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Danton's Death

Georg Büchner's thrilling, epic masterpiece
Directed by David Melville Kennedy

The Illusion

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the university of rochester international theatre program presents

THE ILLUSION
by pierre corneille
freely adapted by tony kushner

directed and set design by nigel maister
costume design by arnulfo maldonado
lighting design by thomas dunn
sound design by will pickens
fight direction by j. david brimmer

production staff

production stage manager .......................................................... jeff englander
assistant production stage manager ........................................... jonathan isaacs
assistant stage managers ............................................................ scott ames/lights
.............................................................................................. catherine crow/run crew
cassandra donatelli/run crew .................................................. meagan gorham/costumes
camber hansen-karr/props .........................................................
master electrician ....................................................................... erica greenbaum
assistant m.e. ................................................................................ david moiseev
audiovisual engineer .................................................................... bruce stockton
assistant lighting designer ............................................................ david moiseev
assistant director .......................................................................... alex rozansky
fight captain .................................................................................. esty thomas
costume construction ................................................................. nadine brooks taylor
.............................................................................................. julie clark
.............................................................................................. melanie weekes
costume design assistant ............................................................. tracy klein

This production has been made possible through the combined efforts of ENG 170 & 270 (Technical & Advanced Technical Theatre) ENG 290 (Plays in Production)

Ashlee Bickley - Emily DaSilva - Chris Futia - Anna Garcia
Jake Gardner - Julieta Gruszko - Samantha Hayes - Latoya Heron
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Mike Lee - Steve Lehner - Alex McCrory - Stefanie Milner - Ashley Nguyen
Elvis Njoku - Val Pyon - Aquella Robinson - Raquell Stephen - Teresa Zaffarano

the illusion
runs 2 hours and 15 minutes with one 15 minute intermission
Pierre Corneille was born on June 6, 1606 in Rouen, France. Educated by the Jesuits, Corneille was initially a lawyer serving as advocate to the King. Although he served as a member of the Rouen parliament for 21 years, Corneille would later become recognized as one of the “Fathers of French Tragedy.”

While Corneille is remembered for pioneering French tragedy (along with Jean Racine, 1639-1699), his interest in literature started with comedies. In the 1620s (the exact year is unknown), Corneille wrote his first play, Mélusine, a comedy that became a great success when it was taken up by a traveling theatrical troupe in Paris. At this early point in his career, Corneille produced approximately seven comedies including Cidandre (1630-1). La Veuve (1631), La Galerie du Palais (1631-32), La Place Royale (1633-34) and L’Amour (Comique 1638).

In 1634, Corneille was personally selected to write verses for Cardinal Richelieu (Chief Minister to King Louis XIII from 1624-1642) on his visit to Rouen. Richelieu founded L’Académie française, the official authority on the French language. A major patron of the arts, Richelieu chose Corneille to join Les Cinq Auteurs, translated as ‘The Five Poets’ or ‘The Society of the Five Authors’. This group also included Pierre Corneille…His contemporaries admired him for his fire, his dramatic power, and his ability to create vivid characters. He was a master of the tragicomedy, and his plays were characterized by their power and intensity.

Love is a tyrant sparing none.

La Académie française, the authority headed and founded by the embattled Richelieu, argued that the play was both technically defective and also immoral. The Academy argued that the play did not follow the Classical rules of unity of time, place, and action. This attack was further propagated by a pamphlet campaign that criticized Corneille so harshly that he withdrew from the public and returned to Rouen.

After his theatrical sabbatical, Corneille re-emerged in 1640 greatly impacted by the “Querelle du Cid”. Corneille’s plays that followed adhered strictly to classical rules of drama and the playwright even wrote revised editions of Le Cid that reconfigured it to better follow the conventions of neoclassical tragedy. The plays that Corneille wrote during this time include Horace (1640), Cinna (1643), and Polyeucte (1645). Collectively, these plays are referred to as Corneille’s Classical Trilogy.

Corneille continued to write more tragedies and his popularity grew, but in 1652 his play Perdixthe received poor reviews and Corneille took a hiatus from theater. After this, Corneille published Discourses on Dramatic Poetry. This was Corneille’s response to the “Querelle du Cid”. In this work, Corneille defended his unique style and argued that the classical dramatic guidelines were open to creative interpretation.

In Man and Ethics. Studies in French Classicism, Paul Benichou writes:

Few great writers have been so hastily judged as Corneille…His contemporaries admired him for his fire, his dash, and his ardor. Saint-Evremond, for example, writes that Corneille elevates the soul.

Corneille made a distinct impact on contemporary French drama, influencing Molière, and the theatrical works that succeeded his time. On October 1, 1684 Corneille died at his home in Paris, married, and both the father of seven children and of French tragedy.
Tony Kushner
b. 1956

In this world, there is a kind of painful progress. Longing for what we’ve left behind, and dreaming ahead.

Tony Kushner was born on July 16th, 1956 in Manhattan, New York to Jewish parents. In 1974, Kushner began his undergraduate education at Columbia University and received a B.A. in Medieval Studies. He then proceeded to get a Master’s degree in Directing at NYU.

Kushner’s plays target controversial contemporary issues including AIDS (Angels in America), Afghanistan (Homebody/Kabul), German Fascism and Reaganism (A Bright Room Called Day), capitalism (Hydriotaphia) and the Civil Rights movement (Caroline, or Change). His other theatrical work includes musicals, and translations and adaptations, including Corneille’s L’Illusion Comique and S. Y. Ansky’s The Dybbuk. Kushner’s work for the screen includes the screenplay for Munich, which was co-written and directed by Steven Spielberg in 2005. Kushner is currently working with Spielberg on a screenplay about Abraham Lincoln.

Kushner’s most renowned theatrical work is the two-part play, Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1993. Angels is a political epic about the AIDS crisis during the 1980s. This work has been made into both a television mini-series and an opera. Both parts of this play received the Tony Award for Best Play.

The New York Times wrote, “Some playwrights want to change the world. Some want to revolutionize theater. Tony Kushner is that rarity of rarities: a writer who has the promise to do both.” Tony Kushner is also well known in the Jewish community for his sometimes controversial stances regarding the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Zionist Organization of America accused Kushner of anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli remarks. The organization circulated alleged Kushner quotes that criticized Israeli treatment of Palestinians and Israeli politics in an attempt to get Brandeis University to revoke the honorary doctorate that they awarded Kushner in 2006. Kushner argues that his remarks completely misconstrued.

Tony Kushner is the winner of a Pulitzer Prize for Drama, an Emmy Award, two Tony Awards, an Oscar nomination, and numerous other awards and honors. He currently lives in Manhattan with his husband, Mark Harris, an editor of Entertainment Weekly.

Respect the delicate ecology of your delusions.

Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches

Imagination can’t create anything new, can it? It only recycles bits and pieces from the world and reassembles them into visions... So when we think we’ve escaped the unbearable ordinariness and well, untruthfulness of our lives, it’s really only the same old ordinariness and falseness rearranged into the appearance of novelty and truth.

Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches

Angels in America, Part Two: Perestroika
Successful during its time, but forgotten soon after Pierre Corneille’s death, *L’Illusion Comique* was adapted by American playwright, Tony Kushner, in 1990. While Kushner has retained much of the original five-act French tragedy in his freely adapted version, it is clear that Kushner’s dramatic intentions differ from Corneille’s. In her *Two Illusions: Cultural Borrowings and Transcendence*, Felicia Hardison Londre explains:

An adaptation implies finding more radical equivalencies that can render a seventeenth-century sensibility comprehensible to contemporary audiences. ‘A free adaptation’ might be understood as an admission that some equivalencies simply cannot be made and thus the adaptor must create anew.

Kushner has both excised some of Corneille’s original characters and included new ones as a means of emphasizing the themes that Corneille introduced, making *The Illusion* both a clear descendent of its original and a work perhaps more immediately approachable for modern audiences.

Both *L’Illusion Comique* and *The Illusion* are odes to the art of the theatrical experience and the power of the imagination. The play-within-a-play structure serves as a vehicle for the nesting of multiple theatrical boxes and the continual mixing of the audience’s (and, indeed the characters’) expectations of what constitutes illusion and what, reality. For Corneille, *L’Illusion Comique*, which was an early work that marked Corneille’s personal transition into the mastery of his craft, showcased his excellence in dramatic technique. Corneille’s vast knowledge of both Spanish and Elizabethan literature can be seen directly influencing his writing. Corneille also drew characters from the Italian tradition of the *commedia dell’arte*. Specifically, the character of the lunatic, Matamore, is a direct descendant of *commedia dell’arte*’s stock character, il Capitano, a boastful, often cowardly soldier (and lover). In addition, Corneille explores the pastoral in his opening act in the cave. Thus *L’Illusion Comique* becomes a showcase for Corneille’s talent and skills as a playwright of considerable versatility.

Although Kushner retains much of the play’s structure, his main concern is not with showing off his mastery of dramatic technique. Kushner, instead, adds the character of the Amanuensis and adds ‘Calisto’, ‘Melibea’, ‘Elicia’, and ‘Pleribo’ as one more name change to the lovers’ plot. These additions develop the idea of illusion and reality that Corneille introduced in his original and further the mental entanglement experienced by the modern audience. Through the additions of many of Alcandre’s monologues, Kushner also imparts to his audience his personal commentary on the tribulations of love. However, the ending of *The Illusion* is the antithesis of the seventeenth century original, proving to be Kushner’s clearest departure from Corneille.

Described by Tony Kushner as his adaptation, *The Illusion* has breathed life back into Pierre Corneille’s long-ignored *L’Illusion Comique* and attracted a new generation of readers and audiences.

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**O, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon, That monthly changes in her circled orb, Lest that thy love prove likewise variable.**  
—William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*

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**The earliest use of the word ‘lunatic’ in English literature occurs in William Langland’s 14th-century poem, *Vision Concerning Piers Plowman*:**

Lunatic lollers and lepers about,  
And mad as the Moon, some more or less

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**The first lunar landing occurred on July 20 at 4:18 p.m. (EDT) when the Apollo 11 Lunar Module touched down on the moon at Tranquility Base (Sea of Tranquility).**  
At 10:56 p.m., astronaut Neil Armstrong touched one foot to the moon’s surface.

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**The term ‘loony bin’, which refers to an insane asylum or the psychiatric ward of a hospital, comes from the term ‘lunatic’.**

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**In Russian, Polish, Czech and Slovak, ‘lunatic’ refers to ‘sleepwalker’, ‘one who walks under the moon’ or ‘moon-walker’.”"
Throughout *The Illusion*, the omnipresent hawk is both seen and referred to in the characters’ dialogue. In traditional Western iconography, the hawk represents prophetic knowledge, and, like other birds, also acts as a symbolic messenger. In addition, the hawk has a special significance for warriors as a representation of martial prowess.

The hawk is also seen as a ‘solar’ animal. In many cultures, the sun deity is represented by the hawk for its clarity, brilliance, and truth. This can be seen in many Native American tribes including the Iroquois and Aztecs. The Ancient Egyptian sun gods, Re and Horus, are depicted as hawks or hawk-headed men. Many polytheistic religions associate the hawk with life-sustaining deities, just like life on Earth cannot exist without the Sun.

**Oh, a hawk!**
**What a sound it makes.**
**Every animal in the whole moonlit world**
**Freezes when it hears that cry.**
**It’s like an icicle through the heart.**

*Isabelle, in The Illusion*
Pierre Corneille's *L'Illusion Comique* (1636) presents a unique look into the stylistic transition from the Baroque to the growing movement of Neoclassicism during the 17th century. While *L'Illusion Comique* can be classified as a Baroque play ([it pays homage to the motto of the age, *theatrum mundi* ("the world is a stage")], it can also be viewed as a satirical reaction to the Baroque. Furthermore, Corneille's position as 'the Father of French tragedy' foreshadows the rise of Neoclassicism as *L'Illusion Comique* does, in fact, adhere to many of Aristotle's rules for dramatic tragedy. Thus, *L'Illusion Comique* provides a tangible study in the shifting artistic values of its time.

The age of the Baroque began in the sixteenth century as the Roman Catholic Church attempted to react against the Reformation. While the Council of Trent (1545) met to discuss the Protestant dispute and to stage a counter-reformation, one result of the Council was a shift in the patronage of the arts and the canonical use of the arts as Church propaganda. The rise of this new canon led to the Age of the Baroque. The Church sought to use the arts in order to communicate religious messages and values to the illiterate. This presented a sharp shift in the influence of art in society, as the arts had previously been directed at the educated. Thus, the Church had a strong hand in regulating the art and literature at the time, dictating that the role of art should be to glorify God and uphold the power of the Church.

In general, Baroque art and literature can be classified as having a prevalence of dynamic emotional intensity and sharp, almost excessive, attention to detail. Although the arts were highly regulated by the Church, writers and artists of the time found ways to use their art to propagate astute analyses of society. With the rise and advancement of drama at this time, *theatrum mundi*, took on multiple meanings. Theatre made immense strides in technological advancements that allowed for a more heightened dramatic experience for audience members. However, "the world is a stage" also alludes to the political nature of the time, in which the Church and government were able to manipulate society much in the same way stages and machinery could be manipulated to alter what was presented to spectators. *L'Illusion Comique* fits beautifully into the mood of the time by exploiting its power to alter appearance and reality to audience members. The meta-theatrical (play-within-a-play) aspect of the work tests the limits of its audience by both creating an illusion within the play and by acting as an allegory for the theatrical universe in society. As the result of a politically turbulent time, the focus on illusion and an emphasis on deceiving appearances are prevalent throughout the Baroque and specifically in Corneille's piece.

Towards the end of his career, Corneille struggled with the rise of classicism and the Church doctrine to adhere to it. Contrary to the demands of Cardinal Richelieu's literary dogma, *L'Illusion Comique* does not conform to Aristotle's 'Three Unities' of time, place, and action. Unlike Aristotle's ideal, Corneille interrupts his plot by changing both the setting and the sequence of events. Corneille does, however, adhere to Aristotle's definition of tragedy. In his Poetics, Aristotle defines tragedy:

"But again, tragedy is an imitation not only of a complete action, but of events inspiring fear or pity. Such an effect is best produced when the events come on us by surprise; and the effect is heightened when, at the same time, they follow as cause and effect. The tragic wonder will then be greater than if they happened of themselves or by accident; for even coincidences are most striking when they have an air of design."

Corneille's ability to appeal to the pathos of the audience and incite pity for Pridamant, the father, fulfills one of Aristotle's requirements for true tragedy.

In addition to embodying aspects of Aristotelian tragedy, *L'Illusion Comique* elaborates Plato's ideal of mimesis in art in his *Theory of Forms*. In his *Ergastu in German Philosophy*, George Santayana explains the Platonic ideal:

"The Platonic ideal is the man by nature so wedded to perfection that he sees in everything not the reality but the faultless ideal, which the reality misses and suggests."

In his *Theory of Forms*, Plato explains that artists and writers use mimesis in their works. This poses a conflict because Plato argues that reality is not the world that we are experiencing around us, but rather the reality we have created in our mind. Imitation, therefore, is also an illusion. Corneille clearly explores the boundaries of mimesis both in the explicit plot of *L'Illusion*, in which the father is not able to distinguish between appearances and reality, and in the illusion that he creates for audience members.

Thus, Pierre Corneille's *L'Illusion Comique* exemplifies both the movement away from the age of the Baroque and the 'world as a theatre', towards an acceptance of classical ideals and the neoclassical style.
Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, written as a fictional dialogue between Socrates and Plato’s brother, Glaucon, is used in his work The Republic to illustrate the human need for reflective understanding to realize enlightenment and be liberated from ignorance. Plato exploits the tendency in human nature to fail to distinguish between illusion and reality. In his allegory, Plato describes a cave in which prisoners have been chained by the arms and legs since childhood. In addition, these prisoners have their heads fixed so that they are forced to stare at a blank wall in front of them. Behind the prisoners is a huge fire and an elevated walkway, upon which people walk carrying objects and figures on their heads. In the dialogue, Socrates explains that these prisoners have only ever watched the shadows cast on the wall without knowing that they are merely shadows. For this reason, the prisoners take the shadows to be the actual reality. Socrates proceeds to describe the situation that occurs as a prisoner is unfettered and allowed to see the objects that cast the shadows. Not only would the prisoner believe the shadows to be more real than the objects, but the prisoner would also be blinded by looking into the fire. However, the prisoner, having been exposed to daylight, would soon acclimate to the Sun and he would no longer be accustomed to the darkness once he was returned to the cave.

Plato’s Allegory symbolically represents his own views on mankind and salvation. Plato illustrates that it is not the world revealed by our senses that is the reality, but the world apprehended intellectually. Thus, knowledge is the key to reality; however, knowledge cannot simply be transferred from teacher to pupil. Instead, education is sought to guide the pupil’s mind towards what is real and allow the student to realize those truths inherently embedded in our own minds. It is these enlightened members of society that are able to see the intangible truths that are found under the surface of appearance. In many ways, Alcandre’s cave mimics that of Plato’s. Alcandre struggles to guide Pridamant to see the reality within the shadowy illusions of the visions that he conjures. In this scenario, the visions replace the shadows on the cave walls and the actors replace the objects that cast the shadows. Pridamant, the captive pupil, struggles to find the invisible truths in these visions and is also unaware of the knowledge he inherently possesses.
The link between the moon and madness resurfaced during the Dark Ages. Italian philosopher, Saint Thomas Aquinas (1226-1274), wrote:

That demons harass men according to certain phases of the Moon happens in two ways — it is manifest that the brain is the most moist of all parts of the body. Therefore it is the most subject to the action of the Moon, the property of which is to move what is moist. (Summa Theologica)

This connection between madness and the phases of the moon has continued to evolve through time. While Renaissance philosophers argued that the disease of insanity was caused by the phases of the moon, over time, scientists simply argued that lunar phases merely enhanced the already existing disease of madness within individuals.

Many scientists and psychiatrists still argue about the validity of a connection between the moon and human behavior. Today, this phenomenon is referred to as the ‘Lunar (or Transylvanian) Effect’. The Lunar Effect suggests that there is a connection between the phases of the moon and deviant behavior. More specifically, the ‘biological tide theory’ argues that because both the Earth and the human body are composed of 80% water, the moon’s gravitational force produces biological tides in the human brain as it does physical tides in the Earth’s oceans. The Lunar Hypothesis, as discussed in the Journal of Affective Disorders (1999), suggests that in the past, the phases of the moon might, in fact, have had an effect on bipolar patients by providing light during nights which would have otherwise been dark, thus causing sleep deprivation. While discourse and research on the Lunar Effect is thoroughly contradictory, studies have been done to show the correlation between the phases of the moon and human behavior. Specific areas of interest have been homicide rates, birth rates, suicides, domestic violence, epilepsy, emergency room admissions, etc. While many researchers vehemently argue against what they consider to be myth and folklore in this theory, some studies have indeed supported it. Scientists who support the hypothesis have argued that results contradicting the Lunar Hypothesis may be attributed to the invention of electric light, which lessens the effects of lunar light on human communities.

In addition to the connection between the moon and madness, there is also discourse on the existence of a correlation between the moon and fertility. In the 1950s, Czech psychiatrist, Dr. Eugene Jonas began researching ancient texts to uncover a remedy that would lower the abortion rate in Czechoslovakia. Jonas discovered that the phases of the moon directly influenced female fertility and that women had both a biological and a lunar fertility cycle. While the ‘rhythm method’ proved to be only 75% effective in preventing pregnancy, in combination with the ‘lunar method’ there was a calculated 98% reliability rate. The ‘lunar method’ involves Jonas’ three fundamental ‘rules of conception’ that relied on the moon: the time of a woman’s fertility depends on the recurrence of the angle of the sun and the moon that occurred at the woman’s own birth; the sex of the child depends on the position of the moon at conception; and certain planetary configurations at the time of conception can affect the viability of the embryo. Under this method, a woman born under a new moon will be most fertile and ready to conceive at the time of a new moon.