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It's always interesting to see the written word make its transition to performance, especially when you're intimately familiar with the work. In the case of *Cloud Formations*, the third in [Bottle Alley Theatre Company's](#) trilogy of plays at [Sessions On Mary](#), I had previously read the play with other company members and had been eagerly awaiting its opening this weekend.

Upon arriving at the venue, the audience was seated in the half-round, encircling a futon with a tent atop. Marlow (Samantha Ireland) sat barefoot under the tent, jotting notes in a journal as the crowd murmured to themselves. She carefully packed her things into a backpack and, after a cue from writer/director [Chris Fontanes](#), the show began.

I will forgive the lady in the audience for speaking (quite loudly) in reply to the rhetorical questions in Marlow's monologue. It was a bit of a surprise, as I would think even the most theatrically uninitiated would know that they should not actually speak to the actors. Nonetheless, Ireland was unfazed, and the show proceeded.

Opposite Marlow was Sunny, a whimsical (albeit sickly) girl with a distaste for puppets, played convincingly by Marian Ayensworth. Though seemingly inane stories, Marlow distracts Sunny from her sickness and Marlow's impending departure. Listening to the odd tale, our minds as the audience are drawn upward and away, instilling a sense of wonder. For a little while we forget where we are. Who are these two? Why are they here? Where is the ghost...

Enter Tom (Ian Pala), the unrequited lover of Marlow. Tom is kind and thoughtful in spite of the cold shoulder Marlow gives him in spite of herself. Tom wants to celebrate. Just because. Between these two the dialog grew tense and animated, raised voices raising eyebrows as a distinctly awkward silence befell the room in the moments where they took a breath. Through the hour we grow to know more about these characters and where Marlow is going, if not exactly why. Like many of Bottle Alley's plays (and like life), we aren't given the answers to all of our questions. Sometimes we have to explore what we're given and find the answer ourselves. Therein lies the true discovery. The real fun.

Every actor hopes they can take the source material they've been given and make it their own... make it better. To take the character they have and give him or her life. In this, all three of the actors succeeded admirably. We feel sorry for Tom when we should, but also angry at him for letting himself be treated so. We want to grab Marlow by the shoulders, scream at her that she's making a mistake (maybe?). We feel like voyeurs when they argue. With Sunny, we want to tell her we agree, that puppet is creepy, and that she makes us wonder, and maybe give her a bowl of chicken noodle soup and cup of tea.

I was surprised to see my own notions of these characters overshadowed by the performances. Rather than viewing the performances in the context of the play I'd read, it took only a few minutes for me to get lost in the show and let the characters take me where they wanted to go, however unwillingly. In more than one case I began to think back to experiences in my own life, look at them in a different way, and if that's not the hallmark of an undeniably successful work of art then I don't know what it is.