



# acts of imagination

## Michael Springate (Writer)

### **We asked Michael what were the roots of the screenplay:**

Autobiographically, the roots stem from my living in Rosemount in east end Montreal as part of the post World War Two immigration from Europe, and from friendships I had with members within the Ukrainian diaspora. While the best man at my first wedding was named Jaroslaw, I hasten to add that the character in the film was not written after him.

More particularly, my first notes towards the work were written during my visit in 1992 to Kiev and Odessa, just after the Ukrainian declaration of independence and during the financial meltdown and social chaos of that period. I was there visiting a theatre company invited to perform in Winnipeg at the Prairie Theatre Exchange, where I was then Artistic Director.

In Ukraine, it was a time equally full of hope and despair, in a society where no-one was quite sure which aspects of official history would, or could, be maintained. That struggle among interpretations is still visible on both sides of the "orange revolution", where differing versions of the past are entangled with issues of power sharing in the present.

### **Is there a specific reason why the two secondary characters are Korean and Pakistani?**

Korea, like Ukraine, has suffered a century of official history built upon the suppression of facts. This is not well known in our society, but accepted widely in Korea itself. The Japanese occupation of Korea (1910-1945), as all occupations, was predicated on building a false historical consciousness among the occupied, but less well known is how many facts regarding the civil war (1950-1953) and the on-going struggle for democracy were suppressed by the following authoritarian governments. Interestingly, when the film was shown in Pusan, South Korea's second largest city, an elderly, male member of that audience said that it was his story which was being told...

As an aside, the American-Korean John Yoo is one of the chief legal architects in President Bush's doctrine of unlimited 'unitary' executive power and disregard of the Geneva Conventions on torture and the treatment of prisoners. Yoo is, I think, part of the unintended consequences (blowback) of the American support for the authoritarianism of President Park in South



Korea. Korean conservatism has helped to shape American conservatism.

As to Aashir from Pakistan, it seemed worthwhile to choose a sympathetic Muslim character to help offset the incredible anti-Muslim racism now rampant in our society, as well as to underline how global the displacement of populations really is.

The encounter of these characters is more than just possible in Vancouver, for on our streets East Europe meets East Asia as a matter of course. Which is our good fortune.



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## **Are all your considerations political?**

Strange you ask that, because when I answered the first two questions I felt as if I were neglecting something important.. the pain that each of the characters feels, and the joy of which they are capable.

I think, at an emotional level, the roots of the screenplay lie in a profound sense of loss. Where does that begin? Perhaps the dissolution of the family unit... which is the critical factor in Jaroslaws's and Katya's emotional development.

I love my characters. Each of them. I really do. I live with them for a long time and learn to respect them, to listen.

## **What is the relevance of the film to Canada?**

Well, it's about Canada today, although not everyone sees that, preferring to think that Canada is different than the people who live in it.

But I want to mention, too, that the United States and Canada are both moving in the direction of that social pathology, evident in Ukraine and Korea, which comes from not being able to speak historical truths in public, and not being able to rely on public figures to question suspect untruths. While Ukraine and Korea are countries struggling to move away from that condition, we in North America are increasingly falling into it.

## **Are you happy with the film?**

In general, yes, very happy. But perhaps, from a writers point of view, it remains a bit oblique. It is not that anything that happens on screen lacks consideration, rather that pieces are missing that should have been shown. I do like the balance of spoken/unspoken which the film achieves, but feel that too much is left unspoken by several characters. I take that as my responsibility, and will have to work harder, in future projects, to discover how characters can speak their mind while staying within believable relationships. I want to maintain the personal and intimate that Carolyn, the actors and designers captured so beautifully, yet not lose any sense of narrative fullness.

## **What are your primary concerns as a writer?**

I write because I like to do the research, and I research because I have questions that don't seem to go away, and that aren't easily satisfied. The writing I do is the trace of the struggle to address the questions I ask.

The questions themselves mutate with time and experience. After Acts of Imagination I started to write Freeport, Texas, and after that, to write kut. There is a certain momentum now, a progression of intertwined themes and voices.

For reasons I have never understood, I prefer to write dialogue over prose. Always have. I like the way intention and context are always there to shape the spoken, to give it only a momentary reality.

Speaking socially, I am very interested in "second tier" nations, such as Canada, Ukraine and Korea, trying to forge distinct paths while living beside large imperial powers. Those three countries mentioned are also "divided countries", and the competing nationalisms that divide also interest me. I have become deeply interested in how the militarism of the American empire is affecting the evolution of Christianity, and I pay a great deal of attention to Confucian and Buddhist thought and history.

I have always written poetry, and still do. I can spend hours (days, months, years) on trying to get certain lines right. The exactness of expression, not primarily as an aesthetic unit, but as a reflection of experience, holds me.