

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT, FU JEN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

GRADUATION PROJECT 2016

Reflection on The Heiress

2015 Annual Play

真善美聖

Wilson Lin



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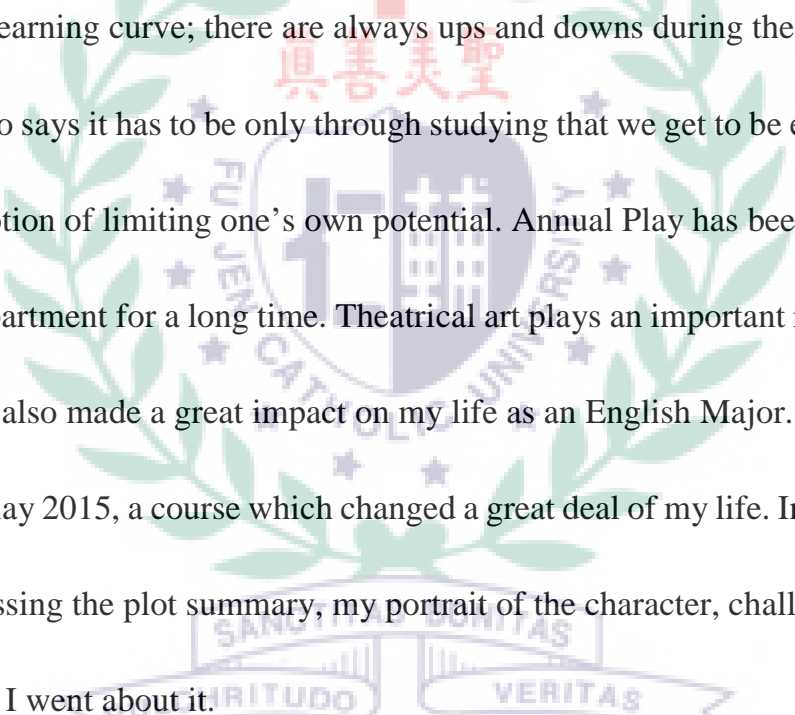
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Dr. John Basourakos

Graduation Benchmark- Annual Play

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Reflection on *The Heiress*

The background of the page features a large, faint watermark of the Fudan University logo. The logo is circular, with a green laurel wreath border. Inside the wreath is a shield with a red cross at the top and the Chinese characters '復旦大學' (Fudan University) in the center. Below the shield is a banner with the Latin motto 'SANCTA VERITAS'. The text 'FUJEN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY' is also visible around the inner edge of the wreath.

Life is a learning curve; there are always ups and downs during the course of education. Who says it has to be only through studying that we get to be educated. I beg to differ the notion of limiting one's own potential. Annual Play has been the tradition in English Department for a long time. Theatrical art plays an important role in western culture, which also made a great impact on my life as an English Major. Last year, I took Annual Play 2015, a course which changed a great deal of my life. In my reflection, I will be discussing the plot summary, my portrait of the character, challenges I have faced and how I went about it.

The story of *The Heiress* starts around 1850s, post- Victorian age, where Doctor Austin Sloper, a mid-aged widower, lives with his daughter Catherine, whom he hates because his wife died while giving birth to her. The plot basically illustrates how a shy, timid young lady who dreads her father, transforms into a mature, relentless woman of her own opinion. It is hard for her father, Doctor Austin Sloper, to recognize her as his

own blood. Their interaction with each other often delivers a sense of awkwardness. The daughter tries her utmost to impress the father but fails continuously as she is never the elegant lady her mother was. Morris, a charming young man who knows a way or two to entertain women, fixes his eyes on Catherine for the expectable fortune she is going to inherit. Observant as Doctor Sloper is, he understands well what Morris is up to, and feels strongly against Catherine's attachment to that young idler. The two eventually didn't end well, which leads to Catherine's cruel attitude on Doctor Sloper. In the end, as Doctor Sloper died of illness, Catherine inherits the house and becomes the heiress.

Although the story centers on the daughter's transformation, Austin Sloper demonstrates every bit of what a real father figure should be like. He blames the death of his wife on Catherine, and transfers his grief to his daughter. At the same time, he has to maintain subtle and gentle while secretly disliking his daughter. The change of his mental state of mind enables the audience to identify with the loss of his beloved wife. Whereas he is not a fan of his daughter, he does show concerns when Morris is about to deceive her. The matchup between Doctor Sloper and Morris displays the doctor's code to live by— one's rather valued by his/her status and attitude than charming personalities.

Never have I thought that one day I would stand on that stage. Ever since I first saw the senior play *Top Girls* three years ago, I have this wild imagination of me as an actor performing onstage. That imagination came into reality last June, when a group of inexperienced students worked their hearts off to strive for the best from their Annual Play *The Heiress*. I had little confidence in auditioning for the part at first. Stage fright had been deeply implanted in my heart for a long time. I took part in the speech contest in SF theater two years ago. I stuttered, flustered and couldn't feel my toes when I was on stage. At that moment, I confirmed the existence of my stage fright. But there I was, trying to get the part of the play. I was undoubtedly thrilled when heard that I would be the male lead of the play. But after two classes of Annual Play, I realized how much I underestimated the production of a good play, and how unqualified I was as an actor.

The first challenge I encountered was pronunciation. I have had difficulty pronouncing and enunciating words correctly. Thanks to Professor John Basourakos, I knew I was not pronouncing the lines in the proper way. By examining actors on stage, the professor would be able to know which part of the acting needed improvement. I was really grateful for professor John's advice and instructions, through which I have learned how to think and register myself as the character. I remember specifically what Professor John said during his directing: "Voice is the most powerful weapon an actor has." Through our voices, the characters we interpret are brought to life and the

audience will get a glimpse of how different characters interact with one another. Therefore, I have put a lot of work into practicing my pronunciation. During the preparation of the production, every day when I got home, I would look at the big mirror in the dining room, and see how my mouth and tongue move as I said the lines from the play. I would circle the room and deliver the lines as loud and clear as possible, which did help me spread my voice at the theater.

The second challenge I have encountered is how to portray someone from the past, especially when he is considered very elegant, decent and subtle on the inside. To reach such sophistication, great preparation and study were required. I have gathered from the Internet and documents about how people would walk, talk and react in around 1850s. What was more, I took two examples from great movie actors, examined and tried to imitate their gesture and walking style, their expressions when they get angry or emotional. The first example was Marlon Brando from God father, who dominates the room every time he shows up. He is able to make everyone in the room believe what he says and act accordingly. He waves his hand like a gorilla, which creates an illusion that he is huge. I have learned a lot from how he operated and performed in those films. The second actor was Leonardo DeCaprio, who just finally won himself an Oscar goldman. I studied his behavior and posture for his role in the movie Django Unchained. He portrayed a southern landlord who owns and traded slaves. He is ferocious, relentless

and will do whatever it takes to get what he wants. I've figured that Doctor Sloper and DeCaprio in Django Unchained are to some extent quite similar, and I've learned his way of talking and how he would rub his fingers when he is pondering over things, which gives him time to brew and chew out the next line.

Taking part in Annual Play was like dream-come-true to me. I have grown to a thoughtful man as the character proceeds in the play. The entire production team made a great impact as well. Without them, the play wouldn't have been perfect; without teamwork and dedication of a group of hardworking students and professors, the play wouldn't have won a round applause after the curtain call. It has been a wonderful and unforgettable experience, and the one I will carry on as life goes on.

