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DRAM 1301 – 001

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Sin, Sex, and the CIA

*Sin, Sex, and the CIA* was performed at UTD for two weeks, from February 22nd to the 24th and again from March 1st to the 3rd. The UTD performance of the play was exceptionally well crafted, in particular both the design and directing meshed together to create a sense of mischief in an otherwise normal setting. While the acting didn’t detract from the experience, it sometimes fell flat when delivering puns or double entendres, focusing exclusively on the physicality of the performance. Taken as a whole each of these elements coalesced into a well-crafted performance that combined a realist framework with Grotowskian elements to generate a farce.

The first, and probably most important, thing to mention in the directing choices for the play must include the addition of “the Shadows” a collection of four characters in a pitch black body suit. They served to add an element of slap-stich by both aiding and punking the characters of the play. These shadows would do anything from hang a characters coat and serve them a drink to replacing their glass with a full bottle of alcohol to handing back the wrong coat to a character. Everything they do is playful, and while they have no lines in the play, their exaggerated movements and body language convey a sense of innocent mischief. While the stage was meticulously designed to resemble a log cabin, and the costume choices were fairly authentic, there were several Grotowskian elements, such as the Shadows and Luke’s exaggerated delivery of lines, punctuating the realist framework to help enhance the farce.

The design choices helped enhance the director’s style by creating a sufficient contrast between the realist setting and Grotowskian elements. Featured most prominently in this design is the stage, which was transformed into the interior of a log cabin where the entirety of the play takes place. The concentration of particular thematic elements on certain parts of the stage gave a greater sense of how the cabin was organized and made it feel more authentic. For example, on stage left, there were a couch and love seat to give that part of the stage a very living room feel, it was normally in this part of stage where some of the more intimate parts of the play, such as Millicent learning to seduce Luke, or the two OPEC agents revealing themselves to the audience occur here. Additionally, the Shadows here would harass the characters less in this area, instead either mocking their movements, being helpful, or just observing. In contrast, on stage right was a dining table, bar, and entrance to the kitchen, here much more of the slap-stich occurred, such as when Luke needed to have his bucket removed. The Shadows were also more mischievous here, more liberally serving alcohol and constantly harassing Luke as he tried to get into or out of the Kitchen. Another design choice that worked to help combine the Grotowskian with the realist can be seen in the costume design. For example, while the Reverend was initially dressed in a fine pressed white suit, during the third act, this classy outfit gives way to a crasser pair of purple boxers and a shirt. In particular, this pair of boxers had the ridiculous words “Sugar Daddy” printed in gold across the buttocks.

While the acting was passable, it contributed the least to combining the two styles. It was particularly successful when it came to the actors who portrayed Luke and Millicent, but their more Grotowskian delivery of lines and movements were ineffectively contrasted with the much more realist performance of the rest of the cast. Both Luke and Millicent had exaggerated silvery methods, Luke in particular moved wildly when delivering lines pertaining to the CIA training manual, and at one point floor dived while throwing a bear rug over himself. Millicent on the other hand had a sort of teenage-girl naiveté in the way she delivered her lines, particularly with a kind of child-like pitch when interacting with Luke. When these two character finally decided to get intimate, they proceeded to rub faces all over each other, moving wildly back and forth while not releasing contact. In addition to this, the line-less Shadows needed to have accentuated body movements in order to convey any sort of message. Unfortunately, the more realistic delivery of the rest of the cast didn’t draw attention or effectively contrast Luke or Millicent’s performance. For example, when Daniel catches the Reverend in compromising positions with Margaret, Daniel shots out a one-liner and then wryly makes fun of the Reverend. While it was fine from a technical standpoint, none of the remaining cast interacted in such a way as to enhance the more fantastical elements of the performance, or mesh those elements with the realist framework set forth by the director and design.

All in all, each of those elements did successfully combine realistic settings and design with Grotowskian elements to create a wonderful farce. While the acting could have been better used to support this combination, it didn’t detract from the overall experience. In fact, the combination was done so well, that the play took on a life distinct from if the production had focused exclusively on ether the realist or Grotowski schools.