RUINEd

By

Lynn Nottage

The College of William and Mary
William and Mary Theatre Mainstage
Audience Guide

Prepared by Artisia Green

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A NOTE ABOUT THIS GUIDE...

Asante Sana (thank you) for visiting our website and for reviewing this audience guide. We are happy to learn that you seek to be an informed audience member and an intellectually active participant in this communal event. This guide, coupled with the lobby display and pre-show conversation with the Production Dramaturge, Nathan Alston and Assistant Director, Christopher Richardson seeks to enhance your understanding of the play and the director’s approach to the production.

In this guide you will find:

• Information about the playwright,
• A context on rape as a tool of war,
• A conversation between the director and dramaturge,
• Information on stylistic influences that shaped the director’s approach to “Ruined”, and
• A list of additional resources and websites you can consult for further information and action.
Lynn Nottage is an award-winning playwright and educator and arguably one of the most intriguing voices of the American theatre. *Ruined* was written in 2007 and earned her a Pulitzer Prize (2009) in addition to an OBIE, the Lucille Lortel Award, New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award, Drama Desk Award, and Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Play (Manhattan Theatre Club, Goodman Theatre). It premiered in London at the Almeida Theatre in April 2010 and toured several US regional theatres in 2010-2011. The work is an outgrowth of her activism rooted in her work with Amnesty International and a result of her research conducted while in Uganda with Kate Whoriskey and her husband, filmmaker and photographer, Tony Gerber. In a 2010 TCG press release for International Theatre Institute’s World Theatre Day, Nottage says, “…as artists and global citizens, the world continues to demand our attention, and as such we must be intrepid explorers, daring to venture into uncomfortable zones to unearth difficult truths…the role of the artist is to keep their eyes open, when everyone else’s are shut.” In a subsequent 2010 press release for the YWCA on *Ruined*, she admits to being, “…in search of her African sisters” with the goal of depicting “the modern Africa in all its complexity and showing the beauty and humor and what keeps people there going.”

Other plays by Lynn Nottage include *Intimate Apparel* (New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for Best Play; Roundabout Theatre, CENTERSTAGE, South Coast Repertory); *Fabulation, or The Re-Education of Undine* (OBIE Award; Playwrights Horizons, London’s Tricycle Theatre); *Crumbs from the Table of Joy; Las Meninas; Mud, River, Stone; Por’knocker; A Walk through Time, A Children’s Musical; A Stone’s Throw/The Antigone Project; Snapshot*; and POOF!

Nottage is the recipient of the 2010 Steinberg Distinguished Playwright Award, the Dramatists Guild Hull-Warriner Award, the inaugural Horton Foote Prize for Outstanding New American Play (*Ruined*), the Lee Reynolds Award, and the Jewish World Watch iWitness Award. Her other honors include the 2007 MacArthur Foundation “Genius Grant,” the National Black Theatre Festival’s August Wilson Playwriting Award, the 2005 Guggenheim Grant for Playwriting, the 2004 PEN/Laura Pels Award for Drama, as well as fellowships from the Lucille Lortel Foundation, Manhattan Theatre Club, New Dramatists and New York Foundation for the Arts.

Her most recent publications include: *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark, Ruined* (TCG), *Intimate Apparel and Fabulation, or The Re-Education of Undine: Two Plays* (TCG) and *Crumbs from the Table of Joy and Other Plays* (TCG). She is a member of The Dramatists Guild, an alumnus of New Dramatists and a graduate of Brown University (1987) and the Yale School of Drama (1989), where she is a visiting lecturer. [www.lynnnottage.net](http://www.lynnnottage.net)
“My heart is in pain, why are you raping me?”: Congo, the rape capital of the world

Rape as a weapon of war was recognized by the United Nations Security Council in 2008, “as a tactic of war to humiliate, dominate, instill fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate civilian members of a community or ethnic group.” This form of sexual violence against women and girls is relied upon by government and rebel soldiers, police, criminals, bandits, civilians and even husbands. Women, often seen as the bearers of the culture, or the representatives of any given community, are raped systematically as an instrumentation of open warfare, under the guise of national security employed by a nervous state and recreationally when soldiers perceive there is an inadequate supply of accessible women (Enloe 2000, 109-110).

“Eastern Congo,” according to U.N. Special Representative Margot Wallstrom, “is the rape capital of the world with 48 women being raped every hour” (Lloyd-Davies). Eastern Congo provinces, particularly the provinces of Ituri, North and South Kivu, all of which border Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi set the geographical and political context for Lynn Nottage’s Ruined.

Research indicates complex rationale as to the reasons why the number of female victims in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is so high. Rape of the Congo: Understanding sexual violence in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Dr. Sara Meger’s 2010 study indicates that DRC is particularly disposed for violence for the following three reasons:

- **ECONOMIC AMBITION**
  - The DRC possesses 80% of the world’s tantalum (found in Coltan) and 60% of the world’s Cobalt. The land is also rich in diamonds, timber, copper and gold.
  - There is high demand from global consumers for technology and material goods that are supported by the DRC’s natural resources. The U.S., Japan and Western Europe are the largest consumers of tantalum. Coltan, copper and cobalt in particular play a major part in U.S military technology.
  - Although there is conflict mineral regulation language (Section 1502) in the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Consumer Protection Act of 2009 that would require...
companies to publicly disclose the origins of their mineral use in consumer products, the law requires U.S. Securities’ Exchange Commission regulations for implementation; regulations which have been delayed. Thus, currently there is no certification process for tracing the exportation of conflict minerals and it is estimated that $1 million is illegally exported every day to meet foreign demand.

- Neighboring countries can support their own weakened economies by forming strategic alliances with the government or militia groups for access to the mine resources.

**SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF MASCULINITY**

- Removing general predispositions of violence and aggression associated with any military unit, the DRC is a patriarchal society with social norms that most commonly place men in positions of authority over women.
- Marriage is expected; procreation is mandated. Husbands are expected to assume responsibility for their wives’ shelter, food, clothing, and medical care and to help her parents as well.
- Perceptions of the lack of masculinity and feelings of frustration and powerlessness are exacerbated by the war and cause men to seek positions of power and control in situations of decay.

**IMPUNITY**

- Many cases of rape go unreported and in some cases when it is reported, it is considered “a private issue or a woman’s issue”. As such disciplinary actions against attackers are limited if sanctioned at all. A number of efforts are used by assailants to confuse victims and witnesses including speaking in different languages (Kinyarwanda, Kiswahili, Lingala and Kilenga) wearing masks, and blinding the victims with lights.

More often than not, women are abducted and held against their will for long periods of time. The entire scenario can take place in as little as ten minutes before they are left lying in the aftermath of the horror. Some accounts have indicated women being enslaved for as long as a year and a half. During this time they may be sexually allocated to individuals, gang raped repeatedly, forced to perform domestic labor for their attackers in their camps - locating and transporting firewood, washing clothes, gathering and preparing food. When and if the camps relocate, the women are forced to carry the belongings of the combatants. During community invasions, the women may be obligated to haul stolen goods and ammunition, help attackers abduct other women and provide amateur medical care for women who have been injured.
EXTREME BRUTALITY

In many cases, rape victims undergo extreme forms of brutality out of hatred and efforts to resist assault. Weapons and tools of physical abuse include bananas, hot peppers, sticks, guns, and knives. Women are beaten with the butts of rifles, raped in front of their children (or their children may be asked to restrain their mothers and siblings may be forced to rape one another). Victims suffer sliced thighs, torn vaginal cavities, prolapsed uteruses, excessive bleeding and recurring abdominal pain. Clitoris and vagina lips may be sliced with razor blades; guns may be shot inside of the woman’s vaginal cavity. Breasts may be completely excised. Research conducted by the Human Rights Watch in 2001 indicated that as many as 60% of regular troops and militia-men in the DRC are infected with HIV/AIDS. Thus, young children (girls and boys), as they are believed to be HIV/AIDS free, are raped. The elderly (the most respected in an African community) are sexually violated as well.

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE AFTERMATH OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Notwithstanding the shame and psychological damage, if the rape victim is vocal about the incident, they may be ostracized by their husbands and fiancés who are embarrassed by the public attention and/or fear the diseases that may have been contracted during the assault. Sometimes the exclusion is on the assumption that the women must have done something to warrant the relations. If the husband remains with the wife, he may take a new bride and “demote” his first wife to a secondary position. Communities and neighbors turn their backs on the women fearing retaliation from the combatants. Unwanted pregnancies, miscarriages, and complicated births occur. Many women cannot afford testing, medical examinations and medicine and fear that by seeking treatment the rape may become known and they may become stigmatized further.

RAPE AS A TOOL OF WAR

- Requires no ammunition or weapons
- Allows attackers to communicate political messages between opposing groups
- Breaks down families and destabilizes communities
  - women are often shamed and abandoned by their husbands and families
  - reproduction ceases
  - children who witness the violence are traumatized
  - families are displaced and combatants now have access to lands they wished to occupy
Sources


Director, Artisia Green and Production Dramaturge, Nathan Alston, Talk About Her Interpretation of “Ruined”

NA: When reviewing shows that you may possibly direct, what do you look for? Are certain themes important to you? Are there certain themes consistent throughout your work or are you always looking for completely new material?

AVG: I must have a gut reaction to any play that I choose to spend time in shaping for the stage. A big indicator of my attraction to a piece is my ability to finish it in one sitting or at least be continuously drawn to the work if I am unable to devote a singular focus because of the multiple demands on my time. First and foremost, I am concerned about infractions on the humanity of all people. However, I do have a heightened interest on the issues of women, children and challenges facing Black people of the Diaspora. I take my role as a storyteller seriously; the time I spend working on a show is time I am not spending with my children, my greatest asset and my footprint upon the earth. Thus, you probably will not see a show credit on my CV that was strictly for its “entertainment value.” You may see consistency in the type of shows to which I am attracted but, I am always looking for new ways to tell a story.

NA: What is your interpretation of “Ruined”?

AVG: While I don’t believe there is a single person in the play who isn’t “ruined” in some generic use of the term, the central foci of the euphemism “ruined” (that which is sterile, infected or dead from sexual torture) as used in the play are the women, Mama Nadi, Sophie, Salima, Josephine, and all the other beautiful faces we see in Mama Nadi’s place. Early in the story is a discussion about an old Grey Parrot that belonged to the last remaining pygmy of the Ituri Rainforest, Old Papa Batunga. Mama keeps it because no one else wanted it. “It stinks,” she said. And yes, she thought she could sell it; thus, her initial intentions were not benevolent. But over the course of the play you see her feed that bird and talk sweetly to that bird and that bird simply becomes a part of the world that she nurtures. That bird and her relationship with it becomes the metaphor for her journey and her relationship with all of the women, but Sophie in particular. Yes, for her own personal use, she exploits them. However, she takes care of these fragile and discarded birds that flutter into her world “smelling like the rot of meat,” as she says. “The Congolese civil war just keeps tossing “girls” at her…the spoils of war.” For food, shelter, clean clothing and maybe a few tips these women allow their bodies to become a sanctuary rather than the battlefield it once was. Yes, the potential exists that you might just find yourself “playing nice” to the soldier who raped you five months ago. But, these women are trapped either way they toss the coin. Mama Nadi’s was the lesser of two evils.

I was listening to Teena Marie’s Sapphire song ‘Resilient’. I began to think about all of bird imagery moving literally and metaphorically through the work. I began to think to
Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* which took me to Paul Lawrence Dunabar’s poem, “Sympathy” and that’s when it truly became clear to me. These women are caged birds struggling to break free of their imaginary enclosures and transition from victims to women with strength, dignity and agency. Hostages of war, they arrived at Mama Nadi’s marked with the scars of conquest. They crossed the threshold of her doorstep as vestiges of both their former selves and status and assume masks of resistance. It is the only way they can survive. And now that they are here in Mama Nadi’s world, dismembered from their families and their communities (their flock), and working under sexual servitude (the very act that propelled them here in the first place) they beat their wings against a continuous aftermath of emotion and ubiquitous violence that threatens to strike again. Why do these caged birds continue to sing? How do they find the strength, courage and the means to transcend their trauma and their memories of a life no longer? Through love, hope and faith in humanity they continue to persist and find something sacred in that which has been deemed worthless…ruined.

**NA: When were you first introduced to “Ruined”? Why did you initially find it impressive?**

**AVG:** I am always impressed when a person uses their position of influence for the greater good and as the playwright, Lynn did that with *Ruined*. She exposed a complicated truth in a creative and compassionate way. The ways in which these women, particularly Mama Nadi, have made something out of nothing and demonstrated their resiliency is completely breathtaking and inspiring. What is heartbreaking about the story is the way the war, a long running extension of colonialism, has pillaged the land and made the men that inhabit these affected communities complicit aggressors in their own destruction. The once colonized has now adopted the oppressive behavior of the colonizer.

**NA: What is your goal for “Ruined”? Do you believe that it should serve as a vehicle to help inspire change?**

**AVG:** The distance between our two worlds, here and the Congo, is great. So it is easy to ignore that which one is not confronted with. Thus, my number one goal for *Ruined* is awareness and responsibility. When I first taught this play almost two years ago, a student once said, “Well what do you want us to do? I’m one person and my father told me that the best thing I could do would be to help myself.” At the heart of this student’s comment, I think, is an overwhelming feeling of hopelessness and lack of clarity about where to begin in addressing the sheer madness of the world. The magnitude of this particular issue is wide and my student was right. He was only one person. However, beyond holding the affected in our hearts there are some practical things we could do to show our global concern, 1) Research Public Law 109-456, the Democratic Republic of the Congo Relief Security, Democracy Promotion Act of 2006. It allows the U.S. to stop its support of countries implicated in the destabilization of the Congo. Contact your local state representative with a letter in support of the existing law. 2) Become conscious technological consumers. Section 1502 of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Consumer Protection Act of 2009 is a conflict mineral regulation that would require companies to publicly disclose the origins of their mineral use in consumer products. The law requires U.S. Securities Exchange Commission regulations for implementation; regulations which have been...
PROVERBS AND POETRY: POETIC REALISM IN *RUINED*

Proverbs are wise sayings that embody the philosophy of a group of people. Although these messages have multiple meanings and levels of interpretation, they are often used in the African community to relay moral codes, transmit desirable values, motivate and build character and serve as the customary laws of governance.

Proverbs are a part of the oral tradition and worldview of Africans and support the survival of a rich and important spiritual heritage. Below are the proverbs mentioned in *Ruined*:

**MAMA**  (7) “…as long as the words of the forest people were spoken the spirits would stay alive.”

**MAMA**  (33) “…if you don’t step on the dogs tail he won’t bite you.”

**MAMA**  (36) “…you can follow behind everyone and walk in the dust, or you can walk ahead through the unbroken thorny brush. You may get blood on your ankles, but you arrive first and not covered in the residue of others.”

**MAMA**  (36) “This land is fertile and blessed in many regards and the men are not the only ones entitled to its beauty.”

**MAMA**  (36) “There must always be a part of you that this war can’t touch.”

**MAMA**  (47) “Careful of the cold rain it carries more men to their death than a storm of arrows.”

**MAMA**  (47) “…there’s nothing better than a gentle hand to pluck out the thorns and heal the heart.”

**MAMA**  (48) “…take care of your land and your mother.”

**MR. HARARI**  (60) “Eventually you must fly your colors. Take a side.”

**MAMA**  (60) “…Two hungry birds fight over a kernel, just then a third swoops down and carries it off. Whoops!”

**CHRISTIAN**  (66) “[don’t] expect the sun to shine where only mold thrives.”

Similarly, there is a significant use of poetry in *Ruined* that serve as a metaphorical intermediary of the character’s subjective truth and emotional state. The abundance of
proverbs and poetic language used in the play give a clue as to the stylistic influences or genre characteristics that have shaped the writing and thus, shaped the staging.

**POETIC REALISM**
Poetic Realism is a popular literary and cinematic style of the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. It is art based on nature and real life with the use of poetic effects. The poetic dialogue is often heightened and is used to express the subjective feelings and emotions of the character. Characters in these plays tend to be the unfortunate – those who are trapped in social situations but still hold fast to hope in what appears hopeless. Characterization, costuming, set music, sound effects, and lighting may be representational and carry symbolic meaning that works to probes the character’s subconscious and reveal the inner being to the audience. When performing poetic realism, actors should work hard to create an inner truth and motivation, have a strong sense of public solitude and honest interactions with their fellow ensemble members, their props, and the set.

Representative playwrights whose work can be categorized in this manner are Anton Chekov, Tennessee Williams, August Wilson and Tarrell Alvin McCraney.

Thus, for *Ruined* the director’s goal was to strike a balance between the realism and the poetry that will allow support for those moments of heightened stylization inherent in the text.

**SET**
The director envisioned a realistic and functional set that was indicative of the world of the Congo and the poverty that existed. Yet Mama’s ability to make something beautiful out of that which others discard was important to highlight. There is cleanliness, order and pleasure in this world. It should be a respite from the chaos that exists beyond its confines and that will eventually make its way to Mama Nadi’s doorstep.

**COSTUMING**
The director envisioned bodies clad in realistic, decorous Congolese clothing. However, the women’s clothing was replete with symbolic patterns/prints that speak to the iconography littered in the play (birds, captivity, diamonds, and phallocentricity for example).

**LIGHTING**
The director envisioned some functional lights – the lamp post and the Christmas lights. Lighting that is representational of the surrounding density of the Ituri Rainforest and yet still capable of filtering sunlight through windows and doors and was important. Capturing the heat of the day, the golden time of the dusk, the blues in rain and depicting the slowly encroaching war on Mama’s doorstep (most evident in Act II) is of great consequence. Just as birds give
indicators as to the weather patterns, the inner life of the characters should indicate what’s brewing in the atmosphere.

**SOUND**

Sound “represents” an opportunity to arrest the rainforest environment and evoke the feeling of actually being there. We are talking about a world that is far removed literally and figuratively for us as Westerners. Thus, soft ongoing sounds of the rainforest layered with the rain, (gunshots that may get progressively louder as the war encroaches), the squawking parrot, allows for the prospect of the two worlds colliding.

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**Interested in LEARNING more about the world of Ruined? Consult the following books and DVD’s for additional information:**

**BOOKS**

*King Leopold’s Ghosts* by Adam Hochschild

*The Enough Moment: Fighting to End Africa’s Worst Human Rights Crimes* by Don Cheadle and John Prendergast

*Overcoming Speechlessness: A Poet Encounters the Horror in Rwanda, Eastern Congo, and Palestine/Israel* by Alice Walker

*Africa’s World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe* by Gerard Prunier

*Consuming the Congo: War and Conflict Minerals in the World’s Deadliest Place* by Peter Eichstaedt

**DVD**

Nightline, Congo: The Hidden War, 2007

Nightline, Heart of Darkness: The Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2007

60 Minutes, The War Against Women, 2008

Congo: White King, Red Rubber, Black Death, 2004
Interested in HEARING more from the William and Mary Theatre cast and crew of *Ruined*? You can watch the following videos on YouTube:

-Cast Thoughts on “Ruined” at the College of William and Mary
-Assistant Director, Christopher Richardson and Production Dramaturge, Nathan Alston on Ruined
-WMT Production of "Ruined", Individual Interviews with the Cast and Crew – Actress, Britaney Coleman ‘12

Interested in IMPLEMENTING change? Please visit the following websites:
(List in part provided for by Arena Stage, Washington, D.C)

**Women for Women International**  
www.womenforwomen.org  
Since its creation, Women for Women International has given hope to more than 299,000 women survivors of war and conflict and helped them move toward economic self-sufficiency with our yearlong program of direct aid, rights education, job skills training, and small business development – one woman at a time.

**Panzi Hospital**  
www.panzihospital.org  
The General Referral Panzi Hospital is a provincial hospital located in Bukavu, DR Congo, managed by CEPAC, a protestant church organization. It was built in 1999 under the supervision of Dr. Denis Mukwege, its founder and current medical director. Swedish and British development funds, PMU and Läkarmissionen supported the infrastructure. The hospital is specialized in treating gynecological disorders, specifically those due to reproductive trauma and trauma from sexual violence, as well as the holistic clinical treatment for survivors. Dr. Mukwege and his gynecological surgical team are internationally recognized experts in fistula and incontinence repair and the long time healing and community reintegration associated with fistula care.

**The Enough Project**  
www.enoughproject.org  
The Enough Project is helping to build a permanent constituency to prevent genocide and crimes against humanity. Co-founded by Africa experts Gayle Smith and John Prendergast, Enough launched in early 2007 as a project of the Center for American Progress. Enough conducts intensive field research in countries plagued by genocide and crimes against humanity, develops practical policies to address these crises, and shares sensible tools to help empower citizens and groups working for change.
Friends of the Congo
www.friendsofthecongo.org
Friends of the Congo an advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C. FOTC was established in 2004 to work in partnership with Congolese to bring about peaceful and lasting change in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The mission of FOTC is to raise the consciousness of the world community on the challenge of the Congo and support Congolese institutions in bringing about a peaceful and lasting change.