



# DRAMA

## NEWSLETTER 3

Welcome everyone to the third edition of the KECHG Drama Newsletter. Once again we have a packed issue for you and on the next few pages you will find all kinds of interesting articles including:

- A Film Review from one of year 12 students, Rutalee, about the film *Spanglish*,
- Live theatre reviews from some of our Year 11 drama students,
- An essay written by a year 11 student, Holly, about the new version of *West Side Story*
- The winning entry from last issue's Script Writing Competition.

As you will no doubt notice from the above list there is a lot of evaluation and reviewing in this issue of the newsletter. Evaluating the work of others is a really key part of Drama and Theatre - it is something that we encourage you to try from your very first drama lessons when you comment on the performances of other students - as you move in to Key Stage 4 and 5 it become part of the examined courses and you write about the work of professionals on stage.

### Year 13 Drama performance - A big WELL DONE

This is a good opportunity for a huge WELL DONE to our year 13 students who performed a devised performance entitled *Celestial Courtroom* before the half term break. Their performance was inspired by the work of 2 theatre companies - *Kneehigh Theatre* and *Shared Experience* - and explored the nature of existence, asking the question 'Do humanity's actions justify their continued existence?' In the performance the audience were asked to work as the jury and make a final judgement on whether humanity deserved a continued existence or not! You will find some photos from the performance on the following page ...



## *Film Review - Spanglish By Rutalee Buch*

In light of Valentine's Day, I had planned to review a romance movie. However, after watching *Spanglish*, I thought it would be nicer to focus on a movie which is more about the love between a mother and daughter instead (although it still has a nice romantic sidestory with Adam Sandler as the love interest). Flor Moreno (played by Paz Vega) is a woman who moves from Mexico to LA to give her daughter Cristina (played by Shelbie Bruce) a better education. There, she gets a job as a maid for a well-off suburban family where she soon realises that there are many culture differences and a language barrier she must overcome. The plot develops as her daughter starts to integrate more and more with the other family - now she has to figure out how to give Cristina the freedom she deserves without losing her to the typical "Western" culture.

This film really stood out to me as on the surface it seems like another typical comedy/drama but it explored so many different themes that you don't necessarily think about on a daily basis. For instance, they highlighted the idea of a mother's love and the tough decisions they have to make regarding their children. I watched this movie with my mum, and even though it was slightly awkward because of how relatable it was, I did find it interesting to see a lot of the typical problems that any mother and daughter would go through from the other perspective. I liked Paz Vega in her role as she showed her internal struggle of balancing her needs and her daughter's really well. Another aspect of the movie which was nice to see was how she reacted to everything as a woman - the character has a lot of pride and she got overlooked sometimes and had to speak up for herself. With the language barrier this was even more difficult and made Vega's performance even better.

Even though the main storyline is Flor's dilemma with Cristina, she also has another complication - a possible romance with John Clasky, who is Deborah's husband. Initially, I was surprised (and a little apprehensive) when I saw that Adam Sandler played this role, as I didn't want the film to be a goofy comedy. However, to my surprise, he played a character who was actually quite sweet and endearing. He showed his predicament nicely. Although he was the "big name" in the movie, I think he played a nice supporting role and just added to Flor's experiences.

Flor has to juggle her feelings for the husband with her daughter moving further away from her and her culture. I thought that Paz Vega and Shelbie Bruce's chemistry made their relationship very realistic. Bruce's acting was something that really stood out to me - I think that she captured the feelings of her character really well. Personally, as someone who was brought up here by parents who were brought up in India, I found it very convincing, because I could relate to a lot of her conflicts - specifically figuring out how to blend both contrasting cultures together. She also helped add to the comedy aspects to the film - there's one scene in particular where she has to act as a translator while Flor and John argue which was very amusing as Bruce had perfected acting flustered in the situation she was in. Along with the comedy, she also successfully made the more emotional scenes heartwarming so overall I think that she was talented in showing her range of emotions.

The only thing I didn't really like was Téa Loni's character, Deborah, but I think she was purposefully written like that. Although it's pace is a bit slow for my liking, it worked for the genre. A lot of it is in Spanish (with translations) but that might be a nice bonus if you take the subject or just want to broaden the languages that you watch movies in. Overall, I enjoyed the movie and would definitely recommend it! It's available to watch on prime video so if you're looking for a sweet movie to relax after a long week, it's perfect!

## *Theatre Review - Medea By Palak Dhore*

“Who doesn’t love a good complex character?” is what Mrs Morgan-Long said after we watched ‘Medea’. And I agree, the world isn’t just black and white, right and wrong, there are shades of grey in between. And ‘Medea’ is a play by Euripides(an Athenian playwright) about the lengths a woman is willing to go to get revenge on her husband for abandoning her and her children. While Medea (played by the late Helen McCrory) is wronged by her husband, she also wrongs others, which makes her complex and makes the play more interesting and thought-provoking.

‘Medea’ is based on a Greek myth, where Jason must retrieve the Golden Fleece to claim his throne. Medea, who lives on Colchis(the land where the Fleece resides), falls for Jason and offers to help him obtain the fleece if he marries her. Jason agrees so Medea helps him out. Once he has the fleece, they plan their escape. However, Medea has to kill her family, including her brother, for them to successfully leave. They then live happily ever after...except they don’t. The other inhabitants of their new home become suspicious of Medea, due to her magical powers and barbarian nature. So, Jason decides to marry King Creon’s daughter, Kreulsa, so he can stay safe. This abandonment causes Medea to become furious at Jason and desperate for revenge.

The play starts off with Medea being exiled by Creon, as he fears what Medea might do to him, his daughter and Jason. After all, Medea has done a lot for Jason and he has cruelly cast her and their children aside for his own safety. After some begging and manipulation, Medea convinces Creon to give her 24 hours. She tells him she needs the time to make arrangements for children but she intends to use that time so she can avenge her desertion.

Her intelligence and manipulative ability is not characteristic of a woman in Greek theatre. In this play, Medea is the one in power, not the men around her, which is unusual for a classical Greek play. Medea can be seen, through a feminist point of view, as a woman using her skills to succeed in a patriarchal society.

McCrory’s portrayal of Medea is excellent, with clear communication of Medea’s feelings and the power she holds, despite being powerless. Her acting skills are so strong, it is difficult to tell whether or not Medea is lying without her dialogue in between detailing her true plans. For example, in the scene where she begs Creon to give her 24 more hours, the desperation in her voice makes it seem as if she really wants to make arrangements for her children but in the next scene she asks the nurse if she truly believes Medea would ‘kneel and weep in front of a man like that except to get her own way’, as she reveals her plans for revenge. I was worried about her voice afterwards, though, as the role of Medea requires a lot of screaming and 8 shows a week seems like a lot to get through.



The creativity of the design team must also be mentioned. While the play is mostly based in Medea’s house and just outside it, there is also a balcony, which represents Jason’s wedding that’s happening on the same day. Even though

the set can be confusing at first (Jason is definitely not marrying his second wife in his first wife's house), you can easily get the hang of it as the play progresses. This design allows us to see what Medea is doing and what is happening at the wedding at the same time, as you can see in the picture on the left.

This is very effective and sticks to traditional greek theatre where there is only one setting, in this case, Medea's house. During the first half of the play, McCrory wears a simple vest top and trousers, which belong to Jason. This creative decision helps show she still loves Jason, despite it all. However, halfway through she has an incredible costume change, as she must look like she's over him to execute her revenge.

I would definitely recommend 'Medea' as Medea's actions are debatable. Who you feel more sorry for at the end, Jason or Medea is a matter of opinion, which is what makes it more compelling for the audience. And the efforts put in by the cast and crew make it a masterpiece worth watching.



### *Theatre Review - Frankenstein By Tasnime Boujamaa*

As smoke slowly started to envelop the stage of Wolverhampton Arena Theatre, we all sat tight in our seats waiting for the performance of 'Frankenstein' by the Blackeyed Theatre; none of us were prepared for this thrilling masterpiece, magically brought to life in a way in which Mary Shelley herself would have been impressed.

The story follows Robert Walton, the captain of a ship bound for the North Pole, who discovers a man adrift at sea. The man, Victor Frankenstein, tells Walton about his perfect childhood in Switzerland alongside his love Elizabeth and his caring friend Henry Cleval. Frankenstein's life is plagued with death, inspiring him to put his knowledge to use at the University of Ingolstadt, where one night he discovers the secret of life. However, upon animating his first creature, its appearance is so hideous that he



abandons it. Despite Frankenstein's attempt to escape, the monster reappears, and laments its wretched life as a result of its horrible appearance.

With only 5 members in the cast, I wondered if such a small scale of production could live up to the timeless classic. But all doubts were cast aside as the crew delivered an unforgettable performance, through a jaw-dropping and imaginative production, with the set up of wooden beams and rope nicely conjuring the feeling of a ship ready to set sail on a wonderful adventure. I loved how the music was created by actors on stage with memorable examples including the beating of the cajon to create a lively and uplifting atmosphere, and the use of a mortar & pestle and Frankenstein's saw to create a sharp ringing noise to evoke a sinister atmosphere. The duality of Frankenstein's instruments being used for music not only added depth to the piece, but also merged the two timelines of the story - the ominous music foreshadowing the tragic fate that awaited him.

It is simply impossible not to praise the actors, in particular Robert Bradley, whose depiction of Victor Frankenstein was flawless and perfect in every way. His domineering stage presence and seamless transitions between his past, not only helped to paint a clear picture of his fond childhood memories, but also shaped our understanding of his character as an ambitious and determined scientist. His strong eye contact with everyone in the theatre ensured that we were all heavily invested in the gothic world created on stage. In the scene where Frankenstein completes his creation, the bright spark in his eyes soon vanishes. His furrowed brows and panicked manner reveal his true feelings of horror, as he prophesies the destructive power of his creation. Later on, Bradley's shaking voice and closed body language makes the audience question who should take responsibility for the horrendous crimes committed: the monster, or its creator ...



The most remarkable aspect of the experience was undoubtedly the puppet created by Yvonne Stone. The reveal of Frankenstein's creation towards the end of the first half was simply jaw dropping and nothing short of spectacular. As the white sheet dropped, the puppet lay down on the testing rack, every breath and blink meticulously orchestrated. The movement of the puppeteers was exceptional, every limb coordinated in a lifelike manner, rendering the audience speechless. My favourite moment was when the monster emerged from the darkness and thick smoke, causing us to forget the puppeteers as we couldn't help but

shiver at the sight of Frankenstein's creation.

Overall, this was a fantastic piece of theatre as the casts' passion for bringing this story to life shone through in every aspect of the production leaving everyone watching in awe. A huge thanks to the drama department for organising such an amazing experience, and to the Blackeyed Theatre Company for all their worthwhile efforts!

## *West Side Story - an essay by Holly Garside*

I was lucky enough to watch the remake of the 1961 cinematic classic *West Side Story* over the holidays - a 10:30am screening seemed like one of my crazier ideas after the out-of-whack sleep schedule I garnered over the Christmas period. I groggily got out of bed at 8:30am and walked to the cinema half-asleep, unaware of the masterpiece awaiting me. Hollywood pulled out all the stops for this latest hit, with such names as director Steven Spielberg and conductor Gustavo Dudamel involved in its production.

Overall the film was a massive success in my eyes, managing to capture the cool thrill of the Jets and warm exuberance of the Sharks that was so expertly portrayed in the original film. While not a huge fan of Ansel Elgort's performance as Tony, I think that Rachel Zegler smashed her debut role of Maria. Mike Faist as Riff was especially a highlight for me, adding a sense of energy and emotion to the role that outdid the actor of the original in my humble opinion: my only tear shed surprisingly was not in the famous final scene, but instead during the death of Riff and Bernardo.

However, the true stars of this film for me were those who worked behind the scenes, and the work by costume designer Paul Tazewell is the perfect representation of this tireless effort offscreen. The use of costume in this film portrays both the theme of division and the power of Tony and Maria's love, including its ability to break all barriers presented by the strict rules concerning mixing of their opposing sides.

Throughout the vast majority of the film, the Jets are adorned in cool colours, most significantly whites and blues; while the Sharks opt for much more warm-toned, subtle shades that almost blend in with the surrounding rubble of the suburb of Manhattan where the story is set. These contrasting appearances not only distinguish the two rival gangs clearly to the viewer, the colours selected for each side expertly highlight the skin tone of each, a subtle display of the poignant racial difference between the two gangs that acts as the central conflict of the film. Furthermore, the more muted tones of the Sharks furthers Spielberg's display of the key theme of racism, with the Sharks appearing to blend in with their surroundings as they must in order to survive a racially aggressive environment. Even the more flamboyant outfits worn by the Sharks continue with this colour scheme, displaying that no matter how free and jovial they appear (the most notable example of this being in 'America'), there will always be the undercurrent of needing to blend in so as to not draw attention to themselves. The Jets, on the other hand, can almost comically stand out in their bright, cool-toned attire without the fear of being reprimanded for their actions, a clear reflection of the unfair treatment of different races especially in law.

There is one character who's costume completely subverts that of her gang, however. The first scene that Maria is present in displays her getting ready for a local dance, one attended by both Jets and Sharks. Attending the aforementioned dance, Maria wears a white dress with a red belt around it, the belt given to her by her sister-in-law Anita. This is hugely significant for several reasons: firstly, she is the only so-called Shark in the entire film to disrupt the unspoken dress code of muted colours. Her youthful naivety of the discrimination her Puerto Rican counterparts face on a daily basis, as well as the intensity of the hatred between the two gangs, is perfectly summarised in this outfit, the innocence and purity

associated with the colour white furthering this. Moreover, this shows from the offset that Maria never truly identified with the Sharks in the same way that her family did, not keeping to the fashion norms of the gang like Bernardo and Anita both do. In fact, the warm-toned red belt being an addition to the outfit made by Anita displays Maria's ties to the Sharks not by choice but by the obligation, pressed upon her by her family.

Much like Maria, Tony is the only so-called Jet that subverts the customary clothes worn by his gang. He arrives at the local dance in brown trousers, a direct parallel to Maria's rejection of her clothing norms in this scene. Like Maria, we are told that Tony doesn't identify with the Jets, only attending the dance after being harassed by his close friend Riff, the leader of the gang. Tony's costume subversion is much more subtle than Maria's in this scene, but his fashion decisions make more of an obvious statement as his relationship with Maria progresses.

As the film progresses, so too does Maria and Tony's relationship, and so too does the dramatic nature of the aforementioned characters' costumes. In one scene, a large buildup in the intensity of the score precedes Maria's arrival on screen; wearing a blue dress. Perhaps the most significant costume reveal in the entire film, this is telling of Maria's loyalty to and love for Tony, the power of said love overthrowing her loyalty to and love for the Sharks. Similarly, Tony appears in another scene wearing a nude jacket worn over a blue t-shirt, portraying his very similar situation and emotional state at this point in the film. Throughout the film's run, Maria wears a series of blue dresses that get darker in shade as it progresses. This foreshadows both the tragic murder of Tony in the final scene and the distress of the Jets, after eventually losing both of the gang's founding members to the war between Jets and Sharks. The darkening shade evokes a mournful tone most prominent in the final scene where it's a deep navy, the shade brought out by the dim streetlights that frame her lover's murder.

Tony and Maria are the only characters that significantly subvert the colour palette of their respective gangs. With this, Spielberg displays Tony and Maria's love as powerful, going beyond the divide between their respective gangs and ultimately disregarding the hate produced by the racial tension surrounding them in favour of love. This hatred is something that the two gangs never quite shake, highlighted by their unchanging wardrobe colour schemes throughout the runtime.

In conclusion, *West Side Story* (2021) was a huge success, with expert casting and brilliant creative minds that came together to produce one of Hollywood's most heart-wrenching movie musicals. The beauty of the story and the messages the film depicts is that, even 64 years after its opening on Broadway, the xenophobia presented is still equally (if not more so) relevant than it was all those years ago.





## Competition Winner - Script Writing

Congratulations to **Iona Mandal** who entered our Script writing competition in the last issue.

The task was to create an opening scene which sets up the idea of a mystery to be discovered and we're sure you'll agree she's done that - the Theatrical spin within her script is just an added bonus!

### THE BARD'S OMEN

#### SCENE 1

It is a fervently stormy night in Stratford-upon-Avon. Poet Laureate of England, Simon Armitage, is fitfully sleeping in his hotel room, after a long day at the Stratford Literary Festival followed by a visit to William Shakespeare's grave at Holy Trinity Church.

**Simon:** (*Tossing and turning in his bed before getting up to get a glass of water*) (*Mutters*) I usually have no trouble sleeping in hotel rooms! Why, of all nights, is this proving to be the most difficult one?

(*He is about to lie down when he sees something near the edge of the window, sparking his interest*) What's that faint glow I see? It must be the moonlight reflecting off the walls. But no...it is a little too bright for that. (He stands up to check what it is. Suddenly the light materialises into an apparition, causing Simon to lurch back).

Www-what?! It can't be! I - - Is that William Shakespeare? B-but how? I just visited your grave today, there is no way---

**Ghost of Shakespeare:** (*Chuckles*) I noticeth thee didst not faileth coequal once to det'rmine mine own owneth charact'r. T might not but beest mineth owneth striking countenance!

**Simon:** Y-yes...Sir? But why...and more importantly, how, are you present in this room with me?

**Ghost of Shakespeare:** Yond, young chuck, is a matt'r i hesitate to bewray.

**Simon:** But why here out of all places?

**Ghost of Shakespeare:** Alloweth me to putteth t in this way. Though I may not beest presenteth in the w'rd at this moment, I am dreadfully acknown of its happenings, and has't thus, familiaris'd myself with mod'rn did light'rature. Not to flatt'r thee, but I, most c'rtainly, recognise thy the lady'r potential and urge thee to continueth with thy w'rk. Aft'r noticing thee spending an awfully longeth timeth staring at mineth owneth headstone the presenteth day, I bethought t courteous to payeth thee a visiteth, and p'rhaps answ'r a few questions it seemeth thee has't.

**Simon:** I see. I must admit, there were some puzzling inscriptions I noticed. And of course, being an admirer of the Bard, I did ponder over it for long after. Something along the lines of "GOOD FREN D FOR IESVS SAKE FORBEARE, TO DIGG THE DVST ENCLOSED HEARE, BLESTe BE Ye MAN Yt SPARES THES STONES, AND CVRST BE HE Yt MOVES MY BONES" left me perplexed.

**Ghost of Shakespeare:** Of course, I shouldst has't did guess! The infamous inscription which has't hath left many just as p'rplex'd as thou art. Yond, mine own lief chuck, is a closely did guard secret. Many has't bethought t to beest a gravedigg'r's omen 'r a beshrew 'gainst humanity, but only the finest of minds shalt seeth t fr what truly is.

**Simon:** I apologise for the cheek, but would not I be considered as one of the finest minds which has the privilege of hearing such a secret?

**Ghost of Shakespeare:** Thee maketh me chuckle, lief chuck! well, aye, thee wouldst beest right. Wherefore else wouldst i has't cometh to thy chamb'r at the dunnest of hours if 't beest true not to grant thee with this knowledge?

**Simon:** Do tell me please Sir!

**Ghost of Shakespeare:** At which hour the timeth is right, mine life chuck, thee shalt figure it out fr yourself. Aft'r all, the finest of minds shouldst not needeth the answ'r in plain sight to seeth what is behind it. Has't patience. Waiteth fr the horologe to striketh thirteen (*Disappears with a flash*).