

Thread of Truth

UT's Second Season opens with retold myth.

University Theatre opened its second season with a delightfully staged *A Thread In the Dark*, Dutch Playwright Hella Haasse's 1962 play that reworks the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur to examine the "truth is the first casualty of war" motif.

Ph.D. student Elizabeth Helman directs the student cast, which includes one graduate student, Connie Hymer as Nurse, and the rest undergraduates in this exploration of love, loyalty and lying.

Helman's production uses classical style. The costumes and lighting are pastel-hued, props minimalized, the staging simple and direct, a wise choice in the small Arena Stage playing area. Thus, the story becomes the soul focus, its themes disturbingly relevant to now.

Ariadne (Erica Smith) is a peace-loving seeker of truth, also a bit headstrong and proud, who begs her father, King Minos (Jon Sharpy) to quit offering human sacrifices to the Minotaur god who resides deep inside a labyrinth-entered dungeon.

The people live in fear of who will be chosen to feed the god. But Minos refuses, saying keeping the Minotaur appeased is crucial to the success of the kingdom. Minos has a big lie, a super secret he's keeping, and tells Ariadne he must hold onto it for the sake of his kingdom's happiness and safety, despite the fact his subjects remain in fear. Meanwhile, Ariadne's nurse (Connie Hymer) tells her to keep quiet to keep the peace.

When Theseus (Eli Levine), a Cretian prince, disembarks from his ship only to be chosen as a sacrifice, Ariadne freaks. Theseus has captured her attention: He's noble, smart and brave — and looks hot in his little leather tunic. She devises a scheme to help lead him out of the labyrinth, from where no one has ever escaped.

Yet when Theseus escapes, he fails Ariadne. He tells a lie to attest to his bravery, and he's convinced, like Minos, he must keep his secret for the good of his own kingdom.

Justice-loving Ariadne begs and pleads with him to tell the truth, yet he holds on as their arguments grow and they alienate each other. Meanwhile, younger, opportunistic sister Phaedra (Margie Kment) sucks up to Theseus as they make their way back to Crete. In the end, Ariadne is tempted by Dionysos (also played by Jon Sharpy) and given the chance to replay her role and

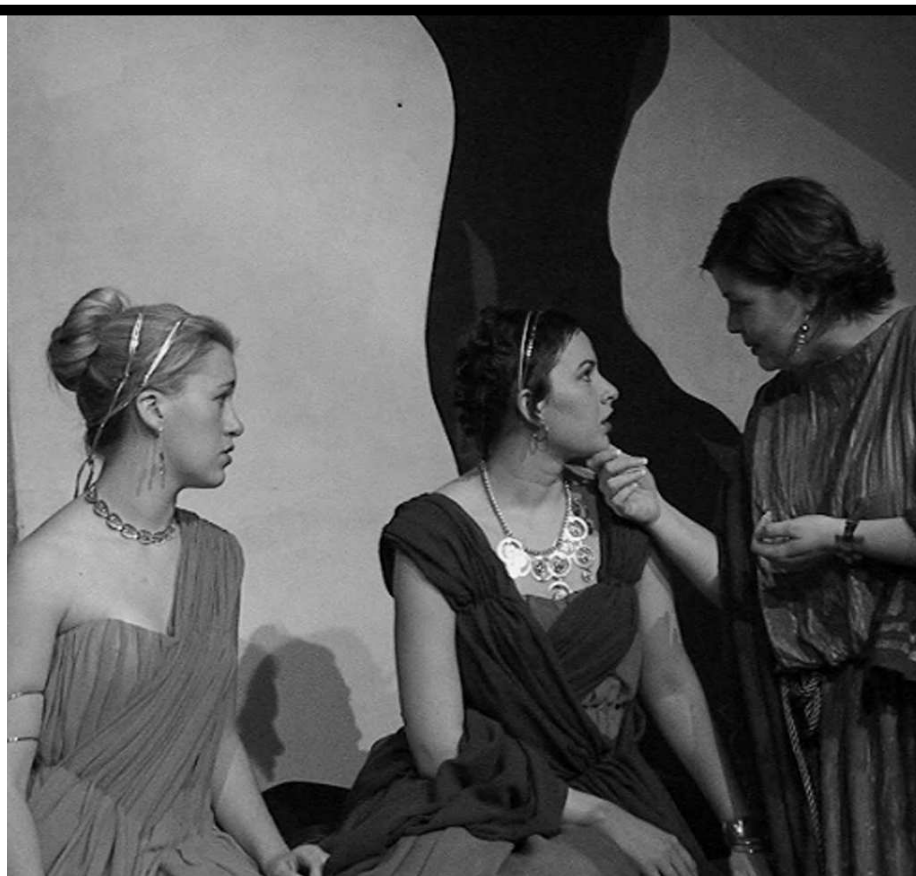
choose a different path — if she so chooses.

Helman had each cast member do some political research for their roles, and each chose a quotation they found in their reading that fit each character. Some comment on the defense budget, some on fear, control and history. During a talkback after the Friday night production, the students said working on the show opened their eyes to the current political situation in our own country, and how they believe they've been lied to.

I wonder if they knew it was Peg Morton, who will serve three months in prison this spring as a prisoner of conscience for crossing the line at Fort Benning Army Base, who asked them to clarify the quotation about freedom and its yoke.

Meanwhile, the students and director ought to be commended for offering a fine example of political theater and what it's meant to do: raise questions and provoke thoughtful discourse.

A Thread in the Dark runs through Feb. 14 in Arena Theatre, UO. **EW**



Phaedra (Margie Kment), Ariadne (Erica Smith) and Nurse (Connie Hymer).

Of Sinners and Saints

Rollicking *Sordid Lives* explores gender.

Review

BY KAUKAB JHUMRA SMITH

The feisty characters in the over-the-top comedy *Sordid Lives* live in gossipy Winters, Texas. They're brought together by a funeral amidst the most embarrassing of circumstances: an elderly mother has tripped over her lover G.W.'s wooden legs in a seedy motel room, hit her head and died. The situation begs for lame jokes, but instead, this play is surprisingly vulnerable and side-splittingly funny.

"God, even white trash feels sorry for me," moans Noleta, G.W.'s betrayed wife, as news of her husband's unfortunate rendezvous sweeps the town. To make matters worse, the "tramp" whom G.W. (pronounced gee dubya) was carrying on with is the mother of Noleta's best friend LaVonda (Marla Norton).

Director Michael Watkins pairs an intrepid, experienced cast with pitch-perfect comic timing. In one of the play's funniest scenes, Noleta (Emily Gilbert) and LaVonda barge into a bar like Thelma and Louise, vowing to take revenge on G.W. (Chris Pinto) and his friends. They round them up and emasculate them with great glee, smearing them with lipstick, strapping one in a bra, and pinning bows in their hair. Each man's transformation is documented with a Polaroid snap. The whole episode is so therapeutic, "I feel like I just been to church!" exclaims LaVonda with great satisfaction.

For all its humor, *Sordid Lives* explores gender identity with

immense sympathy. Each scene opens briefly with Ty (Benjamin Newman), a young gay actor in session with his 27th therapist in three years. Newman plays Ty with impish charm, flicking his wrists, passing naughty asides, and sitting with his knees pressed together like a stereotypical urban gay man. The son of the uptight Latrelle (Sharon Sless), LaVonda's older sister,

Ty has not yet come out to his family. In self-exile in New York, he doesn't think he can go back to Texas for his grandmother's funeral. After all, his family has left his cross-dressing uncle Brother Boy (Gerald Walters) to be "dehomosexualized" in a mental asylum for the last 23 years.

As the funeral approaches and action churns, *Sordid Lives* zips through several scene changes with deliberately restrained sets. A quick furniture move here or there and the stage transforms from a rather shabby living room to a stately but spare funeral home. A sassy country singer (Carol Horne) strings scenes together with her passionate lyrics. "Who's to say who's the sinner and who's the saint?" she croons at play's beginning. "Ain't it a bitch sorting out our sordid lives?"

Ultimately, *Sordid Lives* is really not very sordid at all. It's about the haste with which we love to slap labels on others, and which are easily slapped back on ourselves. After all the travesties in the play, the most touching, dignified figure of all ends up being Brother Boy, a middle-aged transvestite sporting a blonde curled wig and a killer sequin dress a la Tammy Wynette. Sordidness, like much else, lies in the eye of the beholder.

Written by Del Shores, *Sordid Lives* appears at the ACE Annex through Feb. 21. **EW**



MODERN
FURNITURE ■ HOME ■ GIFTS
DESIGNS FOR LIFE

GIFT REGISTRY
DESIGN SERVICES

207 E. 5TH AVE
Across from
5th Street Market
686-1935

Share a
Miracle

The
Fertility
Center



of
OREGON

BECOME AN EGG DONOR

The Fertility Center of Oregon has helped many couples achieve pregnancy since 1978. We are in need of egg donors to continue to help infertile women.

Procedures are done in a pleasant local environment over a period of only six weeks, and donors are compensated \$2,500 for their time. If you are a healthy woman age 21-31 and are interested call 683-1559, or visit our website at www.WomensCare.com.