

Analysis of Queens by Martyna Majok

I. Given Circumstances

A. Environmental facts:

1. Geographical Location, Climate

An apartment building in Queens, specifically the basement. The side of a road in Georgia, an apartment in Odessa. But primarily in the basement apartment in Queens. The climate is New York, but a New York basement apartment where heating is a concern. Because heating costs money. And most places might not have heating systems in this world. New York - snow, summer heat, and humidity. A place where light only comes in through the two windows, as it is a basement apartment. These elements affect the action of the play because the basement apartment is a sanctuary. People can be safe by hiding in the darkness of the basement, but people can also break in. There is a safety and a danger to the environment, but at the end of the day, it is protection from the outside world and the elements.

2. Date, Year, Season, Time of Day

The play primarily takes place over the course of two specific periods. The first is a night in June, 2017, specifically 8:07 p.m. as it bleeds into the next early morning. The second period is a Winter week, three months after September 11th, 2001. The events of this period largely fall in the nighttime, with the bulk of it over one night before Isabella leaves. There are interstitial periods spanning through 2001-2017, specifically, 2013, 2016, and 2002. These periods are chosen specifically to target periods of high anti-immigration sentiment, notable the attacks on September 11th, and the election of Donald Trump, while the interstitial periods highlight periods of international unrest and international economic poverty. These elements feed into the action of the play as they set the context for the world of the play to exist, particularly the connection between the “American dream” and the pressures that lead to immigration and refuge in America.

3. Economic Environment

The play surrounds characters who seek a fracture in the chains of poverty, and this is a driving force within the play. Much of the play’s dialogue exists in tandem with economic disparity, and the dreams of family reunification and supporting people from the characters’ countries of origin. The play is explicit in a number of ways surrounding finances, a few examples of note include the \$10.26 used for Isabella’s goodbye party, the 10% cut for Pelagiya’s help towards Renia for finding a job, the \$8 and tax for a shirt that ended up being an hour and a half’s wages for Isabela, the resistance to sharing a single cigarette, the use of a marker to mark fluid levels in a gallon of milk to see if people are stealing, and the enormous sum given back to Renia by Glenys, and Renia saving and manipulating the owner of the building for 16 years to buy the apartment building from her before hospice. I would go so far as saying that the economic environment of this play drives the action.

4. Political Environment

The political environment in the play is closely related to the aforementioned elements. The play immerses itself in the context of political divisions, although most, if not all political figures and macro actions are occurring in the outside world of the play. Alongside September 11th, and the anti-immigrant, anti-muslim, anti-middle eastern sentiment that followed, alongside spikes in hate crimes, one of the few other directly mentioned political aspects is an allusion to Donald Trump's election, as Lera warns Inna that it is not safe for immigrants in America. Beyond directly addressed political aspects, the play itself is filled with the act of politics on a micro-scale, particularly in its relationship between refugee immigrants, and those seeking freedoms closely tied to physical safety and monetary safety. The play deals with colorism, Racism, misogyny, class, immigration, religious discrimination, sexual politics, violence and domestic abuse, borders, imperialism, and the American dream. These themes serve as the fabric of the play.

5. Social Environment

The play teeters on the balance of numerous characters trying to work together or at least inadvertently (and the power of advertent support) supporting one another, and the perception of how one climbs in social status in America. Much of this is tied to economics and class politics, however, the play manifests these ideas through the lens of country of origin and family dynamics. The play consists of only female bodies on stage, although the presence of masculine bodies off stage plays a large role in the power dynamics of the play. Although financial means are a deciding factor of power in the play, there are times where the financial is momentarily superseded by the social aspect of the community of the play. Very few characters in the play speak a common language besides American English, and so a great deal of the play dissects the fact that language is a barrier to communication, rather than a means of it. Anecdotes and palimpsestic spectres occupy much of the social interactions of the play, particularly in how one of the major staging devices is the conjuring of forgotten bodies back into the space. This peaks in the final moments of the play, as everybody that was once in the space returns to form an amalgamation of sound and experience.

6. Religious Environment

Most of the characters in this play are from different countries of origin, which dictates a great deal of the power dynamics in the play surrounding religion. In the early time periods of the play, notable 2001, the play circles around anti-muslim sentiment, with Aamani and Yara facing direct threats to their physical safety perpetrated by the Americans with anti-middle-eastern sentiment. Persecution of members of the LGBTQIA+ also plays a significant role in Aamani's journey. The play's relationship to death also plays a central role, as almost all the characters experience the loss of a relationship. All of the characters have a negative relationship to death. In 2017, the Muslim population in the United States was around 1%, or 3 million, while accurate data is not easily available for the year 2001. In the period between 2001 and 2017, there are numerous accounts of hate crimes that were charged in court,

with numerous Muslims injured or killed on the basis of faith. This environment is a tributary to the larger anti-immigration sentiment felt throughout the play.

B. Previous Action

Most of the characters within the play immigrated to the United States prior to the action of the play. Amongst these include Renia, Tanya, Pelagiya, Aamani, Isabela, Yara, Dragana, all fleeing persecution in their home country in one form or another. Glenys and Inna arrive in the United States after 2001, and so their previous action contains their journeys solely based on circumstances that led to their immigration. Lera never makes it to the United States within the action of the play, so the focus of her previous action journey is largely related to her learning English, and her enrollment and discovery of programs similar to being a mail-order bride is the bulk of her previous action to the play. Joan has presumably been working at the diner for some time, although she is no stranger to domestic violence. For Renia, she had a daughter in Poland, and a mother who was sick and passed without her knowledge. She travels to the United States for economic freedom to provide for her daughter. For Tanya, her backstory is unclear, but she did visit the apartment building in Queens previously, as her photograph is a recurring image and motif. For Pelagiya, she was one of the earliest immigrants within the play, and therefore she is the most socially connected and has seen the most amount of people come and go within the apartment. Pelagiya has a history of fucking over the people she occupies the space with, largely related to her monetary survival. Pelagiya, Isabela, and Aamani have the most direct relationship to the events of 9/11, which precedes the action of the play by three months. Isabela has been living in the apartment a year prior to the start of the play, and she also has a daughter, Glenys, who is 7 at the start of the play. Inna, prior to the action of the play, experienced the loss of her grandfather and mother, and has spent some time living with Lera prior to the start of her action within the play.

C. Polar Attitudes

How do I feel about my world?

How do I feel about my relationships?

How do I feel about myself?

How do I feel about my prospects?

Renia:

I see the world as a staircase needing to be climbed in order to survive. I see the backs of others as stepping stones to procuring my family's safety and survival.

I feel as though I cannot trust anyone but my family, although I will learn that they do not reciprocate my faith in them.

I feel that I have sacrificed everything for my daughter, and that life is not fair but I have done what I needed to do.

I feel that here in America, my prospects are endless, as long as I still have more to sacrifice.

Inna:

I feel that the world as a dangerous place, and I must fight back at every opportunity I can.

I feel that I cannot trust most people here in America, as I was betrayed as soon as I got here. My mother is the only one I can find solace in, if I can find her. Still, I find that it's going to be around people, as it defrays the loneliness that surrounds my life.

I feel as though I put others before myself, but when I actually try to make changes in my life, I am only met with disappointment.

I feel as though America was my chance for a better life, although that was quickly shattered. I put that faith in my mother, and that has disappointed me as well.

II. Dialogue

A. Choice of Words

\$50. \$60. \$10.26. 10%. \$8 + tax. Fucking. House. Country. Living. Man. Men. Americans. Place. Stay. Maybe. Party. Years. Chips. Milk. Cleaning. Job. Pack. Overstay. Dari. Cigarette. Fire. Ashes. Cat. Planning. Miles. Queens. Owe. Buy. Nothing. Looked. Train. Accent. English. Expensive. Belonged. Upstairs. Purpose. Stench. Slut. Died. Mother. Life. Love. Killed. Afraid. Knows. Husband. Bag. Windows. Sixteen. Soup. Crazy. America. Money. Nothing. Words. Orange. Ticket. New York. Streets. Coffee. Gas. Year, Everybody. Economy. Cost. Cool. Psycho. Name. Congratulations. Police. Understand. Home. Talk. Student. Discount. Safe. Room. School. Easy. Leave. Others. Experience. Depression. Lucky. Afford. Papers. Cop. Daughter. Picture. Problem. Blame. Situation. Regrets. Beautiful. Mom. Sorry. Birthday. Long. Erase.

The play is filled with words that relate back to privilege and the lack of means. There is a bleak diction to the piece, with most of the choice of words enveloped within the staple needs of the characters, largely related to words that are common within sects of immigrant English. Markers of time and finance are some of the most common words used, as well as America and respective countries. "Death," and "Died," are common words throughout, although at times, the absence of these words can be even more evocative and reflective of the characters' inner lives. Ultimately, the language used is immersed in shelter and safety, or the attempts at achieving such.

B. Choice of Phrases

Whole Building. This house. You got a daughter. When you are young? Don't do this in Queens. First time I come here. It's most times it's some man. You learn English really fast then. I like to stay here. I take everything with me. I don't want your stuff. She was marking it. It gets bad so fast. 10 dollars and 26 cents. We never do party for nobody. You think you will come back? You overstay? No one wanted. What happened her? He tries to put his hand in my dress so I leave. May they know... How much you think would cost? People just look at me and that's it. Why someone would leave something so-. Yeah I see how "nice" you're living. Okay fine so I also

can come. Then why not come back? What this means, Better Life, if you gotta leave everything to come? What this means, Better Life, if you don't take me with you? When you find your American. And then one takes you away. For money you would leave everything you know. You got everything you need? What makes you think America it's gonna care about you? I don't have nothing. Was not easy, first few months for me here. You was in situation.

The phrases within the play exemplify fragmented words creating a larger picture of destitution and desperation. Most of the phrases are attempts at communicating the horrors of people living at the bottom of capitalism and globalization, and highlight language's inability to free people from isolation. The phrases allow space between the words which breathes life into the broken, and brings about specific lines of thought and raises certain aspects of language above others. There is an economy of language within the phrases, which says a lot considering the characters within the play don't live in excess, their words are their excess, and yet many of the characters long for their mother tongues, while a few of the characters reject their language history for the sake of assimilation.

C. Choice of Images

A stray cat named Nancy, stuck outside. A Honduran woman climbing through the window. A photograph of an immigrant woman outside an apartment building. A broken guitar off to the corner. A little girl afraid of the dark. Four traumatized immigrant women wearing dresses in a basement apartment. Twelve dolls. A box full of cheap necklaces. Money stuffed down the front of pants. Chicken noodle soup on the house. Two women sitting out by a bus stop. Chasing after someone reading your native tongue. The attacks on September, 11th 2001. Man with a hat. A diner in the distance.

Images serve quite a purpose in this play. They phase between being an identifier and an element of mystery. Many of the characters' backstories and histories are unknown. There is a power in female bodies of all shapes and sizes occupying a space devoted to them. Or what should be devoted to them. The space is perpetually filthy as people are unable to fully take their things with them, so the visual objects serve as a reminder of the history of these characters. There exists a paradox of familiarity and unfamiliarity through the images of this play.

D. Choice of Peculiar Characteristics

Dialects and peculiar characteristics of these characters play a massive role in this piece, as the characters' struggles to learn English represent their struggles to find a better life in America, while the two things are representative of one another, they are also literally tied to one another. There is often use of short, clipped phrases, exaggerated greatly by the use of silence by a number of the characters. Dialects include: Afghani/Dari, Belarusan, Polish, Honduran/Spanglish,

E. Sound of the Dialogue

There is a lonely ebb and flow to the dialogue, with moments of true clarity as a character finds the impetus to fight their way out of loneliness. Often times the phrasing and sentence length is drastically different from one to the next, so we move from one word

answers to fully flushed out responses. The sounds of the dialogue are rough, it is the sound of survival, which is exacerbated by the immigrants' dialects. A very large number of this play is questions, and there is a lot of defensive certainty that manifests itself in speech, creating a dichotomy of speech that flows from up to down in turns of how the words are lifted off the page.

F. Structure of Lines and Speeches

The lines and speeches are the sounds of survival. They are the fight to make a better life for ones' self. It is a language that is specifically structured around assimilation and the striving for connection. This is done through a type of English that some would consider broken. I mention this because the language is broken, there are cracks and holes and fractures within the lines that allows light to get in to reveal the inner life of the characters. The language is rarely smooth. Rather, the sharp edges are prominent and the moments of true clarity burst into the foreground as an elevated moment due to the roughness it is surrounded by. The structure of the plasticity of the page is apparent. There are often line breaks and a type of stanza'd structure on the page. These devices serves as a kind of maze for the energy of the play to pass through, as it clunks from one level on the page down to the next line and so forth.

III. Dramatic Action

A. Titles of the Units

1. Seeking Shelter

Inna punches Renia, and Renia squashes Inna

Hot humidity, the aggression of sound, the taste and smell of New York City air, the force of a punch.

Intoxication of desperation. Quick.

2. Sizing Up

Renia puts Inna in her place, and Inna pokes through Renia

Miasmic, Lectured, Aggressive odor, Depressive reality.

When reality sets in. Medium-slow controlled.

3. The Replacement

Isabela draws the line against Inna, Pela, and Aamani, Pela and Aamani fish from Isabela and Renia, Renia observes

Tug of war, translative dissonance, mix of happy and sad.

A single cigarette with muted music. Slow.

4. I take everything with me; I don't want a party

Isabela rejects, Renia caters, Aamani scavenges, Pelagiya collects

Reveals, Surprise, Goodbyes

Cigarettes and piles of clothes. Faster than before.

5. Make mine a double
Aamani corrects, Pelagiya prepares, Isabela ruminates, Renia soaks in.
The indulgence of a beer. Escalation of alcohol type. The weight of the past.
The spectres of the previous tenants. Medium-fast certainty.
6. We're having a party
The weight of normal clothing for an informal event. The shiver of night. The thirst of something more.
Women wearing dresses. Faster.
7. The ghosts of the past
The somber of chachkies. The cost of sending clothes. The horror of hijacked planes.
An immigrant woman standing over a box of arts and crafts materials. Medium.
8. The Incident with the Jets hat
The recoil of aggressive gaze. The hunger for cigarettes. Hate of difference.
A man in a jets hat. Very fast.
9. Your mother died
A stranger's presence. Sexual competitiveness. The rage of betrayal.
Heart attack. Fast-slow.
10. The Connections of Support
The silence of a locked door. The warmth of a hand on the back.
Two women looking at a door, two women behind the door. Slow.
11. Isabella's goodbye
The touch of condolences. Dredging of feet towards flight.
The keeping of a key. Slow-honest.
12. Inna's Nightmare
The longing of a picture. The jerk of a nightmare. The fear of the disoriented.
A picture of a woman in front of an apartment building. Slow.
13. Dancing with American Men
The ache of work and motherhood. The ache of wearing high heels. The rejection of men.
A dressed up woman and a woman at home. Fast.
14. A rift between the girls from Odessa
The tension of a dying friendship. The pain of a slow goodbye. The fear of change. The
Isolation of immigraton.
A bus stop. Slow.
15. Inna's American Dream
The flailing of struggle. The feeling of desertion. The loss of a friend. The sound of a bus
approaching.
An unreciprocated goodbye present. Fast.
16. Inna's American Dream, Shattered

The smell of coffee when you're too tired for help. The ache of walking for 24 hours. The harsh of the crass. The abrasion of strangers.

A diner waitress outfit. Fast.

17. I need to get to New York

The ache of a bruise. The dream of reunion. The dissonance of the truth.

The revealing of a bruise on a chest. Medium.

18. Renia takes Inna under her wing

The warmth of a mug of tea. The unsettling of a new home. The disarming of a new connection.

A song of Ukraine from out the window. Slow.

19. The Intruder

The weight of a body. The alarm of being woken. The grip of an arm around your neck.

A woman climbing down through a basement window. Fast.

20. The Rent Debt

The shock of seeing a debtor. The rage of an unresolved conflict.

Renia bursting in. Quick.

21. You Can Stay Here For Free

The kindness of an offer. The mistrust of kindness.

"Please just take this money." Slow.

22. In the back of the head

The surprise of a gunshot. The scream of surprise. The registering of a friend's murder.

Shot in the back of the head. Quick.

23. If I ever needed a place-

The awkward of asking for help. The desperation of the unfamiliar. The defensiveness of changing the locks.

Having a key for half your life for a place you've never been. Medium.

24. The Student Discount

The fight for recognition. The gaze of assessment. The aggression of questioning.

A high schoolers trying to be a high schooler. Medium.

25. Depression is Houmam's Choice

The sacrifice of defending a friend. The musk of eight people. The weight of international trauma. The pressure of the upstairs.

Delaying the payment of rent. Quick.

26. Anything Can be Taken Away

The anxiety of debt. The loss of control. The anger of rocking the boat.

A youth standing up for the older. Quick.

27. The Staircase of Backs

The empowerment of education. The unity of two.

Standing on peoples' backs to get higher. Medium-Slow.

28. In the Defense of Yara

The tension of being overheard. The fault of gossip. The taste of someone else's food.
Two people in one bed. Medium-fast.

29. The Re-Arrival of Agata

The shattering of your hopes and dreams. The struggle for life's validation.
A picture of your granddaughter on an iPhone. Quick.

30. My daughter had a daughter

The shock of seeing her. The harshness of the truth. The look of a betrayer.
Tearing down of partitions. Quick.

31. The Mass Exodus

The pensive of the rain. The pierce of screaming. The ache of breaking. The shame of
being revealed. The heartache of lashing out.
A certificate of naturalization. Quick.

32. Tanya seeks Shelter

The scare of seeing someone you might know. The touch of a plea. The disorientation of
an unknown place.
A ghost at the top of the stairs. Slow.

33. Inna hears the truth

The longing of a child. The blame of support. The ache of goodbyes.
The feeling of ghosts. Slow.

34. Renia's Regrets

The worthlessness of work. The frustration of not being able to do anything right. The
missing of a life. The regret of action. The desertion of being with passed loved ones.
A life where people think you are so small. Medium.

35. The Ghosts Return

The cheer of a Happy Birthday. The intimacy of a Happy Birthday. The pierce of an
unanswered call. The desperation of reaching out. The blanket of loss. The reach of a
question. The ache of leaving. The fear of erasure. A Christmas joy wanted to be shared.
The pull of time.
The bodies of Queens on stage. Fast.

B. Summary of the Action

See Above.

IV. Characters

Renia:

A. Desires

I wish to have a great big family in a building that I own and flourish in. I wish to be respected
and to have people love me.

B. Will

I will do whatever it takes to get there.

C. Moral Stance

I will do whatever it takes to get there.

D. Decorum

Cautious. Keeps people at arm's length. Crafty. Flexible. Walks with purpose.

E. Summary list of Adjectives

Street smart. Ruthless. Broken-hearted. Hopeful. Caretaker. Subversive. Generous. Selfish.

F. Initial Character-mood-intensity at scene opening expressed as:

1. Heartbeat rate

Quick but steady and controlled.

2. Perspiration: Heavy, light, where, etc

The armpits and a little bit of sweat in her palms and forehead.

3. Stomach Condition

Stomach is always in knots.

4. Muscle Tension

A wringing of the hands in anxious anticipation and guilt.

5. Breathing rate, depth

Slow inhales through the nose, bursty exhales through the mouth.

Inna

A. Desires

I wish to find my mother and have a relationship with her.

B. Will

I will personally go through hell to find her.

C. Moral Stance

I will depend on the kindness of strangers, but I will also haggle them to get what I need.

D. Decorum

Reckless. Abrupt movements. Observant. Impatient.

E. Summary list of Adjectives

Desperate. Lost. Untrusting. Lonely. Hopeful.

F. Initial Character-Mood-Intensity at scene opening expressed as:

1. Heartbeat rate

Big low powerful beats. Slow but felt in the whole body.

2. Perspiration

In the crotch and feet. Heavy.

3. Stomach Condition

Hungry but she can ignore it.

4. Muscle Tension

Always prepared to fight.

5. Breathing Rate, Depth

A nose inhaler and exhaler. Short puffs of air.

V. Idea

A. Meaning of the title

The title is a suggestion of the place, Queens, NY, and the heroes of the world - the backs of the young and old immigrant women. They are the Queens of this world.

VI. Tone

The dull heartache of a life you weren't supposed to live.

A clock sinking to the bottom of a pool. A staircase of backs. Vagina Money. Lotta bullshit expensive. One person factory. A shirt with every woman in it. How much can we carry with us? How much do we carry with us? How much must we carry with us? What gets lost?