

The Year of Magical Thinking by Joan Didion

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Review by Stacy Knitter

In everyone's life, some form of tragedy is going to occur. Whether the cause is a house fire or the loss of a loved one, everyone experiences grief. Though we as people all experience this emotion, no matter through which events it happens to come to us, it remains taboo as a topic of discussion. People don't like to dwell on the negative, and fear hurting someone by bringing up painful memories. However, in 'The Year of Magical Thinking', Joan Didion puts all of her cards on the table, allowing the audience to experience her emotions as if they were their own. She wanted everyone to understand that no matter who you are, you will experience grief. In order to help people prepare for this, she described in great detail her thoughts and feelings throughout the year that both her husband and daughter passed away.

As students at an IB school, we are offered quite a few opportunities to experience different aspects of culture. Theatre, especially, is a large part of culture. This play in particular gave a fantastic example of theatre. The presentation of 'The Year of Magical Thinking' that I attended, in my opinion, was very well put together. As an actress, Elizabeth Norment, must have the skills to take on a role as if it were her own life. Drawing upon her own experiences, and the shared experiences of those around her, she made a wonderful transition into the life of Joan Didion. Even more difficult, is performing such an extensive piece alone. Yet, Norment performed spectacularly despite the many hindrances of being onstage for over an hour alone. Any breaks sounded completely natural, and even when she stopped to sip water, the storyline didn't fall apart.

The technical aspect of this piece was also very well done. In my opinion, this was by far the best attribute the entire performance. The set itself was very simple, until you took a closer look. Each item onstage had a purpose. Every book on the bookshelf was picked specifically for the play. The Rep is known for its amazing props department, and this truly showed through the set. Perhaps more interesting than the set, was the lighting. As the mood changed, so did the lights. Scientific research has proven that people respond emotionally to different colors. When the mood became sad, the lights faded to blue. As the main character recalled fireworks, the lights responded, flashing brilliant colors. This interactive behavior allowed for the audience to better understand her feelings.

The final main aspect of theatre is the directorial effort. Without a doubt, this is what ties everything together. A seasoned director, John Sipes knows what he is doing. Leading his team, each with their respective responsibilities, Sipes ensures that the entire piece, from rehearsal to performance, goes smoothly. In this performance, it was obvious that the directorial team had spent a lot of time ensuring they had prepared for the performance as much as possible. Everything was in place and running smoothly. Overall, it made for a terrific performance.

In my opinion, the best aspect of this play was the technical aspect. Holding up to the Rep's reputation as one of the best prop departments, the set of this play was spectacularly put together. It

looked comfortable and nothing looked out of place. Still, my favorite part was the lighting. The colors of the lights reflected the mood of the moment. Between chapters, the lights faded, telling the audience a new scene was about to begin. Finally, when the main character spoke of flowing water, the lights didn't just add a screen of blue. The effect of water was portrayed with a spectrum of colors. Blues, greens, purples, and grays could all be seen, interacting with one another, giving a flowing effect like that of water. This performance of 'The Year of Magical Thinking' provided an excellent example of the cultural aspect of theatre. All facets were present and provided clear examples of what good theatre should be.