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CHAPTER 4

QUIARA ALEGRÍA HUDES

I hear things. I hear rhythms and I hear the world and I hear the voices and I hear how loud and soft the voices are . . . Structure is a deeply emotional and musical thing. Repetition and variation is just a basic component of music that I think of all the time when I write a play.¹

When Quiara Alegría Hudes turned on her cell phone after flying to Atlanta, Georgia, for previews of one of her plays, there was a series of messages informing her of the death of her aunt. In 2012, as she was teaching a class on playwriting at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, once again her phone filled up with multiple messages, the regular beeping sounding ominous. This time it was better news. She had won the Pulitzer Prize for her play *Water by the Spoonful*.

She was born and brought up in West Philadelphia in what she has described as a starter home for immigrants. Hers was the only Latino family on the block. Her father is Jewish and her mother Puerto Rican, while her stepfather is Catholic and her grandparents Lutherans. Identity, along with religion, was clearly fluid. Close neighbours were Ethiopian and Vietnamese, though the area was predominantly African-American. But, as she has explained, Puerto Rico is itself culturally diverse. She had family members in North and South Philadelphia as well as in Malvern, twenty-five miles west of Philadelphia, where she lived on a horse farm for three years, her mother reading her own poems to her, in Spanish, though she herself was not as yet fluent in the language. She has said that in some ways her family were always living in translation and she living between worlds, two different cultural points of view, simultaneously an outsider and an insider.

Her extended family was itself diverse including those who had made it and those who had not, those who became influential in their community as well as those struggling with addiction or spending time in prison. There was a division, too, between the Jewish and Puerto Rican sides of her family, the former seeming invisible to the latter; writing, she would come to believe, was one way to deal with that invisibility. Her parents separated when she was young so that she was largely raised by her mother. She herself used to attend Quaker meetings for ten years while her mother, an activist in the community, practiced Santería, an Afro-American religion influenced by Catholicism and popular in Puerto Rico, becoming a Santera, a priestess. As a result, there were often ceremonies conducted in the family home.

As she grew up, she learned aspects of Puerto Rican history and something rather broader. In high school her mother gave her *Doña Licha's Island*, Alfredo Lopez's study of colonialism in Puerto Rico, and Bartolomé de las Casals's *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, he being a Spanish Dominican friar writing in 1552 about the atrocities committed against the indigenous people of the Americas, neither being normal high school reading, though they may account for her later consciousness of forces in her own society.

She has spoken of growing up at a 'combustible, pivotal moment in American history.' 'The War on Drugs was ravaging our neighbourhood – it was really a war on those already destroyed

by drugs. Then AIDS hit us unexpectedly . . . How,' she asked, 'can one community come back from these things?' The simultaneous withdrawal of funds from the arts worked to silence those who might have resisted. Nonetheless, 'The times and people of my life have defined my journey,'² and a journey into understanding would lie at the heart of her play *26 Miles*. Growing up she 'felt so much injustice went unsaid in our society' that later she was 'compelled to say things that were left unsaid. To shine a spotlight where it hadn't yet been shone.'³ In doing so she turned to her family which would become the basis of the stories she would tell, stories that would be rooted in their experiences as Puerto Ricans but stories, too, about America. 'I am drawn to Latino life,' she has explained, 'because it's a vivid part of the American fabric. There are great American stories to tell from Latino life. I am also drawn to write diverse plays, because my lens is Latina but also reflects the diversity within my family and my city and my people . . . Putting Latino characters onstage, without apology, with drama, comedy, despair, love, and integrity, is my daily political act . . . This is the American story.'⁴

She did not read Latin American literature until later. Her real commitment was to music: 'I soaked up *musica jibara* – mountain music – and studied Afro-Cuban piano. I saw Cachao and could hear the Western European and African roots in his glorious music. I did my best to keep up dancing to Rubén Blades and Ray Barretto. I think this music continues to influence me, which is why I continue to include live musicians in my plays.'⁵ *Musica jibara*, according to the Puerto Rican singer Karol Aurora De Jesús Reyes, is 'the music of my country, that which represents us and that which identifies us as a people.'⁶ Cachao is the Cuban-born composer who popularized the mambo in America and was rediscovered in the 1990s having faded from view, while Ray Barretto was the son of Puerto Rican parents, a jazz percussionist elected to the International Latin Music Hall of Fame. In other words, there was no doubting the tradition to which she was laying claim, even as she was equally drawn to classical music and as a playwright to the major figures of American drama.

Music had, in a sense, been a background to her life. She has spoken of her mother playing recordings of Afro-Caribbean drumming, while her aunt was a composer and pianist with whom she took piano lessons, learning works by classical composers. The same aunt would take her to concerts including one by the blues, jazz and gospel singer Etta James and the reggae band Steel Pulse. She also saw the rock and roll band NRBQ and attended a ballet by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at Lincoln Center featuring Mikhail Baryshnikov. In other words, her musical education was eclectic. She studied with Elio Villafranca, the classically-trained jazz pianist, who taught her Afro-Caribbean piano, and the composer Don Rappaport at Settlement Music School (later invoked by Yazmin Ortiz, a music professor in her play *Water by the Spoonful*) from whom she learned composition. As she explained, 'I had absorbed all that by the time I reached ten years old. To me, music was an endless world of sound and possibility. There were no boundaries. I took my first formal piano lesson in the eighth grade and found my way to Settlement by the ninth grade,'⁷ Settlement being a community music school with branches around Philadelphia. She would spend much of her childhood practising piano four or five hours a day.

She was also taken to see the South African musical *Sarafina*, which addressed the question of apartheid, something of which she knew nothing at the time though later she was to credit the experience with introducing her to the idea of theatre as a means of opening audiences to areas to which they had previously had no exposure.

At Central High School in Philadelphia, she had a play produced when she was in eighth grade. It was called *My Best Friend Died*, and was based on the actual death of a friend, a

foreshadowing of her later use of factual material, drawing on those closest to her. She also wrote *My Dreams About Girls* which won first place in the Philadelphia Young Playwrights Festival. In her sophomore year, she took a class on creative writing. She was supposed to go to college early but, as a result of what she called a disruption in her life, stayed on for her junior year, a decision which she has said changed everything. It marked the beginning of her taking writing seriously.

Unsurprisingly, though, when she went to Yale it was to study music, though she later regarded this as a good education in how to write plays, rhythm being a central concern, 'music and literacy', going 'hand in hand' with her musical studies teaching her 'concentration, listening, and the practice of silence',⁸ skills important to writing. On the other hand, 'Music had no meaning. It simply is. People don't say, "The music didn't have a full dramatic arc" or "I didn't believe in that character." They let the language of notes wash over them as a whole experience. I write from that place. Language is a profound instrument creating incredible sounds.'⁹ While there she wrote two musicals and the score for a production of Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* (in which the future playwright Amy Herzog appeared). Previously, she had written, partly, she suggested, as a hobby and partly as a therapy, a way of dealing with loneliness. Now, though, she turned to writing scores and lyrics and would go on to write the book for *In the Heights* (1999), with music and lyrics by Lin-Manuel Miranda, and *Miss You Like Hell* (2016), originally written as a brief play, with music and lyrics by Erin McKeon.

In her freshman year, though, she was assigned Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* finding inspiration in the choreopoem as later, in her senior year, she took a course on Native American fiction which introduced her to Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony* which begins: 'I will tell you something about stories/ [he said]/ They aren't just entertainment. Don't be fooled. / They are all we have, you see, / all we have to fight off/ illness and death. / You don't have anything/if you don't have the stories.'¹⁰ These two works she would claim as the north and south for her when it came to her writing. From the first she derived a sense of something that had been missing from her life, but which was to be discovered within herself, while from the other a sense of story as a ceremony of healing, a route to truth. And since Silko's novel was about the return of a young Native American from war, having been a prisoner of the Japanese, it would have a special significance when she came to write *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*, in some sense itself a choreopoem but also about soldiers in and after not war but wars, her cousin Elliot Ruiz being an Iraq war veteran who had enlisted immediately out of high school and been wounded in the leg in 2003, while his father had served in Vietnam. He, indeed, would be the inspiration for what became known as the Elliot trilogy.

For a time, after Yale, she was a member of a band and on graduating made her money through her music, but on her mother's advice decided to concentrate on writing, though music would remain a point of reference in her plays. She enrolled in the Masters programme at Brown University where, like many other writers, she encountered Paula Vogel who, among other things, introduced her to German expressionism, something she regards as important to her. It was here that she began to write plays, *Yemaya's Belly* and *The Adventures of Barrio Grrrl!* a children's musical.

For Vogel, her work 'has a musicality about it – an emotional honesty without sentimentality, and then effortless outbursts of heightened lyricism.'¹¹ That was already apparent in *Yemaya's Belly*, inspired by a story her father had once told her and which had its premiere at the Portland

Stage Company in 2005, following an earlier version produced by Miracle Theatre in 2004. The characters are poor, a young boy longing to reach an America beyond his comprehension. 'Though the text seems poetic,' she instructed in a programme note, 'and the rituals give a sense of magical realism, it is imperative that these characters and their situation be as real and as specific as possible . . . The moments of poetry should be surprises, should stand out against a starker, more impoverished landscape. These characters are hungry; they do not have a lot.'¹² It is a play with rituals, elements of fantasy, life reformulated as poetry and story. In truth, though, the poverty scarcely impacts being subordinate to the fantasy. Nonetheless there are elements here which foreshadow later plays in which ghosts would make their appearance and daily experience be counterpoised to myths, stories, and a lyricism in part a function of language and in part of a music seldom distant from the lives of her characters.

Even though she had been working on another piece which would later prove hugely successful, *In the Heights*, then making its way through readings and development, her immediate breakthrough came with *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*, the first scene of which had been read by Paula Vogel who had encouraged her to continue. It was a challenging work, innovative in form. An early version was produced by Miracle Theatre in Portland, Oregon, in 2005, before, the following year, it was staged by the Culture Project, a 99-seat theatre on Delancey Street in New York dedicated to addressing human rights issues and, it claimed, amplifying marginalized voices. Despite the small venue, the production prompted reviews in *Variety* and *The New York Times* and went on to be shortlisted for a Pulitzer Prize. The first line of the *Times* review could hardly have been more encouraging for a new playwright, twenty-eight years old: "Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue" is that rare and rewarding thing: a theatre work that succeeds on every level, while creating something new.'¹³

It was a play, which took her two years to write, rooted in her family. As she has said, 'Family is the reason I picked up a pen . . . I had never heard stories like my family told. And they felt important to me. Our country's culture is part of our history, and I thought, if I can add some of these stories to our country's cultural landscape, then . . . I've added a slightly new sliver to history . . . My aunt Ginny was a huge inspiration to me. I named a character after her in *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*. Recently she passed away at the age of 59. I feel that her story lives on.'¹⁴

The Turkish writer Ahmet Altan has remarked that as a writer, 'I am neither where I am nor where I am not.'¹⁵ He spoke as a man, in prison, whose imagination nonetheless left him free. Much the same could be said in a different sense of Hudes not because she found herself in prison but because while she frequently earths her work in her own experiences, or that of those she knows intimately, her plays exist in their own imagined territory. She is both within and without her text as she exists both within the Puerto Rican community and aside from it, someone who escaped the barrio but finds in it a home. Fact and fiction engage in a conversation, fact elevated by the poetry of invention, the imagination grounded in real experience. For her, the experiences of others become so many found objects whose shapes and substance she senses even as she incorporates them into something new. She hears stories and retells them, preserving their truths but accommodating them to a meta-story. English and Spanish have their own dance, language itself expressing and embodying the double consciousness of those constructing a life in one culture while drawn back to another in a negotiation which nonetheless defines them.

Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue, Hudes explained, was prompted by conversations with her uncle, who had served in Vietnam, and her cousin, Elliot Ruiz, who had served in Iraq. She retained

both their first names and this would become her method in subsequent plays in what became a cycle. Elliot would become a central figure in her work, a man who had returned from war with an injured leg. As he explained,

On April 14, 2003, the Iraqis captured seven ‘prisoners of war’ and we were sent to rescue them. That was the day I got injured. An Iraqi ran my checkpoint and almost ripped off my leg. He was driving down the street towards us and I saw that he wasn’t going to stop, so I opened fire on the car. It lost control and the tyres got tangled up in the checkpoint’s barbed wire; the wire snapped and caught my legs, and when the car drove past it yanked my leg and dragged me down the street. I was awarded the Purple Heart for that.

I was flown to Spain and had emergency surgery on my leg. They told me I would never walk again – not without a cane. Basically, they were just telling me the worst. But I had just turned 18 and thought: ‘I’m walking. I’m telling you, I’m running again.’ I didn’t want to be told I wasn’t going to run again; nobody wants to hear that. I did everything the doctors told me not to do and recently I’ve started to be able to jog and run around.¹⁶

Though it was conversations which fed into the play its method was a result of her feeling the limitations of such in drama, aspects of experience being suppressed or not acknowledged, privacies being evaded. Hence this is a play in which characters address themselves, write or receive letters, describe experiences or interact through juxtaposition, an interleaving of events and perceptions. There are commonalities and divergencies as past and present are brought together. Free verse gives way to prose, voice to voice, generation to generation, rhythm to rhythm. There are, perhaps, echoes of *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* which had mixed poetry, music and occasional lines in Spanish. Shange, though, had a clear ideology. She rejected identification as a playwright rather than a poet because she regarded American plays as shallow, stilted and imitative, based on ‘a truly European framework for European psychology’ which ‘cannot function efficiently for those of us from this hemisphere.’ What was needed was to abolish ‘straight theatre for a decade or so, refuse to allow playwrights to work without dancers & musicians.’¹⁷ Hudes’ work is innovative, and certainly involves music, but it is not programmatic nor does she have any desire to reject her fellow American playwrights to whose influence she has attested even as she is committed to exploring new approaches.

A fugue is a contrapuntal composition in which a short phrase or melody is introduced and then taken up by others. But it is also a loss of awareness of identity, an altered state of consciousness, from the Latin for running away, flight. Both definitions apply in *Elliot, A Soldier’s Fugue* which features Elliot, eighteen or nineteen years old, who had served in Iraq, his mother, who had been in the Army Nurse Corps in Vietnam, his father who had been in the 3rd Cavalry Division in Vietnam, and whose age, like his mother’s, varies, and his grandfather, a Korean war veteran from the 65th Infantry Regiment of Puerto Rico (this being a time, we learn, when Puerto Ricans were kept separate), again pictured at different ages. The play takes place in two spaces, one described as ‘stark, sad,’ such light as there is being ‘like light through a jailhouse window or through the dusty stained glass of a decrepit chapel,’ the other a “‘garden space,” . . . teeming with life . . . a verdant sanctuary, green speckled with magenta and gold.’ Both spaces ‘are holy in their own way.’¹⁸ These constitute the contrapuntal context for the action in the play.

Her description of music for the play is equally a description of its rhythms. She identifies Bach, jazz, etudes, scales, hip hop and the flute. It is the grandfather who spells out the nature of a fugue: 'Of everything Bach wrote, it is the fugues. The fugue is like an argument. It starts in one voice. The voice is the melody, the single, solitary melodic line. The statement. Another voice creeps up on the first one. Voice two responds to voice one. They tangle together. They argue. They become messy. They create dissonance. Two, three, four lines clashing' (35). That is, in effect, a description of Hudes' method, the structural principal of the play, but the grandfather also points out its relevance to war claiming that his platoon in Korea had been in love with Bach, or at least to the principle of two contrasting moods, the howl of howitzers being balanced against his playing of a flute. He taught them, he recalls, the difference between major and minor keys, explaining it in terms of loving and losing a woman, sunrise and, implicitly, sunset. The other dimension of the fugue, however, is evident in the fact that later, 'I started losing words. Dates. Names of objects. Family names. Battles I had fought in' (37).

In the fugue scenes, Hudes explained, 'people narrate each other's actions and sometimes narrate their own,' (5) time being fluid and overlapping, characters stepping back into the time when their reality was that of war, different wars. Their experiences echo one another's even as they diverge. The play opens with a scene itself titled 'Fugue', as Ginny, Elliot's mother, Pop, his father, along with his grandfather, each describe beds in military facilities except that they exist in different times even as, moments later, they describe Elliot as he emerges from a shower, commenting on actions of which they are not a part. Thus, Grandpop observes that his grandson will board a ship to Iraq while he and Ginny describe his journey on board and he and Pop, speaking together, instruct in the military code.

As Elliot listens to hip hop on his headphones we are back in 1950s Korea with Grandpop who has been reading a letter from his son, Elliott's father, though we hear nothing of it. He assembles a flute and plays the melody of a Bach passacaglia while his son lies down singing himself to sleep to a marching song even as Elliot bobs his head in time to the hip hop music he hears until, for a moment, he sings the words of the song he is listening to as Pop sings his marching song and his grandfather plays his flute. Here, then, are the elements of fugue, voices sounding out in isolation but coming together, a three-part counterpoint as Hudes points out, a counterpoint consisting of voices which are harmonically interdependent and yet independent rhythmically. Their experiences differ, Elliot on his way to the desert, his grandfather freezing in Inchon, yet there is an assonance, an internal rhyme, in that their lives are contained by war.

The opening scene is followed by a Prelude, musically an introductory piece but equally an action leading to something more significant. Here, Elliot, back from Iraq, though only for a week, and with a Purple Heart signifying his injury, is to throw the first pitch at a Phillies baseball game. This, in turn, is only one of four preludes. The next is set in 1966, in the heat of Vietnam, except that Grandpop seems to be there alongside his son. This in turn gives way to another Prelude in which Ginny is seen in a garden which she has helped create from wasteland since her own return from Vietnam. This is a sanctuary, a relief from, an antidote to, war. She tends it as she had the bodies of those she had worked to heal in Vietnam, this place teeming with life as their deaths had stalked the wards, life in the garden being an act of resistance.

As she tends plants, tumbled together, bringing forth new life, in the next Prelude her husband, back in 1966, writes a letter describing his assignment picking up scattered body parts to be labelled and tossed together, lives disassembled, a letter not to be shared, a truth not to disturb those anxious only for his return. The fact is, though, that these worlds cannot be

kept apart. The counterpoint to the green world of the garden is the green 'from the night goggles. / Green Iraq. / Verdant Falluja. / Emerald Tikrit . . . being The green profile of a machine gun in the distance,' (26–7) Vietnam segueing to Iraq and both to America where Ginny dreams these images as her son has nightmares at the sight of the first man he has killed.

In the next Prelude Elliot is being interviewed on television, explaining the circumstances of his wounding at Tikrit, the producer more concerned at his swearing than capturing the truth of the moment, even rehearsing him, each a step further away from the reality of the moment, now packaged and processed for consumption. Later he is interviewed on a local radio station and we learn that his grandfather has Alzheimer's, his fluency throughout thus suspect or retrieved from another time. We learn, too, that his father 'doesn't bring up that stuff too much,' (50) despite the fact that within the play he does.

What appear to be conversations between the characters are juxtapositions, echoes, momentary assonances, intersecting stories, voices so many instruments sounding together. In their different times, Pop and Elliot perform the same gestures sorting through the wallet of a man they have killed. There comes a moment when Pop and Grandpop utter the same lines in unison. Wars have their different causes, are waged in different places with different enemies. They are occasions of destruction, death, but there is a similar language, a shared experience, a disturbing but undeniable dark harmony and it is that which Hudes orchestrates through her mixture of poetry and prose, her bending of time back on itself, not merely interweaving incidents but registering shared tones, anxieties, fears, melancholy. There are letters but these fall short of the experiences they set out to describe, language being inadequate, silence a preferred option for those who have no wish to recall what they would escape or sensitive to the sensibilities of those they would address.

The play was based not only on interviews with her family but also with other veterans. In that sense hers has some affinity with the work of Emily Mann whose plays were also based on interviews, *Still Life* setting out to explore violence in America largely through the memories of a Vietnam veteran, also, as it happens, looking for a musical sense of harmony, weaving together separate accounts. She, too, looked for a poetic rhythm through intercutting, setting her text out in verse. She looked for an improvisational feel which she found in the best jazz musicians while wishing the monologues in her play to sound like extended riffs. She, too, found or created meaning through juxtapositions, stressing both the continuities and discontinuities of experience.

The subjects of her play attended the final production, surely in a desire to be assured that confidences had not been betrayed. Hudes has confessed to nervousness as she, too, watched alongside those who had shared their memories with her and it is clearly dangerous territory mining the life experiences of others for dramatic purposes, raising moral issues. Even granted that she had their permission she still felt anxious that they should not feel she had violated their trust. She has recalled watching a scene at the beginning of the play in which the character Elliot pulls out a Bible containing family photographs, as the real Elliot had done in Iraq. For the rest of the play he was in tears but insisted that he was proud that elements of his story had been told. Nor was this the last time such a challenge would occur. Ahead lay *Water by the Spoonful*, a play which would deal with addiction and recovery, which, though fictional, would bear directly on the experiences of those in her family.

How does *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*, then, differ from Mann's? She had relied on transcriptions of her interviews, literally cutting them up and rearranging them to form her text. The words

are those of her subjects even as she then manipulated them, generating meanings from that process of editing, as from the rhythms she imposed. Hudes' method differed. Unlike Mann, she was not concerned to create a documentary theatre whose authenticity relied on reproducing the actual words of those with whom she spoke. Hers is not a 'theatre of fact' in the way that Martin Duberman's *In White America* had been, using letters, journals, speeches and personal accounts, a weaving together of historical documents, to explore American race relations. Nor is it 'tribunal theatre' of the kind popular in Britain's Tricycle Theatre which presented public documents, spoken evidence, trial proceedings to explore such subjects as the Iraq war or Guantanamo.

Hers is also not a play with a thesis, not offered as an indictment. This is not theatre as a weapon, a political intervention, even as audiences are free to draw conclusions from what they experience as three generations go to war and are defined in part by what they experience. She is interested in exploring what has shaped her central character, displaced, wounded and returned, reflecting but also creating the community from which he comes, the family who bear the impress of his trauma. She does so by creating visual and linguistic images. There comes a moment when Grandpop, Ginny and Pop wrap Elliot's legs in barbed wire, trapping him, as his wounding is described not by him but them, their accounts mirroring the actual event, and mirroring is one of her strategies in a play in which she is interested in reflections in more than one sense, actions in one time reflecting those in another even as the text itself is a reflection on the impact of war. She works by tonal changes, a shifting of focus, a blending and separation of narratives, the text speeding up – 'Rapid shutter action,' says Ginny, 'frames with no sound,' (42) says Grandpop as Elliot lies, a spill of words rushing through his mind – or slowing down, as in the garden scenes in which monologue goes uninterrupted. Then it is Pop who becomes the person lying in bed with a wounded leg, a man with three purple hearts, as Ginny, his wife-to-be, tends to him, an acting out of the scene she had recounted earlier in her monologue in the garden, time again turning back on itself.

As the play ends so the various strands pull together. Eliot returns wounded from Iraq anxious to talk to his father, to see if their experiences of war were the same, but he can no more learn from him, it seems, than his grandfather. What he does do is read his father's letters from Vietnam. As he does so, now in the garden at night, his mother wraps his body in vines rather than the barbed wire which had injured him. What he learns from the letters is what we have experienced in the play. They had both suffered in the same way, trod the same path, had the same feelings. In spite of everything, Elliot decides to return to Iraq and we see him at the airport in 2003 about to leave, but his is only one of three duffel bags, packed with mementos of home. The others are his grandfather's as, in 1950, he prepares to board a ship to Korea, and his father's, in 1965, as, at Newark Airport, he begins his journey to Vietnam. All are off to war, different wars but essentially the same war, this in a scene designated a Fugue.

The Iraq war was far from over when Hudes wrote the play but it is not an indictment of it, its politics being of no more immediate concern than it is for those, in the play, who served in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and who shared feelings of fear, guilt, anger, camaraderie. Elliot, after all, chooses to return. What is of interest is not only how war impacts on the individual but the sense that it is a closed experience, shared only by those who were there and who themselves choose to contain it as if unconnected to the lives they resume. Yet in the play there are confessions, the unspoken is spoken, a motif established and then taken up by others. The very structure of the play, the shared images, the musical link through a flute handed down, is an

assertion of connection, between those who served disparate causes and between members of a family who carry memories which they hesitate to share but which have shaped who they are.

Some critics objected to what they felt was the coldness of the characters, finding them undeveloped. Perhaps they were expecting a different kind of play. They are seen, for the most part, only in terms of a particular set of experiences. They are seen, too, refracted through letters, memories, commenting on others, sometimes seemingly as others. They partly act as narrators. The very structure and strategy privilege connections over time, images, music, shifting moods themselves being foregrounded.

Her practice is to send drafts of her plays to those she interviews, ready to respond if they object. Sometimes they did, and she did, indeed, respond. She would return to her family in subsequent plays but meanwhile another project had been unfolding for her since 2005, a project which involved working with a fellow Puerto Rican who had grown up not in Philadelphia but first in Washington Heights and then the Inwood area of New York City, today 74 per cent Hispanic, north of Washington Heights. His name was Lin-Manuel Miranda, Lin-Manuel prompted by a poem about the Vietnam War by José Manuel Torres Santiago ('Nana roja para mi hijo Lin Manuel')¹⁹. His father had been born in Puerto Rico, arriving in America in his late teens, while his mother, also from Puerto Rico, had come to America as a child. 'We knew what the deal was,' he said, as immigrants 'we have to work three times as hard. I don't remember a time when my parents had less than three jobs each. That is just the immigrant story.'²⁰

Like Hudes, he had learned to play the piano. He was a lover of hip hop, of the Beastie Boys and Broadway musicals. At school he performed in numerous student productions, including the lead in Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance*: 'I was a musical theatre nerd ... our year did twenty-minute versions of six musicals, and by the time I was twelve I had been Captain Hook, Bernado, a son in *Fiddler*, a farmer in *Oklahoma!* A back up in *The Wiz* ... So, I had this lethal dose of musical theatre [when] I was very young.'²¹ He studied at Wesleyan University where he performed in musicals and wrote songs. It was in his sophomore year, in 1999, that he wrote a draft of *In the Heights*. It was staged by the student theatre company, he having added rap and salsa. He presented it at his parents' house on his twentieth birthday. What he wanted to see in the musical was 'Latinos, not wielding knives, but ... being in love and having businesses and having families ... It was originally more of a love story set in Washington Heights.'²²

He graduated in 2002 and began to act but in 2003 there was a reading of *In the Heights* at the Drama Book Shop on West 40th Street presented by Back House Productions formed by four Wesleyan graduates, one of whom, Thomas Kail, was the director. It was attended by the Broadway producer Jill Furman. She expected nothing but, 'It was music I had never heard before in a musical and a method of storytelling that was fresh, unique, exciting, and had energy to burn. I knew immediately I was in the presence of a musical genius and had to be involved with this project.'²³ She signed up, along with two fellow producers, and began to look for someone who could write the book. They settled on Hudes, musically intelligent, from a similar Puerto Rican background. 'When I came on board,' she explained, 'it already had these amazing sounds and this amazing, vibrant life, and these great characters. And so it was just me taking all these beautiful things Lin had been creating and continuing to sculpt a more focused story out of it that was about the neighbourhood.'²⁴

A reading of a revised first act was held in 2004, with another reading the following year and a workshop at the O'Neill Musical Theatre Conference. A full workshop followed in 2006

designed to impress possible backers. The musical went through numerous drafts, Furman counting at least twenty-four. In 2007, it opened Off-Broadway at the 136 seat 37 Arts named for its location on 37th Street. Finally, in 2008, it arrived at the Richard Rogers Theatre on Broadway. It ran for 1,184 performances and won Drama Desk, Tony and Grammy awards besides being shortlisted for the Pulitzer Prize.

Miranda and Hudes had begun with the idea that the characters would be Puerto Rican, that being their mutual background, but discovered that Washington Heights was now more Dominican. As a result, they decided that the lead could not be Puerto Rican, though that led to casting difficulties there being a smaller number of Dominican actors.

With a show of this kind it is not always easy to disentangle the contribution of the writer of the book and the writer of the lyrics. Talking to Haley Gordon, of the Philadelphia Young Playwrights, of which she was an alumna, Hudes explained that she and Miranda had worked in the same room and that their collaboration was like cooking a soup with someone,

tampering with one another's recipes . . . He would steal from my scenes all the time. I would go and write what I thought was going to be the most brilliant scene in the show and then he would come back the next morning . . . and would say, 'yes, I turned that into a song, so you no longer get to keep that' . . . I would then exact my own revenge by taking his song and cannibalising it for a scene. We referred to ourselves as cannibals because we would eat from ourselves and from each other's work and what ends up happening over time is that there becomes a seamlessness between the book and the music and the lyrics . . . People have asked me . . . who came up with that idea? It might be an idea about the book, it might be a staging, it might be the lyrics and a lot of times I can remember and a lot of times I cannot.²⁵

The wit of her book matches that of his lyrics, dialogue and songs alike having a driving pace and energy. What struck her was that 'it is a traditional piece. It has love stories, it has a comic number, it has a big dance number, it has all these traditional musical theatre elements . . . it's a traditional book musical . . . using [that] traditional book musical structure to bring in new sounds and a new lyrical voice . . . a story that is very traditional in some ways, but is also bringing together new colors and some new elements.'²⁶ It was to be 'a deliberately family-friendly piece and so there was a pleasantness about it that we decided was part of our aesthetic.'²⁷

The central character of *In the Heights* is Usnavi, named for a misreading of the sign his parents saw on the side of a ship – US Navy. He is an immigrant from the Dominican Republic, hanging the Dominican flag as a reminder of where all in his neighbourhood came from, their English slipping into Spanish as they stake their claim on a new country even as they cling to the old. He is owner of the De La Vega Bodega (convenience store), across from which is a taxi company owned by the Rosarios (Kevin and Camilla), in financial trouble, laying off half their drivers. Kevin is the son of a line of farmers back in the Dominican Republic who had come to America to change his life, to break a heritage of poverty, his hope now resting on his daughter, Nina, studying at Stanford University, not only the pride of their lives but of the community. She is the one who made it out, the first to go to college, the barrio's best. Meanwhile, Abuela Claudia, who, though not Usnavi's blood grandmother had nonetheless raised him, and who had arrived from Cuba in 1943, working as a maid on the Upper East Side, learning the

language, has heart problems, the cost of her medication a worry. The dreams of another place become the dreams of this one even as they encounter racism and a suspicion of immigrants.

The other small business in this one block on Washington Heights, Manhattan, is a hair salon owned by Daniela, itself in trouble because of a rising rent, her employee, Vanessa, dreaming of escape, while giving half of her money to her mother who drinks it away rather than paying her electricity bill. The action takes place from 3 July to 5 July, so that celebration should be in the air. But this is a place where money is tight, where dreams attach themselves to lottery tickets, where sacrifices are made for the next generation. The Rosarios' daughter has been far away on the west coast, except that she now returns, having lost her scholarship money because of poor grades, themselves a result of her working two jobs to raise the money necessary for books which she then had no time to read. A door, it seems, has been slammed shut unless she can be persuaded to return and they can raise money to support her.

Things take a turn for the worst, from their point of view, when she falls in love with one of the Rosarios' employees, Benny, a non-Latino with no Spanish. Nina herself had first learned Spanish only to go to Stanford, a place where even English has a different connotation, the word weekend not being a noun but a verb meaning to 'go skiing at your cabin on Lake Tahoe. "Cabin." Noun. A blasé word for mansion.'²⁸ It is alien to who she is but she is unsure of her identity, coming from people who had had to negotiate their own. Where is home, here on Independence Day? Where does her future lie?

A power cut suddenly casts everything into darkness, even as fireworks light the sky, while below someone trashes Usnavi's store. They are seemingly powerless in more ways than one, but a miracle has seemingly occurred Abuela (Grandmother) Claudia winning \$96,000 on the lottery, giving a third of it to Usnavi – whose first thought is to take a flight to the Dominican Republic – a third to his young cousin, Sonny, while keeping a third for herself, dreams suddenly realized. At the same time, though, Nina's father, unbeknown to his wife, has already arranged to sell his business to pay for Nina's tuition. It is a blow to everyone. Good news and bad alike seem to signal the breakup of the community, a fact underlined when Claudia suddenly dies leaving behind mementos of their lives, souvenirs of those she helped on their way, the past which made them what they are. Understanding that she has a debt to this woman who had believed in her, Nina decides to return to California as her parents agree to sell their business to make this possible. Meanwhile she has begun to teach Benny Spanish, while he is determined to create his own company.

Others, too, have new hope, Vanessa being helped to move by Daniela who is herself aided by Usnavi. Sonny passes money to a graffiti artist. People are sharing even as others are leaving, the corner changing, gentrification threatening. Finally, Usnavi decides to stay, this place having become home, a word sung by others in a community not so easily disassembled. Indeed, this is the last word of a show which has itself created a community through song, dance and a book which offers a celebration of those whose lives are interwoven, immigrants who speak more than one language, have more than one dream, who have created the environment in which they live, looking to escape even as they feel the gravitational pull of the place which has shaped them. Notoriously, the political scientist Samuel P. Huntington, alarmed at the spread of Spanish speakers in America, declared that there could be no Americano dream. *In the Heights* suggests otherwise.

For both Miranda and Hudes, though, despite the specifics of the neighbourhood, for all its echo of their own experiences in New York and Philadelphia, its emphasis on an immigrant

community, it dealt with issues relevant to all those struggling to get by, to pay the rent, keep businesses going, fund the next generation's education. It dealt with love crossing racial lines, *West Side Story* without the violence or the tragedy, though Lin-Manuel Miranda would go on to write Spanish-language lyrics for a song from that show, 'Maria', to raise funds for hurricane relief in Puerto Rico. These are characters balancing loyalties, discovering themselves even as the community itself emerges as a character in itself, painted in primary colours, the rhythms of the music and dance, the rhymes, expressing a mutuality which is a resource to those dealing with the daily traffic of problems.

In 2010, a production of *In the Heights* was taken to Puerto Rico. For Lin-Manuel Miranda it was a moving experience: 'I find it hard to talk about it without tearing up . . . Growing up, I'd get sent to Puerto Rico for a month a year where I was the kid with a fucked-up Spanish accent who couldn't really speak it well enough to kids my age. I was like the weird exchange kid. I loved Puerto Rico, but I never felt at home with it. Then to have *In the Heights* embraced in English, the way I wrote it, it closed some hole in me that I didn't know was open.'²⁹ A film version was planned, ending up with the Weinstein Company. In 2017, when news of Weinstein's history of sexual harassment became known, both Hudes and Miranda tried to have it removed.

In 2011 she and Miranda were considering the possibility of working on another musical together, an adaptation of Chaim Potok's *My Name Is Asher Lev*, but for the moment she turned back to drama, her next play being radically different, though there are echoes of her own life, and music again plays a role. From a named cast of thirteen, with a dozen more unnamed, and with twenty-six musical numbers, she moved to a cast of four (though three of them double) in *26 Miles*. It is set in 1986, in part in two households, one in Philadelphia, the other in Paoli, a small suburb with fewer than 1 per cent Latino citizens, even as effectively this is a road play covering a journey of two thousand miles, focussing on a mother, Beatriz, and her fifteen-year-old daughter, Olivia. They have been separated for eight years by court order (Beatriz not at that time being a citizen), Olivia now living with Aaron, her Jewish father, and a step-mother with whom she has difficult relations perhaps because, wanting a child of her own, she has just experienced her sixth miscarriage. Olivia and her father are close, though he had walked out on her mother. He is a carpenter, and she is fluent in the details of his craft. They have also shared a fantasy of escaping to Wyoming and building a cabin in the woods but this is no more than a fantasy, except that, debilitated from a bout of vomiting, she calls her mother and just such an escape ensues, a journey, it turns out, away and towards, away from disintegrating relationships and complexity and towards understanding and acceptance.

In Olivia's mind it is an American adventure and, indeed, that is the heritage she is inclined to accept. As she writes in a primitive magazine/diary, whose entries are scattered through the play (readers appearing and disappearing along the way), she is setting out like 'Lewis and Clark, Jack Kerouac.'³⁰ She and her mother sit side by side in a car, an echo, perhaps, of the device from Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive*.

In an antique shop she picks up a book about explorers over the century, and as they travel so there are discoveries to be made. Not for nothing has she been raised on the *National Geographic*. As they journey deep into America they encounter a Peruvian seller of tamales who has settled in South Dakota and who is equally lyrical about food and love. America is not entirely the land of log cabins and buffalos she had imagined. Nor is love quite what it seems. Beatriz professes love and concern for a daughter she has barely spoken to in three years even though, on their separation, she had attempted suicide in despair before returning to the barrio and speaking

Spanish again, rediscovering a self she had so nearly lost along with her daughter. It is this revelation which leads Olivia to confess that the reason for her vomiting was that she, too, had attempted suicide as a result of bullying at school where she had been called 'white trash', her pants being pulled down to reveal that she was having a period, pulled down, as it happens, by the boy to whom she had lost her virginity and this is a play in which betrayal weaves in and out of the text. It was her desire to live which had prompted the call to her mother.

Olivia's writing is a way of pulling experiences together. 'She makes chaos make sense,' (34) observes Beatriz, much as the play itself pulls threads together from lives which are themselves fragmented and relationships which ebb and flow. Liking her family to tectonic plates shifting under pressure, she writes: 'Plates shift one centimetre a year, they collide slowly. Mom and me and Dad and Deborah. We're all plates. Shifting, eliding, colliding, trying to fit together like jigsaw pieces, searching for compatible edges. Trying to lock in. But something in us, plates of rigid land. Pieces that don't interlock. Trying to come together but making mountains instead . . . until you're green and alive in places, covered in snow in others . . . what kind of a mountain will I be? . . . Mom's definitely volcanic. Dad, he's more underwater mountain' (36).

Arthur Miller once remarked that he did not write plays, he wrote metaphors and in a sense *26 Miles* is such doing what metaphors do, namely bringing together discrete elements thereby creating new meanings, even as the journey is itself a familiar trope.

Beatriz is married to Manuel, a Cuban-American contractor and, like Hudes' mother, into spiritualism, visiting a Santero on the loss of her daughter, while her husband is Catholic. More than one boundary is crossed in *26 Miles*, religious, cultural, linguistic, literal. Beatriz is dark-skinned, her daughter white, and as a result they prompt different responses, themselves have different identities. There is a space between them. How, Olivia asks, could she be Cuban when she cannot speak Spanish, lives in a place with few Latinos and 'don't even tan right', to which her mother replies, 'my skin is yours. Whether anyone else sees, you wear the skin of your mother. You got poor cousins in *el barrio* who buy milk with food stamps . . . you better NEVER apologize for it . . . I used to apologize for it' (42).

As they travel west, so Beatriz teaches her daughter Spanish as they both learn about each other. Her mother's choice of music is Cuban-born Gloria Estefan while Olivia has a preference for Chopin, underscoring the different trajectories they have travelled. It is on the journey that Olivia discovers that she is illegitimate, her father never having married her mother but immediately marrying the woman for whom he abandoned her. Meanwhile, Beatriz's husband is apparently having an affair with a white woman, but another secret is divulged: Beatriz is two months pregnant.

They finally close in on Yellowstone Park, noting a sign indicating that they have twenty-six miles to go until at last they arrive and watch the buffalo Olivia had fantasized seeing. As she says, 'You get an image in your head. It feeds you. It keeps you breathing. Keeps your heart motivated to beat the next beat. Then you see it . . . It just is' (50).

The play ends with Olivia returning to her father and Beatriz reconciled with Manuel. The tales of explorers she has been reading are essentially about surviving, which is what they all struggle to do, unsure what form it might take. They revel in Yellowstone and the buffalos not because they mean anything but because they simply are, celebrating their mere existence, (both Beatriz and Olivia having tried to end theirs). A key to existence, it seems, is not only acceptance but celebration. In one sense the play is a validation of the imagination, as it is of what brings together as well as what pushes apart.

Subsidiary characters are played by the same actors that play the principal parts, with the exception of Olivia. It is not to be presented realistically. Indeed, when, in one production, it was, Hudes was disappointed feeling that the music might have played more of a role, giving momentum to the journey. She was also dissatisfied, to some degree, with her own story: 'I wanted to write a story about different ethnicities joining in one family. But I didn't feel that. I felt that the divisions were almost so subtle that the audience, and even I, was not totally convinced of them.' It was not, she confessed, her favourite piece of writing. She was also, she said, 'thinking about immigration at the time, the way immigration really affects family structures in this country.'³¹ In the end this led in the direction of transforming the play into a musical, *Miss You Like Hell*. Initially concerned that it might no longer seem relevant, she drew attention to the effect the country's immigration laws were having, separating families. There was also a pragmatic reason for writing musicals, lamenting that straight plays 'don't pay bills,' even as the collaborative dimension of writing for musicals dilutes individual contributions and responsibility.

There is a sense in which Hudes writes about centripetal and centrifugal forces, fragmentation and cohesion, dissonance and harmony. There are forces which threaten the individual, the integrity of the self. Bodies suffer assaults, carry wounds, self-inflicted or otherwise. There are divisions, gaps which open up, societal or familial. Yet there is a counter force, a sense of community. There are acts of charity. If communication can be compromised, not least because there are two languages in play, English and Spanish (in *Water by the Spoonful* there is even a ghost who speaks Arabic), the urge to communicate, to reach out, to share, is equally strong. Nor is that true only of the world in which she was raised, with divorced parents and an extended family which itself ranged from those with a confident grasp on life to those battling to keep their heads above water and addiction at bay, yet evidencing a certain solidarity. Their struggles with identity, with surviving the moment, yet their acknowledgement of what is shared, of certain human obligations, applies with equal force to the country at large and beyond, and that would lie at the heart of her next play, *Water by the Spoonful*, a play about family and community but one which extends out into the world, a virtual community which exists, for much of the time, online. The '*real world*,' (her italics) is represented by a jumble of chairs which represent different locations, while the 'online world' is an empty space. There are, in other words, two communities each of which embodies both alienation and the desire for connection, two states to be reflected in music which echoes these different states.

In this play, written over a three-year period, she turned back to the figure of Elliot from *A Soldier's Fugue*, the work, she confessed, of which she was most proud it being, in her view, the best writing she had done. She now decided to create a trilogy each based on musical structures. *A Soldier's Fugue* had been based on classical music, while *Water by the Spoonful* was to be on jazz (inspired by the music of John Coltrane, which she played while writing, especially, she noted, the late Coltrane) and the third, *The Happiest Song Plays Last*, which she claimed in some ways to have been writing for fourteen years (with seven or eight versions along the way), on folk music.³²

Water by the Spoonful, which she has described as big and sprawling, she having seen both *Angels in America* and *August: Osage County*, brings together a 'young Japanese woman in Hokkaido [Yoshiko Sakai] and a middle-aged African-American man in California [Clayton Wilkie],' along with Puerto Ricans, in part, she has explained, because 'I am hungry to find new ways to put divergent characters in rooms together and see where the electricity is. I would like

to be a Latina playwright penning characters from all ethnicities and lifestyles. It's a way to get to know the world.³³

Water by the Spoonful is concerned with addiction and recovery and, in preparation, she attended AA meetings where she was struck by the ironic humour of those in other ways desperate, the humour balancing the darkness that had led them there. Hartford Stage, which would present the play, put her in touch with the Institute of Living at Hartford Hospital, with its addiction recovery programme, where she conducted interviews, though largely with the staff. In terms of characters, she 'decided to widen the lens' feeling that she was in danger of being 'ghettoised in terms of theatre,' hence her inclusion of an African-American, a Japanese-American and a white character, along with her decision to set the play in different places. It was still to be about a Latin family but was opened up to other ethnicities, this being the world she lived in.³⁴

Yazmin Ortiz, known as Yaz, once the only Puerto Rican girl in an all-white school, is now an adjunct professor of music at Swarthmore College. Like Hudes, she had studied under Don Rappaport at Settlement Music School and, again like Hudes, is cousin to Elliot, who is now a would-be actor performing in advertisements on Spanish-language television while working at a fast food store. We encounter her in a seminar playing Coltrane's 'A Love Supreme', and explaining that 'Dissonance is still a gateway to resolution.'³⁵ Though she does not mention it, 'A Love Supreme', is broken up into four tracks whose titles will, in fact, reflect the process underlying Hudes' play, those tracks being 'Acknowledgement', 'Resolution', 'Pursuance' and 'Psalm', the whole record, his most popular, echoing stages in a spiritual struggle. This, it turns out, is an accurate reflection of those in the play who are themselves trying to emerge from confusion through acknowledging their problems, looking for some kind of salvation.

One of those successfully struggling to escape addiction tells a story which is, in effect, a metaphor. He had been sucked under by a wave when swimming, 'sinking to the bottom', (14) only to be rescued, prompting him immediately to seek the help he needs by joining a group and reciting the Serenity Prayer, Reinhold Niebuhr's poem which had been given to soldiers and was adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous, though not quoted in the play: 'God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as the pathway to peace.'³⁶

The poem insists that though supreme happiness can only lie in the next world it is possible to be 'reasonably happy in this life', a modest enough objective but, to those in thrall to addiction, perhaps a reasonable objective. Meanwhile, living one day at a time is what the play's addicts have to attempt, even as acceptance and change prove difficult to reconcile and, indeed, Yaz also invokes Coltrane's 'Ascension', which marked the beginnings of free jazz, the musicians working to no instructions beyond the need for ending solos with crescendos, solos and group-playing alternating as in the play individual stories are integrated with those of the group. The risk, Yaz remarks, is that 'freedom is a hard thing to express musically without spinning into noise,' (15) which proves equally true, it transpires, of those who struggle to communicate with one another through the noise of their contending stories, the confusing and debilitating mess of lives lived in dissonance. Yaz, herself, has her own problems with acceptance. Her marriage to a man with 'Quaker Oats for DNA' (25), and who comes from a different background, is about to end while Elliot's aunt is herself dying of cancer, her ashes to be scattered in Puerto Rico.

Elliot's birth mother, Odessa, whose own life is a mess, living 'one notch above squalor', and who knows what it is to come close to destroying her life through addiction, has set up a

website for those needing help: www.recovertogether.com. Her online name is Haikumom (named for her interest in Haiku). In the online world she puts in touch with one another those in need, each having different identities, in the case of one, multiple identities. Orangutan, born in Japan as Yoshiko Sakai, was adopted and became Madeleine Mays living in Maine where there were no Asians except one working on a deli counter. She now lives back in Japan having seemingly escaped her addiction with the help of her virtual companions, except, having been clean for ninety-six days, she asks for help, or at least a distraction, the need still there. Chutes & Ladders (real name Clayton Wilkie), a 56-year-old God-fearing African-American working in a low-level job in the IRS, is alienated from his son, redeemed only by his sense of humour and the fact that he has been clean for ten years. Orangutan invites him to Japan so that they can meet outside a virtual environment. Urged by Odessa/Haikumom to recognize an offer of friendship he gives his address and actual name, a first step into the real no matter how unreal the offer seems.

Another, Fountainhead, real name John, is a white computer programmer and entrepreneur. This community cuts across racial and class lines as is apparent from the fact that for him, crashing his Porsche and having to rent a Ford, 'is as close to rock bottom as I'd like to get' (18). He steers clear of meetings, doctors and experts for fear he will leave a trail. He celebrates a single day without cocaine, congratulating himself that, 'At least it's not heroin,' (19) refusing to admit to himself that he is an addict having smoked crack for two years. His post is not well received ('We don't come to this site for a pat on the back' [20]) except that Odessa/Haikumom, as site administrator, having herself been clean for years but only after losing her family, reminds the others of their own desperation in joining. Four days later he is back online confessing that three days was all he could manage, not least because his wife suffers from depression and is in therapy. He then adds that having previously made three hundred thousand dollars he is now unemployed. Truth is hard to come by even as it is the price of entry to the site. Haikumom offers consolation and advice: 'For three days straight, you didn't try to kill yourself on an hourly basis. Please. Talk to your wife about your addiction . . . You are in for the fight of your life . . . The only way out of it is through it' (32).

The scene intercuts with one in which Elliot appears, haunted by a ghost, the embodiment of his memory of the person he had killed in Iraq, a man who repeats an Arabic sentence which he has learned means, 'May I please have my passport back,' the significance of which would become evident in her next play, he having taken the passport from the man's dead body. These are all characters who have betrayed themselves and others. Odessa may offer help and forgiveness to others but herself has a secret. When her two-year-old daughter, Elliot's sister, had suffered from flu she had failed to give her the treatment she required for her dehydrated condition, a spoonful of water every five minutes, her own need for drugs taking her away. As a result, the child had died, her name, Mary Lou, never thereafter spoken, a wound not to be healed. She would have survived had she had her regular spoonful, just as the addicts survive by taking a day at a time.

For all their failures, the addicts seem to follow the path of Coltrane's 'A Love Supreme', from acknowledgement, through pursuit, to psalm, that word signifying songs, words accompanying music. Here the songs are the essence of their lives, as they are in August Wilson's plays, Wilson, Hudes has said, always hovering over her with his sense of the importance of music, his concern with spirituality. Chutes & Ladders is no longer using, no longer hurting others. Virtual relationships edge towards real ones, as he responds to the invitation to join Madeleine Mays/

Yoshiko/Orangutan. 'This is about me wanting relationships,' he says, 'With humans, not ones and zeroes,' (46)

Meanwhile, they honour a woman who has died. Eugenia Ortiz had been at the centre of the community, pulling it together, living to serve. She had spent time in the Army Nurse Corps but demonstrated for peace while Elliot was in Iraq. She had created public gardens from abandoned lots, as Hudes' mother had done, as Ginny had in *Elliot: A Soldier's Fugue*, refurbished homes to sell to young families. As Yaz declares, 'She. Was. Here' (49). She stood as a counterforce to those who have conspired in their own invisibility, cut off by their addiction from those who could be their redemption. As she had told Elliot, 'nobody can make you invisible but you' (48). Odessa pours a spoonful of water on the floor. Yet on the day of the funeral she, the administrator, creator of the help site, the moderator, herself relapses after being clean for six years, overdosing, her spectral presence watching as she comes close to dying. With her family flying to Puerto Rico to scatter Eugenia's ashes it is left to John, one day clean, to care for her.

Yaz, Odessa's niece and Elliot's cousin, now takes over as administrator, under the name Freedom&Noise, recalling Odessa's battle with addiction, acknowledging an obligation to her aunt whose fight had left her conscious of her own privileged life. Speaking to Elliot, she asks: 'What did I do to have all that I have? Have I done anything difficult in my whole life? . . . I didn't hold your hand when you were in the desert popping pills trying to make yourself disappear,' (56-7) an immunity of which Hudes herself was surely consciously aware, as she was, of the problems faced by members of her own family.

John now tends to Odessa having confessed to his wife and given her the password to the website and hence the password to his life. Clayton (Chutes & Ladders) meets with Yoshiko (Orangutan). For the first time they make physical contact, giving one another a 'hug of basic survival and necessary friendship' (59). Yaz plans to move in with Elliot except that he has decided to move on, to Hollywood, chasing a dream, shaking free of what haunts him. Together, they scatter Eugenia's ashes in a ceremony which marks not an end but a beginning, for them, as for the others, a journey completed, another begun.

Once again Hudes' cousin Elliot attended a play in which his own experiences, real and imagined, featured, both the after-effects of his time in Iraq and his earlier struggles with addiction. As she observed, 'He said it was hard seeing some of the things, but all in all he felt really honoured that his story seemed to have some value for other people. I think he feels very positive that maybe his story is an important part of a conversation about veterans who have left Iraq. We're still a nation trying to find our way through that right now.' That, perhaps, is the sense in which she has said that writers 'get to be curators of culture, curators of reality.'³⁷ Similarly, the cousin who inspired the character of Odessa had been clean for sixteen years, 'but it takes 80 percent of her energy just staying sober.' When she saw the play, at 'intermission she was a total mess, and I said, "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have brought you here – let me take you back to the hotel and we can hang out." She refused, telling everyone that the part was based on her.'³⁸ The following day, however, she confessed that she had almost not made it to Connecticut to see the play, the need for drugs, even this time later, being so strong that she asked her husband to lock her in the bathroom for almost a day.

Hudes has said that, "'Water by the Spoonful'" has what I would almost call three love stories, though the love is not necessarily romantic at all. But I think it is, in some ways, a play about finding love and grace and companionship in unexpected places.'³⁹

The concluding part of the Elliot trilogy, *The Happiest Song Plays Last*, which opened at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago in April, 2013, before moving to New York's Second Stage Theatre the following year, picks up the story shortly after *Water by the Spoonful*. It was to be a work which explored the notion of social engagement. 'What,' she asked herself, 'is the role of protest in our lives any more for issues that are near and dear to our hearts that we want to give voice to. My mother was a community activist, engaged in many marches as I grew up. So it is [part] of the fabric of who I am. I don't think that my generation has completely figured out how to connect in person anymore. So that's one of the questions I think the play invites the audience to grapple with. What do we do with social issues which matter to us now? Is there only online connection? Is there a way that a community gathering still has value?'⁴⁰ It is a play in which protest is an immediate issue in Philadelphia but equally around the world as the action alternates between the barrio and the Middle East.

Once again, Elliot is at the heart of the play and in her acknowledgements, in the published version, she explains, 'I am marrow-deep grateful to Elliot Ruiz – my cousin, my muse, my inspiration. When he returned from Iraq that boyish sparkle in his eye had changed, ever so slightly. As his life story continued to unfold I continued to write and Elliot gave me his blessing and took my creative license in his stride.'⁴¹

For a man whose acting credits only previously extended to a toothpaste commercial, however, he had now recovered sufficiently to begin a significant acting career with a major role in a film, playing the leader of a group of Marines, his performance reviewed in *The New York Times* and elsewhere. The person who had returned from war, injured, as baffled by the cause he was supposedly fighting for as he had been when he enrolled, had now not simply recovered but flourished.

The play, the last in a sequence which, as Hudes explained, tells of the coming of age of a young man as he finally steps into his manhood, even as he re-experiences some of the experiences which had damaged him, begins with Elliot on the film set of *Haditha on Fire*, based on Nick Broomfield's docu-drama *Battle for Haditha* set three months after the actual battle when US Marines killed twenty-four civilians following the death of a fellow Marine blown up by a bomb. Elliot was a star of the film, playing the part of Corporal Ramirez. Interviewed by *The Guardian*, he said:

I was aware of the shootings in Haditha before I got involved in the movie – everybody was. It was all people in the military talked about, and it actually changed a lot of the way things are run in Iraq. The reporters who wrote about it could never understand what it was like to be there – they hadn't fought in Iraq. It was easy for them to write about 'massacres' and paint the marines as killers. They don't know about the amount of stress and emotion the soldiers go through.

After that soldier was killed in an attack on the US convoy, we felt bad for the marines who were with him because they had lost a friend. But at the same time we're trained not to act like they did. Those marines let their emotions drive them and that's something we can't do. If it is true that it was a massacre, the way they say it was, then they've got to serve time for that. You can't blame the soldiers for losing their composure considering the position they were put in but, if they did it, they were still wrong. If they did it, they let their emotions get the better of them and that led to the death of innocent people ... I don't think we should be in Iraq. I say support the troops but to hell with the war.⁴²

The film, in which Elliot improvised a scene in which he destroys a barracks following the death of his friend, was described as ‘reality fiction’, being a reconstruction of events, and ‘reality fiction’ is perhaps not a bad description of Hudes’ approach. Many of the characters in *The Happiest Song Plays Last* had their real-life counterparts, including Yaz who now returns to Philadelphia where she keeps open house for all who come by, one of whom, a man called Lefty, is described as a ‘cultural outsider’ and who was also based on a number of actual people as Agustín, a musician, is a version of a family friend, a teacher and activist.

Yaz and Elliot are divided by class but pulled together by their sense of a shared community. Yaz, a professor, nonetheless returns to the place which shaped her, buying a house in a run-down neighbourhood and being committed to addressing some of the issues confronting that community, trying to balance her two commitments. Part of the point of the play, for Hudes, was to explore the relationship between the pleasures of community, celebration and protest, something she found reflected in certain Puerto Rican music which itself could embrace that double commitment.

The play opens in Jordan with the sound of an explosion as an Arab-American actress is seen on the ground having been thrown there by virtue of a flying harness, a stunt which will have to be repeated not having gone as expected. Elliot says, ‘Everything’s gotta be real,’ (10) even as, manifestly, it is not but then artifice may be a route to truth which is the basis of Hudes’ weaving of fact and fiction.

Elliot has been promoted from technical advisor to actor and with a day off in prospect tries to persuade Ali, himself an advisor, to drive him to Egypt where events are unfolding in Tahir Square signalling the Arab Spring. Meanwhile, back in Philadelphia, Yaz takes over her aunt’s role, nurturing a garden in an abandoned lot as a way of nurturing those who for different reasons themselves feel abandoned, as she cooks food to sustain those in need. Accused of being someone who has moved away from the barrio, she replies, ‘This block is my children’ (25). Below them, though, are buried rivers which carry the threat of subsidence, what is buried breaking surface even as Elliot suffers from nightmares while other characters keep a tenuous grasp on their lives.

A central figure is Agustín, a player of the cuatro, Puerto Rico’s national instrument – and Hudes calls for a trio of musicians, a guitar player, a cuatro player and a bongo or güiro player, a güiro being a percussion instrument made from a hollow gourd. Agustín, rescued from a drink-drive charge as a result of Yaz’s intervention (‘Alcoholism runs in the blood, it’s genetic, it’s a proclivity’ she says of him) (26), is a one-time protestor against the American use of a Puerto Rican island, Vieques, for bombing practice by the Marines. He is also a music teacher, having taught Yaz before, like Hudes, she went to Yale.

Agustín, with whom she has an affair, subsequently dies of a heart attack modelled on that of another Puerto Rican American, Joaquin Rivera. He had also been a school guidance counsellor, an activist as a founder of the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights, and a musician who had learned his music in the mountains of Cayay, in Puerto Rico, and who, in 2009, died in a Philadelphia emergency room. His passing went unnoticed by all but three homeless drug addicts one of whom stole his watch, hence the significance in the play of Yaz giving him a watch.

In a press conference, Yaz, in an extensive speech, explains the circumstances of Agustín’s death, Hudes borrowing in part from news reports and in part, as she acknowledges, from an actual speech written by Roger Zepernick, assistant to the pastor at Christ Church and Ambrose

in North Philadelphia. She calls for a boycott of every Kappa Health Partners clinic in the city: 'It's protest time,' (59) she declares. His death marks the loss of a link to the past and something which brings people together in the present so that she calls for people to, 'Take your music to people who don't know anything about Puerto Rico . . . grab ahold of a güiro player and go out to the maximum-security prison at Graterford and bring tears of memory and joy to men who made a mistake or are paying for someone else's mistake. And next time some brass hats decide to play war games on the land of your patria, grab your guitar and jump on the next bus to Lafayette Park by the White House' (58). Later, she watches a recording of his death and the theft of the watch on YouTube (a real recording of Rivera's death which was still available to view several years after his death, although now difficult to access).

The ghost of Agustín appears recalling an encounter with Maso Rivera, a classic cuatro player, and Ramito, a troubadour known as the king of Jibaro music, both of them dead, themselves now ghosts. Agustín fades away but the musicians take over even as few people turn up to the planned protest meeting.

In the Middle East, Elliot goes to Egypt thrilled at the revolution, returning to Philadelphia with Shar, an Arab-American actress in the film, though she grew up in Beverly Hills and trained at the Julliard and is now pregnant. His nightmares have not gone away but he has become a successful actor. However, back in Philadelphia, a parcel is waiting for him. He had charged Ali with returning the passport he had taken from the Iraqi he had killed, and whose ghost had haunted him, but an easy closure is not on offer as he learns that the man's wife believes he had spit on the body and stolen his wallet while the man's son had been struck dumb, not speaking for eight years and has nightmares of his own. As Ali insists, 'Man make ghost, man keeps ghost' (85). He could not bury the past and there is a particular reason for that. As he now confesses, 'This guy? Taarek Taleb? I knew he was a civilian. At first I thought it was a AK in his hands. Split second before I shoot, I'm like, that's a cricket bat. And then I pulled the trigger and took his face off' (85). It is Shar who takes a trowel and buries the passport in the garden Yaz has made. It is a ceremony completed when she hands Elliot Agustín's cuatro, previously broken but now repaired. He hesitantly begins to play as the lights fade on him and up on the musicians who '*sing a nostalgic verse about Puerto Rico*' (87).

Outside the play, the hopes of the Arab Spring would come to nothing. The promise of Tahir Square proved illusory. Power changed hands but did not fall into those of the people. The play is set in 2011, the year of the revolution. By the time of its first production Mubarak had been replaced by Mohamed Morsi whose plans to give himself unprecedented powers led to his overthrow three months after it opened at the Goodman. Nor is nostalgia without its conservatism although the troubadours sang of more than sentimental regret and melancholy. The trilogy ends, though, on a note of reconciliation as love and friendship prevail. Elliot discovers himself in discovering someone else. The community may not have turned out to protest but sustains a sense of identity in a culture itself always questing its own.

Reviewing the Goodman Theatre production, Chris Jones, in the *Chicago Tribune*, suggested that 'Hudes has become a better and better writer as she has forged this tale over these years — the qualitative difference between this script and "Soldier's Fugue" is really something. Hudes now is a very accomplished storyteller, a playwright with an emergent, fulsome American narrative, a young writer who knows that her best material is not so far away, as long as she is willing to put her family out there.'⁴³ For Charles Isherwood, though, writing in *The New York Times* and commenting on the Second Stage production the following year, 'In

attempting to write rich new chapters in her two principal characters' complicated lives, Ms. Hudes does run into problems of focus and weight, primarily in her efforts to draw into the play larger issues of social and cultural concern . . . I found myself thinking that Ms. Hudes' play might have been more satisfying if she herself had not felt the need to engage sympathetically with so many thorny issues. Writers can also undermine their work by spreading their interests and affections too broadly.⁴⁴ That, though, was of course precisely what she wished to do, tracing connections between the private and the public world, personal and social commitments, the pressures which separate and the ties that bind.

With her next play, *Daphne's Dive*, Hudes moved away from her family, or almost so in that once again her characters were in part based on those she had known. An incident in which a police raid leaves a young girl abandoned was drawn from the experience of one of her cousins who took her in and adopted her for a while. It was, she has said, an act of abandonment combined with an act of generosity which she wanted to explore.

An activist/performer, Jenn [Jennifer Song], was based on Kathy Chang, a Chinese-American married to the writer Frank Chin, who later changed her name, significantly, to Change, performing on the streets of Philadelphia, particularly, as in Hudes' play, in front of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, dancing and waving a handmade flag of protest at the economic system and people's passivity. In 1996 she immolated herself on the University of Pennsylvania campus in front of the peace symbol sculpture, dancing as she died. What she had wanted was a democracy based on individual communities and there is a sense that Hudes' emphasis on community chimed with that desire. Composer Kevin Norton subsequently created a suite in her name, called 'Change Dance Troubled Energy', music, as in Hudes' work, seeking to capture the essence of the community from which she came. Meanwhile, a play set in a bar owed something to the fact that Hudes' stepfather owned bars in Philadelphia and she used to spend time in them.

Having written a trilogy about a man's coming of age, she explained, she wanted to explore the relationship between women having, as she confessed, scraped by on the Bechdel Test (named for the cartoonist Alison Bechdel, author of the comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For*), this being a test as to whether a work of fiction features at least two women who talk to one another about some other subject than a man. In *Daphne's Dive* what she describes as 'these very enigmatic, atypical female characters get to relate to one another on their own terms.'⁴⁵ These are story tellers, their stories reflecting their own sensibilities but also what holds this group of disparate individuals together. Sometimes the stories are confessional, sometimes a way of evading or dealing with aspects of their lives and experiences. At the same time, though they talk to one another, the men are not extraneous to their conversations, particularly Acosta, a power in the community, not least because he can give them, and the other men, access to what they need: work, accommodation, support of one kind or another. There is also another kind of conversation, that between the action and the music composed by Michel Camilo, himself from the Dominican Republic, a jazz pianist. As Hudes remarked, "There's something about the explosive celebration of his music that made her "want that spark of life to be in my play" . . . despite the fact that there are heavy and painful moments in it.'⁴⁶

Daphne's Dive brings together a group of women telling stories in a North Philadelphia bar, between 1994 and 2011, 1994, as she explained, marking the so-called culture wars between conservative and liberal values, while 2011 saw the Occupy movement, a revolt against social and economic inequality. The women consist of Daphne, the bar owner, pregnant and

abandoned by the age of twelve, her sister Inez, who has moved to Haverford, a wealthy and substantially white suburb, Jenn, an Asian-American performance artist first seen in a sequined American flag bikini with a handmade flag declaring, 'PEACE LIBERTY ECOLOGY DEMOCRACY',⁴⁷ and a young woman called Ruby who we first encounter at eleven (though rather than use different actors for her at different ages, she simply announces her age as the play progresses). Also present are Daphne's husband Acosta, a businessman with ambitions to become a politician, a Latino painter, Pablo, creating art from trash, and a manual labourer, Rey to be played Hudes explains, by an actor of any ethnicity. For all their differences they support one another in their separate existences perhaps because, as Hudes explained, there is a sense in which they are all drawn together precisely because they are outsiders:

... why do they all want to be in this room? Why do they all want to come here together? ... Despite their very divergent portfolios of who they are, they're all outsiders. Even Acosta. He is a man of his people, but he becomes a politician and that makes him a little bit of an outsider. Inez is an outsider because she lives in this community and works in this community, but she's like, 'Get me to the suburbs, I don't want to breathe this air pollution.' She doesn't want to live on these blocks. Jenn is obviously an outsider. They all have outsider qualities. And then there's this character of Rey who is this biker dude who hangs in the bar. He's not from Philadelphia, he's not Latino, it's a mystery why he's there, but he just likes them and that's why he's there. In some ways it's a place where these outsiders can be themselves together. So, discovering what makes each of them an outsider in a different way, and how they show off to each other about who they are, and how they brag about who they are, and how they compete over who is more authentic or who has the funnier story – that was a lot of the character work.⁴⁸

Time moves on, Ruby announcing her age – fifteen. Acosta is elected Councilman, wearing a suit which generations of Acostas have worn over the years, passing it down to those in need of it for special occasions, often not able to afford one of their own, but a link, evidence of a past not abandoned.

In the case of the women, though, that past holds secrets of betrayals and abandonments, an accumulation of pain. Below the surface of a bar which brings people together is evidence of what drives them apart. Ruby, it turns out, is now in therapy, adopted by Daphne because of abuse at the hands of her stepfather. Inez, too, had been abused, in her case by her father. Daphne, meanwhile, has married a homosexual who thought marriage would cure him, divorcing immediately only for him to die of AIDS. Jenn has been thrown out of her home by her father, while her mother committed suicide, she herself abandoning a demanding husband and becoming a prostitute for a while. So, anarchy, moral and otherwise, seems to have been their fate.

The action then moves on five years. Ruby, a would-be social worker, is now in college and stages an exhibition of Pablo's work as part of an assignment. Acosta has his eye on being a state senator but meanwhile, as Counsellor, has ejected Jenn from a squat as Daphne has from the bar, throwing her clothes after her, calling the police, her mental condition deteriorating until, finally, she had committed suicide, setting fire to herself. It is the eve of a memorial (as there is a real memorial every year to Kathy Chang/Change), Daphne arriving to take Ruby back for it. For Ruby, Jenn's suicide is a sacrifice with meaning, in the name of 'Belief, marrow-deep, so real

it hurts . . . that was her gift,' while accusing herself and the others: 'Name one thing any of us believes in?' (40)

For his part, Pablo offers paintings consisting of the detritus of his society, the ashes of burnt buildings, art as social commentary perhaps but not art offering transcendence. For Ruby, he was doing no more than pour gasoline on a society while accusing herself of walking by, failing to pick up the baton of protest. She reads pages of Jenn's suicide note: 'And so I will be your sunrise awakening/And so I will be your torch for liberty/And so I will try to spark the discussion/ I'll light the match of your human memory/ And come ablaze with transformation/ Wake up/Wake up/ Wake up' (40-1). For Pablo, though, the true heroism lies in survival not a suspect death, evidence, if anything, of mental instability rather than commitment: 'Your parents threw you out with the goddamn trash, you woke up the next morning and every morning since then and decided to breathe. *That's brave. That's fucking heroic*' (40).

This is not so much a dialectic, a rational engagement, as a staking out of emotional territory protest seldom lacking an emotional dimension and the fact is that self-immolation is not without its history from the Buddhist monks in Vietnam to Jan Palach in the former Czechoslovakia who sacrificed himself outside the National Museum in Wenceslas Square, in 1969, not so much as a protest against the Soviet invasion the year before as against the fact that the population had simply resigned itself, that compromise seemed the path of least resistance. He, too, was calling upon people to wake up and his death played its role in the subsequent defeat of communism in his country.

The action then moves on a further five years as, back in the bar, they drink and salsa plays, Daphne on a güiro, Pablo tapping a bongo and Ruby a rum bottle with a spoon, as Rey shakes a jar of pennies before Inez and Acosta, now a senator, dance as do Pablo and Ruby. The events of five years earlier seem remote, the old solidarity seemingly restored as they reminisce, Acosta and Inez recalling their first encounter when they had argued about feminism and the Equal Rights Amendment, he telling her to 'come down to earth, wake up to life en el barrio' (44). As they prepare to eat brownies 'plus' they recall sharing marijuana and magic mushrooms, Ruby reveals that she has tracked down her missing brother 'in a duct-taped wheelchair,' (48) and Rey remembers Acosta consoling the victim of a hit-and-run accident as he dies before the community came together to celebrate his life, Jenn among them.

Then, four years later, with Ruby now twenty-nine, popping Xanax (used to treat anxiety disorders) and working behind the bar, they are gathered to commemorate the death of Jenn even as the Occupy movement is underway. In Ruby's mind a spectral Jenn appears, once again calling for revolution, before the action switches back to when she was eleven, waiting to hear whether she would have to return to her mother or stay with Daphne. Daphne now tells one last story, one in which her mother, back in Puerto Rico, had once stood up against her domineering husband who had removed one of her shoes to stop her taking part in a contest to make the best caldo santo, a seafood broth. She had won the contest even though her foot was bloody and raw from walking barefoot to the event. Daphne decides to let Ruby stay. She, in turn, takes off a shoe and nails it to the bar, a shoe which had featured in all the previous scenes, an image of her resistance. The play ends with the sound of music from above. By this stage we know what lies ahead, the anguish and pain, but, like Daphne's mother, they have the support of the community as represented by one another, a unity underlined by the presence of the shoe and of the music which accompanies the action.

The decision to end the play effectively where it began was, she explained, one made during rehearsals. Originally it had progressed chronologically but she came to feel that it was in essence a memory play, the past carried forward, never really abandoned. Not for nothing was she an admirer of *Death of a Salesman*.

For all that their lives have been patterned with betrayals, desertions, loss, there is a solidarity which survives the stresses to which they have been subjected, survival being a central theme. But survival in the name of what? Jenn pursues a social imperative but, like the woman on whom she is modelled, is mentally unstable. The Occupy movement is underway but there is little sense that any of them will be committed to it, though Jenn foreshadowed it. It seemed to Hudes that Jenn, 'missed her chance, she missed a moment in our cultural history where her outsider-ness, her rebellious nature, her commitment to what seemed like a fringe ideology, might have been embraced. I can even imagine that during Occupy she could have been somewhat of an effective leader . . . One of the things that I think the movement struggled with was finding those leaders that could have stuck with it for the long haul, and I feel like . . . Jennifer Song, could have done that.'⁴⁹

Hudes has said that the movement 'was the anchor point for me, and I had to work backwards from there,' even as 1994 was also the year of the Republican Party's Contract with America which, as it happens given Daphne's experience, contained provisions to discourage teenage pregnancy and tax credits for adoption.

It is Acosta who has the greatest purchase on the world beyond this bar, using his political position to help others but especially this group of people who gather to share stories while music plays, reminding them of their origins, a counterbalance to the problems to which they admit, the damage they have experienced. These are characters who have experienced disappointments, with the exception of Acosta existing on the margin of the public world or, in the case of Jenn, with an oblique relationship to it. While that world may define the parameters within which they live, as with August Wilson's characters that is not where they exist and have their being. What Hudes had aimed for in the play was to present 'the ebbs and flows of a group of friends over time, and this group of friends in particular is almost like each other's family.' They were deliberately of 'different ethnicities, class, political interests,'⁵⁰ drawn together in a place of refuge where there is a certain mutuality of need and trust.

The social and political context exists, and we are aware of it, but it is off stage as it is for most people for most of the time. For Hudes, there is another context, that of a world with which she is familiar and wishes to celebrate but which is regarded by her society as marginal, in an unequal negotiation with an assumed norm. She has been accused of a certain nostalgia for a pure culture, with its myths, values and practices intact, and she is a story teller who listens for familiar rhythms to which lives may be lived. She can, though, scarcely be accused of failing to acknowledge the injuries her characters carry, like her cousin with a leg wounded in a suspect cause. What interests her is how they sustain themselves as individuals, the poetry which infiltrates their lives, even as they are haunted by ghosts from a past by no means bereft of pain.

For Charles Isherwood, reviewing the Signature Theatre production in *The New York Times*, Daphne's Dive was 'warm-spirited if loose-jointed' though not untouched with sentimentality, while Hudes had 'a supple feel for characterization and a wide-ranging sympathy for life's waifs and strays.'⁵¹ Britain's Michael Billington, writing in *The Guardian*, while doubtful about the plotting and characterizations, nonetheless found 'an unassailable heart to Hudes' work – a

fierce compassion for the people she creates and an equally ardent love for the ethnically and culturally diverse city that raised her.⁵²

For all her excursions to Iraq, by virtue of the trajectory of her cousin's life, throughout her work Quiara Alegría Hudes has been drawn to stage the lives of those she knows, members of her family, of the community whose derelictions and triumphs she dramatizes. She herself is aware of being within and without, granted a perspective which carries its own obligations. If her plays can seem loosely constructed it is in part because she is conscious of the social and psychological fragmentations experienced by those whose loyalties can be divided, their identities in flux, even as she sets herself to trace the connections between them. Biographical and social facts penetrate her work with a transparency unusual in playwrights. She has sat beside those on whom she has modelled her characters even as they watched a version of themselves on stage revealing intimate secrets, a high-risk project requiring trust on their part and perhaps what Graham Greene famously called a splinter of ice in the heart on hers. There can be a price to be paid for turning the pain, anxieties, sufferings of others into art redeemed, surely, in her case, by the humanity she brings to bear.