

## **The Exclusivity of Art: A Review of '*An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*': Dress Rehearsal Review**

Theatre has become something inaccessible to most people. Art itself isn't something we typically engage in, whether it is because of the time or cost, or the fact that we must actively seek it. This is why I felt connected to Dr. Pascal's play, *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*, as it provides a holistic approach to theatre that can reach a unique audience while educating people.

Performance has the power to bring the text to life in a way no other media can. It is directly in front of the audience, demanding their attention. To truly portray characters accurate to the director and writer's vision, an intimate process between the actors and directors takes place. Ultimately, this process is cyclical. It is a constant process of actors performing their interpretation of the character and the director tweaking the character into how they envision them. This creates a nuanced character as a product, one that is detailed and fitted for the actor to embody someone almost real.

Dr Pascal's role as the writer and director is to create a performance that reflects its intentions, in this case, to be an engaging and educational feminist play. Making music, dance, and acting surround this theme to respect the text's intentions to educate an audience through its high accessibility. The smallest changes make the largest difference, making everything that goes into a performance intentional. In this play, all of the music comes from a violin, clapping, steps, and other noises directly made from the body. This helps to build immersion, as the music fits the minimalistic sound of the period. It is a play set in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the lack of technology follows this. The play doesn't try to hide the fact that it is a play, openly showing costume changes and the violinist, which reflects the primary focus of the play to be free and intellectually enriching.

Throughout the rehearsal, I was able to watch changes be made directly in front of me. After the first run through, one of my classmates said they could not hear the words because the stepping was too distracting. In the next run through, the stepping was noticeably quieter, and the words were spoken louder. It coincided with what Dr. Pascal had also mentioned that the audience would likely have many older people with hearing issues, and the words needed to be understandable and projected. Changes like this bring the performance to life, creating a play reflective of the director's vision.

In terms of themes, the play seeks to educate on feminism while using three women from history and a cast. There is one man in the cast, Jon Rodd who plays as the Judge. He is a clear symbol of male oppression, spouting stereotypes and often standing on a table looking down on the rest of the female cast. The three main characters are representative of women's

strength, sticking to their ideals and aspirations despite the limitations on women. Lesley Lightfoot and Nadya Mills are both professional actors, while Leila Nardone is a dance student. In combination with Marzena Krywult and Annalia Sparks who are dancers and Rosalie, Simone, and Izzy being volunteer SLU students, there is a vast range in experience and age for the female cast. Thus, each person had their own convictions on feminism and their aspirations, reflecting the individuality that exists within all women.

For example, call and response was often used as the professional actresses stand more sound in their conviction while the students question and learn from the older professionals. This reiterates the intergenerational aspect of the play. The students are confused younger girls, looking to older women for guidance, reflecting their first step away from male established society. The older women throughout the play also ask a few questions and form their own identity, but they never show this side directly to the younger students. The chorus become key to the performance, representing a larger view of women as all different, but together under a shared experience of oppression.

The choreography mirrors this, showing the women undergoing male oppression forcing them into subservient roles. During the Judge's musical numbers, the women are often shown in dances repeating single actions, such as getting dressed or doing laundry. Mundane aspects of life being daily work, showing the generalized nature of traditional roles. They would also be shown sitting on the floor, or once were laying down with their legs open, showing the forced submission of women that was tied to male power. In contrast, when the women were shown in power while dancing, they were pushing the man out of the way and putting the focus on themselves.

Beyond the surface issues, such as pink tax, small numbers of women in power, and women absent or mistreated in certain academic fields, the issue of individualism found in feminism is still overlooked today. The idea that women can do what they want to and have their own ideology within feminism isn't discussed as much as other issues. They all hold an importance that is underrepresented and not acknowledging that all women are different because they are *human*.

The Polish Clown was an interesting character because of this, as she sticks out from the rest as appearing less serious and almost a symbol of liberation. She seems to be eccentric and entirely herself but also displays broader themes of the play. As an older woman and a Polish woman, her character introduces intergenerational and international themes to feminism, displaying the play's global relevance.

This all pays off with the accessibility of the play. Theatre is something that typically requires high monetary value, using lots of money for the production of the play and making a lot of money from the audience, which makes it exclusive. The audience is typically made of people

that want to see and agree with the content of the play, which limits how much new information may be learned. Theatre started off being for the wealthy, and often still is an art form people can struggle to make time for or spend money on.

An Unsuitable Job for a Woman, goes against all these notions, being well made poor theatre that is free so it can teach a broad audience. It creates a space for people who don't regularly experience theatre to learn and also engage with the entertainment aspects of theatre through music, acting, and dancing.

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