



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN PLAYWRIGTHS

Voices of Identity and
Transformation—Proceedings of the
First International Women Playwrights
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particularly in view of the contribution of lesbian and gay artists to every society's culture. When one artist is silenced, all people are silenced.

[The proposal passed unanimously.]

Somalatha Subasinghe: In Sri Lanka, most of the censorship has been political. When we write a play, we have to hand over the script to members of a Censor Board. They read the script, and if they like it, they pass it on. Or they may want certain statements changed. The director knows how to tackle such situations working together with the playwright.

I used, the other day, a Buddhist poem to hit the system of government in Sri Lanka today, without changing a single word, only the style it was presented in. Because there is censorship. But I thought, it is a Buddhist story, nothing to worry about. I played it and my friends came and said, "Sonta, it is emergency time, take it off." Everybody understood what I was doing from top to bottom.

When the people like you, the Censor Board can't do anything. My professor was not allowed to be interviewed over the television or the radio, but still people went to his house to talk to him. It's not difficult for us because it is a small country, and we can reach out like this to almost all people. A very popular singer's songs were not allowed to be played over the radio or television for some time, but that was when she sold the most cassettes. If you tell the truth and you know the way of telling the truth, you'll get it across.⁴

Irén Kiss: We have spoken a lot about playwrights, a little bit less about the audience and not at all about theater critics. I don't know why, because they should be connected also with the subject of censorship. So I would propose the following subjects for the next conference: theater critic as the embodiment of the devil, theater critic as the manifestation of the author's masochism, and theater criticism as a necessary misunderstanding.

Maria Lampadaridou Pothou: I know the censorship imposed by a regime. When there was a dictatorship in Greece, I wrote a play against it because a friend was captured and tortured. The censor characterized the play as "anarchistic," trying to prevent its production. I say this to explain that I know, I have personal experience of this kind of censorship. But here I want to speak about self-censorship.

I believe that my censorship is my fear as a human being, existential fear, substantial fear, and that it is more important for me than my social, political and familial relationship fear. That means: as a

playwright, I am free in a dictatorship but I am not free from my personal fears.

Well, creation is a way to go against my metaphysical fears, against my innocence, against my need of compromise, against the times, against my culpability.

Creation is "against" in order to transcend. I believe this describes my self-censorship, how to tell my truth. But to be able to tell my truth, I must find my truth, and this truth is a liberation of my *prosopo*. *Prosopo* is a Greek word meaning spiritual individuality. And that is the last against: against my self-censorship.

In this distinguished conference, I hear about the problems of each speaker, problems of their country, of personal life or social, sexual and color problems. I understand that the problem describes the difficulty of being a playwright. I respect these problems, but it's not enough. I don't hear about women's dramatic creation as an existential necessity. I don't hear about the stuff of her plays, stuff of her dreams, of her internal need to be a playwright in this troubled world.

I believe that women's nature is nearer to world mystery because she has been created to be a mother, and that, I believe, brings her closer to the contemporary world problems. There is a mysticism and an inborn sensibility in her that enables her to conceive the great questions of life, of dream, of death, of god, of peace. The playwright belongs to her time more than to her country. A woman is the same beyond color or country or society. I am a human being in my loneliness and my nakedness in front of my own destiny, which is the same for every other human being in the world. If the theater as action and passion and drama helps me to find my human limits, it gives me also the dream and the possibility to transcend my limits. I would like to hear about the woman playwright's position vis-à-vis the contemporary problems, beyond her local and personal problems.⁵

¹ In *A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich* (New York: Coward McCann, 1973), Childress depicts a young teenage boy, nearly hooked on drugs, and the network of family and friends affected by his situation.

² Frye, Marilyn, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1983), p. 172.

³ The remainder of Assunção's statement is included in "Eroticism, Sexual Identity and Politics."

⁴ Part of Subasinghe's statement was transferred from "Creating Theater for Children and Youth."

⁵ Statements by Kiss and Lampadaridou-Pothou were originally made in the open forum.