

On the Howell Stage . . .

Shakespeare is fun— with help of Hall, NU players

By Howard B. Norland
Associate Professor of English

Shakespeare has done it again — with the skillful assistance of Robert Hall and the summer troupe of University players. The old bard returned to the stage Friday evening at the Howell Theatre as the master of rollicking farce.

Updated to the late nineteenth century in setting and costumes, "Much Ado About Nothing" proved its universal dramatic appeal in an ingeniously comic production, dazzling in its blocking, stage business, and sight gags. The potential for humor was so rigorously exploited and so adeptly portrayed that "Old Billy" must have been as pleased as the full house that repeatedly interrupted the performance with applause.

Broad comedy

However, as a result of the emphasis on broad comedy, some of the inherent dramatic values in the play are unfortunately missed. Shakespeare in "Much Ado" provides much opportunity for farce in Dogberry, Verges, and the watch, but the essence of the play is the comedy of wit among the aristocracy.

Beatrice and Benedick are both the vehicles and the subjects of much of this higher comedy, which resides in the verbal thrust and parry of the word duel. Jo Flaughner as Beatrice, the unrivaled star of the performance, conveyed the mental gymnastics essential to her role with verve and vivacity; her sense of timing as well as her facial expressiveness made her performance difficult to match, as Ric Marsh playing Benedick seems to have realized.

Instead of competing with her on her own terms, as Shakespeare appears to have conceived the part, Marsh's Benedick worked for the grosser laughs of the buffoon. Lacking the sophistication and cynicism of the scornful of love, who is made to eat his words, Marsh failed to achieve the dignity or sense of discomfiture that raises Benedick's action above the level of farce.

Marsh is a very good clown and his interpretation of Benedick is very entertaining, but a dramatic problem arises when the plot takes a serious turn in the slandering of Hero and Benedick is forced to choose between his love and his friend. The line Marsh has been taking cannot accommodate Benedick's dilemma of honor or the thematic implications of his choice.

'Rotten orange'

The leveling of the dramatic values to farce poses a more significant problem in the representation of the wedding scene where Hero is castigated as a "rotten orange."

For the first time in the performance, the audience began to shift in their seats as the import of tragedy became apparent. The audience, unprepared for this development, uneasily awaited the comic turn that did not come.

The disappointed expectation arose because the melodramatic villainy of Don John and his cohorts had been reduced to mellerdramer with all the tricks employed at the Gas Light.

Dana Mills portrayed a very comic villain, but the fact is that there comes a point in Shakespeare's script where the burlesque just will not work and Don John must be faced up to as a serious force of evil.

The malcontent bastard is the dissonant note in the light-hearted festivity and tempers the fun from the first scene to the last when the message of his capture intrudes upon the happy resolution, but instead of counterpointing the innocent deceit practiced upon Benedick and Beatrice and high-lighting by contrast the mirth afforded by love, the force of Ate is repudiated with laughter until it destroys the artistic unity of the performance.

Spirit of Dogberry

The spirit of Dogberry and his comic watch pervades the production from the beginning though Shakespeare does not introduce them until the very middle of the play (III,III), where they are juxtaposed against the villainous machinations of Don John. Perhaps it was the very ubiquitousness of the

farce that made the appearance of the watch less impressive than it might be, though the costuming and the performance of Verges (played by William Turek) and the two watchmen (Gary Carper and Rex Rodgers) were brilliant in their way.

Paul Baker as Dogberry improved considerably after his first scene, but a more Dickenson caricature, perhaps with an exaggerated nose and spectacles, would better exploit the comic potential.

A delightful directorial touch in the Dogberry vein of comedy that does fully exploit the comic potential is the transformation of Balthazar, an attendant on Don Pedro, into a female singer (acted by Linda Varvel) and a band. Though the words of the song could unfortunately not be understood, the antics of this trio deservingly received more vigorous applause than almost any other scene in the production.

Professional polish

The professional polish of these cameo roles is indicative of the performance in general.

Though one can argue from an academic point of view about the representation of the dramatic values and the interpretation of particular characters, it is impossible to go away from the production feeling anything but admiration for Robert Hall, his cast, and his crew.

The quality of the acting was consistently high. Stephen Gaines as Leonato demonstrated extremely well the variety of moods demanded of Hero's father and introduced some interesting comic notes. William Szymanski turned in his usual fine performance as Don Pedro.

But more impressive was William Lacey's portrayal of the difficult role of Claudio. Something of a cardboard conventional lover at the beginning, Claudio then behaves like a spoiled child and ultimately becomes an insensitively prig. Lacey made these stages in Claudio's development appear most natural and human, even the acceptance of the feigned cousin of Hero at the end. The changes of mood and dramatic function were skillfully registered by changes in intonation and facial expression.

Hero is also a tough assignment because she is forced to play in the shade of the witty Beatrice, but Susan Vosik after a slow start captured the excitability and youthful innocence of a maiden's first love and its ensuing crisis.

However, the performance that truly smacked of greatness was that of Jo Flaughner as Beatrice. It is difficult to conceive of a more perfect rendition of the beautiful but bitchy, light-hearted but loyal comic heroine. Her remarkable stage presence was further set off by the brilliant directorial touch of having her appear for the festive entertainment in swallow coat and breeches, which exemplified her masculine independence and at the same time emphasized her diminutive features.

Closer to modern world

The late nineteenth century context established by costume and set brought the action closer to the modern world while still retaining the necessary aesthetic distance.

This choice of dramatic milieu is particularly appropriate to both the wit and the melodrama of "Much Ado," though if the qualities of Wilde and Boucicault had been more completely realized, the effect would have been stunning. The permanent set proved to be a very serviceable fusion of the Elizabethan multiple stage and the late nineteenth century back-drop: it afforded both a variety of levels on which to play and a concrete decor for the action.

Only once were the limits of the realistic set seriously strained and that was the scene in which Claudio delivers the epitaph on Hero at the monument. This sequence might have been more effectively performed in front of the gate on stage-left.

The lighting was adequate if not imaginative, and the costuming satisfactory though uneven. Stage uniforms too often have that moth-eaten look and cotton does not a gown make, but ingenuity overcame the low budget in the intriguing masks and the dress of Verges and the comic watch.

Ingenuity manifest

Ingenuity was manifested in many aspects of the production, but nowhere was it more apparent than in the devices of farce.

Gestures, facial expressions, and stage business consistently reinforced the comedy of the lines, though at times the appeal for laughter led to distortion of the meaning.

Robert Hall has in his interpretation of the comedy taken the title seriously, so literally in fact that the entertainment of the "much ado" so dominates the production that "nothing" of the implications about love engages our attention.

However, a serious comment about man and his world seems beside the point in a performance that makes Shakespeare so much fun.



"Children, come here. I've found another one under this cabbage leaf."

Reader views sex education

"And what do you do for a living?"
"I'm a homemaking teacher."
"Oh, I see . . . Uh, you like cooking and sewing, do you?"

"Well, yes, that is part of it," I must reply. Contrary to what most people believe, there is more to a homemaking class than preparing meals and making clothes.

Along with a search for independence the teenager wants to discover who she is and where she is going.

More specific questions concern dating — what to do on dates, what to say on dates. To be really specific teenagers seem to be in a real quandary when it comes to sex.

As a homemaking teacher, I feel that this is an area which can be covered in a personal development unit — along with the social and psychological effects of families and discussions about personal goals and life expectations.

An effective discussion about sex cannot be held, unless the teacher takes a careful approach. After a rather "matter-of-fact" discussion of how important it is to be knowledgeable about the physiological and psychological aspects of sex, it was my experience to have homemaking classes still in dialogue on premarital sex at the end of 90 minutes.

As a result, the students seemed to be clearing their misconceptions about word meanings — words such as fertilization, ova, sperm, intercourse, testes, and many more. They weren't clock-watchers that day; they wanted to learn.

My only question is: Why are adults so afraid to answer questions? Could it be because they themselves do not know the answers? If this is the case, then my answer is that sex education must begin somewhere. What is your school doing?

Gerelyn Cornell
Homemaking teacher
Omaha Public Schools

In Washington, D.C. . . .

M street could be half way to China

Editor's note: Kent Cockson is a senior majoring in journalism at the University. He is currently serving a journalism summer internship with the United States Information Agency in Washington, D.C. This is the first of several columns which he is writing for the Summer Nebraskan.

By Kent Cockson

A funny thing happened to me on the way to the agency the other day. Actually, it was the first day that I was to report to the United States Information Agency to begin a summer journalism internship.

I had just started to pass in front of the fence surrounding the White House grounds on Pennsylvania Avenue when I noticed a group of about 15 Japanese students standing in the vicinity of the main gate. None were holding a protest sign, so I knew that it could not have been another group trying to make the front pages by protesting the war in Vietnam.

I approached them, as it was inevitable that I should pass them on my way to work (not that I am particular about what race or nationality I associate with or anything like that). I was less than 20 steps away when one member of the group sauntered toward me.

"How do I get to the National Education Association?" he asked me in broken but intelligible English. He looked like a university student, about my own age and very lost.

I was in a pickle.
Should I pretend to be a Washington

white collar know-it-all and just give him some random directions? Or should I be frank and admit that, as far as the NEA was concerned, I was just as lost as he and his friends were.

"Hey, listen," I started. "Believe it or not, this is only my third day in Washington, and my first day downtown. So I really don't think I can help you guys out at all."

He looked back at me blankly, probably astounded by the fact that the well-seasoned bureaucrat he had approached for directions was turning out to be only another stupid American who didn't know which way from up. No telling how many times those young men had asked for directions and had been given what was probably a bum steer.

One of his colleagues came to the rescue announcing that he knew the street address where the building was located. It was on 16th and M. Now I had been on 16th Street before, but M Street could have been half way to China for all I knew. (I didn't put it in those exact words when I explained that M Street could have been in any direction.)

Determined not to let me get away (it was getting late), another member of the group rushed over with a little six-inch square map, probably printed by the NEA. Now I'm not necessarily putting in a plug for ROTC, but I oriented the map toward the area where we were located and discovered that the students were about sixteen long Washington blocks

Continued on page 3

Prague, Paris films are Sheldon features

The film documents are brought together in one program that offers a factual account of the two most important events occurring in Europe this decade — the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia and the French student uprising in Paris.

The films are being shown four times today at Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery. The showings are at 2:30, 5:30, 7:30 and 9:30 p.m. General admission is \$1.50, one dollar for students and 50 cents for children.

"Prague, the Summer of Tanks" was made by professional Czech film makers, who began filming within one hour after the Russians' midnight takeover of the Prague airport.

The film gives a precise account of what happened, hour by hour. The coverage is so thorough that the first 25 minutes of the film are concerned with the action up to noon of the first day of the invasion, August 21.

"The Right to Speak" presents the sequence of events in France from February to June — the Paris student revolution. Made by four young French film makers, it documents the initial period of popular support, the unions' opposition to student contact with workers, and the erosion of effective purpose which preceded De Gaulle's re-assertion of power.

The setting and the causes for the sudden magnification of a student protest at Nanterre into a crisis which nearly toppled the government, is a subject which needs the examination provided by a comprehensive in-depth film.

These two films cover two subjects which dominate the present course of European history — the changes and tensions radiating from them have not yet been resolved. Both documents will continue to be relevant to the daily news through the coming year.

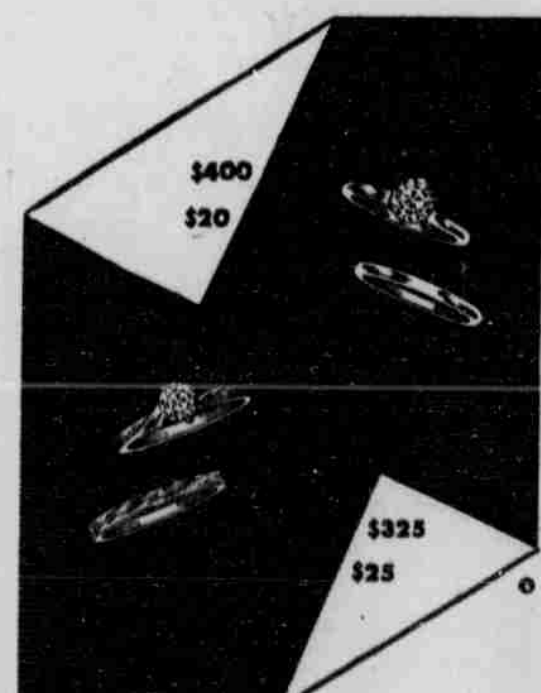
This program runs approximately 100 minutes. With the original live action shown on each film, there is an English narration or subtitles.

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