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John Goodman  
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cape-flourishing grandeur. "You came to the melting pot, sir, and melted ... melted away," he says, staring down at Eddie (although he's probably staring up) and rebuking him as he would the villain in a turn-of-the-century melodrama. Zaretsky can't forget the pogroms, and aren't the newspapers talking about a holocaust?

Still, I'm not sure this ongoing argument is ever conclusively tipped in one direction or the other. Eddie is doing what he has to, and so is Zaretsky, and if we're meant to choose sides, it's not clear which one "Conversations With My Father" endorses. More mixed signals, to my mind. While theoretically you can applaud Mr. Gardner for wanting to include as much as possible in his play, from a pragmatic standpoint, you wish he'd put in less.

The production, staged by Daniel Sullivan, doesn't stint on mood and the performances are, for the most part, richly layered. But I wasn't even of a fixed mind about Tony Walton's set — with its dark wood paneling, an ornate bar that might have propped up Anna Christie, and, perched above it, a stuffed moose head that, I swear, had an occasional grin on its chops. At times, the place struck me as down and out and dingy, a mockery of Eddie's ambitions. But then, Pat Collins's lighting would change and it would take on a burnished glow and a cockamamie warmth, and I caught myself thinking

that if it existed, it would be in all the New York guidebooks.

Do you gather I seesawed all through "Conversations With My Father"?

### 'Tis Pity She's a Whore'

JoAnne Akalaitis's staging of "'Tis Pity She's a Whore" (at the Newman Theater at the Public Theater) exhibits precisely the same strengths and deficiencies as her productions of "Henry IV, Parts I and II" last season. It is as alluring to look at as it is painful to hear. Ms. Akalaitis seems to elicit terrific work from her designers and technicians and terrible work from her actors. The spells engendered by the former are repeatedly ruptured by the latter, who insist on speaking their lines.

The director has chosen to advance John Ford's 1630 drama about incest and evisceration to Fascist Italy in the early 1930's, where it has no trouble making a home for itself. The sets are by John Conklin, but they could be by de Chirico and Dali. Mimi Jordan Sherin's lighting, frequently flat and white, furthers the surrealistic effect, while the costumer Gabriel Berry has provided some elegant fashions for an indulgent aristocracy to preen in. (The stagehands, not to be left out, sport tuxes and bright red face-masks.)

It's a chilly, hollow world, but on the surface only. Underneath, putrefaction has set in and forbidden emotions are festering. Now and again, we are afforded a glimpse into the rococo bedroom, behind the upstage scrim, where Giovanni (Val Kilmer) and his sister, Annabella (Jeanne

Tripplehorn), are writhing on "lawless sheets." They are an undeniably handsome couple and catching them in the act makes you feel a bit like a peeping Tom. "'Tis Pity," one of the grisliest plays ever written, is also one of the most voyeuristic.

Much of the action is underscored by original music, composed by Jan A. P. Kaczmarek, and it, too, contributes mightily to the impression of eerie foreboding. Everything, in fact, points to an overheated, sexually charged evening. Then the actors go and open their mouths, and the temperature plummets, the lasciviousness seems silly and Fascism looks as if it could be beaten back with a feather duster. Lurid passion, if it's not totally persuasive, registers as a big put-on.

The performances of Mr. Kilmer and Ms. Tripplehorn never seem compulsive or blood-driven, as they must. His delivery gravitates to the monotonously remote; hers, to the schoolgirlishly shallow. Biology doesn't have much to do with their coupling; perversity, even less. Jared Harris, as the evil nobleman Soranzo, hails from the Christopher Walken School of Villainy — pale face, dead lips, numb voice. Elsewhere, inept posturing predominates.

(Deirdre O'Connell is a fortunate exception, as the heroine's cheap, gossipy companion. And Ross Lehman caught me off guard with the poignance of his death scene, since up to that point he has been directed to portray Bergetto, a comic suitor, as an imbecilic vaudeville hoofer.)

## 'Conversations With My Father' doesn't stint on mood.

Part of the considerable fascination of "'Tis Pity" is the gusto with which it hurtles toward its gruesome climax. The performers at the Public are unable to keep pace, however. One by one, they tire and flag, and Ms. Akalaitis can't rally them. The divorce, considerable by the end, makes for a ridiculous state of affairs. Here is the play, bursting over the finish line, and way back there, panting in the dust, is the cast.

### 'Lypsinka! A Day in the Life'

Were the 1950's really that psychotic? So torn between visions of sweet domesticity and nightmares of impending destruction? So wiggled out, self-deluded and double-faced? So frankly ... nuts?

They seemed pretty normal to me, growing up in Eisenhowerland. But the other night I left the New York Theater Workshop (at the Perry Street Theater), thinking that John Epperson has a point. Mr. Epperson, a recent Off Off Broadway phenom, practices the art of lip-synching, which is to say mouthing the words to other people's records. This talent — marginal, perhaps, but no less demanding for that — has given rise to Mr. Epperson's stage persona, Lypsinka, a flamboyant diva

what you'd call son's latest 80 "Lypsinka! A made up of no songs, lines' o snippets of be with the care o midcentury's voices I recog were those of Bette Davis a that it matters: blend into a ma or production n sinka is some never — I rep by a chorus li cutouts.

Changing o with a speed double joints bounds from o anhood to the the types — haughty, coy, c verse, befuddl — as they car highly stereot spect, indicati age that gave purposefully t ple of steps fu the end of whi least, a mov green light, sh the approachi

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The "death scene" that the reviewer makes reference to, is a scene that I staged for Ms. Akalaitis during the absence of David Leong.

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