

Too much plight, but you won't mind

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Voices Contributor

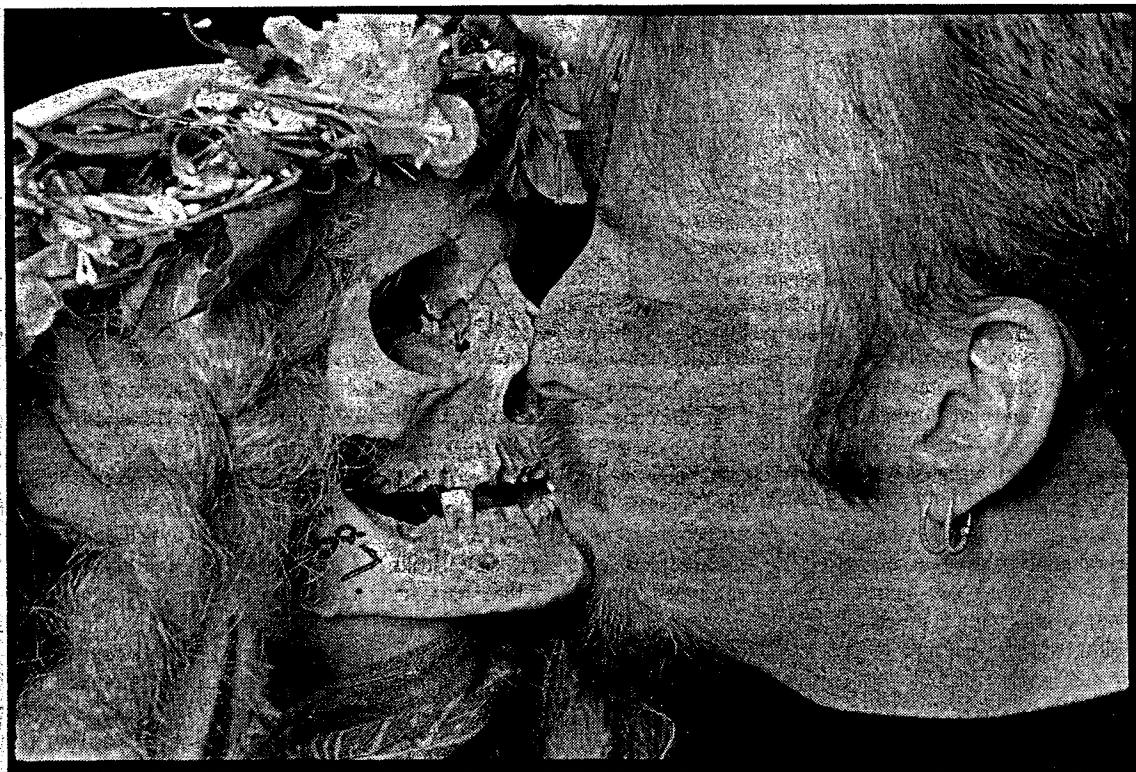
The *Neo-Futurist Revenger's Tragedy* dispenses with expensive set pieces and costumes in favor of virtuoso acting, which seeks not only to explore the relationships between the characters, but between the actors and the text, the audience and the text, and even the actors and the text.

As I arrived at the Neo-Futurarium, I was shown into a waiting room with an exhibit called "The Hall of Presidents," a collection of presidential portraits ranging from cubist to representationalist styles. Members of the cast circulated around conversing with members of the audience until the house was open for seating. At first, the interaction between the cast members and the audience struck me as in opposition to the convention of actors remaining backstage until the show begins, and I began to fear that I had actually gone to "Tony and Tina's Wedding" by accident.

As the evening progressed, however, I realized that the cast's ability to mingle, converse, and be generally available to the audience had the rather pleasant effect of personalizing the action of the play. Furthermore, Mr. Interlocutor (Heather Jordan) announced that the audience was free to stop the action of the play at any time to ask what a word meant, how the characters related to one another, or even "What the hell is going on?"

Essentially, *The Neo-Futurist Revenger's Tragedy* is a hands-on theatrical experience which could be likened to Hyper-Text in its ability to thoroughly explain any part of itself in potentially infinite detail. This potential for cast/audience/text interplay, though under-exploited by the audience members the night that I attended the show, presents the rather appealing possibility of making Cyril Tourneur's 17th century tragedy not only comprehensible but fun for those unaccustomed to rhymed iambic pentameter.

The cast's innate ability to stop and start action to accommodate interruption was tested a few times by the audience's questions, and humorously by Mr. Interlocutor, who at one point during some invective speech towards the Dutch by



JIM ALEXANDER NEWBERRY

The Neo-Futurist's Revenger's Tragedy: "Alas, poor Yorick, I knew him in the biblical sense."

Vindice (Scott Hermes), Mr. Interlocutor interrupted Hermes to ask him if he had ever been to Holland. Hermes replied that he indeed had, and that he bore no ill will towards the people of Holland, and then resumed the scene as if nothing had happened.

The *Neo-Futurist Revenger's Tragedy* is a simultaneously self-conscious and unself-conscious experience for the actors.

The actors appear to have reached a certain point in their evolution as performers where the intimacy of performing for people with whom they had conversed has no inhibiting effect. Yet on the other hand, the actors are self-conscious enough to revel in the exposition of the unintentional humorlessness of the text on which the play is based. The result is similar to Bertolt Brecht's theories of alienation in theater, wherein the machin-

ery of the play is exposed, in order that the audience may distance itself from the actors, (figuratively) smoke a cigarette, and take in the message of the play. However, the Neo-Futurists not only invite your input and presence, but are figuratively sharing your cigarettes and commenting on how silly the conventions of Jacobean drama are, anyway.

Though the humor is broad and sometimes downright crude, such as the onstage depiction of the Duke (Greg Kotis) turning his back from the audience to put on a condom and giving the wrapper to an audience member (me), the majority of the jokes were meta-textual commentary. In another one of her many humorous narrations and interruptions, Mr. Interlocutor announces, "In deference to contemporary taste, we will depict all violence onstage." The violence

depicted onstage is humorously choreographed with all the glee of a mock-fight scene among fifth-graders, with each slain character falling into the chalk outline prepared for their corpse.

Gags such as the gender-crossing casting Lusia Strus as the bastard, or "false son" of the Duke never failed to draw a laugh. The affected falsetto and drag outfit worn by Dave Awi as Gratiana not nearly as humorous in itself as his interaction in the role with the virgin Castiza (Ayun Halliday). My favorite running gag was the gargantuan steps away from the action that each character would take to deliver the countless asides to the audience before returning to the momentarily frozen scene. Overall, *The Neo-Futurist Revenger's Tragedy* is another witty and warm production from director and Neo-Futurist founder Greg Allen, whose *Too Much Light Makes The Baby Go Blind* has run every week since December 2, 1988. The only drawback about this play is its two and a half plus hour running time; it's a little too much of a good thing. As they say in the theater, always leave 'em wanting more.

The Neo-Futurist Revenger's Tragedy

Performances at The Neo-Futurarium, 5153 N. Ashland, Fridays and Saturdays through December 3. Tickets \$8.

For reservations and more information call (942) 475-1111.