

# Sad theme; excellent play

A Day in the Death of Joe Egg  
Rice Theatre  
Review by I. and J. Levental

Can a meaningless, purposeless, and utterly helpless existence be characterized by the word "life"? Sounds familiar, doesn't it? This question, which forms the central issue of Peter Nichols' *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* (now playing at the Rice Theatre), deals with the same basic issues as an earlier Citadel production, *Whose Life is it Anyway?* Yet, despite this essential thematic similarity, the contents of the two plays are very different.

Josephine has been nicknamed "Joe Egg" by her parents with an ambiguous mixture of affection and derision. Like most children, Joe has enhanced the lives of her parents, but has also taken something away from them. Yet she is not at all like most children. Incapable of co-ordinated muscle control, blind, deaf, and totally retarded, Joe has been maintaining a vegetable existence since birth.

Peter Nichols, very wisely, has focused this drama not on the handicapped Joe, but rather on her parents, the innocent victims of a family tragedy. In the 10 years of her empty, speechless life, Joe has become an obstacle in her parents' marriage. Her father, Brian (Brian Tree), has long ago lost hope for any improvement in her condition and "just goes through the motions now." Despite her husband's pessimism, mother Sheila (Wenna Shaw) maintains that "where there's life, there's hope."

As an outlet to relieve their emotional burden, Brian and Sheila search desperately for self-fulfillment outside of their day-to-day routine. Sheila pursues amateur theatre. Brian attempts to paint, but mainly diverts himself by concocting stories about Sheila's infidelity.

Brian's jealousy extends not only to his wife's innocent relationship with their mutual acquaintance, Freddie (Brian

Taylor), but to the blameless Joe as well. He is frustrated by the fact that Sheila must pay so much attention to their daughter, which of course detracts from the amount she pays to him. For him Joe must go...

Despite its sad theme, *Joe Egg* is a sheer pleasure to watch. Again reminiscent of *Whose Life*, the play is fast-paced, witty, and full of snappy dialogue. It is also one-hundred-percent natural and human.

The stage arrangement, masterfully done by Brian Currah, is simple and effective. The lighting, by David Gauthier, successfully manages to bring us back and forth in time with a simple turn of a switch. Director Tom Kerr has integrated a myriad of interesting elements that don't "jump out" at you but rather approach you subtly and unpretentiously.

Brian Tree as Brian gives a fine interpretation of an unsure yet assertive character. While his personal, face-to-face relationship with the audience is well managed, his monologues are at times too blurry for all parts of the theatre to properly hear. As a result, we occasionally missed parts of this excellent script.

Wenna Shaw as Sheila is uneven, a little too nervous and uncomfortable. Yet she does present us with a woman who "embraces all living creatures" with a "positive approach" to life.

Brian Taylor as Freddie and Dorothy-Ann Haug as his wife, Pam, characterize a haughty, upper-crust couple. Outwardly, they attest to all the "bleeding-heart liberal" principles, but inwardly, they harbor a disdain for anything N.P.A. (Non-Physically Attractive). Freddie is particularly amusing in portraying a "squaresville" industrialist.

Carolyn Hetherington as Brian's mother, Grace, plays the classic bitchy mother-in-law with impeccable style. Even her most innocent-sounding statements could make one shudder with guilt.

This play is definitely the best piece we've seen this season on the Rice stage.



Not exactly a love triangle — a handicapped child strains a family's emotions

Photo: Ray Giguere

## A poignant history

The Desperate People  
written by Farley Mowat  
Review by Wes Oginski

Farley Mowat is an interesting accomplished writer. *The Desperate People* reflects his concern and frustration for those he cares for but may probably never understand.

This book is a sequel to his earlier *People of the Deer*, which details the history of the Ihalmut, an Eskimo community in the District of Keewatin of the North West Territories. The history is an optimistic look from the early 1800's to the 1940's.

*The Desperate People* continues the Ihalmut's history in a more fatalistic manner. They are followed from the 1940's until 1958. The book has an air of condemnation and uselessness especially towards those who tried to help the Ihalmut people.

Dwindling caribou herds and a reduction of fur trade in the north start the book. With these reductions come a drastic change to the Ihalmut way of life, one which they never successfully adapt to.

As hunger and starvation advanced on the Ihalmut, the government at first refused to accept responsibility for them, deny their existence, and finally adopt

inept programs designed to phase the Eskimo into modern Canadian society.

Mowat does not dwell only on the failures but does show some of the minor victories, of little help perhaps in the end.

One such victory is the relationship developed between the Ihalmut and the soldiers of an outpost built in their area. These soldiers learn to care for the Ihalmut. But because of their vast cultural differences, they never learn how to understand each other.

Mowat is a prolific writer. *The Desperate People* is a book of condemnation and frustrated awareness.

He does not truly understand what happened himself but knows the problem exists. His purpose is to show something must be done or others will suffer the same fate.

A depressing book that becomes drearier as it continues. An effective method to point out our responsibilities toward the people whose land we have usurped.



## Good book ruined

Tess  
Director: Roman Polanski  
Playing at Meadowlark Cinema  
Reviewed by Candy Fertile

Roman Polanski's *Tess* is long and boring. I can think of almost nothing to recommend this film. The scenery is beautiful and the photography is unobtrusive but after the eleventh shot of a solitary figure gazing out over the land captured in a contemplative moment, I wanted to scream.

The acting, almost without exception, is awful. Nastassia Kinski, Polanski's new find is, in a way, beautiful. She does have large sad eyes appropriate for Tess. However, she can't act, no, not at all. She is not at all comfortable with English. Her voice is stilted and has a curious cadence.

Kinski does not look at all like a healthy Wessex lass, she is too fragile and precious looking. This Tess is a victim purely and solely. Thomas Hardy's characters are generally victims but this Tess could be swept away with the simple verdict: victim, that would be that. There is zero characterization.

Strangely enough this complete lack of characterization extends to everyone else in the film as well. Alec d'Urberville, who seduces Tess while she is under the protection of his mother, shifts between being a cad and a man who tries to help Tess and her penniless family. Angel Clare, Tess' husband, turns on her when he discovers her past but his anguish is inadequately portrayed so he comes off as a self-righteous creep. Naturally in Hardy's novel these elements are present but we also get Tess' thoughts. In the film it is hard to believe Tess considers anything before she falls into it.

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Polanski stays very close to the novel. The scenes Hardy avoids describing are left the same way by Polanski.

But it seems obvious his rigid adherence to the novel does not make a good film. Some people may question Polanski's sanity in trying to make a film out of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in any case. After watching this attempt, I'm inclined to agree with them.

The tragedy of life that interested Hardy comes out as melodrama in *Tess*. The music crashes in as if it were a soap opera; the pauses for reflection are too long and frequent.

If you really like the pastoral you might get by on the scenery. If not, three hours is a very long time.

## Depthless Thompson Gunners

The Dogs of War  
Director: John Irvin  
Playing at Capital Square  
review by Wes Oginski

The Hollywood soldier of the fifties has been replaced by the mercenary of today. No longer is it the patriot who fights for his country, but a man who works for the highest pay.

Christopher Walken, as Jamie Shannon, personifies the mercenary. Shannon is a man for hire who also has his dreams and desires, and limitations.

Director John Irvin does not go further in any development in *The Dogs of War*, and does nothing more to impress the audience. Gary Devore wrote the screenplay based upon the novel by Frederick Forsyth.

The film opens with Shannon

leading a group of mercenaries out of a war zone to a plane evacuating government personnel.

This sequence is a fast paced action scene introducing the close relations between the mercenaries. These relationships are not explored further.

Back in the U.S., Shannon leads a rather normal existence. He is approached by a major industry to perform a reconnaissance mission in a West African nation, Zangaro.

Shannon haggles the price then agrees to go. Walken has created a disinterested personality with glimpses of human feelings. But he is the mercenary, and he does what he is paid to do.

In Zangaro, Shannon poses as a bird naturalist. His attention to the army garrison and to the president's mistress

are noticed. Shannon is soon imprisoned, beaten and exiled.

When he arrives back to the U.S., Shannon is asked to lead a mercenary force to overthrow the existing government in Zangaro. Then the industry will set up its own government.

The rest of the film details the plans, preparations, and execution of the raid.

As far as the film goes, the action scenes are interesting and attention holding. But the initial introduction of the mercenaries interrelationships is never touched.

These relations are the most promising aspect of the film and essentially ignored in the *The Dogs of War*. Irvin leaves the audience with an exciting action film but no depth.