

Fanshen — it just lays there lifeless

By LYNN SLOTKIN

I wish that Fanshen, a play about the Chinese Revolution now at the Toronto Workshop, was like Chinese food — an hour later and you want more. That was not the case. This production was more like stale bagels — it just laid there.

Fanshen, which means 'to turn over', is about the peasants of Long Bow Village, who revolt against their overbearing landlord. For the first time they have land, stock, and implements. The people try to establish a just means of governing themselves, but invariably end up with just as corrupt a government as before.

Author Rick Salutin has some good points, but his script is too wordy, and sometimes the point is

lost. The acting was another disappointment. The cast failed in their efforts to be believable, stoical Chinese. Their delivery of lines, for the most part, was flat, monotoned and lifeless. Ray Whelan, as Tuichin, and Jeff Braunstein, as Te seemed to be giving the same performances they gave in Arturo Ui, only at a slower speed.

Nancy Brown captured the poverty of the peasants in her grey quilt jackets, and the affluence of the landlord in his black and gold gown, but costumes don't make a play a success.

Perhaps if director George Luscombe paced the show a little quicker, and made his actors show a little more emotion, the play might be a little more enjoyable.



Ray Whelan, François-Regis Iclanfer and Jeff Braunstein playing in Fanshen at the Toronto Workshop Theatre.

Film of King Lear a triumph for Scofield

By JOHN OUGHTON

Peter Brooks' new movie King Lear is an attempt to inject the withered arm of the old master with a little of the old Marat-Sade. Brooks' attempts to update Lear are, however, insignificant to the overall impact of the film. Paul Scofield as the aged monarch of emptiness is the movie. The rest of the cast is drawn from The Royal Shakespearean company; all the performances are therefore solid and competent. Irene Worth as Goneril and the actor who plays the Fool are especially impressive as supporting characters, but it is the dimension of Scofield's performance which glows in one's mind long after the movie is over.

Brooks' adaptation of the original is fairly faithful as a script. The major cinematic innovations which Brooks has grafted onto the play occur at the movie's beginning, and during the storm scene on the heath. The first scene works well. The camera slowly pans over Lear's subjects and relatives until it finally settles on the old king himself, enshrouded in a hollow stone structure which is as much a tomb as a throne. No one moves until Lear's first words break the spell.

The scene on the heath is less successful. Brooks attempted to give it a sort of Artaudian energy by rapid cutting, violent lightning and

thunder effects, and an overpowering deluge entering upstage through the thatched roof of the hovel. The general impression is that the play has stopped so that the special effects people could do their thing.

With the above exception, Brooks' direction conveys the assurance which one expects from the creator of Marat-Sade.

Despite the opinions of some New York critics, the movie is not perfect. There are some minor qualities about it which suggest that its nature as cinema was not carefully enough planned. The black and white photography is good, but the tone of the film changes back and forth between a cold bluish cast and a warmer brown tint with little apparent reason.

In view of the power created by the scenes between Lear and his daughters, and Lear and the Fool, the above reservations are no more than quibbles. As Lear, Scofield shows us a man who becomes the victim of both his own folly and the universe's indifference. Even in his madness, Lear knows that men are "as flies to wanton boys"; every detail of Scofield's performance vibrates with the buzzings of an old man's mind, no longer master of itself or anything outside it. Go and experience it.

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