



HONEY BROWN EYES

BY STEFANIE ZADRAVEC



★
DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



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HONEY BROWN EYES premiered in Washington, D.C. in October 2008 at Theater J (Ari Roth, Artistic Director). It was directed by Jessica Lefkow; the scenic design was by James Kronzer; the costume design was by Misha Kachman; the lighting design was by James Arnold; the sound design was by Matt Nielson; and the production stage manager was Karen Currie. The cast was as follows:

ALMA..... Maia Desanti
DRAGAN..... Alexander Strain
ZLATA..... Taylor Dawson
DENIS..... Joel Rubin Ganz
JOVANKA..... Barbara Rappaport
BRANKO Grady Weatherford
MILENKO Shane Wallis

HONEY BROWN EYES was first produced in New York City by the Working Theater (Mark Plesent, Producing Artistic Director), premiering on January 20, 2011. It was directed by Erica Schmidt; the set design was by Laura Jellinek; the costume design was by Emily Rebholz; the lighting design was by Jeff Croiter; and the sound design was by Bart Fasbender. The cast was as follows:

ALMA..... Sue Cremin
DRAGAN..... Edoardo Ballerini
ZLATA..... Beatrice Miller
DENIS..... Daniel Serafini-Sauli
JOVANKA..... Kate Skinner
BRANKO/MILENKO Gene Gillette

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

What might it be like to suddenly find yourself swept up in a war, trapped in your home with no idea what to say or who to trust? One cannot afford to stop and ponder the atrocities; one cannot let emotion take over. For the characters in this play, sorrow is covered over by fear, which gets buried beneath outrage, shoved aside for hunger, then stifled by the exhaustion of simply trying to survive day-to-day, moment-to-moment. Conversely, a simple, forgotten pleasure — the warm smell of an onion cooking on the stove or hearing a song you used to play on your guitar — unlocks a flood of feeling, along with a remembrance of who you once were, how you lived, and what you once dreamed about. If every detail and moment of this play is laden with an outpouring of emotion, melodrama will obscure the deeper exploration of the two selves: who we were before the war and who we are now. Therefore, it will serve the actor to cry or scream only where specifically noted in the script.

LANGUAGE AND STAGING

In this play, the silences are as important as the dialogue. Together with the sound effects, they create an overall disjointed rhythm that is an integral part of this story of life interrupted. Each silence should be observed and held a few seconds longer than is comfortable. Each silence is filled with all the things the characters wish they could say in the moment but can't.

The use of a slash (/) at the beginning or in the middle of a line of dialogue indicates that the next line of dialogue begins at that moment, creating verbal overlap.

A sentence ending with ellipses (...) indicates the speaker has trailed off. A sentence ending with a dash (—) indicates that the speaker is cut off mid-sentence.

The play was written to be performed in an American vernacular without accents, except for Jovanka, whose lines fall into a kind of old-world rhythm. Whatever the choice, it should be subtle and uniform.

The use of foreign language text among characters who are otherwise speaking English should be treated like slang. The audience will not likely know that *bàlija* is a slang term for a Bosnian Muslim, but the actor can deliver it with the offhanded disgust you would any language of this kind.

The play was designed to use one playing space if possible. The empty kitchen in Višegrad can be altered to represent the cluttered Sarajevo kitchen at the top of Act Two. By adding a new dimension to the playing space, the action in the two apartments can blend together by having the actors in each city follow separate floor plans in the same space.

A NOTE ON SOUND

Television sounds (laughter, dialogue, applause) should play lightly beneath the scene whenever the television is on. The stage direction (*Sound: Laugh track.*) indicates a separate sound cue meant to punctuate the action or the silence onstage.

A NOTE ON MUSIC AND TELEVISION

Anywhere that music should be played, thorough research should be done to ensure accuracy. Likewise with any television shows that are used. Rights to whatever songs and programs are selected will need to be obtained before using them in production.

CHARACTERS

ALMA — 30s. Female. Brown hair, brown eyes, thin.
(Bosnian-Muslim)

DRAGAN — 20s. A soldier with the White Eagle
Paramilitary. (Bosnian-Serb)

ZLATA — 12 years old. Alma's daughter. Looks like
Alma, brown hair, brown eyes.

DENIS — Late 20s. Alma's brother. Tall, sensitive.
(Bosnian-Muslim)

JOVANKA — 60s+. Petite, tough, resilient,
unsentimental. (Bosnian-Serb)

BRANKO — 30s. A soldier with the White Eagle Paramilitary.
Branko is physically large and/or imposing. Bigger than
Dragan. (Bosnian-Serb)

MILENKO — 30s. Local mafia, a snake. (Bosnian-Serb)

The roles of Branko and Milenko may be played by the same actor.

PLACE

Bosnia.

TIME

June 1992.

Act One — A kitchen in an apartment in Višegrad, Bosnia.

Act Two — A kitchen in Sarajevo and the kitchen in Višegrad.

The play takes place in one day and night.

HONEY BROWN EYES

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Višegrad. June 1992. Day.

Music: 1980s Serbian punk music.

Sound: Commotion in the street and from the hallway. Sporadic shouting and screams as doors are being kicked in and people are taken from their homes. Or shot. Then silence.

Lights up on a small, bare kitchen. The door has been forced open.

Dragan carries an assault rifle and keeps a handgun tucked in his belt. He wears military pants and boots and a t-shirt depicting the cover art for Dum Dum, the album by the Serbian New Wave band Ekatarina Velika. He works to steady his hand as he aims his weapon at Alma, who stands holding a hot džezva, a Turkish coffee pot with a long handle, which she was just about to pour.

Alma and Dragan stare at each other, frozen. Neither dares to move.

On the kitchen table sits a small, battery-operated television, which plays a rerun of an American sitcom. We hear its laugh track and light chatter throughout the scene.

A long silence.

Sound: Laugh track.

Silence.

ALMA. Coffee?

DRAGAN. What?

ALMA. Coffee. *(Beat.)* Would you like some?

Silence.

I just made it.

DRAGAN. So?

ALMA. It's fresh.

Silence.

Sound: Laugh track.

I'll pour it out then.

Alma slowly turns towards the direction of her sink.

DRAGAN. *Leave it.*

ALMA. Okay.

Alma places the pot on the table and steps back. They stare at each other.

I just made it.

DRAGAN. You said that already. *(Beat.)* I need a cup.

Sound: Laugh track.

Alma carefully retrieves a cup and places it on the table. Dragan pours himself coffee. He lifts the lid to the sugar bowl, then turns the whole thing upside down.

ALMA. There's no more.

DRAGAN. I see that.

ALMA. I used the last of it.

DRAGAN. *(Blowing on his coffee.)* Uh-huh.

ALMA. The last of it.

DRAGAN. You said.

ALMA. Yesterday the bread.

DRAGAN. Who else is here?

ALMA. Nothing.

DRAGAN. What?

ALMA. No. No one.

Dragan sips the coffee and burns himself.

DRAGAN. God! Whatthefuckareyoutryingtodo?! It's / scalding fucking hot. God. Fuck. God.

ALMA. I said I just made it — sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Silence.

Sound: Laugh track.

I'm sorry.

DRAGAN. (*Tossing the coffee in his cup towards Alma.*) Burned my fucking tongue.

ALMA. Sorry.

DRAGAN. Fuck.

ALMA. I don't have any bread —

DRAGAN. What?

ALMA. Bread. If you burn your tongue, you can eat a piece of bread. It helps to —

DRAGAN. I didn't burn my tongue.

Sound: Someone being dragged from another apartment in the building.

Sound: Laugh track.

Get your stuff.

ALMA. What?

DRAGAN. Pack your fucking — wait, who's here? Who else lives here?

ALMA. No one.

DRAGAN. *No one?* Do *you* live here?

ALMA. Yes.

DRAGAN. What about your husband?

Alma doesn't answer.

Huh?

ALMA. He ... isn't here.

DRAGAN. (*Looks around.*) You sure about that?

ALMA. Yes.

DRAGAN. Yeah?

ALMA. Why?

DRAGAN. *Why?*

ALMA. He isn't here.

DRAGAN. You're sure about that.

ALMA. Yes. Why do you keep saying that? He isn't —

DRAGAN. Where is he?

ALMA. Yes. That. He isn't here.

DRAGAN. What happened? He get tired of you?

ALMA. No.

DRAGAN. Tired of looking at you?

ALMA. No.

DRAGAN. How do you know?

ALMA. Because I'm telling you / the truth.

DRAGAN. *Huh?! A husband doesn't always tell his wife —*

ALMA. I'm telling you, I don't know.

DRAGAN. You don't know what you're telling me?

ALMA. No. I. *Why* are you —

DRAGAN. What?

ALMA. I mean. What I meant to say, you have to trust / what I'm telling you. I have no reason —

DRAGAN. SHUT UP — SHUT UP — SHUT UP!

Silence.

Sound: Laugh track.

Now tell me where your husband is.

ALMA. He's ...

DRAGAN. What.

ALMA. Gone.

DRAGAN. *(Making the sound of a game show buzzer when you get the wrong answer.) Eh.*

ALMA. I have no reason to lie to you.

DRAGAN. Sure you do.

Dragan checks the room offstage and returns.

Where is he? Really.

ALMA. I told you.

DRAGAN. Actually you didn't.

ALMA. I said —

DRAGAN. In fact, you haven't been very helpful at all.

ALMA. I. *(Beat.)* May I ask a question?

DRAGAN. No. You don't get to ask questions.

A long silence.

Sound: Laugh track.

What?

ALMA. Are you a soldier?

DRAGAN. What fucking question is that? Are you fucking / retarded?

ALMA. Your shirt —

DRAGAN. What about my fucking shirt?

ALMA. It isn't regulation.

DRAGAN. How do you know what is and isn't regulation? Huh?
You like to fuck soldiers?

ALMA. No.

DRAGAN. You like to fuck soldiers and wear their shirts?

ALMA. No.

DRAGAN. You wanna fuck a soldier right now? (*He moves in, in an aggressive, sexual way.*)

ALMA. (*Quietly.*) Please. Don't.

DRAGAN. (*Stops, relieved.*) Then shut up like I said and get your things.

ALMA. Why are you doing this?

DRAGAN. I said shut. The fuck. Up.

ALMA. Why?

DRAGAN. (*Casually.*) Because you're a Muslim piece of shit. (*Beat.*)
You've got five minutes.

ALMA. Please.

DRAGAN. Five minutes or I slit your throat right here.

Alma goes into the next room. Dragan breathes. Alma reenters with a small bag, some kind of dress, and boots.

(*As a gameshow host.*) Contestant number one has brought with her a party dress and some kind of boot! Oh, I'm sorry contestant number one, you're not going to a *disco*. Or a *farm*. (*Throws Alma's boots across the floor.*)

Sound: Laugh track.

ALMA. Where am I going?

DRAGAN. Nowhere.

ALMA. Somewhere.

DRAGAN. Where'd your husband go?

ALMA. I told you. Look, we haven't done anything —

DRAGAN. That doesn't matter. Where's he gone?

ALMA. The name on the box here is Andrić. We're Croatian.

DRAGAN. I didn't ask that.

ALMA. He isn't here.

DRAGAN. When's he coming back?

ALMA. He isn't. (*Beat.*) He's gone.

DRAGAN. What, *dead*?

Alma nods.

HONEY BROWN EYES

by Stefanie Zdravcec

3M, 3W (doubling, flexible casting)

Bosnia 1992: In two kitchens, two soldiers recover a little of what they've lost during the war. A Serbian paramilitary soldier must face the consequences of his own brutality, while a Bosnian resistance fighter, crippled by the limits of his own courage, seeks refuge with a kindred soul.

"Ms. Zdravcec has tackled a bruising subject and dared to approach it through her own, more humanistic aesthetic, one that can spot isolated moments of grace in even the most nightmarish scenarios. It will be interesting to see where this aesthetic takes her next."

—**The New York Times**

"Although each character is allowed to show some mettle, Zdravcec doesn't overplay the heroism. Putting them all around kitchen sinks, she wants us to see how, in the midst of incomprehensible cruelty, tragedy could come to be something utterly average . . . Zdravcec's drama makes for an absorbing evening, especially when it lets its traumatized characters reveal, in muted exchanges, who they were before the nation broke down into armed camps of Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims."

—**The Washington Post**

"Stefanie Zdravcec's HONEY BROWN EYES [is] a passionate, thought-provoking play about war, whose serious message is intensified by its implied comments on youth, age, courage and the disastrous effects of conflict — not just on nations but on brothers and friends."

—**Examiner.com**

"Playwright Stefanie Zdravcec deploys a different kind of kitchen-sink drama, one that perceptively explores the psychologically crushing consequences of a war that, in HONEY BROWN EYES, leaves two former friends on opposing sides."

—**Time Out (New York)**

"Zdravcec is to be lauded for taking a faraway conflict and skillfully revealing its universal lessons."

—**Huffington Post**

"As a writer Zdravcec is skillful at keeping her audience on its toes. Absurd but raucous comedy can turn on a razor-thin edge to tragic violence, then to much darker comedy and then on into the unknown."

—**TheaterMania.com**

Also by Stefanie Zdravcec
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