

THE . . . STANDARD . . . PURIFICATION

By Katie...Doyle

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes...*

In The Standard Purification, Katie Doyle has written an unusual performance piece that is at once as abstracted and realistic as its setting:

Somewhere in America.

The piece unfolds without dialogue as a series of actions in real time with the two characters in the play, MAN and WOMAN, interacting not with each other, but with the American flag as a third character. The flag provides the counterpoint for this experimental play symbolizing a country conflicted in its definition of patriotism. At only three pages, the play is a veritable theatrical Zip file that opens up into an expansive pantomime. It's a vignette with startling simplicity, but that doesn't diminish the size or scope of the presentation.

[Note: The flag used in this play should be as big as can possibly be accommodated by the pole and stage in which this plays.]

The Standard Purification offers no explanations or conclusions. Rather, it allows us to explore a cultural divide silently, even subconsciously, within the embodiment of the characters, their breaths, and their gestures. For those who have tuned into the American election cycle from the world stage, this piece is timely indeed. And for anyone who hasn't (you lucky devil!), it might be worth lifting your rock to take a peek. (Spacing and format is author's own.)

THE STANDARD PURIFICATION

by

Katie Doyle

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THE STANDARD PURIFICATION

Cast of Characters

- Man : Caucasian. Well dressed. Content. An all-around American gentleman. Under his jacket, he carries a concealed weapon, which we see.
- Woman: An immigrant African or Latin woman. Possibly Native American. She is comfortably and neatly well-dressed for work in a factory or housekeeping, wearing an apron. She works with precision, compassion. Above all, she does her job very well.
- Note: Man and Woman, however cast older/younger, should be of about the same age.
- SETTING: Somewhere in America. Any clear blue-sky day. A flag staff, with halyard/hoist rope.
[*Note: The flag used in this play should be as big as can possibly be accommodated by the pole and stage in which this plays.*]
- SOUND: *A light breeze blows throughout the work.*

AT THE TOP:

For a few seconds, we hear, almost feel, the breeze blowing and a bird chirping.

(LIGHTS RISE.)

(BEAT.)

MAN

(MAN enters the stage casually holding, with both hands, a carefully correctly folded American flag. He stops for a moment and feels the breeze, then looks the flag staff over. Satisfied, putting the flag under his arm, he walks to the pole. When he reaches the staff, he takes the halyard/rope and opens up the carabineer to hold the top of the flag, attaching the entire flag by its grommets as he moves along the band. He raises the flag, full staff, ties it off, steps back AND looks up at it. Without thinking, he wipes his hands against each other, as satisfied, he gives a slight smile and turns exiting the stage.)

(BEAT.)

(Breeze blows.)

WOMAN

(WOMAN enters the stage focused on doing her work. She has a large laundry 'drying tree', which she plants on the stage.

WOMAN exits stage and quickly returns with 2 weights to support the bottom of the drying rack.

She exits again and this time returns with a wash basin filled with water which she plants near the drying tree.

WOMAN carefully, and thoroughly, wipes her hands off on her apron. She says a short mantra (or prayer) to herself which we don't really hear.

WOMAN then crosses to the flag pole. She unties the halyard and lowers the flag, gathering it in a bundle in her arms. She does this carefully, so that the flag does not touch the ground. WOMAN is respectful with the flag. With the bundle secured in one arm, she reties the halyard, almost as a sacred thing - gathers the bundle securely in both arms.

WOMAN crosses to the washbasin and proceeds the process of washing the flag.

She washes thoroughly, adeptly. She has done this many times before.

She washes it, and washes it, and washes it, until it is utterly and completely clean. . . to her satisfaction.

When the flag is washed, she rings the flag out.

Wringing and wringing... Once this is completed, she again bundles the flag in her arms and crosses to the drying tree. Here she lays the flag out to dry, draping it as best she can on the large tree, laying it out as far open as possible. Steeping underneath it, getting dripped on.

When she is finished with this, she steps back, wiping her hands again. Then she reaches out and puts one hand on the flag for a moment, just talking it all in.

WOMAN slowly pulls her hand off the flag, and crosses to her wash basin which she picks up and then moves towards her exit.

Before she exits, she stops. It has been a long day already. We see her roll her shoulders and let out an almost inaudible sign. Woman carries on and exits the stage, as...

(LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.)

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THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:

This play was originally written in early 2018 as a response to mounting national stories regarding the continued emotional and sexual abuse of women. Especially women of color. When I discovered poetry and playwriting during my early high school years, writing became a necessary part of my life. Now, as a woman-of-an-age, I find there is still much for me to write about and to learn. In this winter season, with the COVID pandemic, though my body is pulled down towards the hard earth, I try to stand upright amongst the trees, eyes on the blue sky. Take in a deep breath. Listen. There are so many stories that must be shared.

AUTHOR'S BIO:

Katie grew up a DoD kid, whose career-military dad, and mom, were born in the Midwest. She calls Michigan home because home is where your parents keep all your childhood artwork and writing in little boxes. All over the house. As a grown-up, some working moments Katie truly

enjoyed include: several years as assistant to the director of Playwrights Horizons Theatre School in NYC; Properties Designer with the Peterborough Players in New Hampshire; Associate Director of BoarsHead Theatre and Stormfield Theatre in Michigan, where she also worked as Stage Manager and an AEA actor. She worked for over a decade as a planning organizer and coordinator for the Renegade Theater Festival in Lansing, Michigan, and a playwright with *Renegade N.O.W.*, the new original works portion of this Festival. After her move to Oregon in June 2018 to care for an extended family member with ALS, Katie was honored to be involved with *'The Art of Aging'* in Portland's 2019 Fertile Ground Festival - which featured a portion of her writing - as well as performing original spoken word stories at the Clinton Theater and in the community. She currently reads original work with Prop Thtr's WRITERS ALOUD (Chicago) and listens to others who do the same. Katie continues to write, challenging herself to come up with some answers to daily questions that flummox her.