

'Warriors' in M. Stefan Strozier's *Guns, Shackles, and Winter Coats*

Emerging dramatist and publisher Mike Stefan Strozier, of World Audience Inc., has brought to light the flip side of the most powerful warriors on globe today-the pathetic American soldiers at war. In his two-act play *Guns, Shackles, and Winter Coats* (Where Eagles Dare Theater, NYC, 2005), Strozier portrays the detachedness and ennui of an American Sergeant John Brown, the protagonist of the play, as experienced in Iraq during the recent US-Iraq war. The audience witnesses the sergeant and his team engaged in drivel during which they utter bits of true feelings, giving voice to the deep-seated personal experience of war. Sergeant Brown puts it expressly in the third scene of Act One: 'I've seen enough war and death for one lifetime.' Private Johnson comments on religion and its influence in the Middle East in the same scene: 'Religion doesn't matter-except, over here, where everyone is an insane fanatic.'

Strozier's play reaches its climax in the second Act when we find Sergeant Brown in a mental hospital in America, suffering delusional psychosis on account of war trauma. As the concerned doctor, Zinn, tells him that he is going to be discharged from the institute, Brown speaks up a political blasphemy: 'I feel America has used me and then abandoned me.' Dr. Zinn's explanation that war is necessary for the proper functioning of society reveals the dramatist's covert concern with the disparity between rationality and humanity in such instances. In the second scene of Act Two, Sergeant Brown's wife Kara hits the nail right on the head by asking: 'Why doesn't America take care of its veterans?' Dr. Zinn's explanation is alarmingly clear viz. the limited grant money won't allow it. Strozier's play thus conveys the discontent over the absurd use of money on wars while cutting it off from treating the victims of these very wars.

The dramatist ventures further to explore the havoc played by war on a warrior's personal and familial life. Sergeant Brown is divorced by his wife because she cannot live with a crazy man. We see the sergeant ending out on a street. Of course, he is not alone there. A Vietnam Veteran comes to show him their most disgusting commonality: the fact they are not warriors but cowards.

Ernest Dempsey

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