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Dramatic Publishing

DUST EATERS

By

JULIE JENSEN



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

This play’s first draft was given a week-long workshop at Salt Lake Acting Company in March of 2003, supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts. David Mong directed, Mike Dorrell was dramaturg, and the cast consisted of Kateri Walker, Valerie Kittel and Robert Scott Smith.

A month later the second draft was rehearsed with the same cast for a public reading at Salt Lake Acting Company, again supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts. On that occasion David Mong and Meg Gibson co-directed.

In November 2003, the fourth draft of the play was given a public reading at Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey, directed by Elizabeth Murphy, dramaturged by Peter Hayes, the cast consisting of Tamir, Debra Cerruti, Michael Irvin Pollard and Steve Mones.

Dust Eaters was supported by the National Theatre Artist Residency Program, administered by Theatre Communications Group and funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. The play premiered at Salt Lake Acting Company in April 2005 with the following artists:

CAST

Scene I: 1870s

Albertine LAVONNE RAE ANDREWS
Emma. JOYCE COHEN
Wesley MORGAN LUND

Scene II: 1890s

Estima JOYCE COHEN
Albertine LAVONNE RAE ANDREWS

Scene III: 1910s

Pratt MORGAN LUND
Carlotta JOYCE COHEN
Albertine LAVONNE RAE ANDREWS

Scene IV: 1930s

Lydia JOYCE COHEN
Enoch. MORGAN LUND
Albertine LAVONNE RAE ANDREWS

Scene V: 1950s

Maud Moon. LAVONNE RAE ANDREWS
Bone. ERNEST DAVID TSOSIE, III
Enoch. MORGAN LUND
Lydia JOYCE COHEN

Scene VI: 1970s

Maud Moon. LAVONNE RAE ANDREWS
Lydia JOYCE COHEN
Enoch. MORGAN LUND

Scene VII: 1990s

Maud Moon. LAVONNE RAE ANDREWS
Bone. ERNEST DAVID TSOSIE, III

PRODUCTION STAFF

Director. DAVID MONG
Set Design. KEVEN MYHRE
Lighting Design. JEFF STURGIS
Costume Design. BRENDA VAN DER WEIL
Sound Design CYNTHIA L. KEHR
Dramaturg MIKE DORRELL
Production Stage Manager TANNER BROUGHTON
Executive Producers ALLEN NEVINS,
NANCY BORGENICHT

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The playwright gratefully acknowledges the expertise and generosity of two Native Americans in the preparation of this play: Kateri Walker, Native American actress and political activist, and Dr. Melvin Brewster, archaeologist for the Goshute Tribe.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

Dust Eaters is the story of seven generations of struggle in the west desert of Utah between the Goshute Indians and white European settlers.

Mormons always believed that they had a special relationship with Native Americans because *The Book of Mormon* was considered a record of their history. Yet in all essential ways, Mormons treated native peoples the same as other Europeans had: they lied to them, impoverished them, stripped them of their land, and finally relegated them to reservations.

Now, however, the Goshute people have accepted an offer to store high-level nuclear waste on their reservation, located some forty miles from the urban center of Salt Lake City. Needless to say, the white European population is upset.

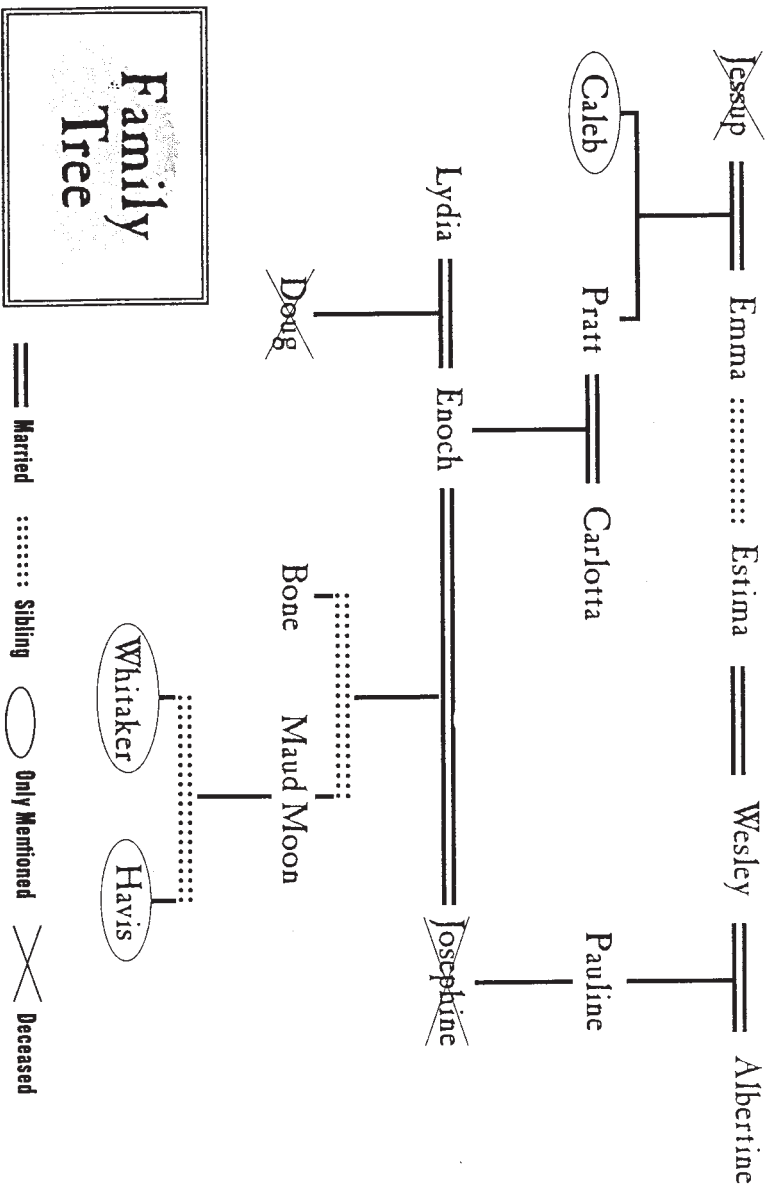
Although I have considerable experience writing about the history of the West (*Two-Headed* and *Across the Wide and Lonesome Prairie*), and although my ancestors were among the earliest white settlers in the Utah territory, I have never written about Native Americans.

Two aspects of my past, however, prepare me to write this play: one is the fact that during the 1930s my father taught school on the Goshute Reservation, and the other is that he was an amateur archeologist. And so as a child, I spent nearly every weekend tracking through the desert looking for remnants of a long-lost

culture, imagining where they lived, where they got water, what they did in the winter and where they sheltered in summer, an exercise in imagination that has never lost its power for me.

I am frequently asked if I am uncomfortable writing this story, since I am not Native American. The answer is yes but that fact also propels the work. The answer to the question of who should tell this kind of story is that we all should. If we shy away from such stories because of ethnicity, we risk leaving our history untold and our mistakes unacknowledged. This is an important story, specific in its details, universal in its applicability. I feel proud to have written it.

— *Julie Jensen*



DUST EATERS

A Full-length Play with Intermission
For 2m. and 2w.

CASTING NOTE: This play is intended for four actors: one Native American woman, one Native American man, one white woman, one white man. This is not an issue of doubling, not an issue of economics, it is conceptual.

CHARACTERS

Scene I: 1870s

WESLEY . . church leader, 50s, grinning, Southern accent

EMMA middle-aged woman, slapped but not beaten

ALBERTINE Native American girl, 10, feisty

Scene II: 1890s

ESTIMA Emma's younger sister, sexy, a bit silly

ALBERTINE Native American woman, 20s, willful

Scene III: 1910s

PRATT Emma's son, 45, a rancher, devout

CARLOTTA . . wife of Pratt, Scandinavian accent, nervous

ALBERTINE . . Native American woman, 40s, no one's fool

Scene IV: 1930s

LYDIA wife of Enoch, intelligent

ENOCH . . . Emma's grandson, 30s, a teacher, vulnerable

ALBERTINE . . Native American woman, 60s, in shock but
able

INTERMISSION

Scene V: 1950s

MAUD MOON Albertine's great-granddaughter, 20s
BONE Maud Moon's brother, 20s, a veteran, fragile
ENOCH Emma's grandson, 50s, a farmer, crusty
LYDIA Enoch's wife, 50s, eager to make it right

Scene VI: 1970s

MAUD MOON Albertine's great-granddaughter, 40s,
fiery
LYDIA Enoch's wife, 70s, fragile, sweet
ENOCH Emma's grandson, 70s, ill

Scene VII: 1990s

MAUD MOON Albertine's great-granddaughter, 60s
BONE her brother, 60s, tribal leader

SETTING

A pioneer house near the Goshute Indian Reservation in the west desert of Utah. There should be no walls, only a panorama of a sagebrush desert. The table, chairs, a window and a stove are in all scenes but their treatment changes through time.

In this scene, which takes place in the 1910s, Native American Albertine, now in her 40s, returns to the house she was raised in to find her white step brother running the farm. This scene articulates what separates two cultures as well as two childhood friends.

Scene III: 1910s

(Lights up on the same room. A porch has been added to the house. CARLOTTA enters, a nervous woman, with a Scandinavian accent. She carries a tray with the dishes for the midday meal, which she sets out.)

CARLOTTA. It's twenty years later, 1918. My husband Pratt. Hard worker, as you can tell.

(PRATT enters and sits at the table.)

We got his mother Emma's old house. Trying to make a go of the farm, such as it is. Out here in the middle of nowhere. And of course, there's the baby now. Little Enoch. *(She sits. PRATT begins eating. A beat. CARLOTTA watches him nervously. Blurting out:)* Because they blend in with the shadows somehow. Take you by surprise.

PRATT. Don't be ridiculous.

CARLOTTA. Don't want nothing that dirty around me. Nothing that dark.

PRATT. Carlotta, please. Pass the gravy, would you?

CARLOTTA. But they scare me, Pratt. The look of them scares me. The smell of them.

PRATT. There is nothing to be scared of!

CARLOTTA. There most certainly is.

PRATT. No, Carlotta, there isn't.

CARLOTTA. "The scourge of the plains"?

PRATT. Eat something, would you? You're not eating anything.

CARLOTTA. That woman south of here. In the foothills of the Stansbury Mountains. Terrified for the rest of her life. *Died* terrified.

PRATT. That happened thirty years ago, Carlotta. At a time of war.

CARLOTTA. What about those militants against the draft. Goshutes with guns!

PRATT. Controlled by federal troops, Carlotta. Listen here, we are far more dangerous to them than they are to us.

CARLOTTA. That's what people say about snakes.

PRATT. Because it's true. Pass the bread and have done with this. *(She hands him a plate. Pause.)*

CARLOTTA. Dust Eaters. That's their tribal name. Because they eat dirt?

PRATT. A name the Paiutes gave them as a joke. Because they dig up roots. Now enough!

CARLOTTA. Enoch is frightened of them. Little Enoch.

PRATT. He's too young to be frightened of them.

CARLOTTA. He tenses up, seizes up. I can feel his little body. Tensing up. Whenever one is near.

PRATT. He's five months old, Carlotta. Everything he knows, he's learned from you. Look here, why don't you come with me this afternoon. I'll give you a shovel. You can help me put in that dam on the spring. Get your mind off this. *(Pause.)*

CARLOTTA. I think they do it on purpose.

PRATT. Do what?

CARLOTTA. Look that way.

PRATT. Look what way? Pass the butter.

CARLOTTA. They know how to set us off. They do it to set us off.

PRATT. They do nothing of the sort.

CARLOTTA. And why ain't they over on the Ute Reservation? That's where they belong.

PRATT. Goshutes and Utes don't get along.

CARLOTTA. Since when?

PRATT. Since forever.

CARLOTTA. That's the worst thing about you being the bishop. We got them crouching on the porch, hunched in the yard all the time.

PRATT. It ain't all the time.

CARLOTTA. That woman this morning, standing right in front of the window, looking straight in.

PRATT. If you can look out, why can't she look in?

CARLOTTA. Because it is rude!

PRATT. Maybe she thinks it's polite. Mind if I take the rest of these turnips?

CARLOTTA. Then she just come up to the door and knocked like she was...a person.

PRATT. Did she give her name?

CARLOTTA. Of course not. Just stood there looking out from under her hair. *(A knock is heard.)*

PRATT. I'll get it.

CARLOTTA. Pratt... *(He stops. Looks at her.)* If it's them again, you can give them something to eat. But I ain't having them in the house. And I mean what I say, Pratt.

(She leaves the room. He goes to the door. It's ALBERTINE, now in her 40s, with cropped hair and blood on her face. He looks at her for a moment.)

PRATT. Albertine?

ALBERTINE. What happened to your hair?

PRATT *(chuckles)*. What happened to yours?

ALBERTINE. You think our mother Emma would not approve?

PRATT. I think she would not. *(He studies her.)* You look a little older. But healthy. Are you healthy?

ALBERTINE. Yes. Yes, of course. You've painted the house. Added a...

PRATT. Porch.

ALBERTINE. Porch.

PRATT. My wife's idea.

ALBERTINE. Like standing on a square cloud.

PRATT. I guess so.

ALBERTINE. Well, it'll give you something to sweep.

PRATT. Yes. (*He smiles in recognition.*)

ALBERTINE. I brought you these. (*She hands him a pair of tanned leather gloves; they have large cuffs, beadwork and fringe.*)

PRATT. Beautiful gloves.

ALBERTINE. Buckskin.

PRATT. Someone must have died. (*ALBERTINE nods.*)
Fine beadwork. Thank you.

ALBERTINE. Welcome. (*Pause.*)

PRATT. I'd invite you in, but—

ALBERTINE. But your wife can't stand the sight of me.

PRATT. Well, she's a little fussy, you know.

ALBERTINE. Fussy. Not something that happens to us.

PRATT. No, I guess not. I still have your little straw doll.
The *ohmaa*.

ALBERTINE. Oh yes, the Mother Deer.

PRATT. And where is Baby Fawn?

ALBERTINE. She was eaten by Old Chicken Hawk, don't you remember? While Mother Deer looked on.

(*PRATT nods. Nothing to say.*)

PRATT. Magpie feathers in your hair?

ALBERTINE. Yes.

PRATT. Women can have them now?

ALBERTINE. They're my husband's.

PRATT (*with a grin*). Better hide them good, or I might just steal them.

ALBERTINE. And in the middle of the night, too.

PRATT. I stole them, all right. But I had them for less than an hour before I buried them. Out by the stack yard. I was afraid I'd die if I kept them.

ALBERTINE. And so you would have.

PRATT. I know. (*He smiles.*) Where are you now?

ALBERTINE. Standing on your shiny white porch.

Looking at your shiny white head.

PRATT. Where are you living?

ALBERTINE. In the stand of cottonwoods down by the spring.

PRATT. No, I mean where are you *living*?

ALBERTINE. In that stand of cottonwoods.

PRATT. But just for the next few days.

ALBERTINE. Until we move on.

PRATT. You're not just a...vagabond.

ALBERTINE. No. I'm free.

PRATT. Not free from want. (*Pause.*) Is Pauline with you?

ALBERTINE. Yes. Married. A child of her own. A girl. Josephine.

PRATT. Josephine. Named after Joseph Smith?

ALBERTINE. No. Named after Chief Joseph.

PRATT. And Pauline. She married an Indian?

ALBERTINE. She *is* an Indian.

PRATT. Well, my Uncle Wesley might disagree with you.

ALBERTINE. All right, she's half. But the better half.

PRATT (*looks at her again*). You know, you look a sight.

My mother would have a fit.

ALBERTINE. So would mine. But my husband died.

PRATT. I'm sorry.

ALBERTINE. Influenza. One of your white man diseases.

Those gloves were his.

PRATT. That's why there's blood all over you.

ALBERTINE (*nodding*). In mourning.

PRATT. Little wonder you frightened my wife.

ALBERTINE. Little wonder.

PRATT. Terrifying, when you think about it.

ALBERTINE. It's not terrifying.

PRATT. Extreme, then.

ALBERTINE. So is death.

PRATT. And your hair?

ALBERTINE. Cut it when he died.

PRATT (*eyeing her*). You've reverted, haven't you?

ALBERTINE. No, I've returned!

PRATT. You've reverted!

ALBERTINE. You just can't follow me anymore!

PRATT. Listen, I don't want you people going into that pasture down there by the spring. I'm putting a dam in. And I don't want you inside that fence. I got cattle in there, and I don't want you scaring them, tromping through the water.

ALBERTINE. We used to camp down there in the fall. After pine nut season, before the rabbit drive. Wait for the antelope to come through. Long before any of you were here.

PRATT. Indians been in the water, cattle won't drink afterward.

ALBERTINE (*ironically*). Is that right?

PRATT. That's right. Especially with blood all over you. They smell it. They won't drink.

ALBERTINE. For a smart white man, you hold a lot of superstitions.

PRATT. My father told me that. And I believe it's true.

ALBERTINE. It ain't true, Parley Pratt. But I won't get inside your fence. Won't mess with your dam. (*Awkward pause.*)

PRATT. You need food, I suppose.

ALBERTINE. Since you've scared off the antelope, yes.

PRATT. If you can work, we can feed you.

ALBERTINE. If I can work?

PRATT. New policy from the Church.

ALBERTINE. What happened to “feed em, don’t fight em”?

PRATT. This is a new policy. We’re instilling the work ethic.

ALBERTINE. ’Course, I was your sister once.

PRATT. That has nothing to do with this.

ALBERTINE. ...Pulled you out of that spring down there, choking and spitting. If it weren’t for me, you’d be laying next to Emma now, out in the back yard, under a little mound of dirt!

PRATT. You’re an Indian, Albertine. We can’t afford to encourage bad habits!

ALBERTINE. Can’t afford Christian charity neither, I guess!

PRATT. You’re always fighting about something. Always had a chip on your shoulder.

ALBERTINE. Just because I wouldn’t do everything you said—

PRATT. Mother could never make you behave.

ALBERTINE. I’m no one’s slave!

PRATT. And you can’t get along with your own people either. Why ain’t you still in South Dakota? And what *were* you people thinking, anyway? Dancing with ghosts.

ALBERTINE. I survived a massacre, Parley Pratt. One of the few. Hid under a sagebrush and pretended to be dead. Later I watched them throw the frozen bodies of the dead Indians in a pit I helped to dig.

PRATT. I’m sorry.

ALBERTINE (*pause. This is difficult for her to say*). Look, Pratt, there's a dozen of us down at the spring. We ain't eaten in four days.

PRATT. Oh, my God...

CARLOTTA (*calling from offstage*). Who is it, Pratt?

PRATT. I'll take care of it.

(*CARLOTTA comes up to the door.*)

CARLOTTA (*whispering*). My God, she's a sight. Smells like a bonfire, looks like a banshee. Give her some soup, but don't let her in.

PRATT. Let me handle this. Please.

CARLOTTA (*whispering*). She can't come in here. And make sure she gets the hair out of her eyes.

ALBERTINE. She speaks of me as if I were dead.

CARLOTTA (*whispering*). If she cleans up, she can eat on the porch. Otherwise, I want her off my lot.

PRATT. I'll take care of this, Carlotta.

(*ALBERTINE and CARLOTTA stare at one another. ALBERTINE jumps. CARLOTTA runs.*)

ALBERTINE. She's a wonderful person, Parley Pratt. Generous and brave.

PRATT. She has other qualities.

ALBERTINE. Keeps the house well dusted.

PRATT. In a manner of speaking, yes.

ALBERTINE. Well, that must be nice. Helps you remember who you are. Clean and bright, light and white.

PRATT. Listen, you can have something to eat, but I want you to help Carlotta with the laundry this afternoon.

ALBERTINE. I ain't working in the heat of the day.

PRATT. If there's daylight, you work. That's the rule.

That's what it takes.

ALBERTINE. I don't work in the heat. I'm not crazy.

PRATT. You sit around waiting for someone to give you a handout instead.

ALBERTINE. We work till we have enough for that day.

PRATT. And in the meantime, you live in brush houses.

ALBERTINE. And you live in a square prison.

PRATT (*change of tone*). You gotta help me out here. You gotta clean up. (*Chuckle.*) Don't want you mistaken for an animal.

ALBERTINE. I am an animal, Pratt, and so are you.

PRATT. I think I've risen above that.

ALBERTINE. No, Parley Pratt, you ain't. And one day maybe you'll understand it. One day, if you're lucky.

PRATT. Sit down, right where you are.

ALBERTINE. What for?

PRATT. I'm washing your face. (*He grabs her. She twists away from him. Sits down on her own.*)

ALBERTINE. You can wash my face. But it won't change a thing.

PRATT. It changes a lot. I can't stand to look at you. (*He grabs a rag and a bucket.*)

ALBERTINE. On the day you die, if not before, you will understand.

PRATT. We are a civilized people. Doing our best to civilize the rest of you.

ALBERTINE. On that day you will join the rest of creation. One of many. Distinct in no way at all. A small part of the whole. A very small part.

PRATT. That's enough, Albertine.

ALBERTINE. Where is your civilization then? Your fences, your dams, your ninety head of cattle.

PRATT. And when I'm finished, we'll put you in clean clothes.

ALBERTINE. So that at last I can become both whitesome and delightsome?

PRATT. Hush up and sit still. *(He begins to scrub her face. She stops him.)*

ALBERTINE. Coyote lost her brother, Wolf. She watched the enemy kill him, then skin him. She followed after them, and when it was night, she took back her brother's hide. She kept it wet, and every morning looked to see if her brother Wolf had returned to her. Then one morning she heard her brother howling. So she followed the sound. But it got farther and farther away. The more she traveled, the more distant the sound. Coyote never found her brother. *(PRATT pauses. Hands her the rag.)* Now I will be white enough to clean your floors. *(ALBERTINE washes her face, her eyes glued to PRATT.)*