

The Winter's Tale, January 1st, The Roundhouse Theater

I really enjoyed this performance of *The Winter's Tale*. I thought that the acting was superb, especially the performance given by Leontes. His entire body conveyed his emotions so well, which was definitely easier to see sitting so close to the stage.

The things that I especially noticed in this play were the set and the props that were used. Specifically, I noted the use of books and pages in these objects. The books that fell from the collapsed bookshelves created the landscape of the second act, the leaves on the trees were painted book pages, the bear that killed Antigonus was made of book pages, and the shepherds who performed the fertility dance were dressed in book pages. At the time, I really didn't understand what this was supposed to signify, and even now, I'm not entirely sure that I understand. If I had to guess, I would say that it relates to the theme of knowledge. Knowledge is certainly power for the characters in *The Winter's Tale*. When they are ignorant, such as Leontes presuming Hermoine's guilt, they make very destructive choices, and when they are informed, they are able to act properly.

I thought it was an interesting decision to leave the broken bookshelves and books on the stage through the second half of the play. This seemed to be a constant reminder of the turmoil from act one, and I know that I definitely associated these books with Leontes' mourning and guilt. It's interesting that this set established a subtle connection between Leontes and Perdita. Without knowing that the two are

related, we still see her interacting with the books that we associate with his character.

I enjoyed the opening of the second act with the shepherds and their sheep shearing ceremony. It seemed to establish a theme of renewal and beginning anew, which applies to Leontes as well as Perdita and her shepherd family. Leontes is only able to start over once he is humiliated by Paulina and is able to accept humility after acting in an extremely self-centered and egotistical way, believing only himself and not listening to the pleas of everyone around him. One thing that I didn't understand in the beginning of act two was the fertility dance. Perhaps it was just a ritual of the sheep shearing celebration, or maybe it was a bit of comic relief after a very heavy act.

As in other plays we have seen, there were several anagnorises, each applying to a different character. One thing that I thought was interesting is that the epiphany that Perdita is alive and has been found happens offstage. We don't initially see her interaction with her father, but instead hear about her return from three men who are discussing the gossip they have heard. I loved the way that everything fell into place at the end of *The Winter's Tale*, and there seemed to be a great sense of catharsis for everyone. Leontes is reunited with both Hermoine and Perdita, Polixenes is able to accept Florizel's love for Perdita, and Florizel and Perdita are married with everyone's consent. The only character that seemed unsatisfied was Autolycus, but this is something that the audience was hoping for since he was such a greedy character.

An Ideal Husband, January 5th, Vaudeville Theater

An Ideal Husband was an interesting play that I enjoyed very much. I believe that ultimately, this is a play about the dangers of idealizing the people around you. The worlds ideal, idle, and idol interact in interesting ways, as the most idle character seems to be the most idolized and the character who seems the most ideal turns out to have skeletons in his closet.

One aspect of the opening scene that I thought was interesting was that women get the attention they seek from men outside their husbands, and they get other men to flirt with them and compliment them for their own amusement. Perhaps this shows the small revenges that women were able to give to their absent husbands.

At times, this play seemed quite like a farce. The wrong characters were often present at the wrong times, creating humor for the viewer. This was especially true in the scene towards the end where Lord Goring has called upon Lady Chiltern, but when Robert enters the room, Lord Goring has to find a way to hide in plain sight and sneaks out secretly.

The set was extravagantly painted gold and was highly aesthetic, which shows how much the characters value aestheticism. The women especially seem to make themselves into works of art to be admired by those around them.

There was one time that I thought an especially unexpected plot twist occurred. When Lord Goring finds the broach and said he gave it to someone, I

thought that he had given it to Mrs. Cheveley, which was proof that he had cared for me more than he let on; yet in reality, he had given it to his cousin as a wedding present and Mrs. Cheveley had stolen it, which give Lord Goring the upper hand to convince her to hand over the letter.

An Ideal Husband often discusses the dangers of putting the people you love on a pedestal and turning them into works of art to be admired for their perfection instead of viewing them as human and capable of making mistakes. Gertrude Chiltern especially learns the price she must pay for idealizing her husband Robert Chiltern and putting an extreme amount of pressure on him to live up to the image that she has created for him.

Though Lord Goring seems to be a character that is not widely respected and who is usually idly trying to pass the time, he appears to be the most moral character. Somehow he ends up in the morally superior position that he can both judge Robert for his political scandal and offer advice on how to fix his marriage. It is rather ironic that Gertrude and Robert hold so much stock in Lord Goring's advice about how to mend their relationship since he seems to be the absolute representation of the word bachelor. Yet somehow, with the help of Lord Goring, the Chilterns achieve an honesty in their marriage that was never present before.

At first it seemed to me that Robert had done an evil deed by selling state secrets and has escaped unpunished, but upon further reflection, it seems this is not the case. Robert feels sincerely repentant for what he has done and attempts to make things right when he delivers the speech to the cabinet about how they should

avoid the scheme. When he delivers this speech, he is unaware that Lord Goring has burned the letter, and thus Robert is accepting whatever ramifications might come at the expense of doing the right thing.

I believe that this play had the best sense of catharsis of all the plays thus far. Mrs. Cheveley is exposed for the villain she truly is, Robert and Gertrude have repaired their marriage, and Lord Goring has proposed to Mabel Chiltern. All of the loose ends were nicely tied up and everything that the audience wanted to happen fell nicely into place.

***Men Should Weep*, January 6th**

Men Should Weep was a very powerful play that shed light to what can happen to people when they are forced into unfortunate living conditions. A note from the program says that “the sty creates the pig,” which I think accurately describes what has happened to the characters in this play.

The program includes a note about what inspired Ena Lamont Stewart, the author of the play, and “she knew without question that bad housing, more even than income, was central to women’s experience of poverty: the grind, the grimness, the uncertainty, the hacking coughs and the interminable arguments.” This is primarily a play about women and what poor living conditions can lead to for the individual women and for her family members around her. Maggie is trying to make the best of what little she has and what little space she has, and her husband John is doing the best he can to provide for his family in the midst of the depression. It is clear how every character is a product of their environment. I think that we can see this most clearly through Jenny’s character. She is fed up with living in such squalid conditions and being embarrassed by her lifestyle enough that it has interfered with her love life since she doesn’t feel comfortable bringing dates back to her house. Instead of allowing these circumstances to hold her down, she chooses to rise up, move out, and find a way to help provide for her family. We can also see the effect that the tenement housing has on Bernie. After he is starting to recover from tuberculosis, he is not allowed back into his home because the conditions are so poor that he would never get better.

We are able to forgive the Morrison family for their poor behaviour because we know what has caused them to be the way they are. However, I found that I felt different about Isa. She is a manipulative and rude young woman who acts like she is better than the Morrison's and treats her husband Alec very poorly. I had a difficult time forgiving Isa for her behaviour since I never saw the circumstances she grew up in, and thus it is harder for the audience to make excuses for her actions.

I thought it was interesting that *Men Should Weep* showed women abusing men as well as men abusing women, and the women weren't made to seem like weak victims most of the time. This is especially true with Isa. Though Alec often loses his temper with Isa and becomes violent, she frequently deceives him, is condescending to him, and is often blatantly cruel. We also see Maggie verbally abusing and humiliating John when she discusses with Jenny how he tried to pressure Maggie to have sex before they were married. It was interesting to see examples of strong women, though sometimes in negative ways, and show different ways the women can have power. Lily is another example of a strong woman. She values her independence and constantly proves that she can be successful without a man. Sometimes this leads to her acting superior, such as when she criticizes Maggie on her parenting skills, her marriage, her appearance, and how she keeps her home. Lily doesn't seem to be very understanding of how hard it is for Maggie to keep her life together for herself and her family.

We see interesting family dynamics when Jenny returns home. We admire her for how sincere she seems to be with Maggie and her noble intentions to help

her family in a time of need. However, she has hurt John's pride. When she left home, she said cruel things about how he is unable to provide enough for the family. Coming back home, she further wounds his pride when she offers to give her family money, because it makes John feel like she is once again attacking his ability to be the provider that the family needs. Though Jenny's character is complicated, I believe that we ultimately end up sympathizing with her because she has genuinely good intentions to help her family in the best way she can.

***Bea*, January 6th**

Bea was probably my favorite out of all of the plays we saw in London. It was unlike anything I had seen before. The characters seemed so real in their flaws and strengths. This play dealt with empathy and its limits for each character.

One technique that I enjoyed was how scene changes were performed. Between scene changes, the lights went out, and the only lights were the ones that illuminated Bea's earring display board. I believe that this was to put an emphasis on the small things that make Bea who she is and that help her get through the mundane days of never being able to leave her room. I also thought it was interesting that this play took place entirely in one room. This was the only play I saw where the setting never changes at all.

"This Bea is lively, fun and full of energy, able to move and play freely. It is Bea's inner self or the life that Bea does not have. Bea's real condition, which we only glimpse occasionally, could not be more different. Bea suffers from a chronically debilitating illness and in reality she cannot move without pain and exhaustion" (25). The first time that we really see Bea's true condition is when her mother reads Bea's daily schedule to her caretaker, Ray. We come to understand that she is unable to eat, go to the bathroom, or really do anything on her own without Ray or her mother's help. However, in her mind, she can dance, sing, and move around freely. Ray serves as a stark contrast to Bea. He has lived life to the fullest, has dated around, lost his virginity, tried many drugs, and discovered what

makes life interesting and meaningful for him. Bea is not able to really do any of these things.

The main purpose of this play is to explore the topic of empathy. I feel that the audience was able to empathize with Bea, her mother, and Ray. We learn a great deal about each of these characters. For example, we learn that Ray has an autistic sister, Bea's mother went through a difficult divorce, and of course Bea has a degenerative disease. We feel emotional about what happens to each of these characters. This play also explores the limits of empathy. Bea's mother tries to put herself into Bea's shoes by acting out a day in Bea's life with Ray, but she can't stand to do it even for one day. She tries to feel what Bea feels but is unable to do so. However, this experience does help her understand how life is for Bea and allows her to finally decide to help Bea kill herself. We also can see that Bea's mother doesn't fully understand her when in the final scene of the play, Bea is screaming in ecstasy and her mother is screaming in agony. Bea feels liberated but her mother only feels the pain of losing her daughter.

Bea's mother is the character who grows and changes the most. When we are first introduced to her, she seems like a cold and emotionless woman, but the more we get to know her, we also see her playful side. She changes in coming to understand why Bea wants to end her life, and by helping Bea to do this. Ray's purpose seems to be giving Bea's mother the distance she needs to be able to cope with the reality of Bea's situation.

