

December 20, 2010

Dear Janet,

I had the pleasure of seeing your production of *Glenwood: Restoration of Spirit* on October 10, 2010, and I was thoroughly impressed the energy of the performance. I often like to let such experiences settle; the elements that stay with me are the ones I know have made the deepest impact, and I'd like to share those with you in this letter.

I will never forget the shuttle ride to the performance. As I listened to you speak about the Glenwood cemetery as a rural sanctuary in the midst of the industrial revolution, we passed the rubble of a recently demolished building. The juxtaposition of your voice and that image took my breath away, and I applaud your foresight in allowing the audience to begin the experience of the production on the shuttle.

When we arrived at the cemetery, the performers seemed to float in their exquisite clothes as they approached the Glenwood gates, singing a welcome song. And, again, past and present collided as these 19<sup>th</sup> century figures sang a reminder to turn off our cell phones to the tune of the Addams family. As they dispersed, we stayed behind with our official guides, Polly and the Reverend, but I felt the urge to follow the others, to hear their stories. Instead, they moved in and out of the periphery, adding depth to an occasion our desperately eager-to-please "guides" could not possibly fashion with their appropriately conventional banter. Thus, in this moment, I found the tension that would ultimately drive the story of this non-linear experience. I got to hear their stories in bits and pieces. Sometimes, hearing nothing, I simply watched a couple engage in the private exchanges of courtship. In time, I realized these characters all had names based on 19<sup>th</sup> century virtues, and I could not help but reflect on their contemporary relevance. The more these figures moved in and out of our path, the less distant the gap between the past and present.

Dramaturgically, Chloé activated the energy behind the play's nonlinear story: through her, the ineffable spirit of the cemetery transformed into the physically vital hope of contemporary youth. We met her—apparently—by chance. Slouched against a tree and dressed in distressed jeans and a hoodie, she took us out of the game we agreed to play when we picked up our tickets and met our historical guides at the gate. When she intercepted the tour and shared what she sees at Glenwood, what the site brings to her imagination, she contrasted sharply (and refreshingly) with her historical counterparts. Free from the visible trappings of a "performance," she shared images, poetry and memories that conveyed her resolve to engage with her community rather than skulk and disappear.

Thus, when Chloé took out her ear buds and took over from Polly and the Reverend, everything about the experience flipped: suddenly, instead of viewing the present through the lens of the past, I found myself examining the past through the lens of the present. The shift was nothing short of exhilarating. Color me unsentimental, but I've never been one to walk through a cemetery and see anything beyond the discrepancy between the sizes of people's tombstones. In the second part of *Glenwood*, however, I had the kind of experience I've always felt I *should* have in a cemetery; I honestly felt the presence of people I'd never known. The feeling wasn't spooky in a Halloween sense. (I wasn't seeing ghosts, I promise.) I just thought of the people beneath the stones, and when their presence merged with the lights of the city behind the actors, I felt for a moment as if I were the one floating.

As I continue to reflect on the experience, I am endlessly impressed with the level of investment I felt from the company as a whole, and I am confident your decision to guide them through a devising process had everything to do with their dedication. The students brought to life archival material, elegantly and creatively embodying texts such as the letter Governor Crapo wrote to his daughter. I also found their imaginative response to a flyer about an evening of Shakespeare scenes especially delightful. The students' commitment showed in their performances, in their ability to adjust physically to the unpredictable movements of a roaming audience, and in their palpable connection to the stories of Glenwood's spiritual denizens.

Research alone, however, cannot evoke such profound enthusiasm. Those students have clearly benefited greatly from your ability to pass on your own training in collaborative approaches to site-based performance. You are a gifted leader, and I have every expectation students and audiences alike will continue to benefit from your talents.

In retrospect, the title of your piece makes perfect sense in unexpected ways: the essence of this production lay not in the spooky conjuring of ghosts that often populate stories about cemeteries. Rather, its power emerged from the way you led a group of contemporary students to restore the spirit of a place teeming with life.

Last week, a survey from LMDA (Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas), asked me to name a production I'd seen recently that I think we should be talking about at next year's conference. Without hesitation, I filled in the blank with *Glenwood: Restoration of Spirit*. Your production has stayed with me, and I greatly look forward to the next opportunity to experience your work.

Sincerely,

Diane Brewer  
Dramaturg  
Associate Professor of Theatre History and Criticism