspectives, or are we each marooned in our own separate universes, between which no communication is possible?

While I was wondering how to address this in a play, I happened to read a newspaper article about a literary scandal unfolding in Australia—and there, gift-wrapped with a gracious note attached, was my basic plot. It quickly took shape as a mystery in which what is being investigated changes with each successive revelation—first a person, then a history, and finally an idea. In the end, of course, it's impossible to separate these things so neatly.

This information is drawn from <http://www.pewarts.org/97/Gibbons/> and Florida Stage's publication, *Stages*.

Read more about it

We encourage you to examine these topics in-depth by exploring the following books and websites.

The Face of Our Past: Images of Black Women from Colonial America to the Present edited by Kathleen Thompson & Hilary Mac Austin; with an introduction by Darlene Clark Hine. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself, Harriet Jacobs. *With A True Tale of Slavery* by John S. Jacobs; edited with an introduction and notes by Nell Irvin Painter. New York: Penguin Books, 2000.

Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal; An African American Anthology edited by Manning Marable and Leith Mullings. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000.

My Soul is a Witness: A Chronology of the Civil Rights Era, 1954–1965 by Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin. New York: Henry Holt, 2000.

Southern Selves: A Collection of Autobiographical Writings edited by James H. Watkins. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.

"Asa Carter." *George Wallace: Settin' the Woods on Fire*. 2000. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wallace/peopleevents/ponde01.html>

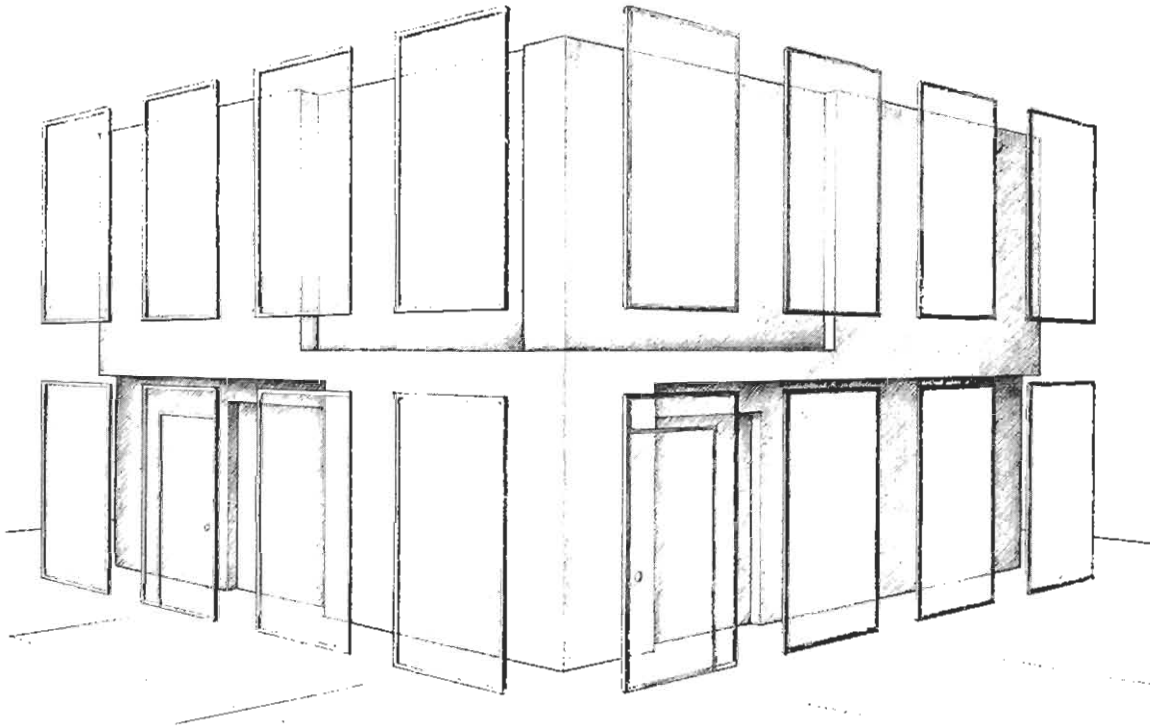
"Fragments of a Fraud" <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Print/0,3858,3912688,00.html>

"Literary Scandals" <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~ozlit/scandals.html>

"Male Aboriginal Artist Turns Out to Be Woman With Irish Descent" <http://lubbockonline.com/news/030897/male.htm>

"Profs Will Continue to Teach Nobel Prize Winner's Hoax as Fact" http://www.ocademia.org/campus_reparts/1999/september_1999_2.html

Shop Talk



Although the environment for *Bee-luther-batchee* is relatively simple, the demands on the production team, particularly the scenic and sound designer are significant because the play forces the audience to move rapidly in and out of the past and present and reality and illusion. The work of these designers is to make these transitions function within the context of the play.

According to scenic designer Peter Hicks, there are two kinds of plays: those that need scenery and those that don't. *Bee-luther-batchee* is "one of those plays that doesn't need scenery." With a first act that packs 14 scenes and 13 different locations into a span of less than 60 minutes, any attempt to portray realistically those locations on stage would quickly become a distraction from the essential dialogue and substantially slow the pace of the show. To facilitate these multiple scenes and focus the audience squarely on the relationships of the play, Hicks has designed, in his words, "a non-specific, non-representational" set.

The main element onstage is a two-level cube structure surrounded by Plexiglas panels. The majority of the play takes place in the present, but a few scenes are flashbacks into the past

from Libby's memoir. These memory scenes are staged on the second level of the cube, with the panels and walls concealed within the cube opening to create a playing area. Both Hicks and Director Debra Wicks felt strongly that the set should convey in a tangible way, the story of Libby's life. With this goal in mind, they decided that selected pieces of the text from the memoir would be etched onto the Plexiglas panels, bringing the words to life. However, just as the meaning of someone else's words can at times be clear and at other times be elusive, the panels are smoky, making reading the truth of the text a privilege reserved only for those who are willing to work to do so.

Also blurring lines generally thought of as clearly defined is Lindsay Jones' original music for the production. By combining such dissimilar musical styles as gospel and techno, and blues and hard rock, Jones blends the worlds of past and present African-American musical traditions and encourages the audience to see the connections between the two.

These visual and aural metaphors reinforce the "grey area" themes of the play, in which characters are faced with complex moral and ethical decisions which can only be resolved through a careful search for and evaluation of the truth.



These questions and activities are designed to help students anticipate the performance and then to build on their impressions and interpretations after attending the theatre. The activities and questions are divided into “**Before the Performance**” and “**After the Performance**” categories. While most of the exercises provide specific instructions, please feel free to adapt these activities to accommodate your own teaching strategies and curricular needs. To assist you in incorporating these materials into your existing curriculum, we have provided the numbers of some of the corresponding Missouri Knowledge Standards and Illinois Learning Standards.

COMMUNICATION ARTS

Before the Performance

1 Each year, thousands of people set out to write what they believe will be the next bestseller. While only a tiny fraction of these works are completed and an even smaller portion makes it to publication, many individuals pursue the dream of seeing their thoughts in print. Though fiction still remains an overall larger market than nonfiction, many of the storylines in both fields come from the writers' personal experiences. Try your hand at this national pastime by creating a proposal for your own book. Using the guidelines below, develop a synopsis of your story, select one or more publishers and pitch the idea to your class as if they were your potential publishers.

- Do some research on a prospective publisher using *Literary Marketplace* and other similar reference materials that are available at the library. It is important to have an idea of the kind of books that a company publishes so that you do not waste time and energy sending manuscripts or queries to publishers who do not print your kind of book. You may also want to consider the size of the company and how many books they publish a year.
- Visit bookstores in your area, and see if there are any books on the shelves that are similar to the book that you want to publish. Then identify the publisher(s) for these books and add the company's name to your list of prospects. Write or call the publisher for a recent catalog so that you can gather as much information as possible about the company.
- Consider contacting professional organizations that specialize in your particular area of interest. For example, if you are interested in producing an autobiographical work, search the internet for organizations that support writers in this field.
(MO: CA1, CA3, CA4, CA5, CA6 IL: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)



Isak Dinesen

2 Autobiography is a special form of nonfiction writing in which the author records something about his or her life. The autobiography can take many forms, but one of the most popular in recent years has been the memoir. With the success of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, the memoir took center stage in the nonfiction publishing world, at least temporarily. The Center for Autobiographic Studies characterizes memoirs in the following ways:

A memoir puts a frame onto life by limiting what is included. A memoir may be publishable if it focuses on a topic of significant popular interest or if it is so well written that it can be considered literature. The limiting frame may be determined by a particular period in your life, for example, your childhood, your adolescence, or your fabulous fifties.

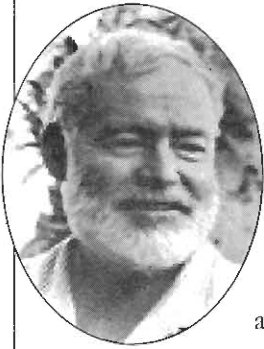
The coming of age memoir, restricted to childhood, has become a distinct literary genre. You don't need to be a name to publish this literary genre, but the writing has to be superb. Examples include Tobias Wolff's *This Boy's Life*, James Joyce's *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.



Maya Angelou

Memoirs of place from a multitude of regional voices have become very popular in contemporary American literature. A memoir's frame may also be limited by a particular setting as with Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa* or Alfred Kazin's *A Walker in the City*.

A memoir can also be limited by the author's relationship with an individual or group. Colette's



Ernest Hemingway

Sido is about the author's relationship with her beloved mother. Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast* is restricted by place (Paris), period (1920s–30s), and his social relationships with an interrelated group of American expatriate artists and writers.

In addition to these recognizable types, there are some important ethnic traditions of autobiographic narrative. The African-American tradition includes *Black Ice*, a young woman's relation of her

experience at a New England boarding school in the 1980s. Within the Native American tradition, N. Scott Momaday's *The Names* emphasizes the importance of the Kiowa landscape and his father's tribal heritage, and Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger for Memory, the Education of Richard Rodriguez* is a thematic memoir which explores the conflict between Spanish as the personal language of home and intimacy versus English a public language of commerce and achievement.

Select one of the kinds of memoirs described above and read one of the titles given as an example. As you read, consider the following questions: 1) What is the author's opinion of him—

or herself? 2) Does this opinion change over the course of the book? If so, how and why? 3) Who are the most important people in the narrator's life? Does the narrator have specific dreams and goals in this narrative? Describe them. 4) What is the most difficult problem this narrator faces? 5) How does he or she solve this problem? Using your responses to these questions as a framework, present your memoir of choice to your class. (MO: CA1, CA3, CA4, CA6, CA7, SS2, SS6 IL: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 16, 18)

After the Performance

3 Read "A False Note" on pages 6 and 7 of your study guide. How do these real-life cases relate to the events played out in *Bee-luther-hatchee*? What is your response to the actions taken by Asa Carter, Susan Jeffers, Elizabeth Durack and the fictional Sean Leonard? Do you feel that their actions are justified by the publicity that their work attracted for ethnic groups that might have otherwise been overlooked, or does their inauthenticity devalue any literary or cultural merit of the pieces? Do artists from outside a cultural group have the right to tell a story (or paint or compose, etc.) on behalf of that group as long as they present it as fictional or derivative art? Discuss these questions in a group of no more than five. (MO: CA1, CA3, CA5, CA6, CA7, FA4, FA5, SS6 IL: 1, 2, 4, 5, 18, 27)

FINE ARTS

Before the Performance

1 Musical performer Eminem, along with other white rap artists, has been criticized for adopting and adapting hip-hop, which is traditionally thought of as an African-American art form. According to the dictionary, to appropriate is to "take possession of or make use of exclusively for oneself, often without permission." However, some of these performers come out of social and economic backgrounds that are very similar to those of African-American artists. Does this afford them a measure of cultural authenticity, or does their ethnic background still make their work an appropriation (or outright theft) of a cultural heritage that is not their own? Should artists restrict their work to those styles or traditions which are specific to their own ethnic background, or are there benefits that can come from stepping outside of these boundaries? Examine current popular culture and identify a performer, (musician, actor, comedian, etc.) or



Eminem

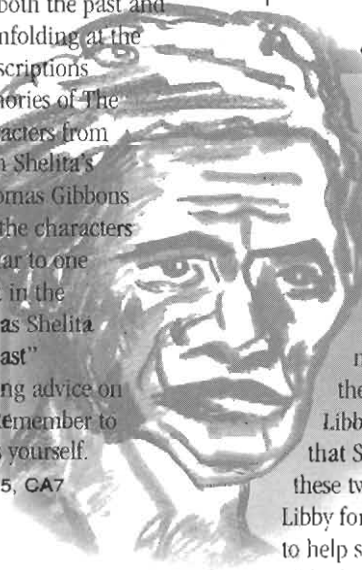
fashion trend that uses the style or appearance of another culture for personal or commercial profit (monetary or otherwise). Research this performer or trend to determine:

1) The cultural background of the performer or designer; 2) The cultural background of the majority of consumers (Are most people listening to this music, watching these movies or wearing these clothes from the culture portrayed?); 3) Whether or not the culture is portrayed accurately (Is language, symbol or custom used out of context or incorrectly to misrepresent the culture?). If possible, find someone native to the culture in question and ask

his or opinion of the performer or fashion trend. Does he or she find the behavior offensive, flattering, disrespectful, harmless? Using this information, determine your own opinion on this question and write an editorial either in support of or against this performer's behavior or fashion trend. (MO: FA1, FA2, FA3, FA4, FA5, CA1, CA3, CA4, CA5, SS6 IL: 1, 2, 3, 5, 25, 26, 27)

After the Performance

2 *Bee-lutber-hatchee* takes place in both the past and present, with two parallel stories unfolding at the same time. Using the character descriptions provided in “Who’s Who” and your memories of The Rep’s production of the play, which characters from Libby’s world parallel, or mirror, those in Shelita’s world? Why do you think playwright Thomas Gibbons constructs the play in this way? Each of the characters from the past has faced a situation similar to one currently faced by his or her counterpart in the present. Choose one of these pairs, such as Shelita and Libby, and write a letter from the “past” character to the “present” character giving advice on how to deal with the difficult decision. Remember to think and write as your character, not as yourself. (MO: FA1, FA2, FA3, CA1, CA2, CA4, CA5, CA7 IL: 1, 2, 3, 5, 25, 26)



3 From the moment that Shelita reads Libby’s manuscript, she feels deeply connected to this remarkable woman. In fact, she writes to her, “When I first read the manuscript of *Bee-lutber-hatchee*, it was with a profound sense of recognition. I felt that the voice in the book—your voice—was speaking directly to my heart. No other book has ever affected me in quite the same way. And I felt something else as well, something deeper and inexplicable: that this voice was, somehow, one that I have always known. How can that be, Libby? So you see, I must meet you. Not to invade your world with mine, but to complete a connection that you began.” In the play, Shelita is never allowed this conversation because Libby, as she knows her, does not exist. Imagine, though, that Shelita does get to meet the real Libby Price. What would these two women discuss? Write a scene in which Shelita meets Libby for the first time. Use what you have learned from the play to help shape the dialogue for both characters. Cast your scene with classmates and present it to your class. (MO: FA1, FA2, FA3, CA1, CA2, CA4, CA5, CA6 IL: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 25, 26)

SOCIAL STUDIES

Before the Performance

1 One of the primary concerns of this play is the silencing of African-American voices throughout history. Shelita Burns, a major character claims: “If you take away a people’s literature, you take away their collective consciousness, their sense of their own unique identity.” Do you agree or disagree? Research historical situations which have made it difficult for populations to maintain their unique ethnic identities, such as the Holocaust, the African slave trade and the institutionalization of Native American orphans. How crucial a role did literature (this may also include oral histories) play in reestablishing the identities of these people? Write an essay presenting your findings. (MO: SS2, SS6, SS7, CA1, CA3, CA4, CA7 IL: 1, 2, 3, 5, 16, 18)



After the Performance

2 Read “Owning the Past” on page 5 of your study guide. Select three of these events to research in detail. Imagine what role Libby Price might have played in each of these events or how she might have reacted to the news. For each event, write a journal entry describing Libby’s “memory” of that day. (MO: SS2, SS6, SS7, CA1, CA3, CA4, CA5 IL: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 16, 18, 27)

3 *Bee-lutber-hatchee* addresses some very difficult moral questions of ownership of personal stories and histories, but beyond that there are also challenging legal questions involved. Visit the following web site <http://www.pnpa.com/legal/handbook2/privacy.htm> and determine which, if any of these violations of privacy Sean Leonard has committed against Libby Price. Assign these roles to class members: Sean, Shelita, Judge, Defense Attorney, Plaintiff’s Attorney and Jury. Based on research both of Sean’s actions in the play and the privacy guidelines, build a case against Sean and try him in your own mock court. (MO: SS1, SS7, CA1, CA2, CA3, CA4, CA5, CA6 IL: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 14, 18, 27)