

Conception concept captivating

by donalee moulton

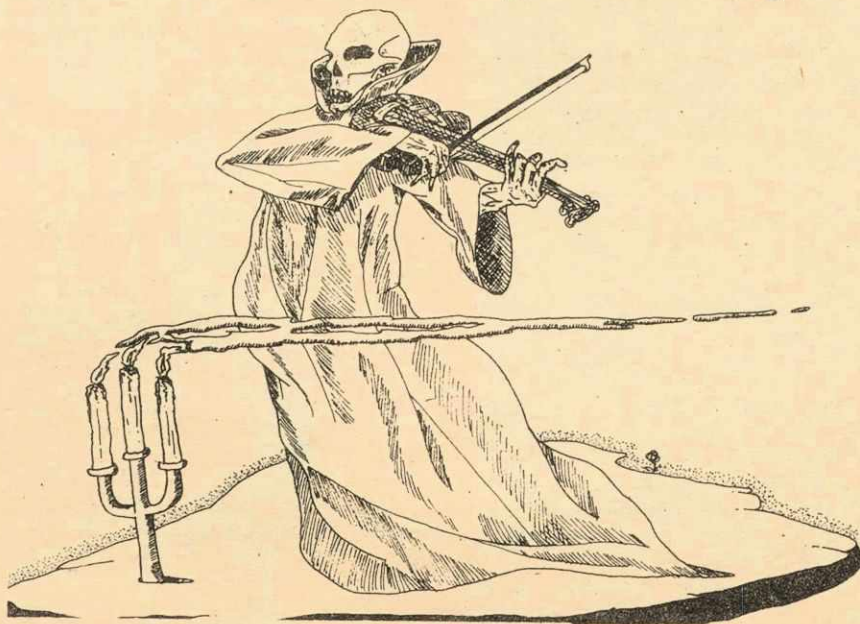
For the second time this term, the Dal Theatre Department has creatively and successfully produced a play. Shakespeare has been reshuffled for Machiavelli; **Twelfth Night** for the **Mandragola**. **Mandragola** is an imaginary potion which makes women conceive. If not for this, the Queen of France would be childless, or so Callimaco claims. In reality this imaginary potion is the means by which Callimaco meets, sleeps and loves, with the wife of another man. Lucrezia is a Venus personified and Callimaco is the melodramatic in love. Fortunately for Callimaco, and most of the other characters, Lucrezia's husband, Messer Nicia, is a halfwit who will employ and believe anything which will give him an heir.

The Theatre Department has basically kept to the original Machiavellian plot. They have, however, taken liberties which, although within the thematic construct, add a unique perspective to not only the male/female debate but also to theatre as a device for creative expression.

The opening of the play is; time now. The female performers discuss Machiavelli, drama, and the Dalhousie Theatre Department. Upon the conclusion of this scene it is decided that the character perscription of Machiavelli's day is to be altered. The cast, with one exception, is totally female and thus the audience is exposed to females as females, females as males, and for a pinch of comic relief, male as female.

On an obvious level this transformation introduces not only the performers to new and varied roles but it introduces the audience to talent in a form that normal sex stereotyping prohibits. Success then depends on the quality of the acting.

It is continuously argued that ratings of quality are merely subjective opinions. What must be considered, however, is that while degrees of quality may be subjective opinions, quality is not. Never being male it is difficult for a female to portray a male. Quality exists when spectators forget the sex of the performer and see the performer as the character portrayed; in essence seeing the male characters as, in fact, men.



With the exception of Messer Nicia, who faltered vocally and alternated her voice type, the female - males were well above the level of competence. Messer Nicia although not a vocal success was a

pleasure, her gestures, movements, and facial expressions were ingenious.

Fortunately males are the predominant characters in **Mandragola**

because the female as female performers were little better than competent, appearing forced and unnatural. This is not because they were placed beside such ludicrous characters. Lucrezia and her mother-in-law are interesting characters. They were made dull.

The play had one serious flaw and that had nothing to do with the acting, the set, or the plot. It has to do with time. The play ran over two hours without one intermission. Not only is this grossly inconsiderate of the audience but it will be reflected in appreciation. Most people do not have a two hour attention span and this was obvious from the amount of coughing, restless moving, and people leaving. One cannot enjoy a production if they have been sitting that length of time. Not only was this manoeuvre a rude one it was also an impractical and unrealistic one.

Aside from the common sense aspect the play was highly creditable. If this is any indication of how good college theatre can be then we should have more college theatre.

Harris as 'Horse' is excellent

by Cheryl Downton

In the early eighteen hundreds, a member of the British nobility, Captain John Morgan, was captured by the Yellow Hands, a band of the Sioux, while hunting game in America. He lived with the Yellow Hands for five years and grew to love the people as his own. He was freed and returned to England to resume the life of a wealthy British nobleman.

In "The Return of a Man Called Horse", Richard Harris plays Morgan as he returns to the western plains to seek out his friends three years later. At this point in history, the plains of the west were going through massive change. No longer could the Plains Indians roam freely over the prairie, unconcerned with the whiteman. This was the time when the fur traders were forging across the country seeking the best places to set up the business. It was to this situation that Morgan returns.

The movie deals almost entirely with the Yellow Hands and their

struggle to regain their sacred burial grounds which have been gutted by the traders and their Indian allies. The struggle is not only between the Sioux Indians and the traders, the Sioux Indians and the Crow Indians, the Crow Indians and the traders, but between Richard Harris (a man called Horse), the whiteman and the Yellow Hand band. Horse has trouble convincing his friends they should fight for what is theirs, rather than accept defeat and wait for a sign from the spirits as they communicate through Raven, the band's medicine man.

The movie is concerned with a specific period in the development of the American West and its treatment of this growing period is generally handled with a great deal of authenticity and is basically a realistic portrayal of life on the Plains during the early and mid eighteen hundreds. The storyline was realistically adapted from the pages of history where there is mention of a man called Horse. The

costumes and Indian trappings were excellently depicted and the terrain was indeed that of the western Prairies.

One particular scene, the dancing of the traditional Sun Dance, underlined the movie's focus toward realism. This religious ceremonial rite involves many non-stop hours of dancing around a pole while attached to rawhide strips which are positioned under the skin by sharp pieces of bone. It is an endurance test which is designed to make the mind fertile for visions and communication with the spirits. Again the costumes, accompanying drums and ceremonial trappings were authentically displayed.

Harris as Horse is generally excellent. The supporting cast gives strong performances, although most are unknowns. The acting, as the story, works well to produce a competent and interesting picture of the earliest beginnings of the commercialism of the West.

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