

African Diaspora Monologue

BIO: Amy Gijsbers van Wijk is a submerged (sometimes emerging) playwright from Pasadena, TX, who now lives in New York City. Her work includes *Dirty Dirty*, a play about pornography, and a play based on the journals of Lewis and Clark, *The Alternate Possibilities of Our Past and Future History with Particular Regard to the Identification of the Eastern Puma and the Corps of Discovery* (semi-finalist, O'Neill 2016; semifinalist, Bay Area Playwrights Festival 2016). Amy was a collaborator on *Lovushke*, a virtual reality theatre piece that she held inaugural 2016 residency at Pearl Diving Movement Residency in Pittsburgh, PA (featured in *The Brooklyn Rail*). In 2014, she participated in *Write Out Front* at the Drama Bookshop in New York. In 2011, her play *Second Skin* had its world premiere at the American Theatre of Actors in New York City. She also wrote a play for a robot, once, and wrote about it for *American Theatre* magazine. Amy holds a BA from Brooklyn College, where she studied with Erin Courtney and Sibyl Kempson, and an MFA in Dramatic Writing at Carnegie Mellon University, where she studied under Rob Handel.

SONJA:

I ride the train to work every morning. 8:46 a.m., and I'm there. A straphanger, 'cept there aren't straps anymore. I have found, in my twelve years of riding the train, that they've only become more crowded. Busiest, most crowded trains are before 8:00 where I live. Those people are always angry — at the world, at their job, at themselves, for having to get up so early to just get on a big hunk of metal and wait for an hour around other angry, tired people who smell like eggs from the deli down the street, which were never very good anyway. They taste like rubber, the eggs. Anyway. What I really pay attention to are the shoes.

On the train, you spend a lot of time avoiding eye contact. So you look down, or you sit down and you look down, which lands your eyes at the feet of all these strangers. Like, when if your life have you paid so much attention to the feet of strangers? I bet the only other person who did that more was *Jesus*, so that's something to think about. Uh-huh. So I look at the shoes of people — like this one woman who wore shoes that were *way* to tall. You could tell. Her feet were bulging and purple and red in these heels, and you could tell *she* knew it because she sat

down with her feet off the ground, trying to take off the pressure. Or you see the man in some horrible mismatched situation of socks and sandals like he was raised by a pack of wolverine or something. You know. But this morning, a man comes on. He's homeless. He's got the card full o' bags, and the weary look, and these sneakers with feet sticking out so bulbous — he looked like a tree, roots for feet. Not a pretty site. Gruesome, almost. And I thought about. . . you know that myth, of Zeus visiting in disguise, as a weary traveler? He visits these elderly people and they are kind to him, and he reveals himself to them? I thought about that. How maybe, under this bedraggled, torn up shell, there was Zeus, right before me. And everyone on the bus looked away. But not me. I looked him in the eye. I said, "Hey, Zeus, you looking alright there?" And his eyes, this warm metal gray, were bewildered at me. "I ain't Zeus." That's what he said. "I ain't Zeus." Well, to me, he might as well be. He's a man, in pain, before me. A man, in need, before me. I said, "Zeus, you ain't looking too comfortable there," and he snarled up at me kinda defensive but I said, "can I help you?" and it was like the world broke open, it got so quiet. He looked at me like I discovered him.

"Can I help you?" And he became Zeus, before my eyes, a transformation I cannot truly describe. He didn't turn into anything, or offer me a magic wish. But he looked at me like I saw him. And he said yes.