





## 2008 New York International Fringe Festival Reviews

### Mourn the Living Hector

reviewed by [Kelly Aliano](#)

Aug 14, 2008

*Mourn the Living Hector*, written by Paul Cohen and directed by Shira Milikowsky and Julie Rossman, interweaves the story of Mike, a present-day young Marine on leave, and the tale of Hector, a leader of the army of Troy during the Trojan War. The play foregrounds the violence inherent in war and how this contrasts, and sometimes mirrors, the violence of the everyday world.

The play is directed to use its environment to its benefit, creating an all-encompassing experience for the viewer. The soldier lies asleep in bed as the audience enters, bright lights glare in the eyes of the audience (mostly to mark scene changes), and the broadcast of the sound of a helicopter whirring just above us brings Mike's war nightmare into the physical realm of the space. The opening is reminiscent of *Apocalypse Now*—a soldier looking back over the incomprehensible violence of war, as he tries to readjust to the everyday pressures of regular society.

The use of the story of the Trojan War reminds the audience of the ever-present nature of war in our culture. Modern

warfare is not so different from ancient combat—only the technology has been updated. The play's structure operates as a nonlinear sequence of vignettes, flipping back and forth between Mike's encounters with those back home and Hector's growing realization of the futility of the war in which Troy is engaged. The plot is, however, quite complicated and often difficult to follow.

Despite this, the play is still an enjoyable and meaningful work of theatre. The beauty of the poetic text both engages the audience with the issues at work in the piece, while still alienating them enough to force them to think. The play employs a dark humor; I found myself chuckling about something as terrible as "armless orphans" before being made to confront what, exactly, it was that I was laughing at. The performances are all compelling—the actors make wonderful connections with one another and really seem to grapple with the deep concerns that the play raises.

The piece is able to be about violence without being gratuitous. The first scene depicts a young woman who has been brutalized; the side of her face is covered in blood, and more blood stains the sheets of the bed. This led me to believe that the rest of the performance would bring more of the same. In spite of this introduction, the play shifts focus and is much more psychological and philosophical than physically brutal. It raises the real question of how human beings glorify the murder and devastation of war while condemning violence, often of a similar nature, in ordinary society. The play contemplates the possible hypocrisy of this and really puts the soldier's role in society under the microscope. Mike, like Hector, has committed his life to serving his country—to being for the people—yet he finds himself entirely incapable of relating to the common folk he encounters. They, in turn, cannot relate to him and have often become nameless, without unique identities of their own. In addition, both Mike and Hector lead armies in the name of their people, but in both cases it is a war that the people do not actually want. In this context, the play opens the real question of why we fight at all, especially when we know that we most likely have little chance of victory. Like the best works of art, *Mourn the Living Hector* leaves these questions unanswered, for the audience members to consider for themselves.

Written/created by: Paul Cohen  
Directed by Shira Milikowsky and Julie Rossman  
Presented by Performance Lab 115

**Buy tickets for this show:**

**Thu August 14 9:45 pm**

**Sat August 16 2:45 pm**

**Mon August 18 7:30 pm**

**Thu August 21 5:00 pm**

**Sat August 23 9:30 pm**

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