

Ilia Kemble

TH488; TTH3-5:30

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Response

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Micheal Frayn's *Copenhagen* is a play about a historical meeting between two famous physicists, Neils Bohr and Werner Heisenberg. This meeting takes place in 1941 in German occupied Denmark. Heisenberg appears to be working on developing an atomic bomb for Nazi Germany. Not a whole lot is known about what was discussed at this mysterious meeting; however, there is much speculation that Heisenberg came to ask Bohr about the moral implication of using theoretical physics to create a weapon. Frayn draws a parallel between the impossibility that Heisenberg established in physics, about never knowing everything about the behavior of physical objects, and the mysterious nature of human actions. The play explores various possible outcomes of this meeting between Heisenberg and Bohr and each is discussed as a scientific treatise on theoretical physics.

When I first read the play, I was overwhelmed by the amount of scientific exposition. If Frayn had not included Margarethe's character, none of Bohr and Heisenberg's scientific babble would have made any sense. The "plain language" that they used to describe things to Margarethe was a very effective way to keep the audience from feeling alienated and frustrated. It also helped me to see the connection that Frayn was making between science and human actions.

I really responded to the moral implication of their discussion. Since the characters are clearly in an afterlife of some sort, I decided that the world that this play take place in should not look like any place or time. Instead, I wanted the set to be symbolic of the moral questions posed.

The center circle represents the inside of Bohr's House. It is on a turntable that rotates every time a new draft of the visit between the characters is reviewed. This circle will be made out of hollow frosted plexi-glass and emit a slight glow as if it is radiating energy. Painted on the circle is a symbol used to warn people of the danger of radiation poisoning. Above the table in the center, is a chandelier of frosted globes that appear to be moving up and down at the same time. This chandelier represents the ever moving and changing atoms that are always being discussed. The outer square is a chalkboard with theoretical physics calculations. This area represents the park that Bohr and Heisenberg used to walk at while discussing physics in the 1920's. The benches that surround the center circle represent the park benches that Bohr and Heisenberg may have come across on their long walks, and are also made out of plexi-glass. These benches add a dynamic quality to the set and make the turntable appear to be moving even when it is still.

Lighting plays a large part in my vision as well. It will create the sterile atmosphere while at the same time setting locations for the action. I see the characters lit by stark white light. I want this light to feel otherworldly. The center circle will be the brightest, while the outer square is broken by globular partially lit patterns. When Heisenberg and Bohr step off the center circle to go on their walks, it will appear to be nighttime in October or September, but it will have an astral quality to it, as though they are walking on stars.

Overall, I see this play as taking place inside the character's minds or in a place somewhere between life and death. I wanted my set to speak to the moral questions presented in the play as well as give the audience a clue about the content presented by providing them with well-known objects and symbols such as a chalkboard and the radiation symbol.