

NORM AND AHMED

ALEX BUZO



CURRENCY PRESS
SYDNEY

CURRENCY PLAYS

First published in 1969 in *Komos*, Vol.2 No.2.

This edition first published in 2014

Currency Press Pty Ltd,

PO Box 2287, Strawberry Hills, NSW, 2012, Australia

enquiries@currency.com.au

www.currency.com.au

Reprinted 2015, 2016.

Norm and Ahmed copyright © The Estate of Alex Buzo, 2014.

‘The Failed Nationalism of Alex Buzo’ copyright © Stephen Sewell, 2015.

COPYING FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES

The Australian *Copyright Act 1968* (Act) allows a maximum of one chapter or 10% of this book, whichever is the greater, to be copied by any educational institution for its educational purposes provided that that educational institution (or the body that administers it) has given a remuneration notice to Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) under the Act.

For details of the CAL licence for educational institutions contact CAL, Level 15/233 Castlereagh Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000; tel: within Australia 1800 066 844 toll free; outside Australia 61 2 9394 7600; fax: 61 2 9394 7601; email: info@copyright.com.au

COPYING FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Except as permitted under the Act, for example a fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without prior written permission. All enquiries should be made to the publisher at the address above.

Any performance or public reading of *Norm and Ahmed* is forbidden unless a licence has been received from the author or the author’s agent. The purchase of this book in no way gives the purchaser the right to perform the play in public, whether by means of a staged production or a reading. All applications for public performance should be addressed to The Estate of Alex Buzo c/- Currency Press at the above address.

Cataloguing-in-publication data for this title is available from the National Library of Australia website: www.nla.gov.au

Printed by Ligare Book Printers, Riverwood, NSW.

Front cover shows Craig Meneaud (left) as Ahmed, and Laurence Coy as Norm, in The Alex Buzo Company’s 2007 production at The Old Fitzroy Hotel Theatre, Sydney. (Photo by Mark Mawson)

Contents

NORM AND AHMED	1
<i>The Failed Nationalism of Alex Buzo</i>	31
<i>Stephen Sewell</i>	

Norm and Ahmed was first performed by the Old Tote Theatre Company at the Old Tote Theatre, Sydney, on 9 April 1968, with the following cast:

NORM

Ron Graham

AHMED

Edwin Hodgeman

Director, Jim Sharman

Set Designer, Allan Lees

CHARACTERS

NORM, a strongly-built, middle-aged man

AHMED, a slim, young Pakistani student.

SETTING

A footpath on a Sydney street under some scaffolding in front of a construction site. A white fence at the back, about five feet high, and then a wire-mesh fence rising above it. The scaffolding is supported by two posts at the front, which are joined by a handrail. There is a bus stop on one side and a garbage bin on the other.

TIME

Midnight on a summer night.

Lights up on NORM, who is leaning against the fence. He wears an open-necked white shirt and grey trousers. A clock strikes twelve. NORM moves around restlessly looking up and down the street. He takes out a cigarette packet, looks in it, then screws it up and flings it on the ground angrily. He brings out a fresh packet, rips off the cellophane with his teeth and takes out a cigarette, which he lights with a lighter. He moves around a bit more and then leans on the fence again. He waits. Then he starts moving around some more, and suddenly straightens up, looking to his left. He puts his cigarette out and takes another from the packet, putting it in his mouth unlit. He leans casually against the fence. The sound of footsteps is heard and AHMED appears, wearing a Nehru-style suit and carrying a briefcase. He walks past NORM.

NORM: Excuse me, mate.

AHMED stops and looks at NORM. Pause.

Got a light?

AHMED: Yes, certainly.

He offers a box of matches.

NORM: Thanks.

He keeps the matches after he has lit up.

I was dying for a smoke. Lucky you turned up. Nothing open at this hour.

AHMED: No, it's nearly midnight.

Pause. AHMED has been waiting for NORM to return his

matches, but now he starts to edge away warily.

NORM: Wait a minute, mate.

AHMED: Yes?

Pause.

NORM: You forgot your matches.

He holds them out.

AHMED: [*taking them warily*] Thank you.

He edges away.

NORM: What's the matter, mate? Do you think going to hold you up and rob you or something?

AHMED: [*hastily*] Oh no, not at all.

NORM: This isn't India, mate. You're in Sydney. No Bombay stranglers around here. You're quite safe.

AHMED: There are hoodlums here, too. Just as many as in my country.

NORM: Yeah, I'd reckon it'd be about evens. What part of the... uh... south-east Asian sub-continent would you be from?

AHMED: I am from Pakistan. Karachi, to be exact. I, uh, really must be going...

NORM: Eh, wait a minute, mate. I'm not going to rob you or bash you or anything.

AHMED: I was not suggesting for one minute that you were.

NORM: Then what's the matter, you think I'm a drunk? You think I'm one of those old pisspots who go around the place annoying decent people?

AHMED: No, not at all.

NORM: You think I'm a poofter, then, don't you? That's what you're thinking, isn't it? You think I'm like those poofsters in Hyde Park who go around soliciting blokes.

AHMED: Certainly not. I assure you I think nothing of the kind. I hope I have not insulted you in any way. If I have, I crave your forgiveness.

NORM: Ar, she's right. I suppose you've got to be careful these days. Lot of nasty types around.

AHMED: Yes, there is a lot of violence prevalent at the moment.

NORM: Too right. You look a bit uneasy.

AHMED: I do?

NORM: Yes. Are you sure you're all right?

AHMED: Yes.

NORM: You don't look all right.

AHMED: I feel fine.

NORM: My name's Norm Gallagher, what's yours?

AHMED: My name is Ahmed. [*Moving away*] Well, I don't wish to seem rude...

NORM: Pleased to meet you, Ahmed.

He offers his hand.

AHMED: [*shaking hands*] How do you do?

NORM: Pakistan. Now that's an interesting place. I've never been to Pakistan. I was in Egypt during the war, but we never went anywhere else. How do you like Australia?

AHMED: It is a very nice place. Naturally I tend to get a little homesick at times, but I quite like it out here. The people are very friendly.

NORM: It's good to hear that, Ahmed. You feel you're settling down all right?

AHMED: Yes, I think so. One always experiences difficulties when one is seeking to adjust to an alien environment. But once the initial period of adjustment is over, it is easier to acclimatise oneself.

Pause.

NORM: That's very true.

AHMED: Yes. Now if you'll excuse me, I'll...

NORM: Do you know what? You're insulting me, do you know that? Eh? You're insinuating that I'm some kind of drunken pervert.

AHMED: Oh no, you have misconstrued my actions. I think nothing of the kind.

NORM: Then why do you keep backing away, eh? Answer me that.

AHMED: Well... I mean... it's late. It's late at night.

NORM: I know it's late. That's no reason. You think you're a bit above me. You don't want to talk to me. I'm insulted. If you think I'm a drunken perv, why don't you say so? Why don't you come right out and say it?

AHMED: I'm very sorry if you think that. Perhaps I have shown bad manners. I offer my humble apologies.

NORM: Never been so insulted in all—

AHMED: Please! Believe me. I did not mean to be rude.

NORM: You sure?

AHMED: Of course I'm sure.

NORM: Well, all right then, don't worry about it. Just a bit of a misunderstanding, that's all. No hard feelings. Jeess, I tell you what, Ahmed, you really looked scared there for a minute.

He laughs.

AHMED: [*smiling, relieved*] Did I really?

NORM: [*jovially*] Yeah, you were terrified. You looked as if a kick in the crutch and a cold frankfurt'd finish you off. You're all right now?

AHMED: Yes.

NORM: You sure?

AHMED: Yes.

NORM: No worries?

AHMED: No.

NORM: You sure?

AHMED: Yes.

NORM: Everything's fine?

AHMED: Yes.

Pause.

NORM: You sure?

AHMED: Yes! Yes! I am sure!

NORM: [*prowling around AHMED*] Good. I'm pleased to hear that. That's very encouraging. Where do you live, Ahmed?

AHMED: I am at La Perouse, not far from the university. I'm sharing a flat with some Indian students.

NORM: La Perouse, eh? What, right out at Botany Bay?

AHMED: Yes. The flat overlooks the bay.

NORM: That's where it all started, isn't it? That's where old Captain Cook landed, Botany Bay. Must have given the boongs a fright, eh? I mean, the Aborigines were probably quite surprised to see the white men in their big ships. All those sails in the wind. They probably thought the white man was some kind of monster.

AHMED: That's quite possible.

NORM: You know much about Australian history?

AHMED: No, not a great deal. I am studying it at the university.

NORM: You're out at the old brain-drainer, eh? What course would you be taking, Ahmed?

AHMED: Arts. I am studying for a Bachelor of Arts degree.

NORM: Arts, eh? What, bit of a painter, are you?

AHMED: No, I am not doing painting, I am studying the humanities.

NORM: Oh. Uh... now just what exactly would that involve, Ahmed?

AHMED: History, mainly. I am majoring in History.

NORM: Oh, History. Yeah, I see. I was never much good at History. No head for dates. That was my trouble. Tell me, Ahmed, what with your education and all, you'd be able to form a few impressions, like, of this country. I mean, you'd be able to sort a few things out. Have your own opinions.

AHMED: Yes, I have formed several opinions of your country... some good, others bad.

NORM: What would you say was a bad point, Ahmed?

AHMED: Well, I would rather talk about the good points. It would hardly be diplomatic on my part to seek to undermine—