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Las Meninas

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April 30, 2012 By [Sarah Ameigh](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

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How many faces have historians and powers-that-be overlooked in favor of a cleaner ending, or a more convenient moral? History has captives and casualties, buried in basements and the minds of those that witnessed these crimes for themselves. Lynn Nottage's *Las Meninas*, directed by Eve Muson at Rep Stage, pauses to examine these crimes, peering deeply into a "possibly true historical footnote about the court of Louis XIV."



KeiLyn Durrel Jones as Nabo, Katie Hileman as Queen Marie-Therese, (back) Jessie Poole and Louise Schlegel as servants (Photo: Stran Barouh)

Queen Marie-Therese (Katie Hileman) is the brash and lonely Queen of France (a woman whose marriage was part of a royal peace treaty, and a woman far from her home in Spain). Her husband, King Louie XIV, (Drew Kopas) tolerates her presence while members of the court find her strange, and abrasive. Queen Marie is given the gift of company, though, when a small-statured court fool is delivered to her from Africa. Nabo (the charismatic KeiLyn Durrel Jones) proves to be more than a quick wit. The two strike up an unexpected companionship as Queen Marie struggles to find comfort in a cold palace and a cold bed.

The piece contains a second layer, however, as it is narrated by a young woman in a convent (Fatima Quander), vividly telling the story of the strange and rumored romance. Her stringent Mother Superior (Susan Rome) tries to force these stories from her mind, as the young woman draws closer to her union with God.

As life moves forward in the palace, King Louie's attentions continue to wain in favor of a member of the court, La Valiere (Annie Grier) leaving Marie to turn to the caustic and delightful Queen Mother for advice (Susan Rome). And from his much ignored corner, the court painter (Tony Tsendeas) sees all as Marie and Nabo's story unfolds to its jarring end.



Drew Kopas as King Louis XIV, Susan Rome as Queen Mother, Keilyn Durrel Jones as Nabo, & Katie Hileman as Queen Marie-Therese (Photo: Stan Barouh)

Elena Zlotescu's set reeks of vanity and self-consciousness. Royal mirrors adorn the space, transforming into screens and walls, giving one the feeling that the court's eyes are always upon you, and if not the eyes of the court, your own. With majestic lighting (Dan Covey) and limited but effective furniture, (fashioned in the image of excess) the worlds transition coldly and seamlessly throughout the space.

The play is as heartfelt as it is scathing, and though the scene is forebodingly set, the wit pokes holes in the story's deep night. The ensemble brings the palace to shallow life (Kevin James Logan, Sean McComas, Jessie Poole, Louise Schlegel, Brady Whealton), and the intricate costume design pulls the story back in time (Elena Zlotescu).

While the pieces' history is dark and rich, the immediacy of basic human need rises to the production's surface, bringing a lustful royal rumor into the hearts of the audience. The chemistry between Marie and Nabo is difficult to look past, and against great odds, they become the light in a dark palace dungeon. These two lost souls, cast from the top and the bottom of society's ladder find a connection, the heat and heart of which emanates into the audience.

Las Meninas casts a wide net – posing questions of race, gender, alienation, loneliness – which offers itself to anyone in search of something, or somebody. Though sometimes dizzying in its scope, Rep Stage delivers this challenging and nuanced piece with grace, and above all else, humanity.

Las Meninas plays thru May 6, 2012 at Rep Stage, Horowitz Center, Howard Community College, 10901 Little Patuxent Parkway Columbia, MD.

Las Meninas

Written by Lynn Nottage

Directed by Eve Muson
Produced by the Rep Stage
Reviewed by Sarah Ameigh

Highly Recommended

Running Time: 2 and a half hours, plus a 15 minute intermission.

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