

Title: The Tunic
Run time: 10 minutes
Writer: Clint Hutzulak
Director: Paul Willis
Cast: 4 actors (3 female, 1 male)
Characters: Woman in Dress (WD)
Woman with Thread (WT)
Couple Wrestling

Props required: tall stool
long tunic
large needle
heavy red thread
large scrim
roman candle sound effect
candelabra and candles
four beeping wristwatches

Lights come up on Woman in Dress (WD), sitting centre stage on tall stool. She is wearing what looks to be a long white dress. It is a floor-length fabric cone, with a simple hole for her head, no sleeves or arm holes, open at the bottom. Her feet are not visible. WD stares intently at audience throughout, with a strangely radiant aura, as if she possesses some secret knowledge.

Woman with Thread (WT) enters and kneels at WD's feet. WT has a spool of red mending yarn and a darning needle. She sews the bottom of the "dress" closed, so a row of large red stitched seals the cone. This sewing spans about half the length of the play, completing in Minute 5.

Couple Behind the two women is a scrim of some sort. Behind the scrim, hidden at all times from the audience, are a man and a woman. The couple wrestle with each other on the floor, like two lovers playing. The muffled sound of their wrestling is faintly audible to the audience through the first half of the play. Except for the rare yelp or subdued curse, there is a very restrained quality to their play fighting, as if the two were trying very hard not to disturb relatives in the next room. Mostly the audience hears clothing rubbing on the floor, maybe an elbow whacking the ground when one of the wrestlers is a bit clumsy.

SFX Halfway through the piece, at the beginning of Minute 5, the near silence of the theatre is ruptured by the scream of a roman candle, loud enough to jolt awake anyone who has fallen asleep. The sound effect is on tape. When the rocket noise dies out, the stage lights begin to dim. The couple behind the scrim fall absolutely silent until the end of the play.

WT exits.

WD remains sitting centre stage, where she is still watching the audience.

Lights By the end of Minute 5, the lights on WD have completely dimmed, but a candelabra has been lit behind the scrim, so WD is backlit.

SFX As Minute Six begins, a digital alarm, a wristwatch, goes off from somewhere above and to the left of the audience. A minute later, a second wristwatch alarm joins in, from above and behind the audience. A minute later, a third alarm sounds, from the right of the theatre, and finally, a fourth, from the floor in front of the stage. The theatre is silent and still except for the overlapping, out-of-phase electronic chiming of the watches.

Play ends when the last watch shuts off. Candles are extinguished.

WD carried or dragged offstage, as her feet are bound in the tunic.

Writer's Notes:

I think of this play as a piece of minimalist music, or a Rothko painting. Almost still, boring maybe, but if you give it a chance, give it time, there's sort of a warm luminosity beneath the surface. The warmth comes both from WD, as she looks at and tries to understand the audience, and from the couple play fighting behind the scrim. From the faint sounds the audience hears, you get a sense of two people who love each other, whose emotions flow rapidly and naturally from loving to mock sadistic to wounded to conciliatory to serious to tender.

In some way the play is about contrast. Silence ruptured by a very loud noise. Stillness and the constant rustle of activity behind the scrim. Light moving from front to back, sound moving from side to side. And a very contrived, fictional, situation, contrasted with very simple, naturalistic acting on the part of the two women. There is some interaction between them, a muttered word, a quiet instruction, as might happen between two people engaged in a simple task, but in spite of the intimacy of the action between the two women, WD is almost completely absorbed in her appraisal of the audience, while WT is completely unaware of the audience. Think of a Japanese ritual, where there's a precision and an intensity to very subtle, stylized movements.

Good luck! I look forward to seeing what you do with it.