



A Dream Called Laundry

Introduction by Austin Clarke

A Dream Called Laundry announces Sang Kim's presence upon the landscape of the Canadian literary scene. It is a presence that will be felt with resounding effect for his sensitive portrayal of the horrors suffered by Korean women at the hands of Japanese soldiers during World War II. Both before and during that conflict the Japanese military established brothels where countless women laboured as sex slaves. About 80 percent of the estimated 80,000 to 200,000 "comfort women," in Japanese-occupied lands were Korean.

The horrors, the repeated sexual assaults that the Japanese armed forces deliberately and with deadly administrative efficiency carried out, were like knives plunged into the hearts and the bodies of tens of thousands of Korean women. It was a monumental operation undertaken by the Japanese government, which ripped away the last skin of rights of these women. Sang Kim has dramatized their plight with graphic, searching dialogue. His characters stalk the stage and send their deafening cries for mercy into our consciences. They do so in a manner far more effective than any Korean official intervention, or government or state authority could perform.

Sang Kim therefore has achieved in *A Dream Called Laundry* what the state is incapable of achieving: he has shown us the pain, and the hopelessness of life that these Korean women endured. He has also shown us their dignity and their fatalistic belief that the human spirit can never be dominated even by the best organized oppression. But they endured it with the confidence that only women, overcome in this tearing away of human rights and personal integrity, are able to do -- to refuse to regard themselves as victims. They will not lose their dignity.





Sang Kim

Soo, the main character in this engagingly tragic story reveals an indomitable will amid her circumstances. She rises above the degradation that the comfort woman's lot assumed. Damaged as she is, her heart irreparably broken, Soo stands nobly, in a symbolic manner, in great speech and great dramatic posture. She is the reminder that any kind of colonization can be overcome -- whether in time, or by constant resistance.

It is the voice, the posture, the majestic stature of her ability to adapt and overcome her plight that makes *A Dream Called Laundry* the successful entry onto the stage of Canadian theatre that it is. Sang Kim's play has given us a lesson in human rights and in sexual oppression, two persevering problems that the world today is faced with -- and he has done it with a deft regard for the record of history.

Austin Clarke is the winner of the 2002 Giller Prize
for his novel, *The Polished Hoe*.

