**Multi-rolling.**

On the 14th March, I went to see the 39 Steps at the Criteron Theatre. The 39 Steps is a satirical comedy commenting on the fragility of the veneer of society during the 1930s. The remarkable multi-rolling performed by the 4 person ensemble, in addition to the employment of stereotypical characters and representational costume and props in keep with the Brechtian influence. The play follows Richard Hannay as he attempts to clear his name after wrongly being accused of murder and discover the secret of ‘the top air military secret’. Throughout the play Hannay encounters 3 different love interests, all played by Jennifer Bryden and all stark contrasts to each other with the effective use of stereotypes.

As Jennifer Bryden takes on the role of Annabella Schmidt she creates a stereotype of the seductive foreign spy, through her thick German accent paired with a husky voice portraying her as a seductive character to the audience. Bryden also moves her hips seductively as she walks, and swishes her clean cut black glossy bob- used as a representational prop to indicate her bluntness and her job as a spy. After inviting herself to spend the night at Richard Hannays ‘portland place’ apartment to escape being pursued by opposing agents, Annabella claims Hannays bed while he sleeps in an armchair. However during the night Jennifer Bryden slowly edges onto the stage as Richard Hannay sits asleep in an armchair centre stage. She moves awkwardly with her legs wide apart as she takes unsteady steps towards Hannay with the knife concealed behind her back so the audience and Hannay are unaware and calls in a broken, and husky voice ‘Richard?’ with her eyes unnaturally wide and her eyebrows furrowed. As Hannay has his back to Annabella he misses the desperation in her face and assumes she’s going to make a sexual advance- this use of dramatic irony is cleverly created by Bryden, who faces towards Hannay at all times so he will not realise she has been injured. The audience are left sitting on the edges of their seats as the tension and sexual expectation builds.

As Annabella gets closer to Hannay, the audience expect Annabella to advance as they fall silent. Bryden whispers with a even deeper long drawn out whisper ‘Oh Richard’ widening her eyes and slowly edging towards Hannay who reacts awkwardly, as her forward nature highlights the theme of Sexual Repression in the play. As the tension builds on stage, Annabella stumbles closer to him slowly till the two performers are face to face and Annabella looks seductively at his lips with her own mouth slightly parted as she breathes deeply, while, still in contrast Hannay appears to stop breathing. However when the tension is almost unbearable for the audience to watch Annabella falls over his lap on the armchair and the knife is revealed. This complete change of setting catches the audience off guard and is a comical moment as the mood vanishes completely. As she lies across Hannays lap convulsing about to die she says ‘Oh my dear Richard’ in a soft accented voice. Then as she is losing time she passionately shouts ‘ALT-NA-SHELLACH’ and thrusting her hips onto Hannay increasingly dramatically, whilst kicking her legs and shaking her head violently. When Annabella finally lies still, Hannay’s character looks up from the body and looks directly at the audience and says ‘Golly’; this scene makes the death of Annabella Schmidt a farcical scene for the audience as although they now know that Annabella did not enter with the intention of making a sexual advance, she has resulted in making sexual movements on top of Hannay, causing the audience to roar with laughter at the unexpected ridiculousness of the situation.

After Hannay embarks on his search for the secret of the 39 Steps at ‘Alt Na Shellach’, he re-encounters Pamela, the plays portrayal of the ‘proper and polite 1930’s lady ’ who ends up handcuffed to Hannay, much to the audiences enjoyment as the two characters currently despise each other as they reside in the Mcarrigle Hotel. Bryden illustrates Pamelas character through the fitted classy dress and the curled neat blond up-do, showing her high class; Bryden touched her hair a lot when she first enters and kept smoothing her clothes down, showing her to be up tight and self obsessed. Also her well pronounced speech and aghast expressions- showing how easily shocked she is. As Pamela’s clothes are soaking she is forced to remove her stockings with attempted grace and as she tries to remove her first stocking, Pamela turns slightly away from Hannay to retain her dignity slightly and the audience can foresee the awkward scene that is about to unravel. Both characters soon realise that because of their handcuffed wrists, Hannay will be forced to touch her leg. Bryden illustrates how uncomfortable her character feels, through her head suddenly looking down at her feet and her hands removing the stocking flinching, as her eyebrows slowly raise at the tense situation. As she starts to remove the stocking on the leg closest to Hannay his hand is physically forced to stroke her bare thigh, as his hand, rigid with panic, first touches her thigh Jennifer Bryden freezes, glances upwards at Hannay’s face and then employs the British attitude of Stiff upper Lip, as she firmly fixes her gaze with the stockings her handcuffed hand is struggling with as she attempts to ignore Hannay’s hand stroking down her leg as she blanches and purses her lips. As the stocking finally is removed both character sigh with relief that the ordeal is over.

In conclusion the mirrored sexual repression between Pamela, the stereotypical English lady, and Hannay, the stereotypical English gentleman, ensure that they can be together. After the play explores his relationships with women on each end of the spectrum who are all played by the same actress, with Annabella the overly confident spy, Hannay finds the right woman and can have a happy ending. The multi-rolling by Jennifer Bryden effectively brings Hannay’s journey for a partner to life by creating these two characters, and her use of Stereotypes successfully allows the audience to identify with each character despite the short time each character is on stage.

Ao2- 13/17 Ao4- 27/33 40/50

This is more focussed well, you could make more of a point of the differences in the characterisation, this is essentially what the question is after.