Photo by Gary Isaacs

Dirty Story

Oct. 7 - Nov. 13 • Space Theatre

Either you're the villain or the victim. Those are the only roles available.

—Brutus, *Dirty Story*

Dirty Story begins in a Manhattan park where Wanda, an aspiring young writer with no home, seeks the guidance of her literary idol, Brutus, a rich, brilliant but blocked novelist. Their initial interaction is rocky; he scathingly criticizes her unpublished novel which then turns into a discussion of fiction, storytelling and history. When Brutus invites Wanda to his apartment in Manhattan's meat district, their relationship takes a quirky, savage turn (via viewings of the old movie serial *The Perils of Pauline)* into one of the world's most incendiary conflicts. The focus of the play suddenly expands from the intimate to the international and becomes a hilarious, satirical and gut-punching allegory.■

Even conflict requires common ground.

– Brutus, *Dirty Story*

The Playwright

A New York playwright, John Patrick Shanley earned almost overnight recognition with his play *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea* in 1984. The Bronx-raised author began his career while still in elementary school, writing poems at age 11 and winning a statewide essay competition the following year. After interrupting his college education with a tour of duty in the Marines, Shanley obtained a degree in educational theatre. By age 26, while supporting himself as a bartender, he began writing what became his first hit. In the 1980s, Shanley found outlets for his stage work, which often revolved around working-class ethnic concerns, in both Los Angeles (where he also became involved in screenwriting) and New York. With 1986's *Women of Manhattan*, he inaugurated an association with the off-Broadway not-for-profit Manhattan Theatre Club, which went on to present *Italian American Reconciliation* (1987) and his Hollywood satire *Four Dogs and a Bone* (1993). In 2001, the playwright veered into a slightly different direction with *Cellini* (which he also staged), an ambitious if flawed portrait of a creative genius.

Shanley made his Hollywood reputation with *Moonstruck* (1987), a romantic comedy set in Brooklyn's Italian-American community. The film won three Oscars (including one for Best Original Screenplay) and was a huge box-office success. His subsequent film efforts—notably his script for the crime thriller *The January Man* (1989) and his directorial debut with *Joe Versus the Volcano* (1989)—were less successful.

In a *New York Times* article about the prevalence of political theatre (March 14, 2003), Mr. Shanley said, "Something's going on that needs to be addressed in our government and in the world... Everything has political overtones, whether you like it or not. There's no other kind of play I could write right now. I can't write about how my mother wasn't nice to me right now."[1] The result was *Dirty Story*.■

Allegory

In literature an allegory is a story with characters disguised to serve as representations for meanings other than those indicated on the surface. Sometimes the characters have no individual personalities but are embodiments of moral qualities or religious problems. A great variety of literary forms have been used for allegories. For example, the medieval morality play *Everyman* personifies such abstractions as Fellowship and Good Deeds as it recounts the death journey of the character Everyman. John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress,* a prose narrative, is an allegory of man's spiritual salvation. The main character, Christian, struggles to escape from a bog or swamp, a symbol of life's hardships and distractions. Many modern literary masterpieces are allegorical, including Dante's *Divine Comedy,* Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth.* ■

The Perils of Pauline

> **Pauline saw a world that contained only people like her. Reflections that wanted what she wanted, believed what she believed. Her peril and her strength was the same.**
>
> *–Dirty Story*

The Perils of Pauline was a black and white film serial of 20 episodes produced in 1914. It was made at Pathé-Eclectic Film Company and distributed by General Film Company. George B. Seitz, Bertram Millhauser and Charles W. Goddard wrote the scenarios and cinematography was by Arthur C. Miller and Harry Wood. Seven of the episodes have been preserved including "The Aerial Wire" and "The Deadly Turning," the others are presumed lost.

The serials or chapter plays were simple in concept. Pauline (played by Pearl White) was a young girl who wanted to be a successful writer. Her boyfriend, Harry Marvin, (acted by Crane Wilbur) wanted to marry her, but she resisted his proposal until she had spent a year pursuing her dream. After her foster father died in the first episode, Pauline inherited half of his estate and the other half went to his secretary, Owen, later renamed Koerner (portrayed by Paul Panzer). Owen/Koerner hoped to get his hands upon the entire fortune by discrediting Harry and doing away with Pauline. And so it went, week after week, for 20 episodes while Pauline fought pirates, Indians, gypsies, rats, sharks and being tied to railroad tracks with a rapidly approaching train. All this travail to avoid the attempts on her life by her evil, dastardly guardian.

The headliners of these early silent serials were primarily pretty young women. Although naive and trusting, they proved brave and rugged by undergoing their trials and overcoming them. These serial queens were proof, as reported by men of science and medicine, "that females are actually better suited for strain and hardship than men." 1. Only in the last chapter of the serial did Pauline discover the evil nature of Koerner, and with the help of Harry, defeated him, leaving the two virtuous characters free to marry. Thus, in 1915, ended *The Perils of Pauline*.■

> **Put the girl in danger.[2]**
>
> **—Louis Gasnier, director and head of Pathé Studios in the United States.**

The Meat District

From colonial times the development of New York City was heavily influenced by shortages of land and housing that led city and state governments to encourage aggressive investment and private development. As population increased, far-sighted developers turned to areas that were once considered uninhabitable for human use.

Meat was produced for local consumption in Manhattan by the earliest of settlers. Independent butchers bought animals from outlying stockyards and brought them to slaughter in the city, where they had access to "baulks," spaces in slaughterhouses containing a hoist, a table and gutters. Slaughterhouses were poorly lit and ventilated and impossible to clean thoroughly because they were built of wood. The result was an ever-powerful and lingering stench and streets filled with animal waste. In 1650 the first measures regulating slaughterhouses were passed.

There were many "meatpacking districts" in the city, including Pearl Street, north of Wall Street (1676); Roosevelt and Water Street (1720); the Bowery near the Bull's Head Tavern (1850), and First Avenue from 42nd to 45th streets, which was cleared for the United Nations site in the late 1940s.

About 1902 a group of retail butchers orga- nized the New York Butchers' Dressed Meat Company to compete with the large Midwestern meatpackers that dominated the market. An *abattoir* (slaughterhouse) was built at West 39th Street and 11th Avenue by the company according to scientific standards of sanitation and efficiency. Opening in 1905, it was called "the model *abattoir* of the world" after an uproar was prompted by the publica- tion of *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair's novel about abuses in the meatpacking industry. Over the years, the plants were fireproofed and had their own stockyards, power stations, rendering houses, transportation links and cold storage facilities.

Slaughtering was finally banned in the city in 1960 and meat dealers subsequently moved to Hunt's Point in the Bronx. Developers con- verted the area into apartment buildings and lofts. Brutus, aptly, lives in this neighborhood because his name means "heavy chops."■

A Brief History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict

> No two historians ever agree on what happened, and the damn thing is that they both think they're telling the truth.
>
> –Harry S. Truman

History and different perceptions of history are perhaps the most important factors in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Historical accounts and their interpretations are used to justify or negate claims, to vilify one side or glorify the other. This very brief account is intended as a balanced and fair view of Palestinian and Israeli history and the present situation.

The land variously called Israel and Palestine has been settled continuously for tens of thousands of years. Fossil remains have been found of *homo erectus*, Neanderthal and transitional types between Neanderthal and modern man. Archeologists have found hybrid wheat at Jericho dating from 8000 BC, making it one of the oldest sites of agricultural activity in the world. Amorites, Canaanites and other Semitic peoples related to the Phoenicians entered the area about 2000 BC and the region became known as the Land of Canaan.

The archeological record indicates that the Jewish people evolved out of native Canaanite peoples and invading tribes. Some time between 1800 and 1500 BC, it is thought that a Semitic people called Hebrews (*hapiru*) left Mesopotamia and settled in Canaan. According to the Bible, Moses led the Israelites, or a portion of them, out of Egypt. Under Joshua they conquered the tribes and city states of Canaan; under David they captured Jerusalem about 1000 BC and established an Israelite kingdom. The kingdom was divided into Judea in the South and Israel in the North after the death of Solomon, David's son. Jerusalem remained the center of Jewish sovereignty and worship in the subsequent period up to 133 AD.

Up to that time, Israel had been conquered by the Assyrians (722 BC), the Babylonians (586 BC), the Persians (530 BC) and the Seleucids (200 BC). In 167 BC, the Jews revolted under the leadership of the Maccabeans, drove out the Seleucids and formed a kingdom with its capital in Jerusalem. They were allowed to exist under a Roman protectorate until 61 BC, when Roman troops under Pompeii invaded Judea and sacked Jerusalem. In 135 AD the Romans drove the Jews out of Jerusalem and named the area *Palaestina* (Palestine), a term derived from the Greek historian Herodotus who called the southern part of Syria *Palaestine Syria*, meaning Philistine Syria. The Roman Empire governed until the fourth century (AD 300s) and then by the Byzantines (the eastern part of the later Roman Empire).

In the seventh century (AD 600s), Muslim Arab armies moved north from Arabia to conquer most of the Middle East including Palestine. Muslim powers controlled the region until the early 1900s, allowing Christians and Jews to keep their religions. However, most of the local population accepted Islam and the culture of their rulers. Jerusalem became holy to Muslims as the site where, according to tradition, the prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven after a miraculous overnight ride on his horse Al-Buraq. The Al-Aqsa mosque was built on the site historians regard as the area of the Jewish temples.

In the 11th century, the Christian crusaders from Europe allied themselves with the Fatamids of Egypt and captured Jerusalem, Jaffa, and other parts of Palestine. After breaking the alliance with the Fatamids, they slaughtered all the Jews and Muslims. The Crusaders held Jerusalem until 1187, when the Muslim ruler Saladin attacked Palestine and took back the holy city. Repeatedly, the Crusaders broke treaties with Saladin and tried to recapture Jerusalem until they were finally evicted by Muslim forces in 1291.

In the mid-1200s, Mamelukes, originally soldier-slaves of the Arabs, established their empire in Palestine and, by the late 1300s, Jews from Spain and other Mediterranean regions settled in the land. The Ottoman Empire of Turkey defeated the Mamelukes in 1517 and Palestine became part of the empire. The Turkish Sultan invited Jews fleeing the Catholic inquisition to settle in their lands, including several cities in Palestine.

Napoleon's invasion in 1798 and subsequent mismanagement by Ottoman rulers reduced the population of Palestine. Revolts by Palestinian Arabs against the Turks may have helped to catalyze Palestinian national feeling. Some reorganization and opening of the Turkish Empire to foreigners restored a kind of order and allowed the beginnings of a few Jewish settlements. By 1880, about 24,000 Jews were living in Palestine, out of a population of nearly 400,000.

In the 19th century, the emancipation of Jews in Europe and nationalist ideas blended with the rise of Zionism. The tradition of living in the land of the Jews and returning to Zion were more than messianic aspirations for the Sephardic (Spanish) and Eastern Jewish communities of Europe; they were practical goals for a people who still spoke and read Hebrew. These ideas took root chiefly among a few European Jews, and when oppression began again in the late 1800s in Eastern Europe, many Jews emigrated to Palestine. The Zionist movement became a formal organization in 1897, with the first Zionist congress in Basle, Switzerland, organized by Theodore Herzl; their objective was to establish a Jewish Homeland in Palestine under Turkish or German rule.

They paid scant attention to the Arab population already living there whom they believed would agree to transfer to other Arab countries; also, being mostly from Eastern Europe, had little sensitivity to Arab culture. Even though some Jewish settlers purchased land from absentee Arab owners, the peasants who cultivated it refused to leave. Despite disputes and altercations, the Zionists established farm

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communities in Palestine at Petah, Tikva, Zichron, among others, and built the new city of Tel Aviv. Although there was significant Jewish emigration, the population of Palestine in 1914 was 615,000 Arabs and about 100,000 Jews.

During World War I (1914-1918), the Ottoman Empire joined Germany and Austria-Hungary against the Allies. The war was difficult for both the Jewish and Arab populations owing to outbreaks of cholera and typhus. In 1916 Great Britain and France planned to divide the Ottoman holdings in the Middle East with parts of Palestine to be under British rule, a part to be placed under a joint Allied government, and Syria and Lebanon to go to France. However, Britain also offered to back Arab demands for postwar independence from the Ottomans in return for Arab support for the Allies. But they seemed to have made the same promise to the Jews.

In 1917 Great Britain issued the Balfour Declaration that stated Britain's support for the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine, without violating the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities. The Arabs opposed the idea of a Jewish homeland for they considered Palestine their home. Nevertheless, in 1920, Britain received a provisional mandate over Palestine that would extend west and east of the River Jordan; the British were to help the Jews build a national home and promote the creation of self-governing institutions for both Arabs and Jews. However, the Arabs would not accept proposals for such institutions if they included any Jews, so no institutions were created. As Sir Ormsby-Gore, under-secretary of state for the colonies, concluded, "Palestine is largely inhabited by unreasonable people."[1]

Arab nationalists, opposed to the Balfour Declaration, instigated riots and pogroms led by Haj Amin El-Husseini, later Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, and Arif El-Arif, a prominent Palestinian journalist.

Despite the upheaval, Jewish immigration swelled in the 1930s, driven by the persecution of Jews in Eastern Europe, even before the rise of Nazism. In 1936 widespread rioting, later known as the Arab Revolt, broke out. The uprising was led by the Husseini family and apparently financed by Nazi Germany. Hundreds of Arabs and Jews were killed in the violence, which spread rapidly because of the lack of preparation by the British authorities. In response to the riots, in 1939 the British began limiting Jewish immigration into Palestine to 15,000 persons a year for the next five years.

After World War II (1939-1945), the discovery that the Germans had murdered six million Jews in Europe in the Holocaust stunned the world. The victims had been trapped there because virtually no country would give them shelter and the British restriction on immigration had cost thousands of lives. World Jewry was now desperate to bring the remaining Jews of Europe, about 250,000 in displaced persons camps, to Palestine.

The United States and other countries brought pressure to bear on the British to allow immigration, while the Arabs wanted to block such action. In the meantime, Zionist underground groups, the Irgun and the Stern gang, used force to drive the British out of

Palestine. As a result, the British threw up their hands and returned the mandate to the United Nations (UN).

The United Nations Special Commission on Palestine (UNSCOP) recommended that Palestine be divided into an Arab state and a Jewish one, but the Arabs rejected it. The result was a siege of hostilities by the Arabs that went on during 1947. But by April 1948, the tide turned and the Jewish forces gained the upper hand. On May 14, 1948, the Jews proclaimed the independent State of Israel and the British withdrew from Palestine. One month later neighboring Arab nations invaded Palestine and Israel. The War for Independence (The 1948 War) was fought in several pieces, punctuated by cease-fire agreements imposed by the UN.

When the fighting ended in 1949, Israel held territories beyond the boundaries set by the UN plan—a total of 78% of the area west of the Jordan River. As a result, about 726,000 Arabs fled or were driven out of Israel and became refugees in neighboring countries. Because Arab states refused to recognize Israel, the Israeli government refused to read-mit more than a small number of refugees. Thus, began a series of wars that have escalated the conflict and solved nothing.

The Sinai campaign of 1954 and the 1967 Six-Day War expanded Israel's territories; the occupation of the Sinai Palestinian Desert, the Golan Heights and the West Bank squeezed Palestinian Arabs into tiny settlements. In addition, these disastrous defeats of the Arabs contributed to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and brought about a million Palestinians under Israeli rule. Despite UN sanctions, Oslo agreements, the Intifada, United States support and Camp David accords, Road Maps to Peace, the creation of defense fences, the bull-dozing of settlements and the building of others, suicide bombers and Aqaba summits, there is no peace in the Middle East. The conflict has been raging unabated for generations and no workable solution appears imminent.

David Hare's play *Via Dolorosa* is an account of the playwright's visit to Israel and his interviews with both Arabs and Jews. In one scene he visits Albert Aghazerin, a renowned Palestinian historian, and the two discuss the problems in Israel. Aghazerin quotes a parable. "Israel has its hand round our throat. It can't throttle us, nor can it let us go. Israel's unhappy because he wants to go for a beer, and we (the Palestinians) are unhappy because we're being strangled, but in some terrible way, we're both bound up in each other's unhappiness. We cannot be separated."[2] On the other hand, Hare's conversation with David Grossman, an Israeli novelist, produced this reaction. "What you call the major problems of Israel can one day be solved. There will be a Palestinian state... Now in their hearts, the Israelis know it will happen. There are huge issues. But they are essentially soluble."[3]

> **The past isn't dead; it isn't even past.**
>
> **– William Faulkner**

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