PRODUCED BY THE MARKETING DEPARTMENT OF THE DENVER CENTER THEATRE COMPANY

MARCH 2005

## The Madwoman

Mar 24 - Apr 30 • Space Theatre

RAGPICKER: Countess, little by little, the pimps have taken over the world. They don't do anything, they don't make anything – they just stand there and take their cut.

– The Madwoman

here is a conspiracy against the heart of New York City. A group of financiers, CEO's, brokers, senators and other nefarious characters suspect oil lies beneath the Manhattan terra firma and will not hesitate to destroy the Big Apple to exploit it. But they find formidable opposition in the poor and homeless, led by Countess Aurelia, the Madwoman of Tribeca. Commentaries about materialism, the disparity between the haves and have-nots, and the greed of those in power lie beneath the humor and whimsical satire.

COUNTESS: And you see how simple it all was? Nothing is ever so wrong in this world that a sensible woman can't set it right in the course of an afternoon.

-The Madwoman

(ahtleen M. Brady . Photo by Terry Shapiro

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# The Playwright

Tean Giraudoux was born on October 29, 1882 in the village of Bellac, a small town of fewer than 5,000 inhabitants in the province of Limousin. For Giraudoux, Bellac was "the most beautiful town in the world." Both town and province strongly influenced his personality and his works, for he was interested in nature, ecology and the preservation of all things beautiful.

After attending local elementary schools, he was so intelligent he received a scholarship to the Lycée of Châteauroux which Giraudoux called "the ugliest city in France." He was aloof and lonely, but he found in his studies a rich compensation. His moral idealism, rationalism and rigid intellectual discipline were molded by his teachers there.

In 1903, he passed the examination to attend the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. There he specialized in German literature and traveled through Belgium, Holland, Germany and finally settled in Munich. He was captivated by the charm of old Germany, but seemed to ignore modern Germany with its stern discipline and technological expertise.

In 1907, through the help of influential friends, he came to Harvard University as an exchange student. Fascinated by the aspects of this immense and infinitely varied country, Giraudoux returned to Paris with a new refinement, a new wardrobe and new social graces. But he needed to make a living. He was 27 years old and decided to enter the French diplomatic school. After graduation, he was assigned to the Political Bureau of the Foreign Ministry, but found the work so tedious that he had little time to write short stories and enjoy the delights of Paris. With the aid of a

close friend, Philippe Berthelot, he was promoted to Vice Consul of the Foreign Ministry in 1913.

A year later, Giraudoux became involved in World War I. At the battle of Marne, he was wounded and spent much time in military hospitals because his injuries were complicated by an intestinal ailment. He was not discharged by the Army, but with Berthelot's protection, joined a mission of French military instructors to Harvard in 1917. He was received with open arms by Boston society who appreciated a wounded officer, a dashing diplomat and a writer to boot.

Back in France after the war, he met a beautiful young woman, Suzanne Boland, whom he married in 1918. They had a son, Jean Pierre, in 1919 and Giraudoux, now head of a family, pursued his diplomatic career in earnest. In 1919 he produced a series of novels. With his friend Berthelot at his side, he penetrated exclusive circles of old French nobility. Despite all his successes, he found his world changing.

The political situation in Europe began to deteriorate with the Nazi party's progress East of the Rhine and the French became seriously alarmed. Giraudoux had tried to explain the German moods in his novel, *Siegfried et le Limousin*, in 1922, but the French were not interested. In 1928 Louis Jouvet, a producer and actor with a keen understanding of the French public, urged Giraudoux to give him a stage version of his work. The result was the play *Siegfried* which succeeded beyond all expectations. From then on, he dedicated his energies to the stage.

During World War II he did not join any

#### CONTINUED

Resistance movement, but accumulated enormous documentation on the abuses and crimes committed by the German occupation troops in France. Because of a deteriorating marriage and poor health, he spent most of his time at his retreat at Cusset. He died on January 21, 1944, "in the throes of torturing internal pains at the age of 61."

His fame rests on such plays as Amphitryon 38 (1929); Judith (1931); Tiger at the Gates (1935); Ondine (1939) and The Madwoman of Chaillot (1945). His best known novels are My Friend from Limousin (1922) and Bella (1926). He also wrote numerous short stories and essays, among them, Racine (1930) and Full Powers (1939). Giraudoux's dramatic and narrative style was a rich blend of allusive prose, allegory, fantasy, and political and psychological perceptions.

# AHistory of the Homeless in New York City

"And homeless near a thousand homes I stood,
And near a thousand tables
pined and wanted food."
William Wordsworth (1770-1850)
Guilt and Sorrow

he problem of homelessness in New York City existed long before the present century. Provisions for the homeless began in 1734 when the city and a number of churches erected a "house of correction, workhouse and poorhouse and the residents were referred to as 'family.'" Before 1859 the police regularly put up the unsheltered; each precinct was required to designate one station house to lodge vagrants. These informal arrangements offered part-time shelter if the inhabitants agreed to behave themselves. With each economic downturn, the number of homeless increased and the Department of Charities and Corrections was overwhelmed by those seeking shelter.

They opened lodging houses, which did little to ease the problem; instead the management devoted more time to the discipline of the "disreputable poor."<sup>2</sup>

In the years after the Civil War, a host of evangelical rescue missions opened their doors and distributed food, fuel and clothing to the desperately poor. In 1886, the state legislature passed the Municipal Lodging House Act, which empowered the city to open shelters for homeless men, but excluded women and

children. Other charities organized shelters where the guests paid for their stay by chopping wood and doing other outdoor chores.

In 1896 Police Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt closed the station houses, largely at the urging of reformer Jacob A. Riis. No alternative facility was available, so thousands of homeless were left without shelter until a barge, moored in the East River, refurbished for their use. In 1909 the first Municipal Lodging House opened on East 25th Street; it had the latest "amenities" including 1,000 beds and a separate dormitory for women and children. But from the start, the House was inadequate to the demand and many of the homeless resorted to living in parks, saloons, waiting rooms and under bridges. In addition, the Municipal Lodging House suffered from corrupt finanpractices imposed by Tammany Hall, a political machine founded in 1886.

During the Depression years (1929-1939) extraordinary measures were taken. Two enormous annexes with nearly 4,000 beds opened in 1930-1932; in 1935 separate provisions were made for women and two work camps were opened north of the city. By June of that year "nearly 21,000 persons were sheltered nightly by the city, more than ever before." The number of homeless dropped during World War II as workers were recruited to help the war effort.

During the 1960s the census of homeless rose slightly. Poor, elderly men congregated along the Bowery, while 8,000 lived in cheap lodgings supporting themselves with pensions, panhandling, unloading trucks or washing

windshields.

For the most part, shelter was not a problem during this decade.

Despite optimistic predictions of its demise, visible homelessness increased in the 1970s. As neighborhoods were revitalized, flophouses disappeared and affordable housing for the poor became scarce, especially after the loss of about 100,000 low-cost units in single room occupancy hotels (SROs). In addition, thousands of mentally ill were discharged from institutions, some without provisions for housing and unused to living on their own. In October 1979, the case of Callahan v. Carey was brought against the city and state of New York by Robert Hays, a young Wall Street attorney, on behalf of three homeless plaintiffs. The suit charged the city and state for "violations of constitutional and statutory obligations for the indigent needy."4 After a preliminary hearing by the New York State Supreme Court, new facilities were added, because the city was ordered to provide all eligible applicants with adequate shelter. This ruling became the basis of many legal disputes between city government and advocates for the homeless about the definition of "adequate shelter."

The problems only increased during the 1980s, with the number of homeless families growing steadily. Pressured by the courts, a vocal advocacy movement, and the threatened loss of federal funds, Mayor Edward Koch expedited the renovation of tax-foreclosed properties for use by the homeless families; about 20,000 units were reclaimed in this way between 1987 and 1991. The program was later diluted under Mayor David Dinkins, longtime critic of a shelter-based policy for the homeless.

The problems have only worsened in the decade of the 1990s and early 2000. During 2002, the number of homeless New Yorkers residing in shelters each night has reached

the highest point in the city's history. In September 2002, some 36,000 homeless were sleeping in shelters including 15,400 children, 12,800 adult family members and 8,500 single adults. Thousands more slept on city streets, park benches and subways. Since 1998, the New York City homeless shelter population has increased 74%. Through 1987-1995, 333,482 different homeless people utilized the municipal shelter system in New York City; this represents nearly one of every 20 city residents. The tragedy of this situation is that permanent housing for homeless families and individuals costs less than shelter emergency care. The cost of sheltering a homeless family in New York City's shelter system is \$36,000 a year, while the cost for an individual is \$23,000 per year. In contrast, a supportive housing apartment, with services, costs as little as \$12,500 annually for a family, while rental assistance with support services for an individual costs as little as \$8,900 a year.

If you have built castles in the air, that is where they should be

Now put the foundations under them.

—Henry David Thoreau

# Countess Aurelia as a Social Reformer

COUNTESS: If those men are the cause of the trouble, all we have to do is get rid of them.

—The Madwoman

In *The Madwoman* those responsible for humanity's problem are all men. That is the opinion of Countess Aurelia and Victoria B. Korzeniowska, author of *The Heroine as Social Redeemer in the Plays of Jean Giraudoux*. The play portrays the masculine as aggressive and destructive while the feminine are cooperative and desirous of social harmony. Giraudoux himself said in 1934: "Woman lives in the present; she has a taste for quick solutions and immediate retribution. The natural horror she has of suffering and injustice leads her to meet daily problems with quick solutions..."

The Countess believes in "quick solutions and immediate retributions," because her plans are to exterminate the corrupt members of society. But she does not entirely reject men, "for her coquettishness, her obsession with her missing feather boa and love of jewels and clothes single her out as strongly attached to male stereotypes of femininity."2 She exploits the advantage of womanhood and the logic of madness to have a fresh perspective on the problems of society. In addition, she is clearly an outsider who is not really aware of what's going on in the world. When the Ragpicker tells her of the plot to drill for oil, she is outraged that nothing has been done to stop them. Her "nonconformity" extends to her own moral code. Her world-view is that the forces of evil must be overcome by the forces

of good, meaning the ordinary people. In her "madwoman" status, she is able to plot mass murder without a guilty conscience.

Furthermore, Aurelia has extraordinary powers. She is a leader; her fellow citizens look to her to stop the "pimps" and, once nominated as director, she assumes the role.

She not only plans the extermination of the evil doers, but proposes an alternative program which will transform the world. This vision incorporates an appreciation of ecology, diversity and a desire "to respect the rights of all creatures and natural vegetation." Man is supposed to be the guardian of Earth, but he often attempts to dominate his environment; Aurelia, on the other hand, has a close attachment to nature and, in her daily walks, perceives all that is a threat to it.

Environmental issues are not the only concerns Aurelia addresses. Her vision of a transformed society includes an aggressive promotion of love—as that between Irma and Pierre. She wants to preserve tradition; her insistence on working in tandem with nature is an act of nostalgia. But it is also a "prophecy of developments in feminism later on in the 20th century."<sup>4</sup>

Aurelia does not think her actions are particularly exceptional and says that any sensible woman can correct society's mistakes in one afternoon. Though she is an aging and "mad" woman, she exhibits strengths and qualities not always exhibited by younger people. Her resources are her mind and her feelings for humanity and social redemption. Masculine insufficiencies are seen as the root cause of society's ills, while *The Madwoman* suggests that only women can solve the problems of civilization.

# Tunnel People of the New York City Subway

Behold! Human beings living in an underground den... Like ourselves, they see only their own shadows or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave.

Plato, The Republic

he number of homeless people living in the underground subway tunnels of New York City is not precisely known and estimates are controversial, at best. Transit and welfare authorities prefer to keep their estimates low, in part to reduce the fear of commuters about the potential threat of these tunnel people, in part to dampen criticism of their efforts and their budgets to solve the problem. No census of the underground population has been taken, but a 2002 study done by the New York City Department of Homeless Services indicates that "out of 205 homeless people interviewed, 57 slept in the subway." Some estimate the number at 25,000, but a more realistic count would be 50,000.

City and transit authorities would like to ignore the issue and would prefer it if the media did the same. Their accounts might frighten off riders and give the city a poor image. In fact, the NY-MTA web site insists, "while minor theft and homelessness still abound, the subway is a much better place then was predicted back in the financially

troubled days of the city." Homeless advocacy groups are also reluctant to deal with the underground homeless "... for fear the public will lump all homeless people with the most violent and dangerous of the underground homeless and thereby lose their sympathy and support."

Why do these people go underground? Their reasons include the housing shortage and inadequate welfare services; for safety; for weather; to escape thieves and rapists or escape the law; to find and use drugs and alcohol, and to avoid giving up their children to foster homes. Some, ashamed of their poverty and failure, go to escape from seeing their own reflections in store windows. Some simply fall into the tunnels to deteriorate slowly, out of the way of society. They call themselves outcasts in a world of outcasts.

The New York subway lines wind through 731 miles of New York's five boroughs in tunnels that burrow down 18 stories below ground at 191st Street and Broadway. New York's subways constitute the largest urban railroad system in the world, "with 6,100 cars that carry a quarter of a million pounds of flesh and blood each day."4 Many tunnels house the homeless, but the train tunnels under Grand Central Station contain perhaps the largest collection of squatters. There, in three-quarters of a square mile, 34 miles of track stretch out along seven levels. Police have cleared out as many as 200 people living in a single community, but those evicted went to other tunnels under Penn Station or the Port Authority Bus Terminal. Some went even deeper under Grand Central, down below the

level of subways and trains.

Access to these subway burrows is relatively easy. Thousands of stairways lead into subway stations and hundreds of others serve as emergency exits. Locks were placed on most entrances to prevent entry and only 400 keys were made for Transit Authority personnel, but an entrepreneurial Brooklyn hardware store owner, a short distance from Authority headquarters, sells the key for a dollar. Sometimes, during rush hours, homeless people who live in abandoned side entrances open their "homes" to harassed passengers who drop subway tokens or coins into a Styrofoam cup.

To escape dealing alone with the rats, roaches and rotting sewage stench, many tunnel dwellers belong to a "community." In one, members refer to each other as kin such as brother or sister while another group "adopts" each other to form a family. The community provides them with a sense of physical and psychological security that sets them apart from the mass of homeless walking the street. Everyone watches out for everyone else and tasks are assigned, such as going for water, acquiring food or pooling money together when a sick person needs medicine. One tunnel-dweller says the independence self-sufficiency of living underground makes them "the elite of the New York homeless."5 Some communities say they admit new members only after watching them for a while for drug or alcohol abuse and then discussing their suitability. This procedure contributes to a sense of self-respect.

Despite the company of communities, these groups are not a long-term alternative to society. With daily concerns so important, there is no sense of the future in these associations. The deeper the homeless go into the tunnels, the more isolated they become and the more difficult it is for them to fit back into society at any level. Sam, a trained sociologist and mayor of a tunnel community, has a

theory "that individuals remain stuck at the mental age at which they drop out of society." In other words, a 35-year-old who started drug use at 15 thinks that society only expects of him, what it did he did when he was 15. Those who live underground have failed to see and experience the development and socialization that is considered normal in people who live above ground. Sam also believes that the homeless are products of dysfunctional families who literally push them out at ages five or six.

The homeless are a crisis of our time. The immense gap between the wealthy and the destitute in large cities makes pan-handling so successful that sometimes it is more profitable than a minimum wage job. A great deal of food in city restaurants is thrown out and somehow makes its way to the homeless. In addition, the shortage of low-cost housing makes the tunnels, for some, an accessible and attractive place to live. The New York underground population contains a high proportion of substance abusers and mentally ill. If the state could, once again, institutionalize the mentally ill homeless and curb the access to cheap drugs, the underground population might shrink. The notion that these people are "irretrievable" is disproved by their sharing with, and caring for, each other and their organization of communities. As Bernard, a tunnel-dweller, remarks: "Everyone down here is settled. We have a base and we function together. We don't have to deal with all the despair that goes on in the topside world."

If I was in charge, I'd put up a big sign on the platforms saying, 'C'mon down! Everyone welcome! Come live free—rent-free, tax-free, independent.

-Seville, The Mole People

#### Commentary:

### Divided Countries: France 1945 and America 2005

"Only peril can bring the French together. One can't impose unity out of the blue on a country that has 265 different kinds of cheese."

—Charles André Joseph Marie de Gaulle (1890-1970), leader of the French Resistance in World War II

hen Giraudoux was writing the play, La Folle de Chaillot, France was occupied by the German army. In June of 1940, Paris surrendered to the Nazis without resistance and France became a divided country. The Occupied Zone, administered by German officers, covered threefifths of France, including the northern and western parts and the entire Atlantic coast. This area contained the bulk of the population. The remaining section or Free Zone, was controlled by the Vichy government under the leadership of Marshall Henri-Philippe Petain. Petain had begun negotiations with Hitler as early as April 1940, which led to an armistice with Germany. The Vichy government paid the occupation costs of the German army; reduced the French army to 100,000 men, and impressed the Nazis by persecuting Jews within its jurisdiction. The régime included industrialists, financiers, lawyers, technocrats, some military figures and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church; many justified their collaboration with the enemy on the grounds that it was the only way to preserve the best of French civilization.

Despite the cooperation of some French people with Nazis, many chose to join the Resistance. In the beginning, resistance groups were formed mainly through family friends and professional contacts. Their activities consisted of developing early underground networks, stockpiling arms, clandestine newspapers, formpublishing ing escape chains and sabotaging Nazi installations. By 1942, the smaller organizations united into one, the Mouvement Uni de la *Resistance* or MUR. Thus, the scope of their missions became larger, more cohesive and successful. For example, on May 7, 1944, a resistance group led by Philippe de Vomecourt blew up the railway lines outside a German arms depot near Michenon. The destruction of the camp was a serious setback for the Nazi operations in Normandy because, a month later, 100,000 Allied troops landed on the beaches of Normandy to begin the liberation of France.

When *La Folle de Chaillot* was first performed in Paris in December 1945, France was emerging from the deep, disastrous occupation. They recognized that the divisions in the country had produced profiteering, fraudulent financial practices and illicit black markets. When the war ended, the French suffered "disgust and anger toward those who had taken advantage of the public distress to enrich themselves shamelessly."

continued on next page

Though the United States has not seen an invasion by foreign troops in the 20th century, the country bears some similarity to the divisions in France during World War II. After the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, the nation became one of solidarity "rooted in the emotive experience of shared wounds and generated by a sharp sense of external threat." We had lost the illusion that the US could lead the world with its economic and political power and somehow remain uninvolved. The world had issued us a warning.

However, much of that ritual unity after September 11 was temporary. As the passing of time salved the wounds and the memories, the nation returned to its quarreling. The American election of 2004 "revealed a deep divide in the US that is symptomatic of an even deeper change occurring in American society." The outcome of the popular vote in the presidential election in 2004 (51% to 48%) points to continuing divisions in the American populace. The dominant theme of the election (the war against terrorism and the war in Iraq) obscured the role of social issues that have long plagued this nation.

Peter von Stackelberg in his essay, "America Divided," lists some of the challenges facing the country in 2005. They include:

- a war that is won but a peace which may keep us in Iraq for several more years.
- the "war on terrorism" which will bleed America financially as well as in human terms.
- proliferation of nuclear weapons among foes such as North Korea, Iran and possibly others.
- our deteriorating image abroad and outright hostility in the Muslim countries.
- strained relations with long-standing allies that opposed the war in Iraq.
- record financial deficits.
- an economy still struggling to recover from recession.

In addition, social issues that demand attention are differences in race or ethnicity; religion and its impact upon public policy; women's rights, including abortion; gay and lesbian rights, including gay marriage; Social Security; education; health care; science and stem cell research; civil liberties and economic disparities.

The Madwoman illustrates the separation between the under-privileged and the rich and powerful. During the economic boom of the 1990s, caution was dismissed; financial and managerial operators overlooked regulations, and ethics surrendered to greed as illustrated by the scandals at Enron, WorldCom, Adelphia, etc. Countess Aurelia's solution to these evil-doings is extermination, one we cannot emulate. Can we depend upon our government and courts to prosecute these criminals to the extent they deserve? Will share-holders receive compensation for their losses?

The victors of the 2004 elections campaigned as leaders who would unite the nation, but Americans seem more divided than ever. How these leaders "handle the next four years will determine, in large part, just how turbulent the next quarter century will be."<sup>4</sup>

"We don't just disagree on what America should be doing; we disagree on what America is."

> —Thomas L. Friedman "Two Nations Under God." New York Times. Nov. 4, 2004

## Activities

Please contact the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless at www.coloradocoalition. org for more information and study materials for the classroom. CCH is celebrating 20 years of creating lasting solutions to homelessness in Colorado.

#### Middle School & High School Education Materials

www.nationallhomeless.org/fmn2001/education.html

#### **ACTIVITIES**

- 1. What was happening in the world when Giraudoux wrote the play in 1943-44?
- 2. In the play, the CEOs and financiers are "the bad guys." Find examples of corporate leaders and company directors who provide benefits for a community.
- 3. Research the problem of homelessness in Denver and/or your community. How does this problem affect you? What is being done to alleviate the situation or, at least, make life more comfortable for these individuals?
- 4. The term "adequate shelter" has been a source of legal disputes in New York courts. If you were a lawyer, plead a case for a homeless family and enumerate the conditions necessary for "adequate shelter."

- 5. Countess Aurelia makes society aware of a social problem by extreme measures. Research some women who have made us aware of social/ecological/legal issues. Your examples could include Wangari Maathai (winner of this year's Nobel Peace Prize); Rachel Carson, Betty Friedan, Eleanor Roosevelt, Coretta Scott King, etc.
- 6. Imagine you are a homeless person. Keep a daily journal for a week in which you tell how you obtained food; where you slept; where you went to the bathroom, how people treated you, etc.
- 7. Go to a real estate website and research the prices of homes in the Denver area. Find the priciest house and the cheapest one. Compare the size, location, amenities, etc. for each one. If affordable housing is limited in this area, will companies want to locate here? Why or why not?

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pgs. 2-3

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pg. 4-5

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pgs. 6

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pg. 9-10

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