

# Students Bring Quartett's Sinister Eroticism to Life

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*The Oberlin Review*

April 13, 2001

This weekend, Heiner Müller's Quartett continues performances in Fairchild Chapel, fittingly celebrating Friday the 13th with a presentation of dark humor and sadistic obsession. Opening yesterday and scheduled to close with a Saturday matinee, Carl Weber's English translation of Quartett was directed by sophomore Ben Stuber and assistant -directed by sophomore Rachel Samberg, in the tradition of Müller's German experimental theater.

Based on the 18th century French novel by Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, the play was a one -hour glimpse into the lives of French aristocrats Valmont and Merteuil, as they sardonically displayed the bitter mess and lust they felt for one another while discussing both sinister and erotic fantasies.

The play benefited and suffered from being performed in Fairchild Chapel, as the building's stone walls and stained glass windows added to the production's smoochy, gothic feel. Unfortunately, the chapel's intense echoing acoustics rendered many of the actors' words incomprehensible.

The atmosphere of the production was reminiscent of an Anne Rice vampire novel, as suggested by lines like, "Every word drips a gash, every smile bares afang." Yet the actors' costumes and makeup also contributed to a Halloween theme with performers wearing black, formless drapes, stylized masks, face paint and Merteuil displaying a silver corset.

This was one of the highlights of the production, along with the costumes. It consisted of an altar draped in white cloth at the stage's rear, on top of which stood a life -size mannequin with spikes in its hands, alluding to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Stuber's interpretation of the play incorporated choreographed movement, mask and the presence of three demon figures — Lamia, played by sophomore Lily Matini, Asmodeus, played by sophomore Matt Franks and Mara, played by first -year Maya Ray -Schoenfeld.

Throughout the play, the demons danced about the actors, suggesting the inevitable damnation of Valmont and Merteuil for their cold, scheming ways. Sometimes, their presence seemed distracting and superfluous, at other times, they created memorable moments, such as the opening scene, where they writhed sensuously with Merteuil until she reached the peak of excitement, screaming, "The agony to live and not be God."

Merteuil, played by sophomore Allison Moon, was a delight to watch, as she portrayed the sensuous temptress with a refreshing genuine motionalsincerity, which no other actors might have been outdone by a siren to play a melodramatic caricature of the cold -hearted villainess. Her skillful use of tempting glances and teasing gestures easily seduced Valmont, as well as the audience.

Valmont, played by junior Adam Marvel, displayed a more mercurial nature. At times, Marvel's performances suggested a clown or harlequin, dancing about Merteuil with humorous ripostes like, "I shall open my veins . . . with scissors since I am a woman. Every trade has its jokes." At other times, he took a more authoritative stance, as when he forced Merteuil to perform fellatio on him. In either case, the mercuriality in his character seemed appropriate, as Valmont and Merteuil often pretended to switch identities in the play. Ultimately, the highlight of the play's acting was Moon's and Marvel's willingness to be emotionally vulnerable on stage, without which this play might have become a cartoon.

In the end, Quartett left the audience member with more questions than answers. In the show's programs, Stuber wrote, "My advice is to embrace Quartett for what it is. One is not supposed to grasp every ambiguity or [learn] any prepackaged lesson." At a later point, he said that this intention was to let "the works speak for itself, because that's all the audience is going to see anyway."