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THTR 203-101

12 November 2024

*The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* Production Response

Upon seeing *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* by Bertolt Brecht for the first time, I felt a sense of unease and discomfort that was interrupted with dark political humor throughout the entire show. I felt like it was my duty to sit in the discomfort and resist the manipulation I could see the characters on stage falling victim to throughout the cautionary tale. I am fascinated by the way this play blurs the lines between the reality of history and fiction. It challenges audiences to think about the way in which power functions in our society and how easy it can be for people to fall victim or become pawns in someone else's claim to power. Moments that particularly stood out to me were the instances where the character of Arturo Ui bounces back and forth between this angry and determined personality and a pouty child-like demeanor. In using this tactic of feigned innocence and ordinariness, Arturo fooled, took advantage of, and betrayed not only members of the Chicago and Cicero community but his own close personal friends for his own benefit.

*The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* is a cautionary tale above anything else. The central themes and messages within the play are closely related to the tactics Hitler used to obtain authoritarian power from a complicit society in 1930's Nazi Germany. This production successfully conveyed these messages and themes in several different ways. First, the production functioning as a radio play and the characters breaking the fourth wall serves the purpose of reminding the audience that the show that they are watching is not set in reality, allowing them to detach from the drama of the story and focus more completely on thinking critically about the

political themes being conveyed. At the beginning of the play during a 'dumb show' we see the character of Dogsborough put his wig and stomach cushion on in front of the audience. Later, we see both the play and the radio show occurring within the play being interrupted by 'brief musical interludes'. These are just a few moments that poke fun at the absurdity of Ui's rise to power and intentionally take the audience out of the emotional drama occurring to remind them that they are watching a completely constructed theatrical experience which they should continue to be thinking critically about.

I was particularly captivated by Aimee's performance as Betty Dullfleet and the arc of her relationship with Arturo Ui. I think this character is so integral because her story leads to Arturo's intentions becoming alarmingly clear (if they weren't already clear to audiences from the beginning) and we see the threatening coercion tactic of violence at play. The first time we see Betty and her husband Ignatius, they are meeting Givola and Arturo at Givola's flower shop. Shortly after this interaction, we are at Mr. Dullfleet's funeral after he is killed at the hands of Arturo and his gangsters. Betty speaks out against Arturo at Mr. Dullfleet's funeral and blames him for the death of her husband and the corruption in Chicago and Cicero. However, next time we see Betty, she speaks in front of a crowd of people in support of Arturo with immense fear in her eyes which illustrates Arturo and his gangsters' violent tactics to get people to offer public unwavering support for Arturo's plans even if it is against their beliefs and morals.

I thought that the design elements of the production brought the show to life and enhanced the experience for audiences in major ways. The projections, which displayed historical references and political context, played a major role in drawing a clear, definite connection between the fictional Arturo Ui and the reality of Hitler's rise to power. I was also fascinated by the role of the characters on stage and the light-up applause sign had in

manipulating the audience to be complicit and support Arturo's dictatorial rise to power. In several instances I felt forced to applaud either because an actor motioned for the audience to clap or because the applause sign lit up. This always made me feel extremely uncomfortable and uneasy but I felt like I didn't have a choice. I think most audience members felt the same, illustrating just how powerful the play is in displaying how the existing society in 1930's Germany was complicit in Hitler's dictatorship.

During this past week following the recent election, I can't help but think about the epilogue of the play which states, "Thus learn how to see, and not just look, And act instead of talking all day long: The world was almost ruled by such a crook! Though people overcame him, you'd be wrong to pat your backs and think yourselves so clever – the ooze that spawned him is as rich as ever!" (Brecht 88). Upon seeing this play, I understood just how relevant it is and how important it is that it was produced and performed at Loyola this semester. The meaning and learning outcome of the play can be summarized by its title "*The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*" because Hitler, Arturo Ui, and any dictator's rise to power was just that: resistible.