

Show Paper

An Informal Review of “Into the Woods”

Professor John Shafer

Department of English, University of Central Florida

At 10:16pm on October 2nd, I began the viewing experience that was “Into the Woods” by Stephen Sondheim, the venue was the well-established 4th floor student lounge in tower 3. From my understanding the general idea of the play was a mashup of all the different fairytales we’ve been told as children growing up: Jack and the Beanstalk, Cinderella, Repunzel, Little Red Riding Hood, and comical references to both Snow White and Sleeping Beauty. And to summarize it in as few words as possible. Theres a Baker and his Wife. His willy doesn’t work— why? Witch! Mean Witch cursed Baker’s family for theft of fruits and veggies. Baker and Wife angry. Baker and Wife want curse gone. Witch says, “Bring me things!” White cow, red cape, corn hair, golden shoe. Three days or else! Baker and Wife run, steal, trade, shout. They get stuff. Curse go bye! All happy. Then Act Two. Happy ever after. Beanstalk grew. Mood shift. Giantess come. People die. People kill giantess. Many sad. Story full circle. Curtain close. End. In an attempt to keep you entertained at the cost clarity I’ll be using an asterisk (*) whenever there is sarcasm in my sentences.

On a more serious note: I found the tone of the play to be comedically and silly during the 1st Act; there were parts where they foreshadowed the dark side of the story to come in the 2nd Act. A couple of good examples of this would be during the very beginning the narrator references the Baker’s parents’ deaths to be from a “Baking accident” which I thought was funny, I have an ironic sense of humor. And the gluttony shown by little red riding hood when she was grabbing baked goodies to bring to her grandmother and had an exorbitant amount in her pocket, they just kept coming! Those are the two I remember best but because everything else was typical of the original stories. As the 1st Act came to a close the really brutality of the play began to shine, with Cinderella’s stepsisters cutting off parts of their feet in order to fit into the golden slipper. And then in Act 2 it begins with everyone having their happy ending, WRONG,

somewhat another beanstalk grew and started killing different parts of the cast such as the baker's wife, Rapunzel, and the Narrator (I found this bit to be particularly funny as well, very good use of a fourth wall break).

My two favorite actors have got to be Jack and the Baker's Wife, Jack being a innocent and gullible boy, while the Wife is supportive and capable. And they both provide well due comical relief at times. Jack fit his role very well aside from his height, I feel like he could have been a tad shorter for the idea of him being a child. My favorite moments with him happen when he inevitably returns to his mother to boast about his trade for magical beans and ends up being scolded for being gullible enough to believe something like that without proof, honestly while he was right, the chance of that being the case was astronomically small. You just can't give him credit for something that was pure luck.

Now for the Wife, she wasn't the main character and did meet an unfortunate end, but she was honestly one of the more earnest people. When the Baker finds the magic beans and claims he'll be able to lift the spell on his house, she says "the spell on our house, we must lift the spell". Yet the Baker shuts her down claiming this is something he must do alone which I understand might be dangerous, but the fact that the wife was immediately willing to go help and not be some pretentious and dainty damsel really has made me like her character a lot more. The fact that I feel so strongly about these decisions is why I chose each of these characters, both have been able to invoke such a connection through their acting, whether it be from hand gestures, facial movement, or vocal manipulation. They clearly new their characters and embodied them for the duration of the play.

In terms of scenic design, I thought that the stage props and scenery were well made. The forest scene, where the vines came down from the ceiling and gave many different entrances and

exits for the actors to use was genius. It gave the proscenium stage the illusion of being a dense forest, while also allowing for people to exit from behind, left, and right while looking like they just came out of the forest into a clearing. Another section I liked was the very beginning, where they had the 3 separate backdrops of houses representing Cinderella, Jack, and the Bakers. This was one I took note of because they came back to the same backdrop in Act 2 but with added depth. Cinderella was in clothes befitting royalty, Jack and his mother were living quite lavishly, and the baker had a child with his wife. All of which I found great symbolism in, for help summarize in visuals what had happened to each character throughout the 1st Act of the play.

The play was set in the stereotypical age that many fairytales take place in, I would guess in the late 1800s. With the costumes matching the period, all of which I found to be very on point, from the frilly and puffy garments Cinderella's loving* family wore around the house and to the ball where she meets Prince Charming. I found the costumes to be yet another key part of the storytelling throughout the play, depicting how each character's life may have changed. During the 1st Act Jack and his Mother wore common clothing which was fair seeing as how they didn't have much to begin with and had to sell their only cow for "no less than 5 gold coins" and Jack the master negotiator he is sold milky for no less than that*, I mean come on 5 "magic" beans with absolutely no skepticism.

But as the story progressed into Act 2, Jack and his mother have various decorations, new clothes, and a glamorous fresh cut** probably would have paid 5 magic beans for that cut alone! And Cinderella went from dusty old rags to an actually gorgeous coat and gown that looks very comfortable and fluffy. And now for my favorite reflection, the Witch, the prosthetics/makeup team did a fantastic job. For the entirety of Act 1 whenever I got a close up of her face it made my skin crawl, like seriously it looked like someone left her in the sauna too long and her nose

started to melt. Unfortunately, due to the quality of the video I'm unable to give the most specific details but I also feel it might be a blessing I was spared from such a viewing experience.

I do honest to God wish there was less singing though, I'm all for a musical, but having it be constant to such an extent began to hurt me mentally and may have even degraded my sanity*(only a little sarcastic though). Yes, I know it's a musical, but there is a point where the songs coming one after the other with barely a moment in between start to harm the quality of each song individually, they just sort of blend together. The lighting/sound quality isn't something that I find myself in a position to judge, particularly the sound quality. The lighting from what I could tell wasn't anything special, but I also was watching through a screen in my dorm's student lounge. Not a whole lot of dynamic lighting goes on there even on a good day.

Overall, I felt that Into the Woods was a great musical to watch and I honestly might watch the Disney version later this year with my family. At face value I enjoyed the story that was told and wouldn't consider the two and a half hours I spent watching it a waste. Granted my appreciation for the play might also be encouraged by the fact that I had to write a four-page paper on the different parts of the production*. Joke's aside, I think having to write a paper on the production is what made me enjoy it even more, I was taking note of the parts I liked and disliked which I think made the whole production more memorable.

Into the Woods October 2nd 10:16pm



Hamilton Oct 8th 8:53pm



Rent Oct 13th 7:57pm

