This weekend is the last chance for Boston (and American) thespians to see Sizwe Banzi is Dead at the Charles Playhouse. John Kani and Winston Ntshona are black. Since blacks are not permitted to be "artists" in South Africa, they are legally registered as household servants of Athol Fugard, the white playwright, with whom they "devise" Sizwe Banzi. The term "devise" apparently refers to an intense collaboration/improvisation process which stresses reality and authenticity in the final product.

Certainly Mr. Kani's depiction of a visit by Henry Ford II to the South African Ford plant in which he worked has the ring of truth about it (and he did, indeed, work in the Ford plant). The scene in which Mr. Ntshona picks his pride and identity against practicality and abandon the identity of Sizwe Banzi could be real, though apparently wasn't for these actors. All through this play the contrast between the roles the actors with broad grins, for humor is a very important part of this play. A white American audience feels almost guilty about laughing when the subject is of such gravity and tragedy, but it is because we are given a total view of these men's situations that Sizwe Banzi has the powerful effect that it does. It is easy to ignore a harangue but much more difficult to put out of mind two people whom we have to feel a deep empathy for in the course of something so many kinds of emotions.

It would be difficult to compare Sizwe Banzi to other plays; it suffices to say that the critical acclaim (including the 1975 "Best Actor" Tony Awards to John Kani and Winston Ntshona) has not been stepped on the Playhouse. The Charles Playhouse is located at 74 Warren Street in Boston, near the Train Station bus stop, and telephone ticket inquiries should be made to 426-6912.

The Pocket Mime Theatre (84 Newbury Street; 266-1770) has been running this extensive season of on-campus groups. If you are in the region, run Thursday through Saturdays, and the audience is invited to stay after the show for an informal critique on MIT Community Players.

The MIT Community Players' performances of Bette Gordon's Equus, which began last weekend and continues through tomorrow night in Kresge Little Theatre, is a valiant attempt to resist a strong and moving play — an attempt for which the Players should be applauded. But it is an attempt that just barely fails to come off, underlined by minute weaknesses in just enough of the characters to weaken the entire fabric such that it falls just short of carrying away success.

Herbert Henzen's Hedda Gabler is the story of a headstrong woman who wants both to be at the peak of society and to waste society, to live in luxury and to wallow in it, to appear to be a bystander while she is actually a manipulator of people. Hedda Gabler is not a single character. Several people can be drawn from her, people solely out of greed or evil or any other basic flaw; she is complex, multi-faceted, warped, almost whimsical in one way but dead set in her purposes in another. Her complex characters show best when contrasted with characters of equal depth if not equal contrivance, people who distort her more as human beings.

Al Migliorini as Einar Lovberg, the man who vies for her affection, is a good actor, and Hedda Gabler's attempts to manipulative Hedda's with for ulterior and whom Hedda tries to run away from altogether, are as believable, as convincing, as convincing as anything else. In the Common Players' version of the play, Hedda is a well-executed role surrounded by weaker performers that in turn sap her own strength. While Kathleen Martin turned in a good but-not-great rendition of the tragic heroine, the actors around her came off as shallow, somewhat amateurish, and weak. The play demands bold actors to play even the weak roles with strength, but the Phaenon give us almost performances.

Morton Pierce as George Tesman. Hedda's brilliant but-horrible husband, is an example of a weak character who is not forced by circumstances to be melodramatic at every turn, to tower with rage when he should be angry, to cower when he should just be sorry. The character of Lovberg requires a degree of comic drama — some might even see as much as Migliorini provides, but he believes it lies on too heavily.

The Community Players are a group that seems to be living up to its tagline, "the better-edited publicity machines of the Musical Theater Guild, the Drama Workshop, the Dramashop, and Dramadrom, reducing their already-small role in the MIT arts community to miniscule proportions. That's a shame. These the productions of some of the legitimate theater are worthwhile and enjoyable.

Even with its flaws, their Hedda Gabler is well worth the admission price and the time invested in seeing it. But it's like so many Chinese meals; two hours later, you wonder if it was really all that good.