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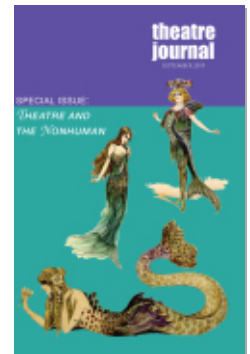
A Warning for Fair Women dir. by Brent Griffin (review)

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Dmitry Kulichkov (Vershinin), Alexandra Rebenok (Olga), Alexandra Vinogradova (Masha), and Sophia Ernst (Irina) in *Three Sisters*. (Photo: Ekaterina Tsvetkova.)

belonged to us more than he belonged to the world of the play. In the final moment of the show, as Olga said the famous final lines “If only we knew! If only we knew!” quietly, quickly, and without inflection, a recording of Tuzenbach singing at the piano appeared on the screens. A shared memory for the audience was replayed, never to be recreated. We were finally able to access the distant past through that recording. Tears began to fall not for the sisters, but for the loss of our comrade who, as in all other productions of the play, had been shot in a duel offstage.

This masterful articulation of the Prozorovs’ plight blurred the line between us and them. But unlike the Prozorovs, the audience left the theatre and stepped onto the streets of Moscow, just as audiences have done after every production of *Three Sisters* at the Moscow Art Theatre for over a hundred years, leaving the Prozorovs behind in their memories.

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A WARNING FOR FAIR WOMEN. Directed by Brent Griffin. Resurgens Theatre Company, Shakespeare Tavern Playhouse, Atlanta. November 21, 2018.

The Atlanta-based Resurgens Theatre Company specializes in non-Shakespearean Renaissance drama. It aims to make plays otherwise relegated to anthologies or academic readings accessible to contemporary audiences. Admittedly, its repertoire is rather niche. If a theatregoer chooses to attend a Renaissance play, it may be difficult to convince her to eschew *Hamlet* in favor of a lesser-known title by Thomas Dekker. But in November 2018, Resurgens took on an added challenge, reviving a Renaissance play that has not been performed in over 400 years, the anonymous domestic tragedy *A Warning for Fair Women*. At its core, *Warning* is a play about adultery, murder, and community justice, but it is also a play about women’s fraught choices in the face of insistent, manipulative men. As such, its world revival was particularly well-chosen for the social zeitgeist of 2018, when questions of consent and coercion were at the forefront of conversation. Focusing on middle-class people’s lives rather than kings and queens, the play takes seriously the domestic every day and the social consequences of women’s



Ash Anderson (Anne Drurie), Sims Lamason (Anne Sanders), and Matthew Trautwein (Trusty Roger) in *A Warning for Fair Women*. (Photo: Ivan Machiz, reprinted with permission of Resurgens Theatre Company.)

liberal sexuality. Resurgens's production managed to make timely connections to the present, doing justice to this play's overlong hiatus from the stage.

Although *A Warning for Fair Women* is best-known among academic circles, this production highlighted its potential for broader appeal. The plot rehearses a ripped-from-the-headlines story from the 1570s, capitalizing on the "true crime" genre still popular today: George Sanders, a London merchant, is murdered by George Brown, a military captain who is sleeping with Sanders's wife, Anne. Meddling neighbor Drurie and her servant Roger help facilitate the affair. The company's artistic director, Brent Griffin, holds a doctorate in Renaissance drama and collaborated with Ann Christensen, editor of a forthcoming critical edition of the play. While maintaining intellectual rigor, the production made an obscure text accessibly palatable. One way that Griffin achieved this was by highlighting tropes that a Shakespeare-going audience would immediately recognize. Some familiar echoes included a handkerchief that circulates among characters, like the one we see in *Othello*; audience-directed soliloquies, like those spoken to psychological effect by Hamlet; and blood that cannot be cleaned off, like the blood on Lady Macbeth's guilt-ridden hands. In this way, the production was smart and referential while walking the line between fresh and familiar.

While the script punishes unfaithful women, this production opened other possibilities for empathy.

Sims Lamason gave Anne sympathetic texture: when we first meet her, Anne is sewing upstage, embodying dutiful boredom and feeling the neglect of her absent husband. This domestic confinement contrasted with her balletic seduction during the ensuing dumbshow. As she moved from confinement into dance, drinking from a skull and wrapping herself in red cloth, Anne's dangerous foray into adultery was also an embodied freedom. Employing a resonant vocal range, Lamason made it difficult to see Anne as a villain, and painted the question of Anne's guilt in contemporary shades of gray: we hear coy coquetry with her lover, confident defiance in the courtroom—her "not guilty" plea was shockingly raw—and heartfelt penitence in her jail cell, singing softly from the skillfully arranged sixteenth-century ballad "The Woeful Lamentation of Mistress Sanders."

In an intimate space like the Shakespeare Tavern Playhouse, musical moments like these were particularly emotive and helped to voice plural perspectives. Using a well-researched version of original practices, the musical direction by Matthew Trautwein combined Renaissance instrumentation like lute, zithers, and drum with layered vocal duets to harness the immediacy of live performance in a way that never felt jarringly modern, but still captured the individuality of each performer. Other original practices included functional period costumes, designed by company member Catherine Thomas, that

subtly reflected the class or status of each character; original pronunciation chosen to highlight significant moments through versification; and a simple set design that relied upon distinct elements—a barred grate, a trap door, a noose in the discovery space—to communicate visual metaphors.

“Candlelight wash” lighting and pub-style seating encouraged audience/actor interaction. This was magnified when some audience members were briefly transformed into shopkeepers, their personal items manhandled and food stolen from their plates. The lighting and intimate seating also made Brown’s confessional soliloquies sympathetic, more of a Hamlet than an Iago when he admits, “by this light, my heart is not my own.” Although scripted as a Lothario, Tamil Periasamy’s quirky performance was endearing. His attempt to be suave—leaning against a post to flirt with Anne—backfired when he awkwardly stumbled. The intimate relationship that Periasamy forged with the audience reached an uncomfortable breaking point when his character brutally attacked the innocent bystander John Beane in the center aisle. This cast the audience as both eyewitnesses and potential victims.

It was sometimes difficult to navigate the abrupt shifts between these intimate audience interactions and the stylized dumbshows that opened each act.

What helped bridge this divide was the clever doubling that cast Drurie as Comedy, Roger as History, and Lord Justice as Tragedy. As Drurie, the sprightly Ash Anderson brought comedic sensibility to her energetic performance, delivering biting lines like “women love most by whom they are most tried” with a knowing wink. As a self-assured Tragedy, the commanding Catie Osborn literally cracked a whip to keep her fellow actors in line. As such, her later turn as Lord Justice brought forceful clarity to the play’s moral ambiguity. While Anne is not innocent, she is also a victim of patriarchal authority. Casting Lord Justice and her two compatriots as women offered a bold reclamation of reparative gender politics. These women doled out their verdict from on high, seated aloft on the upper stage, condemning the philanderer-cum-murderer to death and securing justice for the dead and, perhaps, for the misguided Anne as well.

A revival performance like this offers hope that more forgotten plays can be moved with confidence out of academic obscurity and into contemporary relevance, providing surprising connections to some of our most pressing social concerns.

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