
THE DALTONIAN

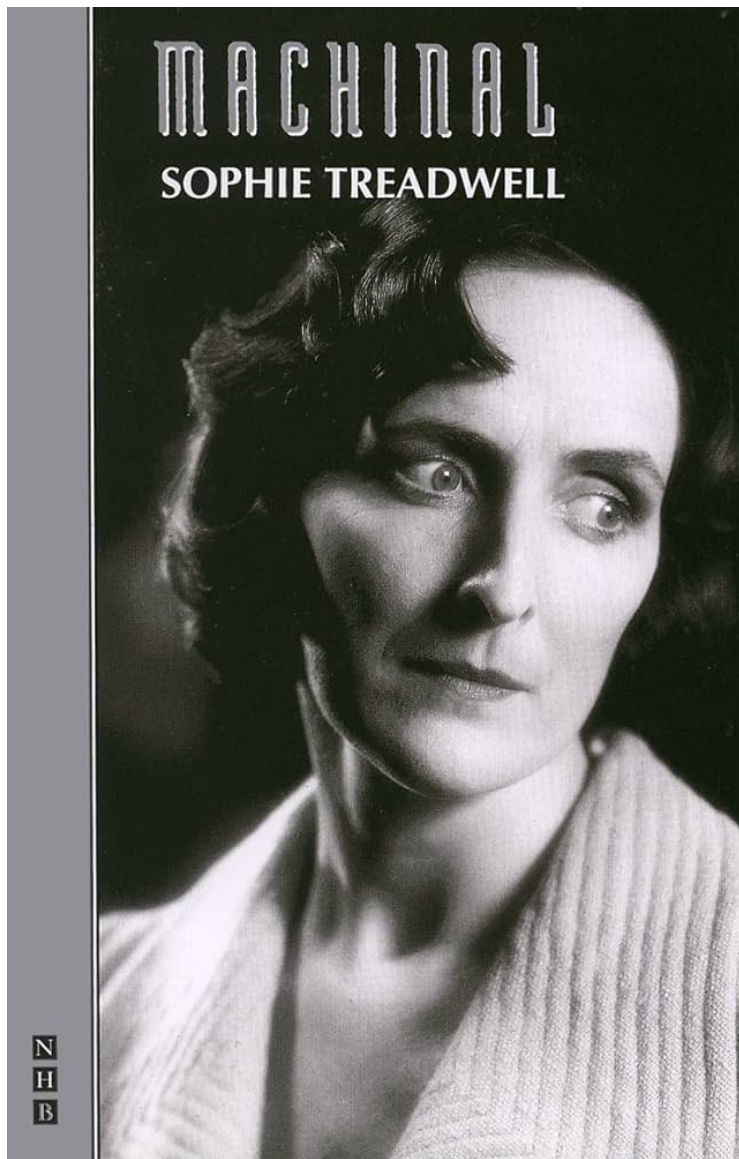
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ARTS

Senior Projects: Machinal!

MAY 9, 2025 BY MIKA HIGGINS-WOO



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Springtime is here, and so are the Senior Projects! Senior Projects are a Dalton theater department tradition where students in the Senior Performance class who have taken at least three theater classes during their time in high school have the opportunity to direct either an original or a pre-existing ten-minute play. These projects are then performed for the Dalton community and families in B06 in May. Usually, five or six ten-minute projects are performed with around three to five student actors in each.

This year, the seniors are taking a different path. Instead of individually choosing a short play and directing it, Tessa Chaet '25, Cole Corper '25, Felix Norris-Lindsay '25, Zafi Dvorozniak '25, and Hayden Almercz '25 are joining together to co-direct a single, longer play with a large cast. The play is *Machinal*, written by Sophie Treadwell in 1928. It follows the story of a young

woman living in the 1920s who, after finding no fulfillment in her role as an office stenographer, then wife, then mother (the only roles society expected of her during this time), is found guilty of murdering her husband. This story is based on a true one: in 1926, Ruth Snyder killed her husband and made history as the first woman in America to be executed in the electric chair.

Machinal is "a timely play for a moment in history when women are being invited to return to an earlier time when their purpose was more limited and expectations for fulfillment were diminished," says former Theater Department Chair Robert Sloan, who is supervising the seniors' direction of this project. Tessa Chaet '25, one of the student directors, agrees. "The play, written in the 1920s," she says, "has surprised us with its relevance to the modern-day world. The play gives a very intense and realistic display of the history of women's bodily autonomy (or lack thereof). This is just one of many reasons why we [the senior acting class] have decided to produce this show."

The story of Machinal moves quickly, using staccato dialogue and an expressionist acting style, and rapidly transporting the audience from one setting to another with the change of a scene. Each scene has its own purpose: one depicting domestic life, one depicting work life, and so on. "Each scene is its own world in a sense, creating nine episodes meant to mirror the nine months of pregnancy," explains Chaet. In addition to this unique style, the seniors are focusing on telling the story through the lens of the main character, and thus accentuating her internal feelings and fears through staging (e.g., exaggerating judgmental looks from her colleagues at work, the hand her husband lays on her shoulder or the aggressive tone the lawyers use in the courtroom). Chaet explains that she and her co-directors are also aiming "to combine fascinating sound cues and light cues to create an immersive experience for the audience."

The different format of senior projects this year creates new and exciting opportunities for both the cast and the directors. Cast member Molly McCoy '26 remarks that although she wasn't optimistic about the new format at first, she is enjoying the rehearsal process, explaining that she's found it to be very "innovative and new, as it serves as an excellent commentary on our ever-evolving political climate. I've been really enjoying the first scene, especially where you can pretty quickly pick up on how weird and freaky this show is." Cast member Oliver Katz '26 agrees, explaining, "Machinal is very stylistically different from any

other show I've ever been in, so I feel that the freedom of Senior Projects allows us to really explore that stylistic difference."

Machinal performances will take place on May 19th at 4:00 and 7:00, as well as on the 20th at 4:00 after school in BO6.

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