

IF ONLY THEY WOULD LISTEN TO ME!

Athenaeum Paper
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Mr. President, Mr. Vice-President, Mr. Secretary/Treasurer, and fellow members of the Athenaeum, as you all know, the topic of a paper is a closely guarded secret until its presentation. Imagine my dismay when a fellow member recently began a paper talking about the topic I had selected for this paper! I was greatly distressed when Mr. Noffsinger began talking about Hadestown and the legend of Orpheus and Eurydice, but was ultimately relieved that he chose to speak about the music in the show and in particular, the idea of selling your soul to achieve legendary status, as some blues musicians reputedly have done.

I, too went to see Hadestown at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center, and found it to be a compelling show. There were some deviations from the original myth, but nothing that detracted from the themes of the story. In the show, Orpheus and Eurydice are down on their luck, probably during the Great Depression somewhere in the American South. In the myth, Orpheus is the son of Apollo and the muse Calliope, who falls in love with and wins the lovely human Eurydice. In the show, Eurydice chooses to go to Hadestown, probably to secure food for herself. In the myth, she is bitten by a snake and dies, thus earning herself a trip across the River Styx to Hades. In both versions, Orpheus is so talented musically that he can sing his way into hell and charm Hades into making a deal. At the end of the show, Orpheus looked back to see if Eurydice was following him, just as he does in the myth. And, as the myth reports, Eurydice was there. However, Orpheus looked too soon, before Eurydice had exited the path from Hades, so she faded back into Hades, leaving Orpheus bereft among the living.

Just before Orpheus looked back, I wanted to shout out a warning: "Wait!" This desire set me to wondering what would happen if Orpheus waited? How would the story proceed? Would they all live happily ever after? Speculation of this nature led me to think of two more stories where I find the outcomes frustrating, so tonight we will spend some time reflecting on

why the main characters take the actions they do, why the stories resonate with us, what the characters might do differently, when they might do it, and what might happen. Perhaps, just once, Romeo and Juliet will not both kill themselves or Tosca will not throw herself off the Castel San Angelo or Orpheus will not look back so soon.

In the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, which has been turned into several operas and theatrical pieces, including Hadestown (now the subject of two Athenaeum papers), Orphee by Gluck, and Orpheus in the Underworld by Offenbach, Orpheus loves Eurydice. When she dies, he is distraught. He is also divinely talented, literally, as the son of Apollo. So, for love of Eurydice, he uses his talent to sing his way into Hades. Hades and Persephone are so charmed that Hades is persuaded to enter into a bargain with Orpheus to allow Eurydice to leave.

Here in the twenty-first century, the story still resonates. Who among us would not use a prodigious talent to rescue a loved-one? Should exceptionalism not be rewarded? After all, Orpheus is exceptionally talented and Eurydice exceptionally beautiful. So, we find Hades' willingness to bargain to be appropriate. However, we know that Hades (or Satan in similar stories like Faust) does not like to lose. So, we should beware a trick. Orpheus is certainly concerned. He must walk out of Hades without looking behind him to see if Eurydice is following. She is a shade, and therefore makes no noise, not even the sound of breathing. They are in a series of caves, so she casts no shadow. Similarly, Orpheus cannot discern her presence through touch. He has no other choice, though, so he walks out, trusting that she is behind him and that Hades has not double-crossed him. Once Orpheus is out of the portal, he turns around to look. Eurydice has not yet exited into the light, so she appears briefly as a shade, then fades back to Hades. Perhaps this is Hades' trick; perhaps he never intended to allow Eurydice to leave. Or, perhaps he trusted to human mistrust in order to keep Eurydice.

In any case, what could Orpheus have done differently? If he had waited another moment or two to see his beloved Eurydice, and who among us would have been able to wait, would she really have been there? Or would the shade of Eurydice never have left Hades? Can you really bring someone back from the dead? There are very few tales of the resurrection of a dead person. Perhaps her shade could not survive the realm of Zeus and the other Olympians. Or, perhaps she could have returned from the dead. Would she have been as beautiful, as vibrant? Surely time amongst the dead would weaken an individual. She might well have been paler, slower, more ethereal or less alive than she was prior to the snake bite. Perhaps she would have been weakened and less able to bear the slings and arrows of daily living, especially including childbearing.

Would Orpheus have been the same after his incursion into Hades? Myth tells us that he does not survive long after returning to earth. In one version, he is torn apart by the Maenads. Scholars suggest that the Gods do not allow anyone to return from the dead, therefore Orpheus has to die somehow. So, perhaps Orpheus' trip to Hades is a form of suicide to unite him with his Eurydice? Maybe the story has been twisted a little bit and really, Hades forced the living Orpheus to leave. Maybe he consorts with the Maenads to seek death to be reunited with Eurydice.

Besides waiting to turn around and look at Eurydice, where else could Orpheus have acted differently? Perhaps he could have bargained harder with Hades. Seems unlikely, as Hades had never previously nor since made such a bargain with a mortal. Perhaps Orpheus could have played some more and thus obtained better conditions for himself. This strategy might have had some risk, if we posit that spending time in Hades would weaken a mortal.

Orpheus could also have just left Eurydice in Hades, but that would hardly have been romantic and certainly would not have made him the subject of an enduring myth or this Athenaeum paper. Perhaps Orpheus should have gone to Olympus and tried to charm Zeus and the other gods? This seems like an unfruitful path, since Hades rules absolutely in his realm. Neither of his brothers, Zeus or Poseidon, have any authority therein.

It seems that waiting is the most likely way for Orpheus to change the outcome of the story. Let's say that he does wait and Eurydice reappears hale and healthy. Do they live happily ever after? Eurydice is a beautiful woman; perhaps Hades has been charmed and would contrive to appear above the Underworld to woo or capture her. Perhaps another god would find her desirable and deprive Orpheus of his prize. Or even mortal men might chase after Eurydice. She might even become bored with Orpheus and his interminable singing and flirt with other men. Or, other women might chase after Orpheus because of his incredible talent, thus creating discord in the marital union. Then there are all of the other usual problems of married life, such as children, provisioning (is Orpheus talented enough to feed his family?), housekeeping (does Eurydice cook as well as Orpheus' mother?), and so forth. Maybe one or both of them cheat. We know that lifespans were not long in the time of the Greeks, so either one or both of them could have died shortly after this episode, perhaps from another snake bite, or child bearing, or fighting in the Trojan Wars. After all, can you really cheat the Fates and change the amount of thread you are allotted?

With all of the problems that might face any married couple and this married couple in particular, we might say perhaps it is for the best that Orpheus looks back. However, if we always thought that way, then none of us would ever marry or undertake important enterprises because of the possibility of failure. Therefore, we should hope that just once, Orpheus waits

another moment for his Eurydice to corporealize and have the chance for a happily ever after ending, or at least for further adventures.

The second story we will consider tonight is that of *Floria Tosca*, made famous in the eponymous opera by Puccini. In it, *Floria Tosca* is an accomplished singer in Rome who is in love with the painter *Cavaradossi*. In turn, she is desired by the Roman Chief of Police, *Baron Scarpia*. *Cavaradossi* is working on a painting of the *Madonna* for a church in Rome when he comes upon an old friend who had been a Consul when Rome was ruled by France. He agrees to help this friend escape Rome. While the opera premiered in 1900, it is set in Rome in 1800, specifically at the time of the *Battle of Marengo* when *Napoleon* defeated the *Austrian* army. At the time of the opera, no one really controls Rome, as the army of the *Kingdom of Naples* has largely retreated but the *French* army has not yet arrived. Hence, *Baron Scarpia* is about the only power in Rome and travel in war-torn Italy is difficult. *Tosca* notes the beauty of the *Madonna* and its likeness to a *Marchesa* and expresses her jealousy. *Cavaradossi* assures her that she is the only girl for him, but she remains unconvinced. *Scarpia* becomes aware of the plot to help the Consul escape and has *Cavaradossi* arrested, partly to secure his own grip on power, and partly to put *Tosca* in his grip. *Scarpia* then invites *Tosca* to his office to discuss a deal. While she is there, she hears *Scarpia's* henchmen torture *Cavaradossi*; she cannot stand hearing him scream so she gives away the secret about the hidden Consul in exchange for *Cavaradossi's* life. We hear *Scarpia* and his henchmen agree to a mock execution of *Cavaradossi*, then hear *Scarpia* agree to passages of safe conduct for *Tosca* and *Cavaradossi* to flee Rome. While *Scarpia* writes out the writs, she stabs him, saying mockingly "E avanti a lui tremava tutta Roma", or "And it was before him that all Rome trembled". In the last Act, we attend the mock execution, which turns out to be a real execution. *Tosca* discovers too late the inadvisability of trusting *Scarpia* and has

to rush to the parapet of the Castel San Angelo to elude the guards who have discovered Scarpia's murder, crying out "O Scarpia, avanti a Dio", or "O Scarpia, we meet before God" as she hurls herself over the edge onto the rocks below.

As an aside, Peter Ustinov wrote a small tract of interesting stories that occurred in performances. One concerns Tosca. Usually, the stage hands place a pit full of padding on the upstage side of the Castel wall so that Tosca can safely hurl herself over the edge. Some sopranos step off gingerly, clearly fearing to injure themselves. Others go in for more verisimilitude and hurl themselves over the edge as if they mean to die. It seems that in one run of performances, a soprano who is not named had been particularly demanding and had overtaxed the tolerance of the stage crew. Knowing that this particular soprano would hurl herself over the edge of the Castel, they set up a trampoline in place of the usual padding. After shouting out "O Scarpia, avanti a Dio" and jumping off, the audience was surprised to see Tosca reappear a moment later, bouncing on the trampoline.

This particular opera is a regular part of the repertoire of opera houses around the globe. In addition to the glorious music of Puccini, it has a great deal of drama, driven by love and lust. We also have jealousy, duplicity, naivete, revenge, and self-sacrifice. Really, what more could you want? It is no wonder that this opera has become what is called a warhorse.

Scarpia's motivations are quite basic: he pursues power, whether it is political power in a chaotic Rome, or power over a lovely woman. He does not love her, he lusts for her. Cavaradossi does love Tosca, but he also wants to help a fellow Republican. We can clearly see that Tosca is driven by love and jealousy. She adores Cavaradossi and cannot bear to think of him looking at another woman or later suffering tortures. She will do anything, including giving herself to a villainous man, to secure him. She acts impulsively, telling Scarpia what he wants to

hear, agreeing to give herself to Scarpia, killing Scarpia, and throwing herself off the Castel. Every time I see this opera, I want to remind Tosca of the foolishness of trusting Scarpia, the foolishness of believing anything he says. I always hope that Tosca will hear me and act more prudently.

Cavaradossi himself could change the outcome of the opera by refusing to help the Consul, letting him try to save himself by fleeing towards the French lines at Marengo. By the way, after the battle, Napoleon's chef created a now-famous dish out of the materials foraged at hand, known as Chicken Marengo. It includes chicken, garlic, tomatoes, a fried egg and crayfish.

Early on in the opera, Tosca could change the outcome by choosing to believe Cavaradossi's professions of devotion, thus enabling her to resist the insinuations of Scarpia about her lover's infidelity. However, choosing not to avenge herself for her lover's imagined infidelity by revealing the elements of the plot to help the Consul flee might not really change much. Scarpia might find out through other means, or he might still arrest Cavaradossi and torture him to reveal the plot.

Before Scarpia seizes Cavaradossi, the two of them might have tried to flee Rome with the Consul. However, without a writ of safe passage from Scarpia, and with French, Austrians, and Neapolitans fighting nearby, this might not be a change with any real chance of success. Although, it could lead to the couple's seizure by the French or Austrians and deportation from Rome and the clutches of Baron Scarpia. While this might not be a particularly desirable outcome, it might be better than the actual outcome.

Tosca might choose to give up Cavaradossi, either truly or seemingly. Truly giving him up might not convince Scarpia and would also leave her quite vulnerable to Scarpia. It is

unlikely that anyone else in Rome could protect her, although she might be able to find a nobleman or someone else influential to take her in. This course of action would require some pretty swift work and might be very difficult to achieve. Up until the time of Napoleon, Rome had been ruled as one of the Papal States by the Pope. Napoleon had defeated the Pope and exiled him, then had to retreat with the advance of the Austrians and their allies the Neapolitans. Rome was temporarily in chaos, so this course of action might have been somewhere between risky and impossible. It also might not have saved Cavaradossi, since Scarpia wanted him dead as a warning to other Republicans as well as to extract Tosca from his grasp.

Perhaps when she heard Cavaradossi's screams under torture, she could have pretended to renounce him quite publicly as a philanderer and left him to his fate. This might have convinced Scarpia of her disinterest, but would probably not have saved Cavaradossi because of Scarpia's lust for power. If, however, Scarpia felt that Tosca was disinterested, perhaps he would decide that Cavaradossi was such a small fish he was not worth the trouble of killing and burying. Unlikely, but possible. Then Cavaradossi could flee and Tosca could try to join him. Again, back to the difficulties of fleeing chaotic, war-torn central Italy. While Tosca is an accomplished singer, is she a sufficiently accomplished actress to make such a strategy believable? Many singers are not good actors; they tend to stand on stage and just sing. Stage directors have to work all of the other characters around the leads. Some singers are also good actors, but we do not know about Tosca. She is unable to dissemble around Scarpia, which suggests she is not much of an actress.

In the unlikely event that Tosca manages to secure Cavaradossi's release and also her own from the clutches of Baron Scarpia, then what happens? Rome and central Italy are plagued by war. Do the Neapolitans execute Cavaradossi anyway? When the French march in, does life

improve for Tosca and her lover? Perhaps they are allowed to live quietly in Cavaradossi's cottage in the nearby countryside. Does Tosca's artistic temperament cause trouble? After all, Cavaradossi will have to finish his painting of the Madonna. He may even be commissioned to paint others, or portraits of beautiful women. His talent will certainly attract female patrons. What does Tosca do then? Problems probably continue to present themselves. While both Tosca and Cavaradossi have remunerative careers, what does war do to their financial prospects? There is probably at least some short-term drop in demand for their services. Happily ever after seems unlikely for this pair, given the situation and their tempers.

As we see, due to the natures of the main characters and the political situation of Rome, it seems unlikely that Tosca could really achieve any significant change in the outcome. By the time she is able to kill Scarpia, he has already quietly commanded his henchmen to use real bullets in the mock execution. Tosca is well and truly caught in Scarpia's web. Her best chances occur early in the opera, when she could distance herself from Cavaradossi or choose to believe in his fidelity. Once she is in Scarpia's chamber, she really has no more cards to play, although it is usually at this point that I want to call out "Don't trust him again, you silly woman!"

Now, onto the most frustrating play in the English language, Romeo and Juliet. Every time I watch it, I want to berate the two idiotic teenagers for their imprudence. At almost every point in the play, it is possible to take a different action and change the outcome. Probably each of you had to study this play in English class in high school; you may have even seen a live performance or movie version of it. Nonetheless, I will give you a brief synopsis of the plot to remind you of some of the salient events.

As you remember, the play opens with the Capulets and the Montagues feuding. Romeo Montague is pining for love of a Capulet, Rosaline. To cheer him up, the Montagues all go to a

ball being held by the Capulets. Of course, they go in masks to cover their identity. While at the party, Romeo and Juliet meet and fall in love. Romeo then steals into the Capulet orchard, where the two enact the famous balcony scene: "O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo" and "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? It is the east and Juliet is the sun". The two pledge their love to one another. Romeo then enlists the help of his friend Friar Lawrence, who agrees to marry the two, reasoning that they are going to sleep together anyway, so it is less risky to their souls if they are already married and that joining the two in marriage might serve to end the feud between the two families. Shortly after the secret marriage ceremony, the Montague boys and the Capulet boys meet in the street, where Tybalt Capulet insults Romeo Montague and challenges him to a duel for invading the ball. Romeo refuses, but his friend Mercutio takes up the challenge. In trying to stop the fight, Romeo makes it so that Tybalt slays Mercutio, which so enrages Romeo that takes up his sword and slays Tybalt. Now the fat is in the fire, for the Prince of Verona has declared that any further fighting will be punishable by death. Since Romeo's slaying of Tybalt is partially exonerated by the death of Mercutio, Romeo is merely banished to Mantua, which is about 25 miles away. Romeo slopes off to Juliet's, where the two spend the night and consummate their marriage prior to Romeo's enforced departure. Juliet's parents then try to get her to marry Count Paris, a relative of the Prince. When she refuses without giving any real reason, they are incensed. Juliet goes to Father Lawrence to seek counsel and he proposes the potion scheme wherein Juliet will drink a sleeping draught that will cause her to appear dead for 42 hours. She takes the draft, the Capulets are all distraught, and she is put in what amounts to their mausoleum. Meanwhile, the letter that is supposed to instruct Romeo about the plot is never delivered, so he is in the dark. When he hears news of Juliet's death, he is heartbroken, buys poison in Mantua, rushes back to Verona under

cover of darkness, slays a grieving Paris at the tomb, finds Juliet dead to the world, takes the poison and expires. She then wakes, finds Romeo dead, discovers that he has hogged all of the poison, takes his dagger, and kills herself. Ugh. Again, at almost every point in the play, there are opportunities for level heads to prevail to avoid tragedy. Teenagers. Deliver me.

Now, what drives this play? Teenage love, coupled with impetuosity, good intentions, pride and honor, and selfishness. Romeo and Juliet are both obviously in love. The play would not work if we were not convinced of their absolute love for each other. It is obvious that both are impetuous. Evidence Romeo's street fighting and their rash decision to marry. After all, Juliet is only 13, and therefore not legally able to give consent. Furthermore, she is a girl or woman, and thus the property of her parents, and legally unable to give consent. Neither one of them think about what the consequences of their actions might be for their families or for those who assist them. Romeo gives no thought to the consequences of attending a ball at the house of his enemies or of street fighting. He is only concerned with his own pleasure in the one case and the honor of his family in the other. Then we have the case of Friar Lawrence and the Nurse, who consents to assist Juliet. While well-intentioned, neither of them act prudently.

Why is this play about teenage stupidity so enduringly popular? Perhaps it is that we, even those of us in middle age, are moved by this tale of strong but fatal love. Perhaps we remember what it is like to feel so strongly, to feel that we will just die if we cannot be with a particular person. Perhaps we enjoy reliving the experience of burning with emotion while simultaneously being glad that we no longer do so.

Unlike in Orpheus and Eurydice or Tosca, both Romeo and Juliet have lots of options. At the beginning of the play, they have many good cards in their hand. They are both young, vibrant, attractive, wealthy, noble, connected, powerful, and relatively free. Juliet, as a girl, has

less freedom than Romeo, but she does enjoy a largely carefree existence. They are equals socially and in every other way. There are no obvious impediments to their love with the glaring exception of the family feud. So, right off the bat, we have one place where different action could be taken. As soon as the Prince enjoins death for anyone fighting in the streets, the heads of the two families could have forbidden their households to fight and made peace between the two of them, thus making it possible for the couple to court openly. It would also have been possible for the two families, with or without pressure from the Prince, to arrange a marriage between them to solidify the pact of peace. But no, no one thought of that.

If the Montague boys had acted prudently, they would never have snuck into the Capulet party, thus keeping Romeo away from Juliet, at least for a while. Or, having met and fallen in love at the party, they could have gone to their parents and sought help in arranging a marriage. Or, if their parents were opposed to this idea, to the Prince and suggested that a union between the houses would promote peace in his city.

Friar Lawrence should never have agreed to marry the two without the permission of their, or particularly Juliet's, parents. Since Juliet could not give legal consent, it is not entirely clear that the marriage was legally binding. Once consummated, whether legally binding or not, Juliet is deflowered and loses much of her market value. If found out, she might have been banished to a nunnery by her parents. Friar Lawrence should have known all this, but chose to ignore it. While acting with good intentions, he has certainly made a mess of things. It is possible that he could face serious disciplinary actions for his role. Probably not de-frocking, but perhaps a change of positions or cities, perhaps even sent abroad on a foreign mission. As a full-fledged adult, unlike teenaged Romeo, he should have foreseen the possible complications that would ensue from such a marriage and never performed it. He should have at least informed the

Prince, if not both sets of parents. If he had done that, you can well imagine that the parents would have acted similarly in securing their wayward offspring. Or, if he had counseled them to wait a few days, even if he did not tell the parents, we might have had a different trajectory. Romeo might have fought in the street and both he and Tybalt might have been sentenced to death or banishment. Had the friar's plot succeeded, it is possible that the marriage might have been annulled, since Juliet was not legally able to give assent. Even the Prince of Mantua would have had to separate the two in that case, unless he wished to feud with the church.

At the scene in the tomb, I always want to shake the young people for their impetuosity. If only Romeo had waited a few more minutes. He should have spent more time bewailing the death of his beloved Juliet, perhaps composing an elegy. Then he might have been astonished at her awakening and they might have been able to steal away together as planned. I have long thought that it might be dramatic if Juliet awakens as Romeo dies so that he knows she is coming back to life as he dies and she sees him dying as she awakens, but is unable to stop his death. It would be poetic justice for the audience who has had to endure five acts of teenage love to see them both suffer the realization of the imprudence of their rash behavior. When Juliet awakens and sees the dead Romeo, she does not have to take her own life. She could cling to life and choose to mourn her beloved husband, then marry another man at some point, as many women do. As a beautiful young widow, she would retain some market value, especially with a good dowry from her parents. She could also have committed herself to a nunnery. Her parents would have had enough money to buy her a good position. We have already had enough death in the play, with Mercutio, Tybalt, Paris, and finally Romeo all dead. All, one way or another, through Romeo's hand, by the way.

Let's say that Friar Lawrence's cockamamie plot actually succeeded and somehow or other, the two star-crossed lovers manage to decamp to Mantua, where Romeo has lived under banishment. How are the two going to support themselves? Will their parents really send them money now that they have joined themselves in marriage, each to an enemy of his or her own family? If the families cut off the flow of money, who will support them? It seems unlikely that the Prince of Verona would send any money or that the Prince of Mantua would support them. As gentles, they would have few marketable skills. Romeo could perhaps hire himself out as a mercenary to some prince with an army. He is obviously skilled with a sword and can almost certainly ride a horse. Depending on the martial situation in northern Italy at the time, this might or might not be a good option. If Romeo goes off to war, what happens to the 13 year old Juliet? She probably does not know how to keep house and feed herself. Would Romeo earn enough to keep her with a servant or servants? How would she protect herself, a comely young bride, from the men of Mantua? She would probably not be welcome back at her parents in Verona after defying them.

Once discovered, and the deception would quickly be discovered, since the body of Juliet would be missing, what would happen? Would the parents make common cause over the disappearance? It seems unlikely, at least not any longer than it would take for both to appear before the Prince demanding satisfaction. More likely, the feud would deepen, perhaps even into open warfare, with the Capulets complaining about Romeo deceiving and seducing their virtuous daughter and the Montagues asserting that Juliet was a loose girl who had overcome the better instincts of their noble Romeo. Would the Prince have sided with one family over the other? Probably not. However, would he have allowed the marriage to persist? Would he have insisted to the Prince of Mantua on the return of the young Juliet, or perhaps both children? What

punishment would he have meted out? Would Mantua choose to comply with the demand of the Prince of Verona? Probably yes, but possibly no. He might have been sympathetic to young love or he might have been glad to have an excuse to flout Verona and stir up hostilities.

We have already discussed the problematic nature of the marriage itself, give Juliet's age. How would Friar Lawrence be punished for his role? What about the Nurse? Her first duty was certainly to her employer, not to Juliet. At the very least, she would probably be dismissed without any stipend. Do Friar Lawrence and the Nurse consider these possibilities? Not according to the play.

Then we have to consider the possibility that the young couple would be allowed to return home and remain wed. Would they have continued to burn with passion for each other? Usually not. The ordinary petty arguments of married life would soon begin. Romeo does not bring in enough money. Juliet spends too much money. Perhaps Juliet turns out to be a shrew. Romeo spends too much time with the lads. Juliet flirts with other men. Perhaps Romeo's impetuous nature leads him to continue to duel in the streets and get himself killed. Will Juliet run herself through with Romeo's sword or will she mourn his death like a sensible person, then move on to another marriage? At some point, children enter the picture, bringing their own stresses. Perhaps Juliet even dies in childbirth. Does Romeo kill himself then, remembering the poison he had once purchased in Mantua and stashed away, meaning to pour it out some day? Perhaps one or both of them, while pretty, turn out to be dull. This seems unlikely, given the glorious lines that both spout in the play. Or, perhaps against all odds, the characters in the play make some better choices, enjoy some better luck, and manage to live more or less happily ever after. They certainly could if they would just listen to me!

Thank you for allowing me to consider the various points at which influence could be exerted to alter the outcome of these three stories. Trying to influence the story mid-performance would be frowned upon. An audience member would probably be ejected if he begin to shout instructions or counsel at the players. Even the players would struggle to change the course of the story mid-performance. In an opera, it would be almost impossible, since the words go with the music. Imagine if Tosca begins to sing something different. The other singers onstage, never mind the 60 members of the orchestra, would be hard pressed to follow her. In a play, it would be a little easier, but still upsetting to the other actors. Trying to ad lib enough dialogue to finish a plot would be quite taxing to them, and is probably better left to improvisational comedy troupes. With all of these impediments, we or I must resign ourselves to watching the performances as they have been written, even if we silently urge changes to the script and wish for a better outcome for the characters.

To close this paper and stimulate discussion in our comment period, I ask you, fellow Athenaeum members, what plays or operas or shows or stories do you find frustrating? Which ones leave you wanting to instruct the characters and how would you instruct them?