

*Misery*. By William Goldman based on the novel by Stephen King, directed by Jamie Dunsdon, BD&P Mystery Theatre Series at Vertigo Theatre, 20 Sept. 2022, Playhouse Theatre, Calgary, Alberta.

*Misery* is the compelling story of Annie Wilkes, a young woman living in the secluded woods and Paul Sheldon, a best selling romance author. Annie is Paul's self-proclaimed biggest fan, and is delighted to take care of him after he is in a car accident near her home. Paul spends weeks in Annie's home and watches first hand as her interest in him which starts out as sweet and heartfelt becomes dark and obsessive. We watch as Annie becomes more and more dangerous, as Paul gets more desperate and eventually has to fight for his life.

I believe what made this particular version of the show so compelling was the attention to detail that was put into every aspect of the show. The set design was a brilliantly executed small cottage home that turned 360 degrees to expose other areas of the home. The props were skillfully chosen and built and fit the aesthetic and time period of the show, and the special effects were well done. Costumes were simple, well executed and fit each character. On top of the production elements being top tier, we as the audience got to experience incredible story telling from the actors and we learned more and more about them as the play went on. *Misery* was a wonderful medley of strong storytelling, simple yet effective set, sound and costume design and the joint effort and solid execution/collaboration of the creative team to scare the pants off of audience members.

As a thriller/horror lover, I was a huge fan of *Misery*, and it was, in my opinion, the most captivating and thrilling piece of theatre I have seen to date. My only wish is that I could have seen it more than once. From the beginning I was drawn in, jumped and screamed more than once and laughed in absolute horror as I watched the story unfold before me.

January 2023

*Little Women*. By Kate Hamill adapted from the novel by Louisa May Alcott, directed by Jenna Rodgers, Theatre Calgary, 14 Dec. 2022, Max Bell Theatre, Calgary, Alberta.

Little Women follows the story of the March sisters; Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy as they navigate life, womanhood, family dynamics, love and loss. We are introduced to the March sisters at the top of the story as they are all gathered around the breakfast table getting ready for school. We soon learn that Meg is the oldest and acts as the manager of the home when her mother is away, Jo always has a journal with her and is forever writing in hopes of becoming an author, Beth stays home from school because of a medical condition and Amy is the youngest of the sisters is the perfect lady with enough fire in her belly to warm a small village. We learn that their father is away at war and their mother, Marmee, works sewing Union Army uniforms.

What struck me in this performance was how the actresses portraying the March sisters were able to foster an incredibly believable sisterly relationship. The set was simple, but supported the story wonderfully, and the costuming was true to the 1860's when the story is based, as each sister had beautiful but simple floor length dresses. I was particularly struck with the performance and characterization of Jo March, and how she broke through gender roles and normality and spoke her mind with passion and bravery. This is a struggle that women feel in our current times so the fact that Jo was so outspoken and passionate about who she is and bravely goes against what society says is right in the mid 1800's is truly remarkable.

Theatre Calgary did a fantastic job of this production, and put me on a rollercoaster of emotions. I felt delighted and happy, I cried with happiness and with sorrow, and I found myself cheering on the March sisters in each of their own journeys. It's not often that I connect with a character in a live performance as much as I did with Jo, and that is something I will hold onto for years to come.

January 2023

*Phaedra*. Written and Directed by Simon Stone, National Theatre, 22 February 2023, Lyttelton Theatre, London, England.

From the moment the house lights dimmed and the Greek text started to the final curtain call of blood soaked actors, I was completely captivated by every aspect of production that went into *Phaedra*. The text was modern and exchanged quickly between actors making an extremely believable comparison to everyday life. The set was incredible; a spinning glass box that would

home five different sets with set changes in under a minute. The sets included a well furnished home, a nearly empty apartment, and a restaurant to name a few. Watching the show take place within a glass box, combined with the high level of production and talented cast made it feel like I was watching something on TV rather than theatre. I have never experienced something like it before. The characters were written with wit and charm and the actors delivered all of these qualities and more, which made it easy for me to buy into the entire story.

I was not familiar with the story of *Phaedra*, but really appreciated this modern day take on it and became very quickly invested in it and each of the characters. They somehow managed to make it seem like we were watching these people's everyday life, which ignited a new feeling of excitement, curiosity and investment in the story and characters. The story line itself is heavy and in ways makes your skin crawl slightly, and though there were moments of total grossness, I couldn't look away through the entire three hour show. My jaw dropped in the final moments as the character of Helen took her own life right in front of our eyes. As heavy as it was, I am so glad it was included in the show. It was brutal, honest, and real. I don't know if I have ever stood up so quickly for a standing ovation.

March 2023

*Standing at the Sky's Edge*, Music and Lyrics by Richard Hawley, based on the book by Chris Bush, directed by Robert Hastie, National Theatre, 20 February 2023, Olivier Theatre, London, England.

*Standing at the Sky's Edge* is a brand new musical that made its world premiere at the National Theatre and was easily one of the best shows I took in while in London. The show begins in the 1960's and works its way through until 2015, and follows three individuals/couples; a newly wed couple, a mother and daughter, and a newly single woman looking for a change. The main set is quite neutral in its design and colour scheme and is able to work for each of the different time

periods. Since the set was so neutral, period props and costumes were used and were really able to pop and help keep the storyline straight in my mind.

I was really intrigued by the staging of the show and how a simple kitchen and living room was able to house so many different stories and how seamless the transitions felt between scenes and characters. Since this show had so many story lines and characters to follow, there was a potential for it to become muddled or confusing, but I was delighted to see clever staging being used to our advantage. The moment that really blew my mind was when all three of the main characters/couples used the kitchen table for dinner at the same time, all in different time periods and storylines and yet it was still easy for the audience to track who we were supposed to be watching. It was pretty incredible to see a concept as simple as eating dinner be elevated to something fascinating.

The spectacle of this show was top notch. The actors sang live and were accompanied by a big, beautiful and full band. The music and vocals had me stunned from the first notes and seemed to get more and more impressive as the show went on. The choreography was killer, and showed a range of everything from swing dance, hip hop, modern and jazz. I was truly blown away at how high end of a production this was and how they were able to incorporate so many elements at once. It really speaks to how much creativity and hard work got poured into this production.

The cast and storylines were really diverse, and had characters experience racism, alcoholism, poverty, domestic violence, cultural differences and embrace being part of the LGBTQIA2S+ community. The ending of the show was simultaneously empowering and bittersweet. This is the kind of theatre I dream of doing one day.

March 2023

*The Lion King*, by Walt Disney, directed by Julie Taymor, Walt Disney Theatrical Productions, 27 February 2023, Lyceum Theatre, London, England.

Puppets and dancing and special effects, oh my! *The Lion King* is easily the highest budget and biggest display of spectacle I have seen in a piece of theatre. From the moment the life size elephant puppet walked past me at the beginning of the show I was consumed by what was being presented in front of me. What I really enjoyed about this show was knowing the story well enough that I could spend more time looking at and appreciating the puppetry, choreography, music and special effects and not end up being confused as to what was happening in the story.

I was struck at the amount of detail in each and every mask and puppet that was used on stage and was fascinated by the amount of precise work that went into navigating and moving the masks and puppets in a true and believable way. After getting a small taste of what goes into

creating a character and show through masks, I was blown away at what these performers were able to accomplish and make look so effortless. It was apparent how much work went into each element of this production, and I can only imagine how many hours of rehearsal the performers have put in. It was a beautiful medley of dance, music, acrobatics, puppetry and passion.

Stand out moments for me in this production would be anytime the character of Scar spoke and the wildebeest stampede. The actor that portrayed Scar had an element of complete ease. His text was littered with sarcasm and ridicule; qualities that should make you loathe a character but it was done in such a way that I felt the exact opposite towards him. As for the wildebeest stampede, it was created by implementing several different height levels and different sizes of puppets to make it look like it went on for miles. It was simple yet effective and was a very clever way to make it look like the stampede went on for miles.

After the show, I looked at the website and discovered that there are over 230 puppets, scores of actors/dancers/puppeteers and over 37,000 hours devoted to making each of the masks and puppets. This show is a complete labour of love and it truly showed when watching it. I had no idea that theatre could look like something as phenomenal as *The Lion King*.

March 2023

*Forgiveness* by Mark Sakamoto, adapted for stage by Hiro Kanagawa, Theatre Calgary, March 24, 2023, Arts Commons Max Bell Theatre, Calgary.

The production of *Forgiveness* that we took in at Theatre Calgary last month was a show that was beautifully executed and told a powerful and humbling story. The story focuses on three families; the first being a family of Asian descent with the parents immigrating and having their children be born in Canada in the early 1900's. The second a young man, no older than twenty who enlists in the army to help fight in World War II, and his parents whom we briefly meet. The third and final family that is focussed on is another family of Asian descent living in Medicine Hat, Alberta in the 1970's, and we later find out that their teenage son is dating the daughter of the older version of the young man that fought in World War II.

As we follow the stories throughout the different decades we see Canadians deal with the stress and repercussions of a world war, systemic and individual racism, discrimination and prejudice as well as reconciliation and the good that comes from having an open mind and heart. I found watching this show to be a somewhat jarring experience. Having such a vivid representation of

racism being presented right in front of us, and slurs that have (mostly) been canceled from the majority of society's vocabulary was a bit of an uncomfortable experience. All of the dialogue was written and spoken with purpose and intention, however it was a humbling thing to experience and a great reminder of what not to say.

While the technical and design aspects of the show as well as the acting were very well executed, I did struggle with the story line. The story itself was easy enough to follow, however I had a hard time finding a climax in the story, which made the remainder of the show less dynamic. It felt like a lot of build up throughout the two hours of show for an ending that while it was touching, felt like a mediocre blip in the story line. Overall I was glad to have taken in the show as it told an important story that I believe every Canadian should be privy to, I was just a little disappointed with the lack of a climax.

April 2023

De Vega, Lopa. *Fuente Ovejuna*. 1614. Oxford University Press. 1999, pages 1-80.

*Fuente Ovejuna*. Spain 1476. In a nutshell? The women of the town are showing ferocity and bravery as they murder a sexist and abusive Commander after their trusty King has died and the citizens are waiting in limbo to find out who will be the next ruler. This was hands down my favourite play that we read all term.

If I'm being honest, I was a little nervous about what the contents of this play were going to be. Being that it is set in the 1400's I was preparing myself for a lot of toxic masculinity, pointless fighting and all around high quantities of sexism and a man to swoop in and save the day. While a great deal of that did happen, I was delighted at the amount of girl power and strong female characters that were evoked in this play.

One of the aspects I appreciated most about this play was that the storyline could be compared to what happens in our society today. For example, we hear scores of headlines about people in high authority positions, whether it be celebrities, politicians, musicians, etc. that take advantage and abuse people either physically, sexually, emotionally, etc. While the individuals at fault are often male, we do hear of women committing the crime as well. Even though some of these

situations do make the news, a good percentage of them don't. And when they do make the news, too often nothing happens, except for a slap on the wrist, even in today's day and age. The women of Fuente Ovejuna took matters into their own hands when the system/people that are meant to protect and advocate for them became the ones to harm them. In recent years, one of the most similar comparisons I can think of would be Roe v. Wade being overturned in 2022 and women all over the world banding together to stick up for the rights to our bodies. While we didn't go and murder the politicians that made this policy change happen, there was an uprising of support and comradery throughout the world to stand with our American sisters in a movement so powerful that could be compared to the suffragette movement in the 1920's.

*Fuente Ovejuna* was a play that evoked a great deal of thought from me and gave a massive sense of feminist pride. 10/10 I love this play.

May 2023

Calderon de la Barca, Pedro. *Life is a Dream*. 1636. Nick Hern Books, 2009.

If I'm being honest, I struggled with this play in a few different ways. First, I struggled in trying to wrap my head around what was going on throughout this play, and it actually took a few times reading through the play to grasp as much as I did. Second, I struggled with King Basillio and his decision to pretend his son did not exist because he saw something in the stars saying he would be an evil and dangerous human. Though I don't have children yet, I cannot imagine locking my child in a dark and gloomy tower and pretending he was dead because I found out some unsettling news that may or may not one day come true. It makes me wonder about the whole concept of nature vs. nurture. Had King Basilio dealt with this "issue" like a loving father should and given Segismundo the love and attention he needed and deserved would he have turned out to be the monster that everyone was scared of? Or did he become King Basilio's worst fear because he was locked in a solitary tower for his entire life and had never had contact with another human other than his guard. Had that been my life, I would be pretty miserable and cranky too.

Segismundo can be quoted saying "I dream I am a powerful prince: I dream I cower within these walls. And both are true and both are lies? What is this life? A trick? A story? An episode of passion? A shadow, a delirium? A vast imperfect fantasy, where even the greatest good of all is nothing but futility? Why do we live? What does it mean? When dreams are life and life is a dream?" (Act Two, Scene Seventeen). This quote really speaks to me on several different

levels. I believe we as human beings have scores of layers, and different versions of us that are shown to different groups of people at different times. For example when I'm with close friends I'm much more boisterous and outspoken compared to when I'm with a large group of people I tend to be a bit quieter and go into more of an observation role. When I say I can be introverted, people laugh and don't believe me because they have seen the complete opposite of me. Like Segismundo, both are true and both are lies. None of us know what life really is. It is all the things quoted above at different times. There are times of passion and joy, times that feel like life is playing a cruel trick on us, times that we have no idea what to expect and others that we know what is going to happen next. There's no instruction manual, even though it would make things infinitely easier if there was. I think the monologue that this quote is taken from was my favourite part of the play. It felt truthful, heartfelt and very relatable. It made Segismundo feel like a real person to me and not a character in a play that I had to read, and honestly really made me reflect and think about what life actually is.

May 2023

Shakespeare, William. *Richard II*. 1595. Penguin Books, 2000.

*Richard II* is chalk full of betrayal, revenge, complicated family dynamics and plenty of drama. This play was an absolute whirlwind to read. To be completely truthful, I found this play to be one of the harder plays for me to buy into and enjoy reading. I found myself growing quite tired of the squabbling men constantly fighting, betraying and killing/trying to have each other killed simply because they are power hungry and selfish. The real tipping point for me was when the Duke of York went to the King to tattle on his son for being involved in the attempted murder of the King. I can understand being loyal to your leader and wanting to hold your child accountable for their actions, however trying to convince someone to sentence your child to death because they made a mistake seems like a very coldhearted thing to do to prove that you are the righteous authority of the household.

The moment/character that really redeemed this play for me was the short but oh so sweet appearance of the Duchess of York being her powerhouse self. We are first introduced to her when she follows her husband to see the King and beg for mercy on her son's behalf. At first, I did not have high hopes for a female character that was written into a male dominated play in the 1400's when women did not have an abundance of rights and weren't typically encouraged to speak out and be defiant. The Duchess however, did not care about societal or gender stereotypes. She broke through those barriers without giving it a second thought and fought for her son. Not only did she stand up to her husband, she also stood up to her King, who could have easily sentenced her and Aumerle both to death for their actions. The Duchess really showed what it meant to have unconditional love for someone and being willing to risk it all for them and I really admired that. She is headstrong, loving, well spoken and not afraid to stand up

for what and who she believes in and won't back down without a fight. I personally believe there need to be more female characters written like this.

May 2023

Marlowe, Christopher. *Dr. Faustus*. 1588. Dover Publications, 1994.

This episodic play is the prime example why we as children were taught to not mess around with things we don't fully understand. This play is relatively short, but boy oh boy does it cover a lot of different ground and introduces us to many new characters concepts in a short period of time. Once I was able to wrap my head around the plot structure and the chaos that ensues, I actually enjoyed this play quite a bit. I found great humour and enjoyment in the escapades that Faustus got up to, especially playing pranks on the Pope and turning a horse into a bundle of hay. The ideas were just so absurd and not at all what I was expecting from Marlowe.

There are several strong themes discussed in *Dr. Faustus*, but the one that stood out to me the most is the theme of sin and temptation. It was compelling to be the outside eye and watch on the sidelines as Faustus has to lie in the bed he has made himself. Faustus conjures Mephistophilis, because he has cursed the holy trinity, whether it was intentional or not. Having a demon appear is not typically an ideal thing to happen to someone, and rather than repent and pray to God to forgive him and stop working with magic, Faustus decides to make a deal with him. He signs a deal with Mephistophilis basically selling his soul to the devil after 24 years have passed. This made me scratch my head a little bit, because in what world does that seem like a good idea? I suppose if you have found a way to be a powerful human with the ability to perform magic, 24 years feels like an eternity away. This theme speaks to how easy it is for us as humans to get carried away when we experience power and dominance, and how easy it is for us to fall into temptation and all the repercussions that can come from it. While most people don't get literally dragged into hell when they succumb to temptation, there are consequences that we have to deal with.

Overall, I really enjoyed this play. I thought that even though it was fictional and some of the ideas and themes were way out there, it was a relatable story that evoked a lot of empathy from me throughout the whole play.

May 2023

Krogman, Kelsey. *The Glass Menagerie*. Adapted from the play by Tennessee Williams, 2023. Manuscript.

Reading and dissecting *The Glass Menagerie* throughout this term has been such an enjoyable highlight for me. I did not know the story at all when I first read through it, and really wasn't sure what to expect. In my first read through, I was struck by how heartbreaking this story was, for each of the characters in different ways. Tom, in feeling stuck and dreaming of bigger things than his mom and tiny apartment can give him. Laura, dealing with a disability and low social experiences while trying to live up to her mother's expectations. Amanda, in leaving the rather swanky life she grew up in behind and having to live in a cramped home with two children that challenge her daily as she tries her hardest to paint a beautiful picture, regardless of how broken she feels on the inside. Jim, in wanting to be a friend and a good man, but hurting people despite his efforts and having to live with the feelings this brings up. It's a big, juicy story and I truly enjoyed the adaptation.

The first few times of working through this story and text, I had a really hard time feeling any empathy for Amanda. It felt as though she was cold and harsh and a bit of a micro manager. As we worked through the play, explored characters and learned more about each of them, I found myself starting to feel a lot of empathy and being able to relate to Amanda more than I thought I ever would. She started to become more human to me and less of a character on the page; as did the rest of the characters. The way they were written was realistic and believable. They had each gone through their own battles and struggles to make them who they are, and make them act how they do, just like all of us. I was struck by the theme of resilience in the characters and story, regardless of how messy their personal lives were, and though none of the characters handled every situation in an ideal way, they handled it the best they knew how.

The ending was the most heartbreaking moment of the play for me. Watching this family fall apart in just a few short minutes and become something unrecognizable and unfixable was painful to watch, read and experience. Seeing the last scraps of hope and love they had for each other be ripped to shreds was a humbling moment. I enjoyed reading the full version of

this play after the show closed and seeing the changes and modifications that were made. While the story was condensed and much shorter than the original, I believe that all the most important parts were left in and the story was still understandable and believable.

May 2023

Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. 1623. Digibooks.

Like any Shakespearean classic, *The Tempest* is full of dynamic characters, intertwined plot lines, young love and has no shortage of dramatics. When reading through the play, the characters that piqued my interest the most were Prospero and Miranda, and their relationship/dynamic, as well as Ariel. I haven't read many plays that focus on a single father/daughter relationship and really enjoyed the dynamic between them. I really admired Miranda for standing up to Prospero and telling him to stop with his powers and making storms that would hurt innocent people. It's never easy to stand up to a parent, especially when you are a woman in the 1600's and I felt a great sense of pride and admiration when Miranda did that.

While reading the play, I found myself wanting to learn more about these three characters; what their past experiences were, how they ended up where they did, what made them who they are. I'm curious to know how Ariel became the servant of Sycorax and what that relationship was like. I want to learn more about Prospero and how he became a single dad and what that journey looked like. I suppose you could say I would thoroughly enjoy a prequel to this play.

I had the pleasure of working Prospero's last monologue in Voice and Text and it gave me a whole new appreciation for Shakespeare. To speak the final lines written by such a prolific writer, of a character that is about to pass on from his Earthly body was such a unique experience. Even though, to my knowledge, I'm not about to pass on from my Earthly body, I felt a ton of emotion reading through these words and dissecting them to understand more and more. The last two lines that Prospero speaks are: "As you from crimes would pardoned be, let your indulgence set me free." There's something so heartbreaking about these lines. Perhaps it's because I know these are the last lines Shakespeare wrote. Perhaps it's because I can empathize with an old man who's dying and just wants to be let go. Perhaps that's just the magic of Shakespeare; knowing how to evoke emotion in the reader. I can say confidently that after reading *The Tempest*, I have a new appreciation for Shakespeare, and dare I say, might even be starting to enjoy his works.

May 2023

Heaney, Seamus. *The Burial at Thebes, A Version of Antigone*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004.

*Burial at Thebes* was the first play I read being back as a student and to say I was compelled right from the beginning is an understatement. As soon Antigone and Ismene enter the scene by whispering and hiding from the guard I was engaged in the story. This family's history and dynamics are messy and dramatic and I loved getting to learn about them more in depth.

I think what pulled me into this story the most was the struggle of power and pride that happened between these characters, especially between Creon and Antigone. With Antigone, I admired her passion and head-strongness, and how she was willing to fight for what she believed was right; to give her brother the proper burial she felt he deserved. She stood up to her uncle, who also happened to be the King, who could have easily sentenced her to death for doing so. She was willing to give up everything she had to do right by her brother and I think that's pretty incredible.

As for Creon, I disliked him but empathized with him simultaneously. At first, I hated that he was being such a dork about burying Eteocles, and honestly didn't understand why he was making such a big deal about burying this body. To me, it felt strange that he was putting up such a fight against something that in the present day world is such a normal and expected thing that we do. However, as the play went on, I really started to feel for him; he's the leader of a country that is in turmoil and essentially can't do anything right. Whatever decision he makes he is going to be upsetting someone and essentially making the wrong call. Then he has a blind prophet come in and tell him that he is messing up so badly and terrible things are going to happen. It's really no wonder why he blew his top like he did.

Neither Creon or Antigone were willing to give up what they were fighting for, and though it ended very tragically, I can understand where both of the characters are coming from. They both believed they were doing the right thing, but unfortunately could not see past their own world to try and understand what each other were going through and why they believed/did what they did. I thought the writing of these characters was really well done, and it made me feel like I really got to know them. I thoroughly enjoyed this play and would honestly love to get to explore it more.

May 2023

Anonymous. *Everyman*. 1530. Nick Hern Books Limited, 1996.

What a wonderfully chewy read this was! I wasn't too sure what to expect from this reality play, but I found myself really enjoying it. I thought it was cleverly written in a way that it was easy for people to relate to, regardless of it being written centuries ago.

One of the most captivating parts of the story for me was when Everyman (who represents us as humans) is essentially pleading his case before God. Everyman is trying to convince Him as to why he should be pardoned even after he listed all of his sins and wrong doings. It made me wonder how we as humans would fare if God actually determined who got into heaven this way rather than having unconditional love and acceptance for us. If He were not like that, I fear that we all may be in the same boat as Everyman. I would love to see this part of the play acted out in person; I think it would be quite remarkable to see.

As the story progressed, I found myself wondering how Everyman was going to get himself out of this pickle he was in. I thought surely God would have a change of heart or Everyman would repent and prove how he is worthy of heaven. I was not expecting Everyman to have to convince one of his companions to go with him, nor was I expecting him to have to go through so many companions. It really struck me when the playwright started to describe each of the companions and why they wouldn't be able to accompany him. Kindred and Cousin go back on their word, Goods and Riches is only valuable in the physical world and will be no help to him in the afterlife, Good Deeds is far too worn out and weak to move with him. When he finally encounters companions that will take the journey with him, Beauty Strength, Discretion and Five Wits all begin to disappear as Everyman starts to die. Knowledge even admits that she cannot stay with him for ever. However it is Good Deeds, now recharged and ready to roll that stays with him and comforts him as he passes from the Earthly world.

I suppose what I enjoyed the most about this play is the truth that is written, and how much that truth made me think. In the end it really doesn't matter how beautiful or intelligent or how reach and famous you are. None of that matters when you're dead. What matters is how you treat people and interact with others in the world around you. If you go around wanting and trying to do your best, helping and supporting others when you can and being an all around decent human being is all that matters. It was a very good reminder to do good in this world and be kind.

May 2023

Auburn, David. *Proof*. Dramatic Play Services Inc. 2001

I was so delighted to get to read this play again after experiencing it all the way back in my Certificate year. I think what really struck me about *Proof* was its ability to capture a realistic image of what it is like to live with mental illness as well as care/look after someone with mental illness. It speaks about it so truthfully and unapologetically and I really appreciated that. It definitely made me more empathetic for the characters and really tugged on my heart strings. I thoroughly enjoyed the relationship between Catherine and Claire; the banter seemed natural and accurate of a sister relationship, and tickled my funny bones many a time. In many moments, it reminded me of my own relationship with my sisters and made me feel a lot more connected to the story.

While Claire may be considered the villain of this story, there is a special place in my heart for her. I admired her desire to help Catherine best she could and just not knowing how to go about it. Unfortunately for her, it is not well received by her sister. Claire reminds me a lot of my older sister; driven, caring and honest. They both say what's on their mind, regardless of how hard it is, and they do so because they care. In the moment, it doesn't always feel like they are doing it out of the goodness of their heart, both Claire and my sister want to see the best for their younger sisters.

I struggled with some of the dated language and slang, but reminded myself that it was written in a very different time, over 20 years ago and a lot has changed in the world. I really enjoyed the fact that the play would bounce between the past and the present. The first time I read it I was completely confused for a few minutes, but after I figured that little detail out, it was a lot of fun to piece the story together going in between the tenses. Then, add in the fact that Catherine is unsure of whether seeing her father is a memory or her mental illness growing more, it not only adds to the drama, it is also a very effective way of storytelling.

May 2023

Kerr, Kevin. *Unity (1918)*. TalonBooks. 2002.

Another piece I was exposed to in my Certificate year, *Unity (1918)* is an absolutely timeless piece of writing and I enjoy it more each time I read it. One of the things I enjoyed the most about it is that it is an ensemble piece. You are told the story from different points of view which helps develop the details even more than you would in a typical play structure. I appreciated getting to know the different characters and having the opportunity to see each of their perspectives and point of views. I can't quite put my finger on why an ensemble piece spoke to me too much, but I found it to be an incredibly effective way of storytelling.

When I first read this play in 2016, I could only imagine what it would be like to live through a pandemic. I remember our class discussing how awful it would be to have events canceled, be forced to stay in your house and be isolated from everyone and how much fear would have been making the rounds. We couldn't wrap our heads around how terrifying it must have been to not have any answers and not know how long something like this would last. I remember us thinking that wearing masks would be the weirdest thing ever, to the point where in a trip I made to the hospital, a classmate and I stole surgical masks so we could have them for our scene! And a quick ten minute scene felt like an eternity wearing one of those things. Fast forward just four short years and we learned all too well how terrifying a global pandemic would be. Rereading this play, after living through a pandemic, gave me a whole new understanding of what these characters were feeling and it sparked a lot of different memories from the very beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Kerr has used asterisks and slashes throughout dialogue to imply dialogue breaks/people interrupting or speaking over each other and I thought that was an effective way of directing from a distance. I appreciate that Kerr chose to include that, rather than the typical approach of one character being cut off with a dash, the second character interjecting in the next line and then the first character finishing their sentence in a third line. I'm not sure why, but Kerr's method seems to capture a more natural way of speaking and with the right group of actors/directors the natural banter that could come from this type of writing would be top notch.

May 2023

Franklin, Eric. *Dance Imagery for Technique and Performance*. Eric Franklin. 1996.

This is a hidden gem in the Resource Centre! I spent quite some time this week pouring over the pages of this glorious book all about dance. Growing up as a competitive dancer, I was taught and trained to focus on the technique and skill that goes into dance, as well as the story telling element. In competition you are graded on both but your technique is looked at under a microscope. To this day, when I approach a dance piece, I find myself focussing on technique first and story second. While this isn't the worst approach, being technique focussed can be a hindrance to telling a compelling and believable story when the focus is not split between the two.

What I enjoyed most about this book was Franklin's perspective of how to tell a thought provoking story while still using the proper technique. Franklin discusses how to use your entire body rather than just isolated parts, to extend your limbs and engage your core. While this may sound straight forward, it's actually a pretty exhausting thing to do. Throughout this process, he suggests that you use these four elements of intention: Visualize before doing, clear intention in the whole body, fragmented intention and chaotic intention. He encourages you to visualize what you want to do in your mind before doing it, fragment by fragment, rather than just letting your body move and doing what it feels is "safe", and moving your body in ways that you may not have expected. I've done movement classes where we are encouraged to move freely and truly and while this seems similar to Franklin's approach, the difference is thinking about the movement beforehand. There is something about the strategy, if you will, of this approach that I really enjoy. As a dancer I like following choreography and knowing what is coming next. Franklin manages to marry these two different practices in a really inviting way.

In the chapter *Discovering Imagery*, Franklin encourages you to tell stories of things you may not think of right away. He suggests pulling inspiration from nature, movies, literary arts, mythology, etc. I appreciate these suggestions as I often get stuck trying to think of new and "exciting" choreography, when in reality, I can be looking all around me for inspiration and ideas, in my favourite television show, how the birds fly outside my window, or how sharks swim around in the ocean...the possibilities are endless and that really excites me! This book was a wonderful way of opening my eyes to new ideas and intentions while still honouring the technique that I have spent so much time working on.

June 2023

Dodd, Craig. *Ballet in Color*. Octopus Books Limited. 1980.

Pointe ballet was one of the only dance styles I didn't train in growing up and am not as well versed in, so finding a book that focussed entirely on the history and details of pointe was a huge thrill for me. In the first section of the book, we are introduced to the different styles of performance pointe ballet; Romantic, Character, Classical, Diaghilev and Modern Ballet. I have only been to one professional ballet performance in my life and was shocked to learn that there were so many different styles. As I read through the book, the styles that stood out the most to me were the classical and romantic styles. When I think of pointe ballet, I think starched, glittery tutus, elegance and incredible storytelling and both of these categories fit that imagery. Dodd has also done an excellent job in the layout of this book and included the story lines of some of the lesser known (at least to me) ballet stories along with photos and the history behind the art which I found incredibly interesting.

As I read through all the different categories of ballet and looked at the photos it really struck me how similar dance and theatre are. As I said earlier, pointe was one of the only styles I didn't train in, but it's ultimately one of the styles of dance that does the most storytelling. The pieces are usually longer than the three minute routines you see at competition and a ballet is usually performed by large groups of people which can help to integrate more characters into the story and help drive the story forward. For the longest time, dance and theatre were always separate. Sure, they are both under the "arts umbrella", but I never considered myself an artist when I danced, I considered myself a dancer first and foremost, and an athlete second. It wasn't until recently that I heard a dance teacher that I had the pleasure of working with state "Is dance a sport? No, absolutely not. Dance is not about winning or losing like sports are. It doesn't matter how big the trophies are or who places first. Dance is about creating and moving and telling the story you want heard. It's a medium used to say difficult things, happy things, sassy things. Dance makes you feel things. Dance is theatre. Dance is an art." When I tell you that hit me like a load of bricks I am not joking. It was like all of the pieces fell into place at that moment. As much as I loved competing, there was always a lingering feeling of feeling like I could have done better and placed higher and gotten a platinum instead of just a gold..but had I looked at it as being able to tell any story I wanted to an audience that was there to receive and just leave it all on the stage, I think I would have had a very different mindset and been a very different dancer.

All of this is not to say that dance and ballet does not include skill and athleticism much like a sport because it does. I mean, ballerinas balance their entire body weight on the tips of their toes that are perched on a wooden block and get thrown around like pillows...there is absolute skill there! But more importantly there is passion and heart and guts; all the things that in my opinion, takes to make a beautiful piece of theatre. This book was a real gem to read and provoked a lot more thought than I was anticipating. It made me curious and amazed and very proud to be an artist.

June 2023

Maga, Carly. *The Curious Voyage: The Potentials and Pitfalls of Immersive Performance*. Canadian Theatre Review Magazine. 2020

In this article, Carly Maga discusses the pros and cons of immersive performances and her experience on an international immersive performance. Maga participated in *The Curious Voyage*, a performance that started in Barrie, Ontario and over three days ended in London,

England. It had a combination of new actors in the beginning of their careers as well as seasoned theatre professionals telling this story.

I suppose I am what you call a traditional kind of girl. I like to see shows in theatres or comfy found spaces such as someone's living room. I enjoy the technical aspects of shows, lighting and sound design, set design and construction, etc. I also like knowing approximately how long a show will last. So the thought of getting on a boat, and then on a plane, and then in hotel rooms with 79 strangers and packing all of this into just 3 days sounds like my worst nightmare. While I would most likely not be signing up for this theatrical experience, I enjoyed reading about Maga's experience and her thoughts on the production.

Maga states in her article that the portion done in Barrie felt like it was "lacking a guiding hand" and because of the amount of moving parts, the young and inexperienced actors as well as the audience's lack of expectations made for a bit of a rough first leg of the experience. She goes on to say that once the show picks up in London, the story line becomes stronger, and audience members are now teamed up to help make sense of what is going on. Maga also states that the audience did have a lot to contribute to the experience. In the first leg, the audience was having a hard time following the storyline and buying into the experience. In the second leg, while the pairs of audience members were seeming to help with comprehension, a negative interaction between an actor and audience member did seem to colour the rest of the performance and experience, for the worse.

I think this article does a really great job of fairly weighing the highs and lows of an experience like this, and gives the reader an honest review. As for the theatre company, I admire them for going out on a limb and trying something big and new. That being said, I think they tried to combine a lot of big experiences with a lot of moving parts without having it totally fleshed out yet. From the sounds of it, if they keep workshoping it and taking the constructive reviews and opinions and integrating them into this piece I think they could really have a captivating piece and one heck of an experience for the audience.

June 2023

*Soulpepper*. <https://www.soulpepper.ca/> . 2023.

What a delightful and intriguing website *Soulpepper* is, that came to me completely by chance! Soulpepper is a theatre company that was founded by 12 theatre artists in 1998. They are based in Toronto, Ontario and are an inclusive, committed and multidisciplinary group of people that strive to make the theatre community as good as they possibly can. They state that they want both their audience and artists to feel safe and accepted in their theatre space. They want to push boundaries, tell true stories, no matter how difficult it may be and make everyone feel welcome and accepted. I really appreciate and admire that about them.

While reading through their history, I discovered that in 2020, amidst the global pandemic, they launched a new program that had women write brand new plays! Soulpepper later staged a festival called *Her Words* and read through the works presented to them by the newest female playwrights in the industry. I was massively impressed by their initiative to make the female voice the opportunity and audience that it so deserves. While it is a new initiative in the somewhat beginning stages, I am really excited to see how this program takes off and what things become of it. Since we are on the “feminism is awesome” train, they also state that 56% of their board of directors are women and 100% of the shows in their 2023 season have female directors (something that I think many theatres closer to home could take a note from.) The delight I felt in my heart when I read that was truly off the charts.

I was excited to learn that Soulpepper Academy was founded in 2005 and is an immersive two year program, each year being composed of 26 weeks, where they accept a handful of students that they feel will be dynamic and encourage change and make significant contributions in the Canadian theatre community. On top of the Academy, they run several summer programs, including a Queer Youth Cabaret which is focussed on working with youth that identify as LGBTQI2S+ and gives them a safe and welcoming environment to explore and dive into theatre.

If I’m being honest, I barely even looked at what their season of shows looked like. I got so caught up in exploring the rest of what this company offers that I nearly forgot that they also produce a yearly season! After looking at it, it appears they do shows of all different genres (most of the titles I have not heard of!) and that really excites me. I really appreciate and applaud them for giving opportunities to women, people of colour and the queer community the chance and opportunities that they deserve. All in all, Soulpepper seems like a really stellar company, and I would be honoured and delighted to get to work with or witness a show or workshop produced by them.

June 2023