

The Berkshire Eagle Chester Theatre Company's 'An Iliad': A story worth telling

Jeffrey Borak, August 21, 2013

The setting for Chester Theatre Company's production of Lisa Peterson and Denis O'Hare's extraordinary "An Iliad" is an incomplete stage set -- an unpainted wall with two door openings stretching diagonally across the stage. Sawdust is scattered across the floor. Old boots are piled in a mound right of stage center; more boots are arrayed in a neat row along a portion of the top of the wall. There are two chairs and a table, upon which is a red high-heel woman's shoe, a glass of water and a gallon jug of water resting on top of what could be drawings of the floor plan of the set.



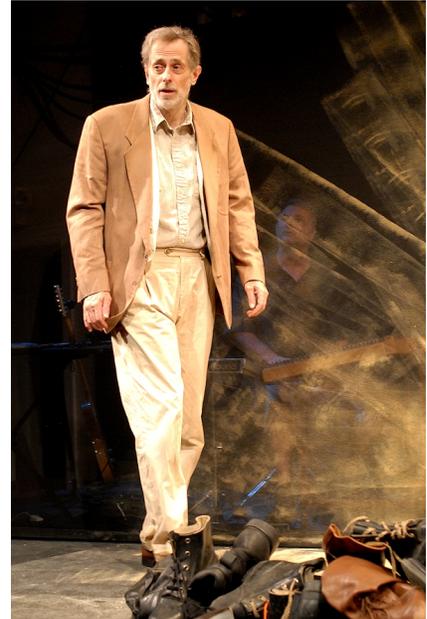
A voice suddenly booms across the theater from one side of the hall. The room reverberates to the sound of a Greek incantation that pulls the audience from its own reality into another.

The voice belongs to a suitcase-bearing man known only as The Poet ([Steve Hendrickson](#)).



He is worn down by time, by the story he has been telling again and again across centuries and cultures, an ancient story first told by Homer of the prolonged war between the Greeks and Trojans, of the cruel, hard, brutal

deaths of thousands upon thousands of soldiers -- kings, princes, commanders, grunts -- bearing Greek and Trojan names that could, the Poet reminds us, just as easily be the names of thousands upon thousands of young Americans who have gone to war at home and overseas.



Even as The Poet struggles on occasion for the right words, the right thoughts, the right expressions to narrate a story he knows too well, there is something fresh in his idiosyncratic cautionary account of war as an instrument of national policy and the people, the ordinary people, who comprise war's collateral damage.

As the Poet, Hendrickson tells Homer's story as if it were his own; as if he were witness to history. His narrative, even as it begins to wear near the end, is told with discovery, dramatic flair, hushed respect and understanding, tempered by wit, irony and an everyman's directness and absence of guile or pretense.

The pain and sorrow in the Poet's eyes speak volumes to the notion that for all the advances mankind has made in the centuries since the Trojan War, this story still has relevance, still needs to be told.

I suspect it has not been told with as much haunting eloquence as it is being told at Chester Town Hall.