Reaction Paper

I enjoyed the performance of “The Importance of Being Earnest.” The set design was very intricate and well done, most notably the interior of Algernon Moncreiff’s house. I loved the bright colors and the color scheme, and the curtains were a nice effect. My favorite part was the painting that was modeled after Bryan Blanks. I had to struggle not to laugh out loud once it caught my eye. In case you haven’t figured it out, I’m easily amused. I enjoyed the character performances, as well. I loved Michael and Bryan’s prissy portrayals of John and Algernon, respectively. I thought the mannerisms were right on the money, and the vocal expressions were perfect for whiny, rich, desperately in love aristocrats. Ellen and Lindsey were perfect at their somewhat satirical characters, and frankly, the argument between the two was what got the play moving. They were both quite funny, and Ellen’s incorporation of sexual humor into the dialogue (I’m sure it was meant to be that way) was a scream. Both butlers were well played, and Sara Youngs and Greg were also good at their roles. Johanna was spectacular as Lady Bracknell. I liked the costuming, and the stage was very well lit, and the dialogue was easy to hear. I was a little disappointed at the lack of laughter from the audience, though. They did not seem to understand much of the humor, and a lot of the laugh lines, especially early on, were disregarded. I’m not entirely sure British comedy was the best choice for the local people of Monmouth. Also, I feel the play seemed to drag somewhat in the first act, and I feel it could probably have been made more enjoyable by more over the top blocking and dialogue. I like this play because it was a good satire of the aristocracy of the time period. The satire was most notable whenever Lady Bracknell was speaking. There was also a generalized satire of women (and men) throughout the
entirety of the play. I’m referring to Cecily’s “engagement” to “Earnest” months prior to Algernon even showing up, as well as the cheesy profession of love between John/Jack and Gwendolyn. I was also amused by the satirical presentation of the women’s lust for “wicked” men, as that’s a contemporary topic. The women’s fascination with the name “Earnest/Ernest” was laughable, as were their methods of testing the devotion of their beloveds. Also, the self-sacrificing and seemingly insane nature of the two men struck a chord (I’ve been there). Although the end is a tad cheesy, at least it’s funny.

I shall now analyze the performances of two of the actors in the play. First will be Johanna’s performance as Lady Bracknell. She was extremely consistent with the character and didn’t seem to be anything else than the living, breathing, stuck up parody that was Lady Bracknell. Johanna also did a good job with the subtle and overlooked character change where Lady Bracknell (incredulously) learns who John is, and chooses to give in and let the couples marry and be happy. As far as “externals” went, Johanna projected very well and had a powerful voice, suitable of the character and an accent that seemed believable and well done. She walked with pomposity and authority, and she did dead on gestures and mannerisms that left no doubt that Lady Bracknell seldom got off her aristocratic, fashionable high horse. As far as “internals” go, Johanna’s face assumed very appropriate (and entertaining) expressions as she reacted to the events unfolding around her. Her expressions of indignation at the lack of credentials John had were hysterical, but her expression of incredulity whenever she saw something that shocked her were priceless! Her overwhelmed expressions (facial and bodily) were also laughable and believable when she figured out that John and Algernon were both brothers. Lady Bracknell’s main functional traits are the fact she’s arrogant, and adheres to the laws of
fashionable society as if they were law. This is a functional trait, because it is why she becomes the biggest obstacle in the way of the lovers being together. Her likeness traits were her loud mouth, which added to the image of the character, and her self-righteous and pompous mannerisms. The fact that she’s a comedic antagonist gave Johanna a lot to work with, as comedies tend to leave the characters very open to a personal touch. Lady Bracknell’s dialogue and role in the story give an actor a lot to work with.

The second character I shall examine is Bryan Blanks’, Algernon Moncrieff. Bryan was pretty consistent at maintaining character. Bryan presented Algernon as a prissy playboy in the beginning, and after his encounters with Cecily and John at John’s house, portrayed him as a prissy, devoted lover. Bryan maintained effeminate, caricature like gestures and speech patterns to a humorous effect. He had a courtly, foppish walk to compliment his hand gestures while speaking. He also had a more upper class sounding accent, and kept an indignant tone whenever anything went wrong, such as when he realized he ate all the cucumber sandwiches, and when John was trying to eat the muffins (that were claimed by Algernon). “Internally” Bryan was quite effective with the different states of mind that Algernon went through. When Algernon was talking about “Bunburying,” his face was mischievous and decorated with a wide grin. He also used a similar, but more focused visage when Algernon encountered Cecily for the first time. At that point, he seemed a bit more predatory. When he was disheartened at their failure with the girls because of their dishonesty with their names, Algernon looked like he was partially broken and truly uncomfortable when he was pining and eating and talking with John. His mannerisms changed, too, and he seemed to radiate insecurity. Bryan seemed to be in the mindset of the character, or at least if he wasn’t, he could replicate
Algernon’s reactions and thought processes well. Whenever his character seemed to stop and think, Bryan made it look believable, like he was actually thinking of his responses on the spot. Overall, Bryan did a terrific job. The functional trait of Algernon is his lack of scruples and the fact he’s a pleasure seeker. Both of which motivate him to travel to John’s house in pursuit of Cecily his young ward, setting off the events of the story in the first place. John and Algernon conflict with one another because Algernon wants Cecily, but John doesn’t want the two to be together. Later, after actually meeting Cecily, his less-than-virtuous intentions that brought him to John’s country home in the first place become replaced with a virtuous desire to be with Cecily, as he genuinely falls in love with her. So later in the play, Algernon’s loving devotion to Cecily drives him to hang on through the conflict, eventually resulting in the revealing of John’s lineage, and the resolution of the conflict, with the pairing of the couples. Algernon’s likeness traits, the fact he’s a rich priss, and he’s amoral, and so forth, give the actor the freedom to have fun with his character. Again, this is a comedy, which gives the actor a lot of freedom.

Bryan portrayed Algernon’s amoral, predatory side with a playful spin, thus making an otherwise unlikable character type likeable. The fact that Algernon has a heart, after all, helps, as the actor can go overboard for Algernon’s love scenes with Cecily, where they’re looking into each others’ eyes and are clingy. Also, Bryan banks took full advantage of the fact he’s whiny and rich and prissy. He chose a highly satirical and funny assortment of mannerisms, everything from the way he walked like peacock, to the way he delicately ate and drank on stage. It was very funny to watch his portrayal of the aristocracy in such a way.

Monmouth College’s “The Importance of Being Earnest” 2005, was a memorable
and enjoyable show. It was well-performed, well designed, and very well put together.

Kat did a great job.