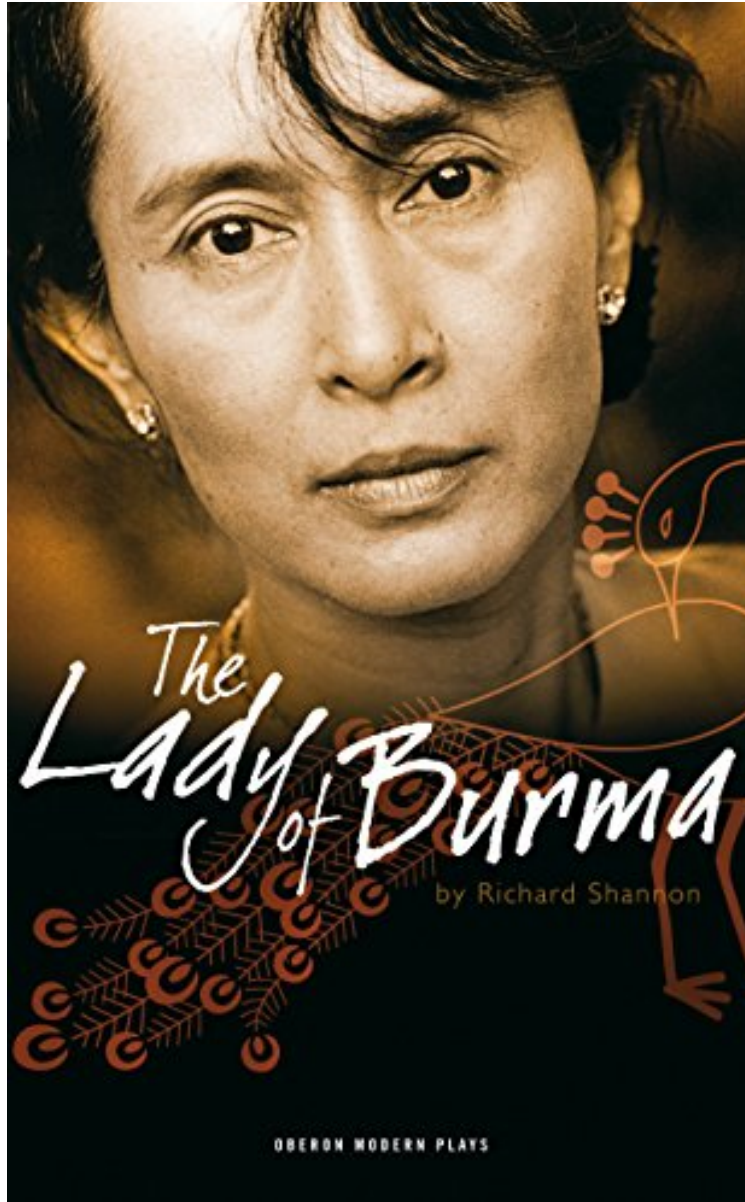


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Richard Shannon

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Richard Shannon : The Lady of Burma (Oberon Modern Plays) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Lady of Burma (Oberon Modern Plays):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Aung San Suu Kyi: Mastering FearBy The Gandhi FoundationFew countries give greater reason for concern than Burma, beleaguered as it is under a long-term military dictatorship and few individuals greater cause for compassion than Aung San Suu Kyi detained under all but permanent house arrest in Rangoon since 1989. Gandhians have especial cause to take the Nobel Laureate Suu Kyi to their hearts for, despite

being under exceptional duress, she remains committed to nonviolence. In Richard Shannon's play *The Lady of Burma*, first performed at the Old Vic and then at this year's Edinburgh fringe, the Burmese actress Liana Mau Tan Gould awesomely recreates the life of Suu Kyi. The play begins with Suu Kyi in the hospital wing of Insein prison, Rangoon's largest, following the atrocity at Depayin, still wearing blood-stained clothes, a bowl of dirty water in front of her. This is a riveting solo performance. We are to share Suu Kyi's memories of her life, both private and public. The central theme is the overcoming of fear. Burma itself is ruled by fear, with some 1,100 political prisoners, child soldiers, slave labour, ethnic cleansing of minorities, the perpetration of rape on ethnic women and children. Suu Kyi's message is simple; only by fighting fear can you be truly free. She had to overcome her childhood fear of the dark and its demons. Her mother was intolerant of fear: "if you were frightened you had to confront those fears instantly." There was to be a terrifying encounter in the early stages of her fight for democracy when she confronts an armed patrol with guns cocked ready to kill her but she walks on and the order is given to lower the rifles; "I faced the demons again and they were not there." She had mastered fear. Her memories are much of her family. Born 19 June 1945 she can have no personal memories of her father, Aung San, the liberator of Burma, brutally assassinated 19 July 1947, though others can recall for her leaping into his arms and she is much comforted by a leading political ally telling her how proud he would have been of her struggle for democracy, for a Burma "free and under the law." It was to nurse her formidable mother, Daw Khin Kyi, struck down by a stroke, so strict in her own upbringing, that she returns to Burma from Oxford in 1988, though Suu Kyi realises she was always bound to return. She recalls the appalling death of her younger brother, Aung Li, drowned in the ornamental pond of their garden. She reflects on the joy of her marriage to Oxford don, Michael Aris, but also knows that the call of her people will have to take precedence over her husband and two sons and although Michael comes to Burma to help her recover from a 13 day hunger strike the regime will not give him entry to Burma in 1999 when he is dying from prostate cancer and she cannot risk leaving Burma to nurse him in England for the regime would never allow her to return. There is so much personal sacrifice she has to make for Burma's freedom. It was when attending her mother in hospital that students approached her to take up the leadership of the struggle - one Maung Htoo tells her there is a planned uprising nation-wide for the 8th of the 8th on 1988 - but she is always painfully aware of the certainties of violent repression from the army. Then comes Burma's Amritsar massacre, the slaughter of peaceful protesters outside Rangoon's town hall and the murder of some three thousand in the following weeks. But Suu Kyi takes on the leadership and in the play we cut to her speech in front of the Shwedagon pagoda: "Our purpose is to show that the entire people entertain the keenest desire for a multi-party democratic system of government". But there still remains "a gnawing fear that I might not measure up and worse that I will lead my people into mortal danger." So she takes on Ne Win's SLORC (The State Law and Order Restoration Council). House arrest follows, 20 July 1989, and her response of a 13 day hunger strike. Weirdly, SLORC sanctions elections in 1990 which the National League for Democracy wins with a landslide on a manifesto of nonviolence; even the jailers of Insein vote NLD. But of course SLORC had no intention of honouring the election and Suu Kyi wonders if it had all been a trap. Leading figures of SLORC visit her in 1994, putting a case that economic progress had to precede political, tourism to the fore, but Suu Kyi merely reflects on the law of karma: "every act of violence done to another is done to himself". How difficult, she reflects, it is to make progress: "If we are truly to negotiate I have to advance their interests in step with my own". She is temporarily released from house arrest July 1995. SLORC gives way to SPDC (The State Peace and Development Council). General Soe Win, the murderer of students in Rangoon hospital in 1988 is promoted: he declaims "the SPDC will never talk to the NLD and will never hand over power". The play ends with the utterly harrowing account of the Depayin atrocity, Suu Kyi stopped en route to a political meeting in the village of Depayin, shouted at as "foreigner", "whore" dragged out of her car and beaten up, witness to the savage beating of her key political associate, U Tin Oo, to the clubbing to death of her followers. But her will is unbroken: "The hands that tore down the Berlin Wall released the flood that swept away sixty years of tyranny ... I have never lost hope. The time is near. It is coming". Antony Copley

In her cell in Rangoon's Insein prison, Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi - incarcerated by Burma's military dictatorship for almost 20 years - tells her story. Richard Shannon's powerful and moving one-woman play vividly portrays the life and message of the world's most famous prisoner of conscience. Aung San Suu Kyi was held under house arrest from 1989-1995, and again from 2000-2002. She was again arrested in May 2003 after the Depayin massacre. At the time of writing she was still being held under house arrest in Rangoon. Aung San Suu Kyi's message is a simple one - that only by fighting fear can you truly be free - a message Burma's military fears and aims to silence. *The Lady of Burma* is a Red Fighting Peacock Production presented by the Burma Campaign UK and Louise Chantal. The Burma Campaign UK is part of a global movement to promote democracy and human rights in Burma.

About the Author Richard Shannon is a writer and a director.