

Goodness premiered at Tarragon Theatre in Toronto on October 25, 2005, as a Volcano/Tarragon co-production, with the following cast and crew:

Victor Ertmanis	MATHIAS TODD, THERAPIST, POLE 3
Lili Francks	ALTHEA
Tara Hughes	YOUNG ALTHEA, POLE 1, VOICE, HELENA SONNEN
Jack Nichol森	STEPHEN PART, COLIN, MAN, POLE 4
Jordan Pettle	MICHAEL REDHILL
Bernadeta Wrobel	JULIA TODD, JOANNA, POLE 2
Ross Manson	Director
Brenna MacCrimmon	Music Director
Teresa Pryzbylski	Set and Costume Design
Rebecca Picherack	Lighting Design
John Gzowski	Sound Design
JP Robichaud	Stage Manager

The characters in this play never leave the stage – the stage being an imaginative space in which Michael Redhill, the character, is writing the play. Other than Michael and Althea, the rest of the characters act as a kind of chorus – each has a primary character, but they take on other roles in a way that has a meaningful interaction with Michael’s thoughts or Althea’s memories.

Act One

Darkness onstage. Under this darkness, multiple voices.

SONG: 'Tobela' (Zimbabwean)

Chorus:

Tobela Murena / Tobela Murena (Pray to God)

Tobela Murena / Tobela Murena

Tobela Murena / Tobela Murena

Tobela Murena / Tobela Murena

Horiyatsa (Look around / pay attention)

Hamuzani waka (To what is happening)

Tobela (Pray)

Ayitobela Murena (O Pray to God)

Tobela Murena / Tobela Murena

Tobela Murena / Tobela Murena

Horiyatsa (Look around / pay attention)

Hamuzani waka (To what is happening)

Tobela (Pray)

Ayitobela Murena (O Pray to God)

Iyo-o / Iyo-o / Iyo-o (a soothing sound)

Ayitobela Murena (O Pray to God)

Lights up. There are six people onstage, five of whom – JULIA, STEPHEN, TODD, ALTHEA, YOUNG ALTHEA – are looking at MICHAEL, whose nose is buried in a notebook. He's writing. After a moment:

MICHAEL: (*remembering the music*) That was it. (*to us as well as the other five characters*) Sorry, I just have to get this down. (*He finishes, holds up the notebook.*) I'm trying to write a play ... although, if you can hear me, I guess it's finished.

Even though right now I could throw it through a window. (*pause, realizing*) You're sitting in a theatre at this very moment, aren't you? Somewhere, in the future, you're in a dark room, and it just got quiet, and you have no idea what's going to happen to you. You've paid your money, you're in your seat and ... you're staring at the playwright. Although it's not me, I have to say. I'm being played tonight by Jordan Pettle. That's a little lie in the form of a person. You're in good hands with Jordan, by the way. He's an excellent actor, a trained actor, who's been in many Canadian plays of repute. You probably saw him in *Waiting for Godot*. A Jewish Estragon – imagine. *For Godot, We're Waiting*. But he was fantastic. So thank you, Jordan. You have my trust, and my gratitude.

Now, this is a true story. I want to be upfront about that. And I'm a real person. You can look me up in the Toronto Yellow Pages, under 'ghost writers': I write bumpf for corporations and pap for cash. But apart from myself there are real people in this play who probably don't know they're in it, and so I've changed their names. I don't strictly have their permission to write about them. Although I'm sure you won't have a problem with that – the reason *why* I've decided to. One of the people I'm referring to is my ex-wife –

Julia, as Joanna, tears the notebook from Michael's hands.

JOANNA (JULIA): What the hell do you think you're doing?

MICHAEL: My divorce was really the first domino to fall in a series of ... I found out she was having an affair.

JOANNA: You read my diary?

MICHAEL: Oh, *you* feel betrayed?

JOANNA: I feel invaded.

MICHAEL: (*suddenly shouting*) YOU SLEPT WITH COLIN!

JOANNA: It figures you'd have to read someone else's diary to know what's going on in your own life.

MICHAEL: (*to us*) He was my best friend.

COLIN (STEPHEN): Hey pal.

MICHAEL: BACK OFF.

COLIN : (*to Michael*) Where do you get your ideas? (*Stephen, as Colin, laughs mildly. Then, as an aside to Julia*) Hi, hon – I put the laundry on the bed.

JOANNA: (*to Stephen*) Thanks, sweetie. (*She looks in Michael's book, then says, honestly*) 'Bumpf' and 'pap.' That's good. (*She hands him back the book.*) Am I going to be in your play? Your horrible ex-wife?

MICHAEL: No.

JOANNA: Prick. You got what you deserved.

She backs away with Stephen.

MICHAEL: I had a little depression after my breakup. Okay: I could barely move for eight months. I'd get up in the mornings but before I could make it to the bathroom, I'd have to lie down again. I grew a beard and got fat. My shrink said,

THERAPIST (TODD): How does it feel?

MICHAEL: How does it *feel*?

THERAPIST : You should get away from your life for a while. Focus on something else.

MICHAEL: Like what.

THERAPIST : Go on a trip. Try to have some fun.

MICHAEL: Where am I going to have ‘fun’?

THERAPIST : Just go somewhere. Get away from yourself. God, you’re depressing, you know that?

MICHAEL: (*to us*) He never really said that. Although he might as well have. Useless ... Anyway, I took his advice.

Blackout.

SONG: ‘*Szerelem*’ (Hungarian)

Szerelem szerelem (Love, love)
Átkozott gyötirelem (Wretched suffering)

Lights up. He turns the notebook to us. There are pictures taped to two pages.

MICHAEL: These are my mother’s grandparents and seven of their children. All of them were killed in 1941, in the town square of Ustrzyki Dolne, in Poland, by the Einsatzgruppen. The Nazi death squads.
Nine people.

SONG: *Szerelem szerelem*

So, this is what I did after my divorce. It probably seems crazy to you, but I went to Poland. Granted, my shrink didn’t say, ‘Sublimate your feelings of loss and worthlessness by making an Orphic journey to your family’s tragic past’ –

SONG: *Átkozott gyötirelem*

– but what the hell.

POLE 1 (YOUNG ALTHEA): No. It's *Oos Tsbikee Dolnya*.

MICHAEL: *Oos Tsbikee Dolnya*.

POLE 2 (JULIA): Tak. (*Ad lib in Polish along the lines of 'he says it with a Yiddish accent' – the Poles laugh*)

MICHAEL: It turned out the people I met in Poland weren't all that interested in my 'quest.'

POLE 3 (TODD): You think the Nazis came through just to make life hard for the Jews?

POLE 4 (STEPHEN): We had the Russki on one side and the Nazi on the other, and you come to Poland looking for bad guys!

POLE 2: (*In Polish: 'Who is this guy?'*)

POLE 1: The Lone Ranger.

The Poles laugh.

MICHAEL: (*suddenly furious*) HEY! There's no need to be so rude, tak?

POLE 2: Tak? Hey, chill man. We're just playing with you. C'mon, ask us anything. Honest.

He stares at them and they stare back. He turns away from them.

MICHAEL: These people weren't going to tell me anything, so I left. It was a mistake to go in the first place.

He turns away from them, is back in the shrink's office.

THERAPIST: Poland? You're planning a trip to Poland? Do you really think that's a good idea? I was thinking something more like Vegas.

MICHAEL: I hate Vegas.

THERAPIST: Let's talk about your ex-wife.

MICHAEL: Let's not.

THERAPIST: You marry a non-Jew, she leaves you for a non-Jew.
Any connection here to the sudden interest in the history of
your people?

MICHAEL: Oh. You mean am I displacing my anger at my gentile
ex-wife by trying to take it out on a bunch of Jew-killing
Poles?

THERAPIST: Are you?

MICHAEL: I know what I'm doing, okay?

SONG: 'Yonana' (Zimbabwean)

*Yonana yo yo yo
Yonana yo yo yo*

*Michael becomes aware of the audience again. He is thinking in
circles.*

Where were we? Yeah. Poland. I took a train from Warsaw
through the green green fields to Berlin, and from there
went to London to wait for my plane home. Annnnd ... you
know what? That's the end of the play! Thank you for
coming. Good night.

*Blackout. Pause. The song returns, (Althea sings 'Yonana.' All
join on 'Yo.')* louder than before, more insistent. Lights up.
*Michael is suddenly in an English pub, with a man (Stephen)
sitting beside him. The man speaks without an accent.*

MAN (STEPHEN): (*amused*) You went all the way to Poland and you thought they'd be happy to see you?

MICHAEL: I said: good night.

MAN: What the hell were you were doing there?

Michael is handed a drink. He looks at it.

MICHAEL: Fine. (*to the audience*) I had a few hours to kill in London before my flight. I met this old guy in some rundown –

MAN: You're lucky they didn't shoot you too.

MICHAEL: It was a little idealistic, maybe. (*Drinks, beat.*) Look, I knew it wouldn't be easy, but I didn't go with a chip on my shoulder. I –

MAN: Let me get this straight. You flew in from overseas, rented a Corolla in Warsaw and drove down to the Carpathian mountains to see if some old folks felt like admitting their part in unspeakable crimes against your people?

MICHAEL: No. I wasn't trying to get anyone to sign a confession. If you're really interested, I was trying to see how they experienced what happened there. Because our histories intersect.

MAN: Your histories don't 'intersect,' yours is a subplot of theirs.

MICHAEL: It's healthy to talk about what you've done.

MAN: Is it?

MICHAEL: Trust me. And it's been sixty years anyway.

MAN: Right. Sixty years of rubble and oppression and Communism. And *revolt*. And repression of the Catholics. And *corruption*. And *poverty*. And *industrial pollution*. And the Miracle of the Free Market! Jews? Holocaust?

MICHAEL: You're Polish.

MAN: Really? Do I look Polish?

MICHAEL: (*to us*) He didn't look Polish, but he might as well have been.

MAN: What?

MICHAEL: I wasn't talking to you.

The man looks out. Then back to Michael.

MAN: Listen, I'm not from your side of the ocean. We know history here like you Americans know cartoons.

MICHAEL: I'm Canadian actually.

MAN: Ah yes. (*quoting something*) 'The minority culture *is*, the majority culture *does*.'

MICHAEL: (*quoting the man*) 'Ah yes.' What the hell are you talking about?

MAN: Write it down. (*insistent, when Michael remains inactive*) Write it down!

Michael reluctantly opens the notebook.

MAN: While the Few expound on their uniqueness, the Many are figuring out how to get rid of them. (*He laughs, Michael closes the book.*) Listen, holocausts happen all the time. Really. Africa, the Caucasus, Europe, Cambodia. They're very

popular, holocausts. Although most of the last, what, sixty have been completely forgotten. Except by the survivors who go around wailing and pointing their fingers, 'You! Go stand trial!, You! Go to the Hague!' and they try to punish us with the story over and over so we'll never forget! But you know what? Everyone has moved on. Except you. You had some bad luck, and you want everyone to pay.

MICHAEL: You call the Holocaust 'bad luck'? Where *are* you from?

MAN: Does it matter?

MICHAEL: When you talk like that it does.

MAN: Consider this. Let's say Hitler doesn't come to power –

MICHAEL: No, let's NOT say that.

MAN: – and Germany copes with the after-effects of the Great Depression some other way.

MICHAEL: So they lower the interest rates instead of, you know, gassing everybody.

MAN: Sure, let's say that.

MICHAEL: Please.

MAN: And everyone thrives. The Jews thrive as well, their numbers increase, they get a voice in government, and one day some of them say, 'The Aryans sure do have a lot of control of industry' –

MICHAEL: 'We should put limits on them!'

MAN: And one thing leads to another and before you know it, the Jews are rounding up the Germans and putting them on trains.

MICHAEL: Well, this is just like all the other times in history the Jews ran rampant and went around killing people, isn't it? Jesus Christ.

MAN: Right! Let's start with him.

MICHAEL: OH! (*to us*) Okay, fine, do you see? (*to man*) Now, THIS IS – this is *exactly* the reason why you people have so many bloody genocides over here! Because you'll find any reason at all to make a 'them' so you can be an 'us,' and then – *look!* – you've got micks and dagos and chinks and niggers and kikes who are corrupting your language and screwing your women and killing your gods! The whole, the whole *IDEA* that there might be some *likeness* between all human beings – well, that's *anathema!*

MAN: (*He's been watching the display.*) Oh, I like you.

MICHAEL: What?

MAN: You take it all so personally! It's refreshing.

MICHAEL: I'm not here to amuse you, bud.

MAN: No, you're an idealist. You think people should be held *accountable!*

MICHAEL: I came over here for a good reason.

MAN: Of course. (*Beat.*) What was that?

MICHAEL: I'm a survivor. I have a responsibility.

MAN: Yes, right. (*Beat.*) What did you survive again?

MICHAEL: (*getting up to leave*) Never mind.