The only good wife is a mad wife: antifeminism in Nu Noch. The injustice of rape: "The death of Amnon" and the sequestering of Tamar. "Spectator in the balance": a classroom exercise in ritual and audience manipulation

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The Injustice of Rape:
"The Death of Amnon" and the Sequestering of Tamar

"Spectator in the Balance":
A Classroom Exercise in Ritual and Audience Manipulation

by

Nicole D. Matson

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The Only Good Wife is a Mad Wife: Antifeminism in *Nu Noch*

**Abstract**

In this paper, I examine antifeminism in the Middle Dutch play, *Nu Noch*. I focus specifically on the wife and her dual role and her transformation from shrew to madwoman.
Antifeminism runs rampant in medieval literature, just as it did in medieval life. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that this Middle Dutch play, *Nu Noch*, is filled with a loathing for women. The antifeminism in this play is represented by two traditional types of Woman, manifested in the same woman. The first of these types is the unattractive woman who brow-beats her husband, rules the roost, and is a terror to all who encounter her. The second is the meek and submissive woman who kowtows to her husband. Judging by first appearances, this second type may seem to be an attractive alternative to the first, but upon further examination we see that she is equally unattractive, for she suffers from a temporary madness. I intend to illustrate first the traditional models of Woman in medieval times. Then I will discuss how and why I say that the wife suffers from temporary madness. Finally, I will demonstrate that although the wife in both her guises might appear to have some positive characteristics in a first reading of this play, when examined in more depth and performed, the wife becomes an exemplar of antifeminist thought.

The play opens with the husband, Jack, a man who appears incapable of handling his wife, admitting in his opening speech that he perhaps deserves some of the abuse he takes: "And yet, to tell the truth, it serves me right, because sometimes I
laugh till I weep at the way she sets about me."¹ Readers initially can interpret the wife, therefore, as someone who merely maintains control of a household that is not well managed by her husband. This interpretation leads to the conclusion that the wife is of strong character, a woman who will not allow her ineffective husband to ruin her way of life. If viewed in this light, the wife comes across in a favorable manner. While a strong wife may appear favorable to a twentieth-century reader, she would probably have been viewed negatively by a medieval audience. Granted, this play is farce, but the wife is comic because she is so far removed from the ideal of Womanhood.

According to medieval beliefs, there are two models of Woman. Traditionally, these models are based on Eve and Mary.² For the purpose of this paper, I am using the model based on Eve, and a different second model based on Mary Magdalene. The first model, based on Eve, is the evil woman who has a knowledge of sexuality. She will bring about the downfall of a man, just as Eve brought about the downfall of mankind. Wives are of this type of woman, because once a woman has carnal knowledge, she cannot go back to innocence. In this medieval schema, then, Eve

¹ E. Colledge, ed., Reynard the Fox and Other Mediaeval Netherlands Secular Literature, (London House & Maxwell, 1967), pp. 187 - 194. All subsequent page references will be included in the text.

² The discussion of the medieval ideal of woman is based on Jacques Dalarun, "The Clerical Gaze," in A History of Women in the West II. Silences of the Middle Ages, ed. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, (Harvard 1992), pp. 15 - 42. Mary was the absolute ideal to which women theoretically were to attempt to strive. It was, of course, impossible for women to reach the same level of purity as Mary, especially since it was necessary for women to marry and marriage automatically precluded virginity.
represents Woman as she is. The second model, based on Mary Magdalene represents a salvation to which all women are able to strive. Mary Magdalene was, of course, the prostitute who reformed after she met Jesus. He spoke to her about the evil acts she committed, and she accepted him as the son of God. She demonstrated her devotion to him by washing his feet and drying them with her hair. Through her belief in Jesus she was redeemed, and she represented redemption for all women, especially in the middle ages.

The wife, at her initial appearance in this play, is definitely modeled on Eve. Jack does everything in his power to indicate the great disparity between his wife and what he would desire her to be. He wishes her to be the ideal: a woman who would wash his own feet, or at least feed him. He wishes that she were a Magdalene.

When we first encounter the wife, she clearly establishes herself as more powerful than Jack. She meets him with sarcasm, threatening him both verbally and physically. This wife beats her husband, belittles him, and curses him, never giving him a minutes peace. We observe that the behavior she displays is not merely that of a woman attempting to keep order in her home, but of someone obsessed with power. Control over her husband seems to be what gives this wife joy. She demonstrates to a medieval audience the dangers of women having even a modicum of control;—they become power-hungry demons who do not even provide proper food to a starving husband. Despite the slapstick, the message is clear: don’t let your woman get out of hand like this one. Control her before it’s too late.

Jack’s attempts at control indicate that he has indeed allowed his wife’s
behavior to continue for too long. As he carries out the neighbor's instructions, he pushes his wife to the edge of madness. She repeatedly refers to madness as they interact: "He's driving me mad with his 'Now again'" (189); then, "This is the very devil himself" (190); and finally, "This is the maddest thing that I've ever heard of" (190). As the balance of power switches, we see the wife in her transformation from being a terror to being terrified. This switch is what allows her to plunge into madness. Her fear that Jack has gone mad overwhelms all of the energy and control that she has maintained up to this point, triggering the onset of the next phase of the playwright's antifeminist propaganda.

Even before the wife runs out of the house, a transformation has begun to take place in her character. No longer the powerful, dominating woman, she knows true fear for the first time. She not only forfeits to her husband, but she seeks the aid of anyone who will offer it. At the suggestion of the neighbor, the wife seeks the aid of a priest to exorcise the demon that she believes has taken control of her husband. The transformation in the wife's character becomes complete, in my opinion, with the realization that an actual exorcism is necessary to help her husband, for this leads her unequivocally to the conclusion that Jack is mad.

Madness, according to medieval belief, is characterized by: a person who behaves in a manner that is out of the ordinary, or is threatening to others or to him- or herself. People who were considered mad were thought to be possessed by
Demons. Demon possession, then, is not simply the cause of madness; rather, madness is demon possession. Once the demon has been exorcised, the possessed victim is cured. The wife has been told that because of her beatings and nagging, she has facilitated the possession of her husband; she is, therefore, an agent of the devil. This realization is what finally pushes her over the edge into madness. In a time of weakness, she radically changes her character. She switches from being an Eve figure to being a Magdalene figure. This radical change in temperament is what leads me to say that she is mad. Instead of the anger she has expressed moments before with "I hope God punishes you for this" (189), she now expresses concern to both the neighbor, "Good neighbor, come and help me" (191), and the priest, "Good sir, please come and see what is wrong with my husband" (191). Her madness is not that of a raving lunatic, or even the senseless ramblings characteristic of the madness she believes her husband to have; rather, hers is the madness of women—contrition and submission.

I call her madness the madness of women, so allow me a moment to explain what I mean. The wife is not possessed by a demon. According to medieval belief, then, she is not mad. I would argue, however, that she is mad because she is possessed, albeit not by a demon. What takes possession of the wife is an alternate aspect of her self, one that is not true to her nature. By expanding the definition of

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possession, the possibilities for madness increase. She replaces her true Eve self with Jack's desired Magdalene. Because this new model runs contrary to her true nature, and she enacts this change against her will, she is possessed by Jack's Magdalene. The Magdalene becomes her own personal demon.

The wife's behavior in the scene after the priest, and more honestly the food, have cured Jack may appear at first to be attractive behavior. This wife is much closer to the medieval ideal of Womanhood than the first wife, assuming that the Magdalene figure is the ideal. She is sorry for what she has done, she promises never to nag her husband again, and she relinquishes all power and control to him. This portrait is that of the "good" wife, the one the husband has desired from the outset. Why is this "good" wife as much a portrait of antifeminism as the first? The answer is threefold. First, she is brought to this state of contrition through trickery and deceit. The husband and neighbor make her out to be a fool. Second, this "good" wife is the complete antithesis of the first. The pendulum has merely swung in the opposite direction. Whereas the first wife was all-powerful and completely dominating, this wife has no power and is completely dominated. Neither portrait of a woman is particularly attractive. Finally, this "good" wife has gone mad. She believes that she has driven her husband mad with her behavior, and her guilt and his wishes have pushed her over the edge into madness. She submits to his will, relinquishing her

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4The idea that I am proposing is based on a modern reading. It is not an idea that would have been accepted in medieval times. The main reason it would not have been accepted is it is dependent upon the notion of self. Self as a concept was not recognized until the eighteenth century.
own. This complete reversal is symptomatic of her fear, irrational as it is, of madness, both of her husband's and her own.

This "good" wife is held up then as a model. She is shown to the medieval audience as an example of Womanhood. She is made out to be a buffoon and a mockery of Woman. That she should be touted as the epitome of a "good" wife demonstrates equal if not greater loathing of women than the portrayal of the first wife did. If she is the closest the husband can come to having the ideal woman, what does this say about women? It says that they should not assert themselves; that they must be meek and contrite; that they must cater to the whims of their husbands; and that they should be quiet and invisible.

Our wife does not remain in this state permanently. The object of this play is comedy, and a meek wife does not remain comedic for long. With the discovery of the men's plot, she returns to her brash, sadistic self, threatening and terrifying both men. This state of energy and force is her natural state, a far cry from the mouse she had become. Again, this complete and radical change from the contrite Magdalene figure demonstrates how the wife had slipped into a state of madness, a state so far removed from her true self. She had to exorcise the Magdalene, again illustrating how this figure is a correlative of a demon. She is again in power, and once more the icon of how power in a woman is a dangerous thing. Once again, she demonstrates in a clear and bold manner the playwright's fear and loathing of women.
The Injustice of Rape:
"The Death of Amnon" and the Sequestering of Tamar

Abstract

In this paper, I examine Elizabeth Hands' eighteenth-century poem, "The Death of Amnon." I focus on the rape of Tamar, Hands' modification of the biblical version, and the victim's reaction.
Elizabeth Hands' 1789 poem, "The Death of Amnon," at first glance appears, like Pope's "The Rape of the Lock," to do little to further the cause of women. While the reader sees some major differences between the poems, the endings seem equally unsatisfying. The initial poetic treatment of Tamar is much better than that received by Belinda in Pope's poem, and, in the end, Tamar is not made out to be a creature of vanity and sexual licentiousness, yet the fate to which she must submit is not one that any modern reader would deem as fair. Not only is she raped, but she is victimized again by being forced into exile, and she is marginalized by the text in which she receives little more than a cursory nod. Upon closer examination, however, one sees that Hands, through careful manipulation of the original biblical text, weaves a much more intricate and provocative story than one would expect from a poor domestic servant. Tamar is marginalized, but I would argue that unlike Belinda in Pope's poem, she is marginalized with a specific intention in mind. Hands' feminizing of her male characters and silencing of the female victim lead the reader to the conclusion that there is more to this poem than is initially apparent. Hands also portrays what seems to be an accurate description of a rape victim's reaction; at least, according to modern-day research. The combination of these two factors, in my opinion, can lead
to no other conclusion than that Hands is attempting a protofeminist reading of a classical rape. For the careless reader, I fear the subtlety of Hands’ poem is too much, and she would be classified with the likes of Pope. In reality, I believe Hands reacts against the writings of Pope and attempts to establish an alternate view of rape. In this paper, I will consider briefly some connections between "The Death of Amnon" and "The Rape of the Lock," but the majority of the paper will focus solely on Hands’ poem. First, I will look to the biblical source for this poem and examine some of the ways in which Hands modified the story. Then I will look at the power struggles and the rape in "The Death of Amnon," and finally I will discuss the rape victim’s reaction that Tamar mentions in one of her lamentations.

The biblical source for "The Death of Amnon" is II. Samuel, Chapter 13. Hands, for the most part, remains true to the biblical text except for Tamar’s speech. In Hands’ poem Tamar is completely silenced, whereas in the biblical source she pleads with her brother not to rape her:

He took hold of her, and said unto her, Come lie with me, my sister.

And she answered him, Nay, my brother, do not force me; for no such thing ought to be done in Israel: do not thou this folly.

And I, whither shall I cause my shame to go? and as for thee, thou shalt be as

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5 Claudia Thomas deals with the subject of women’s reactions to Pope’s writing in Alexander Pope and his Eighteenth-Century Women Readers. Thomas briefly discusses Hands’ reaction to "Eloisa to Abelard" in "On reading Pope's Eloisa to Abelard." Donna Landry engages in the most complete study of the poetry of Elizabeth Hands in The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women's Poetry in Britain, 1739-1796. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990. Landry, however, does not deal with the subject of rape. Landry does state that she finds a protofeminist sentiment all but hidden in "On reading Pope's Eloisa to Abelard."
Tamar, in the original source, is not a passive victim. She pleads with Amnon, and as the next lines demonstrate, she is forced to have sex by Amnon as a result of his superior strength. That Hands does not include any spoken lines for Tamar before the rape is significant. Tamar is not only marginalized by the rape, but she is also marginalized by her lack of speech. I do not think that Hands is implying that Tamar acquiesced; rather, I think she is attempting to demonstrate just how little voice Tamar had in her fate. That we do not hear Tamar's voice is indicative of how Amnon views her. She is a beautiful woman whose future is appropriated by him and is to be determined by him. Even had she pleaded with him, in all likelihood he would not have heard her because he has become too obsessed with his sexual intentions to listen to anything she has to say. Amnon no longer views Tamar as his sister, or even a person; she is merely the object he is going to have at any cost. By not having her readers hear Tamar either, Hands demonstrates with more intensity the lack of power that women have.

Another departure that Hands makes from the biblical source lies in the fact that Amnon must be drunk in order to rape Tamar. Nowhere in the biblical version is alcohol mentioned as a factor in the rape. The biblical version does not depict Amnon as a coward, whereas Hands' poem does, for he needs to drink in order to rape his sister. Amnon demonstrates a real reluctance before raping Tamar. He questions himself and what he is doing because of his sister's purity. In order to overcome his trepidation, "to drown his scruples, and to fire his soul" (II 126), he has to alter his
perceptions chemically. Hands even comments on Amnon’s need for alcohol: "Such aid the most abandoned oft require" (II 127). Hands wants her readers to see without a doubt what a coward Amnon is, for a rapist is cowardly enough, but a drunk one is even more so.

A third difference from the original is visible in many of the characters’ reactions to the rape. In the biblical source, Amnon becomes rather cruel to Tamar and throws her out of his house. Tamar also chastises Amnon for what he does to her:

Then Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her. And Amnon said unto her, Arise, be gone.

And she said unto him, There is no cause: this evil in sending me away is greater than the other that thou didst unto me. But he would not hearken unto her.

Then he called his servant that ministered unto him, and said, Put now this woman out from me, and bolt the door after her.

(II. Samuel 13: 15-17)

In Hands’ poem, however, Tamar remains silent while Amnon laments what he has done and is filled with remorse. Hands’ Amnon is indeed filled with hatred, but it appears to be directed at Jonadab for his poor advice as well as himself for following it. Here, he is "frantick with keen remorse and conscious guilt" (III 22). Hands’ general description of what happens to a man when he "perverts this giv’n blessing" (III 3) and takes advantage of "the weaker sex" (III 2) is more telling in regard to Amnon’s feelings than is anything she tells us about him directly:

Conviction’s sword shall pierce him, and remorse
With all the tortures of the mind assail,
Till he a victim falls to grim despair;  
Except repentance timely to his aid  
Come with her tears, to sooth, to mitigate;  
While her attendant hope extends a ray,  
To point where mercy spreades her healing wings.  
Nor e’en with this is vengeance satisfied,  
She’ll still pursue with some external ills,  
Exhausted health and spirits;--drooping--dread,  
An outcast of society he roams,  
Alike discarded by his friends and foes;  
Perhaps assassination proves his end.  

(III 7-19)

Hands foreshadows Amnon’s fated murder in this passage, but again, no mention is made of the victim’s fate. This lack of consideration for the victim’s fate takes us back to the biblical source. Again, Tamar’s silence immediately after the rape is not in the biblical source. In Hands’ poem, not until the end of canto III, after Amnon has confronted Jonadab about his evil advice and Jonadab has informed Absalom of the rape, does Tamar find a voice. Unlike the biblical Tamar, she does not have an opportunity to tell her brother how truly evil his actions toward her have been. Through Tamar’s long silence Hands is illustrating the hopeless situation that women face in which their voices are never heard.

Turning away from the biblical source and examining only the poem, we can see further instances of women’s marginalization. The debate raging in Amnon’s mind about whether or not he should attempt to seduce his sister is the first indication that Tamar is not going to figure heavily in any decisions. Even when he is arguing with himself that he cannot bring that kind of disgrace upon his sister, he argues in terms of himself:

Sooner shall my passion unreveal’d  
Lie cank’ring in my bosom, till it taints
My very blood, and stops my panting breath.
Better my lov'd companions pass my grave,
And shed a tear to think I died so young,
Than shun me living as a vile reproach
To nature, royalty, and Israel. (22-28)

His concern is not for the honor of his sister, or even for the fact that because she is his sister what he contemplates is inherently wrong; rather, he is concerned that the people he knows will shun him. Even the necessity of pleading with death to take him rather than attempting to control his passion for Tamar does not force him to see that what he contemplates is wrong: "O thou, that hast the pow'rs of life and death,/Take hence my life, and end my wretchedness" (34,35). He even doubts his ability to control himself in her presence and fears "lest some hapless smile/Inflame my soul, and I in passions [sic] phrensy/Should act against my final resolution/To bear my griefs untold" (70-73).

The actual rape in this poem is veiled by the power struggle between Amnon and Jonadab. In anticipation of converting Amnon into a cruel and power-hungry ruler, Jonadab urges Amnon to commit the rape. He plays upon the cruelty that is inherent in Amnon while appealing to his weaker side, the side afraid of his own cowardice. Amnon demonstrates to the reader, however, that he is not only vacillating in his decision about Tamar, but he has reached a breaking point. He displays a fear that he will see his victim with a rival before he can have her:

But I've a thought, that stings me yet more deep;
Doubtless some happy rival will be crown'd
With Tamar's love; 'O tort'ring thought, must I
Behold her deck'd in bridal robes to bless
A rival; 'tis too much;--I cannot bear
E'en to suppose it. (49-54)
The feelings expressed in this passage, combined with Amnon's pleas for death, illustrate how far he has sunk in depravity. Because Amnon is unable to hide his feelings, Jonadab uses them against him. Jonadab's language is like a double-edged sword, making it impossible for Amnon to back down without appearing cowardly to his friend:

This tim'rous tenderness but ill becomes  
A Royal Prince, the hope of Israel,  
The son of David; think but who thou art,  
The eldest son of Israel's mighty King;

Better ten thousand injur'd virgins mourn,  
Than David's son thus live inglorious.  

(194-97, 206-07)

Jonadab cuts right to the center of Amnon's sensibilities and all but calls him a coward. It is Jonadab's tauntings that spur Amnon to commit the rape.

Hands' feminization of Amnon is particularly interesting. He is feminized through his actions, and through Hands' and other characters' descriptions of him. In the opening description, Amnon is portrayed in stereotypical female fashion:

The Royal youth I sing, whose sister's charms  
Inspir'd his heart with love; a latent love  
That prey'd upon his health; he droop'd; so droops  
A beauteous flow'r, when in the stalk some vile  
Opprobrious insect 'bides. In conscious pain  
He pass'd the hapless hours, while in his breast  
Th' aspiring passion, yet by virtue sway'd,  
It's proper limits knew. (1-8, italics mine)

The above passage, although it could be argued to be a description of a male response to unrequited love in the courtly tradition, has a very strong indication of Amnon's feminization. The lines I have italicized are those that best describe him in female
terms. First, Hands’ narrator describes Amnon as a flower. Then, she states that he droops "when in the stalk some vile/ Opprobrious insect 'bides" (4-5). If one looks at this passage metaphorically, the "insect" is a child and Amnon is a pregnant woman. Hands’ narrator is portraying Amnon as a pregnant woman whose health is failing as a result of the burden she bears in both her breast and her uterus. Hands’ narrator later describes Amnon engaging in behavior usually reserved for female characters:

The love-sick youth
Beneath the thickest solitary shade
Was wand’ring, lost in melancholy mood,
So deep in thought, he ne’er perciev’d th’ approach
Of Jonadab, till startled by his voice;
Then smil’d, as usual, as his friend drew near. (125-30)

The images this scene conjures up are those of a young, innocent maiden walking through her garden. This image can lead to two interpretations. The first is a conventional eighteenth-century construction of a rape threat. The maiden is approached by the rogue who will attempt to take her innocence from her. We have seen this scene many times, whether it be a Henry Fielding novel, an Aphra Behn play, or a Francis Burney novel. The second possibility takes us back to the bible, but this time to the book of Genesis. In the garden of Eden, Eve is tempted by Satan and her innocence is taken from her. In the biblical version, Eve, although tricked, is a willing participant in her downfall. Amnon, too, complies in his downfall by ignoring his conscience. Either interpretation of this scene works. Young, effeminate Amnon is lost in his emotions. He is approached, unawares, by the scoundrel, or the "devil," who will take his innocence and his life away from him.

Even Jonadab feminizes Amnon; while pondering how a prince in line to be
the King could possibly be sad, he compares Amnon to a woman:

Like a maid
He talks of virtue, weeps at others [sic] woes,
Yet talks of greatness too; 'tis in the soul,
He says, all greatness dwells. (101-04)

Jonadab adds insult to injury when he makes a similar comment directly to Amnon:

"While Amnon thus effeminately weeps,/ Like some fair captive maid, snatch’d from
the arms/ Of her fond lover" (203-05). Jonadab’s taunt here is doubly cruel, for he
calls Amnon not only a maid, but a captive one at that, as if Amnon is utterly
incapable of protecting himself.

Amnon is not the only male character to be feminized by the text. Absalom is
also described in very feminine terms. Near the end of this lengthy poem, when the
fateful day has arrived on which Absalom is to take his revenge upon Amnon, he is
depicted in terms female:

Now Absalom with secret pleasure sees
The long wish’d day arrive, and in the morn
Assiduously in comely dress array’d
His lovely person, lovely in extreme:
Not in all Israel’s num’rous tribes was found
His peer in beauty; for from head to foot
No blemish, no deformity was seen,
But well proportion’d limbs, and features fair,
With ev’ry natural, ev’ry borrow’d grace
That gives to beauty power. The conscious Prince
Omitted no external ornament
That might, if possible, such gifts improve. (V 81-92)

Absalom’s preening and concern with his appearance on the day he has determined to
kill his brother is rather ironic because the description of Absalom on this day sounds
like that of a woman on her wedding day. It is ironic because a wedding day is
typically an affirmation of life, whereas Absalom is prepared to take a life. Another aspect of this passage that is ironic is the fact that he is described as perfect and without blemish or deformity. That description may be accurate for his external appearance, but internally, he is blemished and deformed by his need to exact revenge for the wrong done to his sister. Absalom is like Lady Macbeth, in that he does not want to soil his hands with the blood of his kinsman: "But looking at his spotless hands, he said,--/ Must these be dy'd in blood? a brother's blood?/ No, I have servants, they shall give the blow" (V 93-5). With the plot to murder his brother, Absalom becomes as manipulative and conniving as Jonadab.

Jonadab indicates to the reader early in the poem that his only motivation in befriending Amnon is to be closer to the crown. He fears that if he does not approach Amnon and give him advice, that Amnon will find a new friend:

I'm great in his esteem, have free access
To him at all times; but, if now I'm slack,
Perhaps I may be rivall'd in his favour
By some more forward to promote his wish.

And with a gentle flow of soothing words
Insinuate myself into his soul,
Then guide him as I please. (114-17, 123-25)

In the passage above, Jonadab, too, is somewhat feminized. One of women's greatest dilemmas in the eighteenth century is how to indicate to a man that she is interested without appearing too forward. Jonadab wants Amnon to see that he is interested, yet he does not want to be either too forward or not forward enough. Finding a sufficient amount of forwardness is difficult at best, and Jonadab does not want to risk loosing his influence. He must, therefore, gently lull Amnon into a sense of trust so he can
then manipulate him as he pleases. Once he discovers Amnon's affliction, his
deviousness manifests in his relationship with Amnon. Only after Jonadab's urging
does Amnon arrive at the decision to rape Tamar. Jonadab, having even less regard
for Tamar than Amnon, demonstrates that his only wish is to exert more control over
Amnon when he assumes the crown: "In time the kingdom will be his, and I, in fact,
shall reign, though he the title bears" (225-6). The desired result of Jonadab's plan is
much like what happens in Macbeth: he hopes that once Amnon has begun
committing treacherous deeds, each subsequent act will come easier and easier:

When these precise ones once extend beyond
The bounds their narrow minds have circumscrib'd
From step to step insensibly they go,
Till so familiariz'd by custom, they
With calmness will transact the very things,
Which but to mention, ere they launch'd so far,
They'd shudder at. (235-241)

I believe that Hands is deliberately making reference to Shakespeare both here and
much later in canto V when Absalom does not want to soil his own hands. I also
believe that she is using Macbeth because of the hideousness of the female character
in that particular play. If one looks at "The Death of Amnon" with that consideration
in mind, the feminization of Hands' male characters becomes even more interesting.
Lady Macbeth is the instigator of all the evil that takes place in Macbeth, and she is
portrayed as lacking feminine sensibilities. Each major male character in "Death of
Amnon" is feminized and commits some form of evil deed, while the female
character is silenced and acted upon. What is Hands doing? I would argue that
Hands is rebelling against stereotypical female behavior and characterizations. For
modesty's sake, she cannot portray women committing the evil deeds that occur in "Death of Amnon." She can, however, portray feminized men committing these deeds. She then silences her only female character, taking her to the extremes of feminine behavior, and then represents her as having committed against her the most horrible crime a woman can experience. This representation is to be tempered, however, by the character of Lady Macbeth, who takes the female too far to the other extreme.

The entire issue of the proposed rape is lost amidst the rhetoric of the two men discussing a hidden agenda of power. Tamar is no longer a woman but rather an object. Hands could have hidden the rape behind all these male struggles in order to save herself trouble in her society. A woman discussing a subject such as rape would be looked down upon because it was a topic only for men. Rape would offend the female sensibilities so any woman that dared to speak or write of it was jeopardizing her standing as a "female." The narrator does not speak of the impending rape, nor is it mentioned as such after the fact. Amnon and Jonadab cease to speak of Tamar; they simply refer to the intended rape as "it." Amnon makes a conscious decision to ignore the possible consequences for himself and never even considers those for his sister. He is easily swayed by the argument of Jonadab that she "will keep the secret, to preserve her fame" (214).

These actions have occurred before the reader has ever seen Tamar. In contrast to Pope's "Rape of the Lock," the woman is not "made to function as the sign not of
her own subjectivity but of a male desire of which she is the object" of the writer.6

What does happen to Tamar is that she is marginalized and dehumanized by these men who think only of their own physical and emotional needs: one, the need for sexual gratification, and the other, a need for supreme power. Because Tamar becomes the means to grant both of these men their desires--Amnon’s sexual gratification and Jonadab’s need to have absolute power and dominion--she is objectified. But instead of object worship, she meets with object neglect. Even her honor and purity, the female commodity most often valued by a brother, is sacrificed to the all-consuming end of absolute power.

When the reader is finally introduced to Tamar, Hands makes certain that she stresses Tamar’s purity, beauty, modesty, and innocence. The narrator makes no attempt to insinuate that she in any way brings her fate upon herself. When Tamar is sent for by the King’s messengers she rushes to Amnon’s side while the narrator

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6 Pollak, The Poetics of Sexual Myth, p. 77. Pollak continues:

It is this idea, this message that woman ultimately belongs to man and that, as such, she is not just a part but also an expression of him, that Pope’s poem repeatedly reaffirms by persistently collapsing Belinda’s subjectivity into her status as an object, and specifically as an object of male desire and ownership. (p. 79)

Laura Claridge, in "Pope’s Rape of Excess," suggests that:

Pope’s pinning of victim [is] dependent upon a penning that undercuts its own potency, so that, rather than inscribing or circumscribing Belinda, the text instead suggests the inadequacy of Pope’s pen to assume authority over her. (p. 129)

Hands does not do what Pollak indicates Pope does. Tamar is made to be an object, but Hands is attempting to demonstrate how wrong it is for Amnon and Jonadab to do this. Pope, on the other hand, is satirizing a society that continually objectifies women. Pope, however, conforms to what he is satirizing. According to Claridge, though, Pope’s desired reading undercuts his own ability to write. Hands does not do this, and her representation of a victim rings true.
points out to us that she has nothing more than sisterly tenderness on her mind: "But not a thought of vile licentious love/ Profan’d her breast" (II 103-4). Her modesty and virtue create doubt in the mind of Amnon as to what he intends to do, but the returning thought of others’ opinions of him causes him to ignore his conscience:

Oh! how can I despoil this lovely maid,  
This fairest of the fair? I cannot—no—  
I’ll let her go untouch’d. But then must I  
Still pine in languishment, as heretofore;  
And Jonadab will at my weakness laugh. (II 120-4)

He is more concerned about his own standing in the eyes of Jonadab than he is about the welfare of his sister. He would rather continue with a plot that is disastrous to his sister than be perceived as cowardly.

The rape itself is given only a few lines and is described in terms which are so distanced that it is not immediately clear that a rape is taking place. Only in what appears to be an afterthought are we told that Tamar has been raped:

Such aid the most abandoned oft require,  
When unsuspecting innocence at once  
Tempts and forbids, more pow’rfully forbids,  
Than the persuasive eloquence of speech,  
But the defence, which innocence can boast  
With tears and mild intreaties, is but weak,  
When love and wine unite their frantick pow’rs,  
And leaving virtue fainting in the rear,  
Rush on impetuous.—Hapless Tamar thus  
To lawless outrage falls th’ unwilling prey. (II 127-36)

To make matters worse, after the deed is done, not only does Amnon not give the slightest indication that he is concerned for his sister, but he suffers from guilt which arises not from a sense that he has wronged her, but from a sense that he will be affected by his actions: "The hapless Amnon from his couch arose;/ Inflam’d with
hatred more than once with love,/ Frantick with keen remorse and conscious guilt,/...

I'm lost, I'm irrecoverably lost" (III 20-3, 46). At this point, Amnon realizes that Jonadab gave him poor advice and that it would behoove him to abandon Jonadab. Jonadab, then, because of his rejection by Amnon, again seeks to use Tamar as an object, this time to gain the favor of Absalom. Her innocence, as opposed to her virginity, is the commodity this time, one which has been stolen from her, but more importantly, at least in terms of the time period, stolen from her male relatives.

Because Tamar is now a fallen woman, she must be disposed of properly. We get this closure in the scene in which she is comforted by Absalom. Even here, in the privacy of their home, we do not see Amnon’s deed condemned for its viciousness by anyone other than Tamar. Absalom, despite the fact that he intends to avenge her honor by killing Amnon, tells her to "silent bear thy wrongs,/ Nor by immod’rate grief enhance the ill/ Which cannot be redress’d" (III 200-2). Absalom does not seem to feel that it is appropriate for his sister, the victim, to bewail her fate. Only her male relatives should feel the taint of what has occurred. Tamar alone portrays the injustice done to her by her brother:

O deed

More cruel than the murd’rers deadly blow!
He takes our life, ’twas lent but for a time;

But he that robs a woman of her honour,
Rob’s her of more than life;--a brother too
Still aggravates the guilt. (208-214)

Tamar then assumes the proper fate for a woman in her position: social exile. Her intention to leave the court scene and dedicate her life to prayer is
entirely self-imposed, but according to societal rules of the time, she has no other recourse. And so we see no more of Tamar.

Tamar's response to the rape leads to the issue of the rape victim's guilt. Regardless of the circumstances, a rape victim often feels in some way responsible for what has happened to her. This feeling of responsibility, along with many other complex emotions, leads to strong feelings of guilt. Although the phenomenon of the victim's guilt is something that has only recently been studied, the issue has existed as long as men have been raping women. In a study published in the early eighties by Sutherland and Scherl, the typical emotional reactions of rape victims are examined. They describe the initial reactions as "shock, humiliation, fear, sadness and anxiety." They describe the second phase as "typically a self-protective retreat and introversion." What Sutherland and Scherl point out in the behavior of modern-day rape victims is exactly what Tamar does in the eighteenth century:

Farewell, ye courtly scenes;
No more shall Tamar shine in your resorts;
But here recluse and tranquil ever 'bide;
Regaling in that never-cloying feast,
Th' internal calm of an untainted mind.

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7 In order to write this paper, I read many accounts of rape, case studies of rape victims, and theoretical approaches to rape. These were all twentieth century accounts, but I feel they are still applicable to Hands' poem because I discovered that reactions to rape seem to be fairly universal and the reaction of Tamar described by Hands correlates to those I read. The most helpful collection of rape accounts was Diana Russell's The Politics of Rape: The Victim's Perspective.

This exile is one that she feels necessary, but no one in her family attempts to
dissuade her from her resolution. This response increases the victim’s feelings of
guilt. Since we do not see Tamar after this point, we cannot be certain whether she
experiences the third phase of recovery, "marked by depression, renewed reflectiveness
and the surfacing of anger."9

One of the typical reactions of family members to rape, as analyzed by modern
psychologists, is included by Hands in both the reactions of the King and Absalom.

The desire for revenge is common in male relatives of rape victims:

The feelings of men near the victim may certainly include genuine sympathy,
but the very notion of rape constellates many psychological factors: defenses
spring up, incestuous claims are activated, conflicts arise between ego attitudes
and the shadow’s fascination with the crime; there are fantasies of violent
retribution which display the typical proprietary attitude of men toward women
and a sense of rivalry with the assailant.10

Absalom displays this behavior in his two-year plan for killing Amnon and exacting
his revenge. He does not kill Amnon for Tamar’s honor; instead, he kills him for his
own honor. The King, too, demonstrates a lack of concern for Tamar, focusing
instead on his own honor:

Thou bitter herb,—thou blemish of my honour;
How can I brook this foul disgrace? Must I
For ever bear confusion in my face,
And blush for thee, thou worse than enemy? (IV 52-55)

Only after he is no longer in the presence of Amnon does he give any consideration to

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9 Ibid

10 Te Paske, p. 24.
Tamar:

The King
Return'd with anger burning in his breast,
Mingled with sorrow for his daughter's wrongs;
My daughter! Oh! my daughter! he exclaim'd,
I would avenge they wrongs; but oh! if I
Avenge my daughter, I destroy my son. (IV 58-63)

His concern for his daughter comes too late. If this man is capable of any sympathy for his daughter and her situation, it becomes lost in his disappointment in his son.

Tamar states that the guilt she feels for the rape is made worse by the fact that it was her brother who raped her. Hands' inclusion of this insight corresponds perfectly with current research on rape. Those women who are victimized by people close to them often have great feelings of guilt. They feel that they are either responsible in some way, as if they had led their attackers on, or they feel they should have been able to prevent the rape from occurring. Whether the rapist be a father, a brother, a husband, a lover, or a friend, the close relationship the victim has with her attacker is certain to weigh on her mind and affect how she feels about her ability to judge other people. These women often feel worthless and establish a pattern for themselves in which they become perpetual victims. Tamar allows herself to be further victimized by giving in to societal and familial pressures to cut herself off from society.

The fate of Tamar becomes lost in all the power struggles and social climbing performed by the men in her life. She is silenced throughout, but the one time she

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11Russell. The Politics of Rape.
finds her voice she cries out with extreme accuracy what would be considered a true
reaction of a rape victim's guilt. If Hands' intention was to only marginalize Tamar
and portray her in a similar vein to Pope's Belinda, this reaction would be completely
misplaced in her poem. Through her characterizations of feminized males and the
silent Tamar, Hands creates a story that effectively portrays a rape victim for all times.
Tamar's situation is the same whether it be biblical times, the eighteenth century, or
the twentieth century. Hands effectively portrays Tamar as a woman whose life and
honor are not worth much except where they serve a purpose to one of the men in the
poem without making this portrayal appear to be her own personal view. She does
this by representing the world as it is; one that does not accept a woman's
victimization as noteworthy. Even the title of her poem reflects how this lack of
consideration for women is true because she cannot call it "The Rape of Tamar." So
we have "The Death of Amnon," a truly devastating event.
"Spectator in the Balance":
A Classroom Exercise in Ritual and Audience Manipulation

Abstract
In this paper, I examine a classroom exercise conducted in ritual and audience manipulation. I explore the exercise's developmental process, student reactions, theoretical bases, and applications for future classroom activities.
The theatre, when it was still part of religion, was already theatre: it liberated the spiritual energy of the congregation or tribe by incorporating myth and profaning or rather transcending it. The spectator thus had a renewed awareness of his personal truth in the truth of the myth, and through fright and a sense of the sacred he came to catharsis. (Grotowski 22-23)

This quotation from Jerzy Grotowski had special significance in regard to the classroom activity which I and two other students, "C" and "G," devised after a class discussion regarding religion, ritual, and drama. Spawned by a presentation I had given on Antonin Artaud’s Theater of Cruelty, the discussion involved examining drama as religion and vice versa. We discussed the similarities of the two communal activities as well as the necessity for both in the daily lives of most people. We decided to utilize drama in the classroom and discover how our classmates would react to the use of ritual and other forms of drama. What follows is a description of precisely what occurred, practical explanations for some of the choices we made, and the reactions of students. Following this experiential discussion will be a more theoretical analysis of our choices and activities.

**ORIGINS OF THE PROJECT**

The concept that both Artaud and Grotowski espouse is that of breaking down the intangible barriers between the audience and the actors. In order to have data that we could utilize, we devised our own exercise in audience interaction. "G" was
fascinated by the entire issue, and, as he was not certain where he stood, his desire was to discover how drama as ritual could actually be applied to our class. "G" approached "C" and they determined to create an exercise in which they would shift from what appeared to be an ordinary class presentation into genuine drama. They approached me with the idea, and my initial role was only to be that of observer. The further we discussed the project, however, the more we felt that our initial idea would not be powerful enough to elicit strong reactions from our fellow students.

**DEVELOPMENT**

The first level in the development of our plan was to impose stage manipulation at a crucial point in "C" and "G"'s performance: emphasizing their actions at that instant by leaving my seat to draw the curtains. We later decided that I would not only manipulate the stage, but I would manipulate the audience as well by invading their sacred space. We arranged that "G" and "C" would exit the room, leaving me in control of the class. At this point I would circle the table and confiscate pens from each student. I was to establish my authority and ascertain that any instructions I gave to them were followed explicitly.

At this stage in the development of our exercise, we believed that our ideas were stable and that we should be capable of eliciting the variety of responses we anticipated, but we still felt that there was some element missing. "G" and "C" had already arrived at the conclusion that they would begin the true acting by moving into a play instead of the original idea of a scripted argument. The notion of bringing existing drama into the exercise developed into the use of one or two different plays.
We decided to use a play by Shakespeare (because we thought it was something
everyone would recognize), and a play from the absurdist tradition. Here again we
opted to revamp my role. Since I was no longer to be purely an observer, we thought
that the barriers opposing my acting were removed. "C" then thought that one of
Yeats's myth plays would be appropriate for the exercise in light of Yeats's use of
ritual. The last step was to locate the plays we chose to use and each of us began to
script our scene.

CARRYING THROUGH

"G" developed what he and "C" were going to do for their presentation. At the
time, our class was discussing Czechoslovakian drama, and they opted to begin with a
contrived presentation on Vaclav Havel's Protestant. In place of the absurdist play, we
realized that anything would be suitable since it would be taken out of context, and we
wanted to maintain an atmosphere of confusion in the classroom for as long as
possible. I selected a homosexual play for "G" and "C." "C" located a Yeats play, At
the Hawk's Well, and then we decided on the banquet scene from Macbeth.

After having briefed our professor on exactly what was to occur and asking that she
be our observer, we were confident the situation was under control. We had props
and costumes hidden both inside and outside the classroom, and we had set the stage
to maximize our ability to break down the barrier between performer and observer in a
variety of ways.

PRODUCTION

"G" and "C" began their presentation as if it was highly researched and would
enlighten the class. They passed out a bibliography of secondary sources, and "C"
went by explaining what they were about to discuss. "C" said that he would begin
by citing one critic's views and then "G" would take over and discuss another's. "G"
started shuffling through papers and searching through his bag for his part of the
presentation. Meanwhile, "C" addressed the class. The entire class was able to see
"G," though, and when "C" finished and turned to "G," he was still searching. "G"
then stopped looking and sat quietly; the classroom was completely silent for
approximately ten excruciating seconds. The discomfort of the other students could be
felt. "C" suggested that they move on to the scene they had selected to read from
Protest. They began to read, but almost immediately began changing the script: first,
switching word order; second, substituting antonyms for some words in order to
seriously distort the meaning of the sentence; finally, colloquializing complete
sentences into American slang. Following this retextualization, "G" and "C" shifted
into the homosexual play that they had taped into their Czech books.

The class had already been subjected to a number of changes. The discomfort
they felt when "G" was unable to locate his notes had intensified when "G" started
distorting the text. After "G" and "C" had progressed into the colloquialisms, many of
the students in the class realized they were witnessing an intentional performance.
Even these students were not prepared for the conversion into drama. While they
initially understood that "G" and "C" must have been reading an entirely different
play, once the class discovered that the characters "G" and "C" were portraying were
gay, there was nervous laughter throughout the room.
After they progressed almost to the end of this scene, I entered the dialogue as a female character in the play. No one in the class was previously aware that I would be involved in this project, so a number of the other students were startled when I began reading. After my last line, all three of us slammed down our books, and while "C" and "G" exited to don their masks for the next scene, I started a tape player that we had hidden behind the curtains. We were playing new age music to sustain the mood and as an indication to the audience that the action was not completed. I then circled the room confiscating pens from various students. The first two students did not realize what was happening until I had already walked past them, told them their pens were unnecessary, and taken them. The next two students had seen what I was doing and simply handed their pens to me as I walked by, requiring no effort on my part to exert authority. The real challenge came on the other side of the room from student "J." Apparently, "J" was angry about the situation, and he fought with me for mastery over his pen. He told me that he would not allow me to take it and held tight to it. I had to almost wrestle with him and reprimand him in order to make him relinquish the pen, which he finally did. Then I turned off the music and resumed my seat, waiting for "G" and "C" to enter. In the interim, all of the students were looking to me for clarification and reassurance.

After a moment, "G" and "C" entered in masks. They immediately commenced a scene from *At the Hawk's Well*. By this time, most of the students had settled back and were engaged in the spectacle. No one in the class was familiar with the scene we chose, so most of the students seemed perplexed. After the scene was over, "G"
and "C" exited, and I resumed my role as stage manipulator while attempting to prepare the set for Macbeth. Once again I turned on the music and then donned a robe I had hidden behind the curtains. As I crossed the room to where we had secreted a platter of fruit, I welcomed the class to our feast. When I placed the fruit on the table and instructed them that they could only partake after the Lord ("C") had entered, the students started to enjoy the fact that they were being addressed directly and that they would be more involved in this scene. Then, I walked over to the white board in the room where I had written the audience response for the scene. We had arrived at the conclusion that we were going to completely cross the line between spectator and participant; not only were we going to speak directly to the audience, but the audience was also going to speak to us, as a character in the scene. I opened the board while directing them to interject their line at the appropriate time. Then I returned to my chair, switched off the music, and instructed the audience to rise. They were now part of the drama. They rose on command, and we all awaited "C"'s entrance. While I had been preparing the audience, "G" and "C" were removing their masks and donning robes for this next scene. When "C" gave his line, the students all responded with their line and then sat as I motioned them to do so. As this is the scene in which Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost at a banquet shortly after having him killed, there was an abundance of movement and shouting for the three of us in the scene. "G" played a dual role: first he came in as the murderer, reporting that Banquo had been killed but that Fleance had escaped. He exited and reentered as a lord reading the roles of both Ross and Lennox and sat in the chair adjacent to the one that
"C," as Macbeth, should occupy. When we arrived at the moment when "G" tells "C" to take his seat, "C" launched into a strong performance as a rather mad Macbeth who sees the ghost. "G"’s character, Lennox, tells them to rise, giving the signal to depart. When "G" delivered this line, he stood. As he did so, a number of the students also rose. We had anticipated that this action might occur, so I, as Lady Macbeth, delivered my next line: "Sit, worthy friends," with a strong emphasis on "Sit." All the students obeyed and resumed their seats. I crossed the room to "C," while soothing the audience. After I reached him, and he and I were engaged in conversation, "G" took a piece of fruit, began eating it, and indicated to the other people that they, too, should eat. Each member of the audience seized a piece of fruit and began eating. The scene progressed without mishap until the point when I directed the lords to leave. I addressed the entire audience, asking them to leave, but "G” was the only one we actually wanted to exit. As "G" stood to leave, one of the other students also rose. As I could not step out of character to indicate that he was to remain, all I could do was glare at him intensely. The gaze was sufficient. "C" and I finished the scene and exited. The three of us returned, took our bows, and directed the students to write down their responses to the performance. We asked them how they felt about being manipulated, when they realized it was a performance, and any other feelings or responses they might have in regard to the scenes. We indicated to them we would discuss what had occurred after they had written their immediate reactions.

REASONS FOR CHOICES
Before I discuss the students' reactions, I would like to explain the rationale for some of the choices we made in our performance. The first choice we made was in text. We chose the homosexual play, *A Tower Near Paris* because it was similar in pace to *Protest*. Unless students had their books open and were following along, they did not immediately recognize that "G" and "C" had switched plays. Both scenes involved two male characters carrying on a normal conversation. A few of the students remarked that they did not have their books open and that they were momentarily confused because they did not recollect having read that part of the play. Further into the scene, though, the entire class was aware that what "C" and "G" were reading was entirely different. Another choice we made in this scene was to extend the portion of the scene we had originally selected so there would be a female voice entering the scene. We hoped that this would have two effects: first, that it would establish my authority before I attempted to exert it by manipulating the stage, and second, that it would completely surprise our audience so they could no longer be certain of who was part of the performance and who was not.

We chose our second text because of the ritual involved in the play. Yeats incorporates Irish mythology into his plays, and with the use of the masks, we entered into archetypal mythologies. Even though our audience would not recognize the myth in our scene, we knew the use of masks would indicate to the students that the play actually functioned at a higher level than we could immediately recognize. We also perceived that our third scene would accelerate the use of ritual established in this scene.
We selected the banquet scene from Macbeth for numerous reasons. The most obvious reason for choosing Macbeth was that it was a play about power. As our exercise was one based on power and manipulation, it was appropriate that we choose it for our finale. We felt that the idea of ritual, which most interested us, could be more fully explored in the banquet scene than in many other possible scenes. In the initial class discussion that had precipitated this entire endeavor, we had addressed ritual as it applied to both drama and religion, and how religion often was drama, and even how drama was religion. These were the issues we wanted to explore. The first connection to religion was in making the audience stand and sit upon command. Catholicism engages in this activity most often, but a number of the Protestant denominations and Judaism also do. Additionally, we felt that the audience response was similar to the religious practice in which the priest or minister makes a statement or greeting, and the congregation has a scripted response. The third ritual, that of eating, was the one that we were most interested in exploring. This ritual not only has ties to the Judeo-Christian tradition, but it also extends back to pagan celebrations. We were anticipating that if we could get the audience to eat when we invited them, that we would all experience a sensation similar to that of communion. I am not sure that a communion was achieved, but a number of the students did mention the food in their responses.

Another choice we made was the use of music. Our original intention was to use Gregorian chants to further emphasize the religious connection through music. Unfortunately, we were unable to locate any Gregorian chants, so we substituted new
age music. We used a song by Andreas Vollenweider, "Behind the Gardens," because of its resonance and mood. We elected to have music during our scene changes because of the way music sets mood, and also because of the role it plays in religious rituals. Even though the audience was not asked to respond directly to our music, we thought it would still be a useful tool in our presentation.

The final choice I want to mention briefly is that of my role as stage manipulator. The initial idea to have me close the curtains at a point in "G"'s and "C"'s presentation was to serve as a visual exclamation point at a crucial moment. The later decision for me to confiscate pens was one that had two intentions. First, it invaded the students' space and was to make them feel that they had no control. Second, it took away their power of recording, which, in a classroom, is often the strongest power a student has. This decision had a much more powerful effect than we anticipated, because it left our audience with no conception of what my next move might be.

AUDIENCE REACTIONS

I now want to cite some reactions from our audience, both from the personal reactions they wrote down and handed to me, and also from the class discussion that occurred after the exercise was completed. A number of the students mentioned one or more of the following reactions: anger, enjoyment, and guilt. Guilt seemed to be included with either of the other two reactions, but the first two were not really coupled together. Some of the students even questioned their participation in what we did and felt guilty that they had acquiesced in our experience. One student even
wondered how far they would have gone as an audience; what if I had strangled another student? Would the class have seen it as part of the performance, or would they have attempted to stop us? This same student equated the experience to what occurred in Nazi Germany when many people complied with Nazi policy because everyone else was and they did not think they could resist against the pressure.

"J" had one of the best angry responses. He was the same student who wrestled me for his pen and he was angry throughout:

I thought, "oh my God, how do I fit into a class where people do things like this?" I'm confused--maybe amused, but not entertained. I feel negative, manipulated, cheated, victimized. I was pissed. I'm still pissed.

"J" was angry at us, the performers, whereas "T" was angry at the other audience members. In her written response, she claimed that she was uncomfortable with what had taken place, that she felt left out of a joke, and that reality had been distorted. In the class discussion, though, when other students were talking about how quickly they had perceived what we were doing and how thoroughly they enjoyed it, she became angry with the audience, as if they were betraying her as a fellow audience member and telling her that her reaction was wrong. Her feelings intensified as the discussion progressed: "I felt uncomfortable in the aftermath. More so than I did during the experience; out of control." "T" was not the only student to mention feeling out of control. Perhaps the strongest overall reaction was a testimony to feeling out of control. Not surprisingly, this response came from "JG," the same student who in the class discussion questioned how far the class would have participated in the action:

I felt overwhelmed. We all began acting as they wanted us to and watching their actions--all so confused that there was no time to react or rebel. I felt
like a hostage in their fantasy. We were imprisoned in their creation—with no tools and powerless.

"JG" referred to another topic that the entire class seemed to feel: betrayal. Much of the anger that some of the students felt was in being excluded from our side of the performance. They were being manipulated as an audience because they did not know what was truly taking place. When I switched roles and went from being one of them, the unknowing ones, to being one of the performers, one of those "in the know," they felt betrayed. "JG" said, "Finally, when Nicole was revealed as part of the play I felt betrayed—as if she knew what was going on." "L" also expressed a similar sentiment, "I was slightly miffed/confused when Nicole took my pen." She did not single out my entrance into the action as "JG" did, but she was disturbed by my participation and the invasion of her space. "T" also stated a similar viewpoint, "I felt power exerted over me. A secret, a joke of which I knew nothing." Our professor also noted an observation that corresponded to these other thoughts: "If "C," Nicole and "G" are in control then the class is not. We don't like it when someone knows something we don't--feeling it isn't 'real.'" Control was extremely important—our professor also noted that she felt sheepish and the class continually looked to her as if she should have stopped this from occurring. She expressed one other observation related to this issue that I found useful:

I was amazed by how long it took the class to react—and how much they would "take" before they actually saw what was happening. The class situation pushes them into passivity and they don't want to break conformity.

This notion of classroom conformity was one that I was particularly interested in exploring in more depth. The passivity of a classroom is, in my mind, a rather
dangerous occurrence at this advanced stage of education.

Another commonly expressed theme was one of not wanting to be singled out. Some of the students, either in their written responses or in the class discussion, said that they did not mind participating, in fact they actually relished the idea, but they did not want to be asked to do something that did not involve the entire class. In the discussion, "V" said that she really enjoyed participating in the experience and that she was perfectly willing to do whatever we asked of her. Her willingness was demonstrated by her readily handing her pen over to me. She was afraid, however, that at some point we might ask her to engage in behavior that the rest of the class was not asked to do, such as actually joining in our drama as an individual participant. Provided the entire group was involved, she was willing to follow along. "S" and "L" both expressed a willingness to participate, but also seemed to have a fear of being separated from the group. "S" said, "I was willing to participate, not hostile. But I didn't want to be singled out either." "L"'s response was similar, but she did not refer to being singled out: "I was willing to continue watching, even better after you allowed me to participate."

One of the most interesting responses was to the food. A few of the students mentioned the food in their written responses, and it was a major point in the discussion. "T," "L," and "J" were the students who wrote about it. "J": "The apple was ok." "T": "My only consolation an apple." "L": "Y'all made up for it with the apple, which I waited to see if we could eat—would we be allowed to have some?" "L"'s question was echoed throughout the discussion. Even "J," the rebel in our class,
said that he was waiting for us to grant permission to eat. Once they felt that we had indicated it was allowable to eat, they all did so, and with relish. Like "T" said, the food made the experience less unpleasant because eating was a communal activity; and eating is, in many cases, an affirmation that all is well. We had not expected the response to the food to be as strong as it was. In retrospect, though, we were not surprised by this fact—the response was in keeping with what we were attempting to emphasize: the ritual involved with food. Some of the most invaluable information came from the observer, our professor. By tracking the comfort levels of the class, and looking at when they finally settled in to eat, we received some assurance that we were right regarding the food. She noted that for a while no one ate—the level of discomfort was still somewhat high. Then "all were eating—transfixed. Food played a part in relaxation."

Another response that we found helpful, as well as interesting, was that of heightened awareness and reality. Again, a few students noted this in their written responses. "M" described the most emotional reaction of all the students present. Her response was a positive one, but she also made observations that other students had perceived as negative:


"M"’s response was, to me, among the most exciting. Unlike some of the other students, she did not try to analyze our scene choices, how they connected to what we were doing in class, or search for wide themes throughout literature. "M" grounded
her response purely in what had occurred. She looked at herself and how our performance affected her. She was unafraid to let our drama touch her. No other student came as close as "M" to registering an emotional response, but there were some other interesting reactions which included a discussion of reality. "N," who had been an undergraduate psychology major, brought a slightly different perspective to our performance:

I really liked it because I didn’t know what was happening but it wasn’t "not safe." It was a strange situation in an environment that was familiar. . . . it took on a type of reality that you don’t get reading the play or watching it or even being a willing-actor in it. It was being thrown into the scene that made it more of a reality.

"S" also mentioned the difference that actually seeing the plays brought as opposed to reading: "I was struck by the difference of actually hearing the dialogue--with feeling, urgency attached to it instead of it being static, simply on the page."

The final point I want to mention regarding the students’ responses is that of the students who perceived what we were doing, participated eagerly, and enjoyed the entire performance, including their own roles. "K"’s own words best express his reaction:

I very quickly realized what was going on when "C" and "G" began dropping/changing/moving words. It took five words for me to pick up. Once they went into their own text I dropped my own book and enjoyed the performance. I participated because it was the actor in me. It was fun. I felt like I caught on and had fun with it.

Many of them said they enjoyed the performance (once they realized it was a performance) initially, but that the more they considered what we had done to them, the more they felt guilt or resentment. "N" conforms to such a description. She had
written in her response that she enjoyed the performance, but as the discussion progressed and other people described how they had found it upsetting, she began to feel regret following along blindly. Others expressed the same sentiment in the discussion.

THEORETICAL INFLUENCES

Having discussed many of the practical reasons for the choices we made, it now becomes necessary to examine the theoretical basis for those decisions. One of our starting points was an idea expressed by Artaud in The Theater and Cruelty:

It is in order to attack the spectator’s sensibility on all sides that we advocate a revolving spectacle which, instead of making the stage and auditorium two closed worlds, without possible communication, spreads its visual and sonorous outbursts over the entire mass of the spectators.

(Artaud 86)

By forcing the audience to participate in our drama as well as invading their personal space, we were attempting to draw upon Artaud’s theories. As Grotowski points out, using Artaud is no easy task as he left behind absolutely no practical advice: "The paradox of Artaud lies in the fact that it is impossible to carry out his proposals. . . . Artaud left no concrete technique behind him, indicated no method" (Grotowski 118).

We did not attempt to set up an arena in which the audience and the actors would not be separate; rather, we set up our drama so that the audience would not realize in advance that they were to witness a drama. Not only would they have no indication that they were to be drawn into our drama, but they also had no possible form of escape.

What we ultimately had corresponds in two ways to what Arthur Sainer
describes in *The Radical Theatre Notebook*. What he depicts as occurring in the
1960s is what we put into practice in the 1990s:

Everything came into question: the place of the performer in the theatre; the
place of the audience; the function of the playwright and the usefulness of a
written script; the structure of the playhouse, and later, the need for any kind of
playhouse; and finally, the continued existence of theatre as a relevant force in
a changing culture. (Sainer 15)

The areas in which our performance overlaps with his questions are in the notion of
place, of both performer and audience, and in the notion of the playhouse. For our
exercise we had performers and audience members in the same space. There was no
designated "stage" for only the performers. The entire room became the stage and the
audience became performers. This idea about the entire room becoming the stage is
where we concur again with Sainer. Our classroom became the stage. This violation
of the classroom is what allowed our exercise to work so well. Sainer says:

> What are the virtues of the nontheatrical interior? A certain enriching tension
is set up when the space is employed as itself but is simultaneously something
else: the church that isn't transformed into a theatre for a night but in which
theatre nevertheless happens, and the laundromat in which theatre suddenly
erupts both demand that the spectator understand that life is less capable than
usual of protecting him from art, that the demands of the imagination, with its
audacious risks and its disturbing confrontations, have pursued him as it were
into his own home. As the spectator finds that he cannot insulate himself from
these demands, he is forced to consider more seriously than ever an adequate
response to the often unarticulated questions and nonverbal demands made on
him. The life of the play is more than ever backing his own life into a corner,
and he can break free only by shutting himself off or by taking risks--that is by
freeing his imagination, by resorting to courage. (Sainer 59)

What we did was to demonstrate to our fellow classmates that the classroom could not
protect them. By mocking the process of report giving, the typical way in which
students learn from each other, we succeeded in undermining the entire academic
process. Expecting new information on a play, they learned new information about themselves—information they did not necessarily want. They discovered just how conformist they truly were, how gullible, and how they have been "programmed" by academia to accept whatever occurs in a classroom. By taking over control of the classroom, we made them much more uncomfortable than they would have been had we done this exercise anywhere else. Students have come to trust that the world cannot entirely the classroom, that they will not be harmed in that setting. They have settled into a dangerous complacency that we, perhaps, disturbed for a while.

Another aspect of Artaud’s ideas, which he did not necessarily intend for general knowledge, was used in our presentation. In his essays, he discusses the use of improvisation on the stage. Our drama was highly stylized and carefully rehearsed, yet gave the impression of being improvisational. Christopher Innes, in *Holy Theatre: Ritual and the Avant Garde*, describes the reality of Artaud:

His [Artaud’s] essays (and his followers) claim "direct staging" and improvisation as the basis of "true" theatre. In his outlines for productions and his own actual stagings, however, he stressed that a performance should only *seem* to be improvised and merely "give us the impression of not only being unexpected but also unrepeatable"—a normal, indeed conventional standpoint. (Innes 63)

What Artaud did not want people to know was what he in actuality did; what we, too, did. Even though it eventually became obvious to the rest of the class that our presentation was rehearsed, we made a great effort to give the impression that our presentation was improvisational. The students in the class also received a lesson in their own ability to react to what is occurring in the setting around them. For those students who were willing to participate with vigor, they accepted an exercise in
Grotowski is a bit more useful and applicable to this experience than Artaud. He describes various ways to initiate a performer-audience relationship, and we developed our scenario based on his description: "The actors can play among the spectators, directly contacting the audience and giving it a passive role in the drama" (Grotowski 20). Grotowski speaks only of assigning the audience a passive role as opposed to no role. We decided to elevate Grotowski’s theory and not only give them a passive role in some parts of our drama, but to force an active role on them in places. Grotowski always emphasizes this relationship:

The elimination of stage-auditorium dichotomy is not the important thing—that simply creates a bare laboratory situation, an appropriate area for investigation. The essential concern is finding the proper spectator-actor relationship for each type of performance and embodying the decision in physical arrangements. (Grotowski 20)

This concept was especially important to us as we already had eliminated the dichotomy by virtue of the classroom setting. The decision we had to make was how to approach our audience—the choice of directly involving them was simple; what was difficult was deciding how we should involve them.

The answer once again lay in the theory of Grotowski. In his discussion of myth and religion he remarks how our society is less involved with religion and myth and how difficult it is to reach the core of people. He has two answers for what to do with myth:

First, confrontation with myth rather than identification.

If the situation is brutal, if we strip ourselves and touch an extraordinarily intimate layer, exposing it, the life-mask cracks and falls away. (Grotowski
The myth that we forced the class to confront was that of the sanctity of the classroom—the separation of life and drama. By weaving in and out of drama, taking over the classroom, and forcing them to engage in our drama we destroyed—briefly—a trusted belief that the classroom is safe and that the professor can maintain that safety.

Grotowski’s other answer was:

Secondly, even with the loss of a "common sky" of belief and the loss of impregnable boundaries, the perceptivity of the human organism remains. Only myth—incarnate in the fact of the actor, in his living organism—can function as a taboo. The violation of the living organism, the exposure carried to outrageous excess, returns us to a concrete mythical situation, an experience of common human truth. (Grotowski 23)

While we could not actually engage in any violation of the human organism, we chose pieces that spoke of self-mutilation or murder: the first dealt with suicide, the second with piercing one’s foot, and the third with murder. Textual choice was as close as we could come to "cruelty," not quite keeping with either Artaud or Grotowski in their view of texts, but the actual text was much less important than the physical manipulation of the audience.

What did occur was something similar, but at the same time dissimilar, to what Daphna Ben Chaim describes in, Distance in Theatre: The Aesthetics of Audience Response:

Grotowski, like Artaud, is suggesting that the actor affect the spectator directly, touching the inner depths of the viewer’s psyche in order that both the actor and spectator can strip themselves of their defenses, their "everyday mask," to get to the person underneath. And yet, even this attempt at direct confrontation and self-revelation is premised on distance: the spectator is aware, "consciously or unconsciously," that the actor’s performance is separate from him or her, and that it is an "invitation." Implied in the voluntary nature of the event is
that the spectator has the choice to accept the performance and respond to it, or
to reject it and choose not to engage in self-penetration.

(Chaim 45)

An experiential-based examination would show that Chaim is not entirely correct in
his view of theater. The reactions of our fellow classmates demonstrate that
involvement in drama is not voluntary and that self-penetration occurs regardless of
whether audience members want to consciously accept the performance. Theater does
not have to be voluntary any more than the spectator can consciously choose respond
to it. In actuality, audience members, like those in our class, would have a difficult
time shutting themselves off from the performance.

As I stated earlier, the classroom figured heavily in the success of this project.
The classroom also enters in to what we did in other ways. As current and future
teachers, "G," "C," and I find ourselves employing the knowledge we gained in the
classroom. We each keep looser classrooms, engage in impromptu activities, and have
heavy student involvement. For each of us, drama plays a prominent role in the
classroom, even when not covering drama. We work with visualization, student
participation, and a degree of fun in our classrooms. Students respond well when they
are challenged to think, and behave, on their own. They learn not only what they are
covering in class but they gain a great deal of self-awareness as well, and, as teachers,
is it not our duty to promote self-awareness whenever we can?

This classroom experience was perhaps one of the most powerful learning
experiences in which I have ever participated. I do not know for certain how
beneficial the other students in the class found it, but "G," "C," and I are not likely to
forget this endeavor in the near future. What makes this project so profound is the
fact that there seems to be no end to the insights it provides, not only into drama, but
into our lives as well. Artaud may not have left behind any directions for how to
carry out his Theater of Cruelty, but we see toned-down versions of what he describes
all the time. We also seem to have come to a better understanding of how drama
works as a performance instead of as purely textually-based. Even though "C" and I
have done previous acting, this experience was the first time we attempted to put
together into practice. We also have become much more conscious of myth and ritual
in the dramas we read and see. I have gained a new appreciation of religion as a form
of drama and enjoy observing people as they respond to these daily dramas in their
lives. I fear that this paper has just barely scratched the surface of what is possible to
find in what we did. I do feel that this exercise has demonstrated how each one of us
who views drama is indeed a "spectator in the balance."
Works Consulted
The Only Good Wife is a Mad Wife:
Antifeminism in Nu Noch


The Injustice of Rape:
"The Death of Amnon" and the Sequestering of Tamar


The Bible. King James Version. II. Samuel, Chapter 13.


"Spectator in the Balance":
A Classroom Exercise in Ritual and Audience Manipulation


Biography

Nicole Matson was born in Lansdale, PA on February 18, 1970. She spent the first seven years of her life in three different states: Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Indiana. She attended Lehigh University and earned a B.A. degree in English. She presented her paper, "The Only Good Wife is a Mad Wife: Antifeminism in Nu Noch" at the Plymouth State College Fifteenth Annual Medieval Forum. Nicole served as an Assistant Book Review Editor of *Eighteenth-Century Studies* for one year while working on her Master's degree. Ms. Matson will receive her Master of Arts in English in May 1994 and plans to enroll in a Ph. D. program elsewhere.
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