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指導教授：包磊思老師

Dr. John Basourakos

真善美聖

**Reflection on Participating in the 2019 Annual Play –  
*Vinegar Tom***

SANCTITAS BONITAS

PULCHRITUDO

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學生：林嘉朗 撰

Richard Ka Long Lam

404110081

Richard Lam

LOD 2019 Annual Play Reflection

Dr. John Basourakos

### Reflection on 2019 Annual Play — Vinegar Tom

Joining the annual play for three years is one of the best choices I have ever made in my university life. Back in my freshman year, the drama is not something that I would want to participate. Although I watched both the senior play and the annual play, I did not feel like I want to become an actor or a member of the crew. After my second drama watching experience with the senior play — *The secret in the wings*, the urge to become an actor comes out from nowhere. In my imagination, an actor is always working alone. He has to think about how to act and recite lines. But the annual play had altered my idea about the role of an actor. In the production, the director and the assistant director worked closely with the actor to come up with one unique performance. Each of the units paid a tremendous effort to the production. I have overcome some obstacles during three years participation of the play. Also, I have learned while I am working a group of awesome colleagues.

I first joined the annual play in the year 2017. The title of the play is *Machinal*. It was a play by American playwright Sophie Treadwell. The storyline is a woman being accused of murdering her husband. The first case of a woman in the New York City to die in the electric chair. I am lucky to play the role of the husband in my first annual play. It was a huge challenge for me because I never have acting experience. Acting becomes a mysterious yet fascinating task for me. The first challenge I faced is pronunciation. An actor needs a whole new way to pronounce every single word because the pronunciation can reflect an actor's state of mind. When I am reciting a long dialogue with emotion, the chance of mispronouncing will increase. When the dialogue is well expressed, the audience and the actor himself can feel the tension of the play. The audience will

somehow feel the joyfulness, sadness, anxiety etc... All these complex emotions are hard to express. Therefore, an actor will need to pay extra attention to the emotion and the pronunciation.

The second challenge I faced is the acting part. In some scenes, I have to express the sexual feeling. My character is a rich boss. One day, he fell in love with one of her employee named Helen. They later get marry and go on honeymoon. When they arrived at the hotel, the boss Jones is trying to have sex with the protagonist. Even when Helen is terrified, the boss enjoyed the process. For me, it was hard to feel connected with the character. I have never experienced something like this before. To understand how to perform, I have discussed my role with the Director and the assistant director. They both offered me a lot of help. We will sit for a while to share experience or things we saw on the internet, thus we have a specific image of the boss. Gradually, I can think like George Jones. Then, I spent a lot of time with Jason to work on my gesture and blocking. We start from how does a boss walk to how does the boss react to other characters. In the end, I am content with my character development.

Back to the play *Vinegar Tom* this year, I have fewer scenes than before. Although I have fewer lines, it does not mean that it is easier for me to act. This play takes place in the seventeenth-century. The play examines the oppression of women in the past and the present. The coolest thing about this play is that there are a lot of songs between scenes. It can serve as a transition or a reflection of the present condition of women. I liked how the director designed the scene. Daniel applies a lot of modern features and metaphors to symbolise the problem we are facing. For instance, in the song "Something to Burn", it covers issues like jews, women and blacks. In my opinion, Churchill is trying to convey the feeling of struggle. Although some of us cannot stand on women's side to think, we can related to similar issues like racial issues. When people are facing struggles, they would tend to find someone to blame. The scapegoat can be anyone. Therefore, it can be African American, Jewish and even women.

For my scene, it can be interrupted as a symbol of modern society. At first, we simply think that this scene was nothing but a comedy show in a music hall. We did not think too much about the

metaphor and symbol behind the lines. In the production note, this scene was played by two women. It has a doubling significance on the play when women can also become oppressors. But in our play, Rex and I are Kramer and Sprenger. It reversed the meaning of women's role in the final scene. Therefore, we have to rethink the meaning of two male characters. At first, we think that these two characters are presenting the origin of the story. Kramer and Sprenger are the writers of the famous witch-hunting book — *Malleus Maleficarum*. They are promoting their book in public. Therefore, they will be dressed professionally. They should look like two professional salesmen. The other thought we had is to play this scene exaggeratedly. We planned to act with maximum body movement and voice projection. In order to produce the physical comedy, I watched some physical youtube videos for three hours. I try to mimic while watching the video. It is a hard but fun process. For instance, I have learned how to walk like a comedian. They usually walked in their unique pace. After several practise, we realised that pure physical comedy is a little bit over-acted and unnecessary. Most of the physical comedy was played without voices and lines. In other words, physical comedy should be played silently so that the audience can focus on body movement. In our scene, it is difficult to fuse total physical comedy and lines reciting together. This is the first time we encountered an obstacle in the play. Then, we have countless discussions about how to present this scene. Finally, we decided to include a modern element in this scene. We got the idea from the tv shopping channel. On the local tv shopping channel, they usually invited some professionals to promote a product. In this case, it can be two theology professors and authors. Kramer and Sprenger are invited to the tv show to give a lesson to the general public about how to distinguish a witch. They claimed that women are the source of evil. We want to create the need that buying this book is the only solution to protect oneself from those witches. Thanks to the stage props team, we can recreate a live tv shopping show and bring the scene to our audience.

One of the most interesting things in the theatre, it's the warm-up exercise before the rehearsal. In the first class of the annual play, Dr John gave us a note of instruction. There are different tasks for us to practise our verbal expression. After that, Dr John will teach us how to

express feelings with words. Day by day, I have learned how to project my voice and use my body effectively. Thanks to our director Daniel, I have learned how to generate idea continually. In my opinion, theatre is all about creativity and try. If we do not use our imagination and creativity, every play would look like the same play before. Therefore, we always try new things when we are rehearsing our scene. Before the rehearsal, we have tried various activities to enhance the quality of our performance. When we first decided to add physical comedy into our scene, we tried different freestyle physical comedy to explore the magic of physical comedy. I love the element of hide and seek in the physical comedy. During those performances, two or more performers will pretend they are playing hide and seek. The one who is seeking is always the dumb one in the two of them. At the beginning of our scene, we are applied that in the last version. It fits perfectly to create the opening for a comedian show in a music hall. Unfortunately, this part was removed after we switch the scenario to a tv show. During the days of rehearsal, I have also learned how to calm myself down. There is a warm-up exercise named Jellyfish. The purpose of this exercise is to stretch and relax your limbs. At first, you need to lie on the ground and pretend that you cannot move. You have to imagine you are a jellyfish. The scenario is that this jellyfish is gradually falling into the sand. When you arrived at the bottom of the ocean, you are asleep. After a minute of silence, the director will ask you to move your toes. During the process, our eyes keep closing. From toes to foot, and lower leg. Slowly, you will have to move your whole leg. By waving and moving your leg, we get to stretch and utilise every muscle on our leg. Then, we do the same thing to our arms. After the awakening of the arms, we will add all the limbs to explore the space. You can do whatever you want with your limbs. This exercise allows the director to observe which actor is not concentrating enough or relax enough. Once the actor is fully focused on the task, he will become more sensitive to the surroundings and his body. If we are doing the jellyfish exercise, then we must be doing the other exercise called “Mirror”. This is a very challenging exercise because it requires extra focus on your partner. This exercise requires two people in a pair. The goal of this exercise is to imitate your partner. People will take turns to become imitator. All the actions in the exercise

should be extremely slow. With the lowest speed, we can observe each other's emotion, gesture and motion. At first, I felt a bit awkward about being imitated. When you are slowly doing some gestures, it is weird to watch someone doing the same gestures. It takes some time to get used to it. By repeating the process, Rex and I can move at the same pace.

To conclude, the annual play and Dr John had gave me an unforgettable three years life-changing experience.

