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Love Song

There are a number of compelling Buddhist elements in this play, which at first seems a bit odd for a play that trumpets living in the outside world as the ultimate act of bravery. Of course, Buddhism has a complex and varied history with regard to renunciation. Not all Buddhists are monastic, and indeed the Buddha himself rejected asceticism as much as worldliness as an unproductive extreme. Further, the later Mahayana bodhisattva tradition defined itself through the bodhisattva's vow to turn away from enlightenment and back to the world in order to lessen the suffering of all sentient beings. In this way, the idea of returning or going into the outside world as an act of bravery is certainly far from anathema to the Buddhist community.

The most striking of the play's pa

hardships, Siddhartha renounced his family and kingdom in order to find a way to end suffering. He went to a number of wandering religious teachers, practiced asceticism and self-mutilation, and almost starved to death in his quest to find a way out of the pains of the material world. Eventually he rejected the path of asceticism as too extreme, took food offered to him, sat beneath the boddhi tree, and vowed not to leave until he had solved the problem of suffering. After a number of trials and temptations, he realized the Four Noble Truths and reached enlightenment.

The most striking parallel between this story and Beane's is the emphasis on the need to solve the problem of suffering by passing through the worst of filth the world offers. Like Prince Siddhartha after he had renounced his kingdom but before he reached enlightenment, before his transformation Beane could only see the negative aspects of life. He allowed death, decay, and meaninglessness to oppress him and utterly devalue the rest of life. The fictionalized story of the first night he and Molly met enacts this theme even more dramatically, as the two literally crawl through the oppressive heat and darkness, over needles, vomit, broken pavement, and trash, [illegible]

acknowledge a shifting scale of levels of truth and illusion. Further, these hierarchies do not resolve to the reality of the world, but to the insight that ultimately all manifestation is an illusion. However, the Buddha's realization of nirvana stands as proof that there is a way out of illusion, even if it is not to reality as such. This stance that all perceivable, conventional reality is ultimately unreal initially poses a significant problem for Buddhists, because the Buddha's own teachings must therefore also be illusionary and unreal.

There is a very famous Buddhist parable that addresses this problem. Once an old beggar who had cataracts thought he saw flies clustering around the food in his begging bowl, and so he didn't eat his food but spent his time trying to shoo the flies away. A younger beggar sees this and asks why the old man isn't eating. "I'm shooing the flies," he replies. "But there are no flies," the young man responds. Realizing his error, the old man stops his futile shooing and begins to eat. Although there are no flies and never were, these unreal objects kept the old man from doing something productive, namely, eating. The young man solves the old man's problem by referencing these non-existent entities, and stating their unreality. However, the simple act of naming these constructs in the sentence "There are no flies," paradoxically both establishes and denies their reality. In this way, while something that is not real can exert influence on what is conventionally deemed reality, naming the unreal empowers the one who names it to change its influence. Buddhists adopt this strategy of "using a thorn to remove a thorn," as the great Madhyamika philosopher Nagarjuna explains, as their dominant paradigm to explain how the Buddha's teachings can lead to nirvana even though these teachings are themselves rooted in the illusions of language and every-day experience.

The influence of unreal objects plays itself out in a similar way in both Beane and Joan's transformations. Indeed, the realization that something does not need to be real to be important

is perhaps Joan's key insight. When she calls the boy who "rendered" her as a teenager a "paper bag," she also demonstrates the converse of this insight. Even though the boy was an objectively real person, his influence on Joan had very little to do with his reality, and everything to do with

returns to reality because there is no where else to go. I have a suspicion that the last possibility may be the case, as the emphasis on love and sex, as well as the scene when Beane imagines shitting and pissing Molly out of him, point strongly in this direction. However, that's a whole other paper.

Spice Drum Beat: Ghoema

Going into this play, I was not expecting a Broadway-style musical. By the end of the first act, I was utterly confused about what I was seeing, as the singing style seemed so conventional it was hard to believe that I was actually listening to South African music. The play's reliance on the same harmonies and same basic musical structures also had the telling effect of making all the songs sound the same. If all of the supposedly wildly diverse influences that blended together to create South African music in various different time periods sound alike, it seems that the play is not actually presenting these various musical styles, but rather is aiming at something else, perhaps something more easily digestible by contemporary Broadway fans.

The actors' physical portrayals deepened my sense of unease. Some of the actors' facial expressions and mannerisms were downright clownish: lips jutting forward, nostrils flared, they seemed to play into the offensive stereotypes of Africans I expected this show to subvert. The cover image on the play's promotional pamphlet contained a similarly jarring image: one of the lead actors, mouth and eyes open wide in a comical, somewhat stupid way, jumps up wearing a 'traditional' costume, complete with funny straw hat, and energetically beats his ghoema. The image looks like it could have been lifted from the days of slavery when slaves were forced to come into the big house and entertain their master's guests. Come see the funny African, it seems to shout. Then, in the theater – a theater in the middle of the Arab section of town – an

almost all-white audience happily watches all this clowning. Honestly, I was a bit shocked. I could hardly believe that this charade was being praised as an authentic look at another culture.

However, during intermission I noticed that the play's program and promotional materials hailed *Spice Drum Beat* as the "hit musical from Capetown." This initially confused me even more. If the origin country embraced this play, it must properly reflect that country's music and traditions, right? If Capetown didn't recognize itself in this play, it didn't seem very likely that the play would be a hit. On further reflection, however, I realized something that the location of our theatre inadvertently pointed out: the people who go to plays aren't necessarily the people who live where the plays are preformed. I honestly don't know anything about theatre-going patterns in South Africa, but considering this play's musical style and the composition of our audience in London, I think it's safe to assume that this play is oriented towards whites. The people of South Africa whose ancestors were slaves, whom the play claims to represent, probably did not go to see this play. So it's rather possible that the people who made this play a hit in Capetown might have been members of the privileged white class of former-slaveholders. Maybe *Spice Drum Beat* plays to stereotypes and presents a clean, whitewashed version of South African musical history because that's what its target audience wants to hear. I realize this is an extremely cynical hypothetical conjecture, but I honestly cannot make sense of the discrepancy between what the play claims to represent and what it actually does any other way.

If a culture reveals and defines itself through performance, then this play seemed to tell more about its white audience then about black South Africa. It speaks to a wish to deny the magnitude of past horrors by acknowledging them in a superficial, melodramatic fashion, and to a desire to pretend that the other is actually just like oneself. In this way, while *Spice Drum Beat*

surprisingly has almost nothing to do with its avowed topic, it does say quite a lot about the state of racial relations, both in Capetown and in London. As an interesting aside, earlier on the same day we saw this play, I was walking in Portobello Market, and came across a jewelry stall tended by an old white man. Prominently framed on the wall behind him, there was a picture of a

hate to dignify it with a reading of this kind. Perhaps if the actors had been sober, had actually acted, and had remembered more of their lines I could attempt an analysis. Given the lack of professionalism the actors showed, and the production's general lack of substance, I can only assume that the play was not trying to make a point about the impossibility of originality; perhaps they simply thought stealing famous songs would be funny, just like Indians who can't speak properly are apparently funny.

Further, this play only reminds me of postmodernism in terms of Fredric Jameson's analysis of this movement, which I don't really put much stock in since Jameson was an avid modernist who was completely opposed to what he saw as the decline of art into superficial play. Watching *Peter Pan*, for the first time I saw the reason why people following Jameson's polemic might mistake this kind of unprofessional tripe for postmodern pastiche, and develop a disdain for postmodern art. This, of course, is extremely unfortunate, but I suppose that great artists have lamented their work being misunderstood and vulgarized since humans began to make and talk about art.

The Lightening Play

This play effectively explores the power of liminality, a theme foregrounded by the its use of various timespaces. The present, base time of the play occurs on Halloween, traditionally a day in which the universe's orders – both human social orders and larger, metaphysical structures – shift, allowing movement between various realms. Halloween is based on the idea that in order to remain viable, structured orders must contain a ritual outlet for disorder: human agency can forge cosmos out of the otherwise chaotic (in the technical sense of possessing too high a degree of complexity to be analyzed) world only if it periodically recognizes the larger aspects of the

universe its ordered reality denies. In this way, Halloween is a nod to super-rational truths that

Jones' decision not to reveal Freddie's existence is also instrumental to the play's enactment of the passage through repressed chaos back into reappropriated order. Halloween is a time to remember all the things that life tells us we must forget: the nearness of death, the dead themselves, and the inexplicably larger universe in which we are embedded. Indeed, the

Harriett's conventional sense of possibilities, then Max and Harriett may have continued to deny their past, rather than name and move through it.

Caroline, or Change

Cycles abound in *Caroline, or Change*. The enormous moon continuously reminds the viewer of natural cycles, of constant change and eternal return. The play's focus on generations, showing multiple sets of grandparents, parents, and children, tie human rhythms into these natural patterns. Caroline's husband and son successively being sent to war remind of the cycles of history, as do the play's lurking undertones of revolution. Even Caroline's predominant domestic duty, the laundry, involves cycles and rotations. But there are other, subtler and more complicated cycles hidden in this play as well. In the final song, Emmie sings of how her mother's strong blood seeps underground through hidden networks and reemerges as the rain, linking all these larger life cycles with the transmission of Caroline's bravery to her children.

This play revealed a completely different aspect of bravery from what other plays have praised thus far. Caroline's bravery is not Beane's: she does not put her uncertainties aside to live in the outside world. Instead, trapped in her underwater purgatory, she renounces her own life so that her children might live. Her bravery is closer to the courage to struggle that Eddie praises and Max lacks in *Lightening Play*, but with a crucial difference: Caroline does not struggle for herself, but for her children. She works to repress self-knowledge, not to gain it. She eloquently demonstrates that sometimes denying oneself and one's world is the bravest thing a person can do, and that extinguishing a fire is harder than lighting one.

However, Caroline represents only half of what this play has to say about bravery. Her

nothing to do with self-discovery. Both these women already know themselves, and indeed seem to take this self-knowledge for granted, as a simple foundational fact, much like being able to walk or breathe. From this position, the question of bravery becomes much larger than just one's own life. Whereas Caroline's bravery allows her to nurture her children's lives, Emmie's grants her the power of destruction, of toppling the old order to make way for new creation. Taken together, the two represent a full picture of bravery in both its sustaining and revolutionary aspects.

However, *Caroline, or Change* does not simply bifurcate the conception of bravery. Through the play's emphasis on cycles, it establishes that Caroline and Emmie's bravery are truly two aspects of the same underlying force. Like the waxing and waning moon, these two mindsets that externally seem diametrically opposed actually cyclically mutate into each other. Caroline extinguishes her spark in order to feed her child, creating the external appearance of submission and meekness; that spark is reborn in Emmie, who passionately acts out against the established order, refusing to bow to anyone, in order to create a world of greater respect and equality. But the unders one L.0 0 Tw (tuallyn os questi-reb) 6 .8 2.3 T9.0 Tc.0 0 Tw [does]

closer to the cyclic power that creates bravery because of their strong natural connection to other cyclic aspects of life. Western culture traditionally identifies women with the moon and the ocean for the very reason that they bleed in time with the moon's phases, and therefore with the changing tides.

Coram Boy

This play seems to exhibit an odd, contradictory relationship between money and freedom. When Otis tempts Mrs. Lynch to run away with him, insinuating that [illegible] bum, to want her [illegible] money, [illegible] one lacks money, one has no choice but to serve those who have wealth. Further, as Otis' abuse of Toby graphically illustrates, the poor servant is completely dependent on his master. While, like Thomas or Aaron, a poor person can get lucky, s/he has absolutely no control over her/his fate.

However, Thomas provides an interesting c

talent of sorts: he is an excellent confidence man. Thus perhaps not money as such, or even class structures in themselves, grant or limit freedom. Rather, it seems that those people blessed (or cursed) with some kind of special talent will undertake the struggle of changing their lot in life, and with tenacity and a bit of luck, may find their freedom.

The Waves

This play's staging provides a very effective and intriguing commentary on the processes of

As the play progresses, both the audience and the characters themselves begin to get the hang of forming whole entities from the fragments of experience. The filmic images become more cohesive, and the character's voices and images become more distinct from each other. In this way, just as the audience finally begins to understand the production's techniques, the characters find themselves within more fully formed identities. The production's decision to stage the events following Percival's death as a series of individual reactions finally completes the atomization of the cast. Whereas at the play's beginning, the characters' voices seemed to mingle and interweave, by the middle of the second act the production presents the viewer with five separate, distinguishable personalities. This mirrors the processes of identity formation, as the characters pass from indefinite formative periods into discrete adulthood.

However, the production constantly undercuts this sense that the characters have advanced forward to become real, discrete entities. Even though both the audience's increasing familiarity with the production's fragmentation techniques combines with increasing clarity in the final images themselves to present the illusion of coherence, the filmic nature of these created images constantly underscores that this coherence is indeed nothing but an illusion. Although the filmic image is the least real thing presented, it alone contains the coherence normally associated with reality. In this way, the production implies that the sense of coherent identity that comes along with adulthood is simply a masked construction, meant to imbue a desperately fragmented reality with some sense of connection, order, and wholeness.

The process of creating seemingly organic images from fragments of multiple actors also seems reminiscent of the process of memory formation. As the characters look back on their lives, and into their futures, they draw causal connections between past events and people in order to create a coherent picture of their present and future. Just as the filmed image draws a

seemingly simple, seemingly whole and real statement out of various fragments, memory creates the impression of order and causality where none in fact exists. I also noticed that there was a slight, barely perceptible time lag between the action onstage and its filmed representation. While this may have simply been the result of the types of cameras and video feeds the production used, I found that this time lag illustrated the necessary removal of the image, either in memory of oneself or the process of identity formation, from its referent. That tiny but impassible gap between the real and its representation came to represent the chasm between human longing for order and coherence and the fragmented chaos of reality.

Much Ado About Nothing

Hero seems to me to be a very vexing and ambiguous character. It does seem that from the beginning, her relationship with Claudio is purely political. She doesn't even really talk to him before she agrees to marry; instead, Don Pedro wo

love with so little time and substance to sustain it should persist after he commits such a heinous act. Further, if she loved and was betrayed with such magnitude, it is hard to believe she could have returned to him without any signs of bitterness. So reasons other than love must have justified Hero's decision to marry, and given how happy she is to be reunited with Claudio at the end, it would seem that these other reasons motivated her from the beginning.

And yet there's the rub: if Hero's 'love' was actually always only political calculation, then she is certainly not the innocent young girl she pretends to be. One then wonders if Hero is so thoroughly a slave to the patriarchy and her father's politically motivated demands that she has no conception of love outside of doing her father's bidding. In such a case, I find her an utterly useless and bankrupt character, although I suppose she retains the nothing of her innocence. The only other reading of her character that I can see, however, is that she is a heartless, calculating, and manipulating person who is willing to marry someone she has every right to despise simply for her own advantage. I shudder to think how such a marriage might turn out. Luckily, I don't think there's much in the play to support this second reading; but unfortunately, that does seem to indicate that Hero is little more than an automaton.

I suppose that one could argue that Hero's apparent lack of will is simply the sign of an extremely well-adjusted woman in her situation, who knows the options open to her and masters the positions allowed her within patriarchal confines. In this way, her eventual marriage to Claudio could be seen as empowering, because despite her trial, she is able to successfully assume the highest patriarchal role for women: the mother of a large estate. Of course, I suppose if serving the patriarchy is what Hero really wants to do, then more power to her. I honestly just cannot bring myself to find this productive, especially when the play presents the counterargument of Benedick and Beatrice, who display an equal partnership founded on

different than what the government may or may not be doing. The best way to deny a government power over one's life is not to actively resist and react to the government's actions, but simply to live life as one chooses without regard for the government. By refusing to allow the government to influence his actions in any way, Jan attempts to maintain a kind of radical independence from the ruling order.

However, while this position ultimately works out well for Jan, he does spend a number of miserable years in prison, and the government eventually denies the Plastic People's ability to perform their music. This reminds me of Foucault's contention that there is no outside of power: even individuals who look like they are completely refusing to participate in power structures are always-already embedded within them. As Max, the play's classic Marxist, slowly and painfully comes to realize, there is no pure, idealistic Marxist utopia in which everyone would harmoniously coexist. However, conversely, since everything always participates in the structure and exercise of power, the dominant order can never completely control or limit power's expressions. In this way, Jan's conception of not caring, which Esme rapturously embraces at the play's end, could be seen as a way of redefining ideology by refusing to accept the terms of the oppressor, thereby shifting the field of possibilities for power's expression. The play therefore does not replace Marxist teleology with an equally absolutist doctrine, but rather places value in the continuous quest to produce structures that are meaningful to the individual.

The Winter's Tale

I do not agree with this production's decision to set *The Winter's Tale* in some ill-dese2eb3fln

nothing about the play other than the costumes and the decision to treat the happy announcements at the end like a press conference changed. All this led to a disjointed production in which the actor's costumes and occasional technological references seemed to float in a void, completely detached from the play's content. For, unfortunately, the play's content does not translate well to a vaguely contemporary setting without a frame story of some kind. People did not go to the Oracle at Delphi to make state decisions in the 1950s. I honestly have no idea what the production tried to accomplish with this historical framing.

Further, the decision to allow members of the audience to stand in the middle of the stage, and to have most of the play's action take place on the stage's edges, seemed rather stupid to me given the shape of the theater. Because of the way the seats were arranged, if the action occurred on my side of the stage, I couldn't see anything without leaning over the railing in an extremely awkward and uncomfortable way, and people sitting behind me doubtless couldn't see anything at all. In this way, half the theater at any given time couldn't see what was happening on the sides of the stage, where the actors were, while other spectators stood dumbly at center-stage, visible to all but adding nothing to the play. In theory, I think it could be interesting to have audience members on stage during a play, but in this particular play they simply seemed to be in the way. All these technical and production issues really obscured the play's content, which is very frustrating because the play did deal with a number of interesting problems and ideas.

As in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Winter's Tale* also features a woman who is presumed to die after being wrongfully charged with adultery. However, in *Much Ado*, all the principle characters, with the exception of Beatrice, basically accept Claudio's actions against Hero as being fully justified; even Hero's own father turns against her without any proof other

than Claudio and the Prince's accusations. On the contrary, *Winter's Tale* does not indict the woman who may have committed adultery, but rather condemns the husband's psychotic jealousy. No one believes that the queen could have done such a thing, and everyone tries to convince the king of his madness. As befits a tragedy, this conception of jealousy and adultery is more sophisticated, but also more dangerous, as it showcases how utterly powerless women were in the face of even an irrational accusation. In *Much Ado*, as soon as evidence surfaces that Hero did not commit adultery, she is completely restored to honor. In *Winter's Tale*, not even the word of Apollo from the divine oracle can sway the king in his fit of rage.

This conception of jealousy, while it seems to completely condemn the king as an irrational madman who destroys everything around him, actually paves the way for his character's redemption. Claudio represents socially-sanctioned, self-righteous male privilege; his relationship to Hero's alleged adultery, like his relationship to Hero herself, never moves beyond the bounds that society decrees. His reactions to her are completely impersonal. On the contrary, the king's bout of insanity at least represents a personal, deep reaction to his wife. He

Merry Wives

In the production of *Merry Wives* that we saw, both the Irish priest and the Frenchman (already stock comic roles) are made even 'funnier' through songs and stage directions that make them appear gay. The audience laughed hysterically as the two sung of their plots together, frequently bending over, bumping butts, and ending up in sexual positions. At first, I was a bit put off by this portrayal of the least sympathetic characters as being gay, as if their implied sexual orientation somehow contributed to their status as secondary characters who oppose the play's heroes. Further, it seemed particularly odd to portray the Frenchman in this light as he is one of the three men seeking Anne Page's hand in marriage. The first reading I developed was simply that Shakespeare (if these kind of insinuations are in the original play) is simply unreflectively using homosexuality as a gag, and perhaps insinuating that the Frenchman will never win Anne's hand because he is not fully a man. However, just as I hesitate to believe that Hero and Hermione simply enact the patriarchal ideal of the good wife by returning to their respective husbands after being disgraced and exonerated, I think (or would like to think) that there's more to Shakespeare's portrayal of gays than simply calling on a cultural prejudice to get some laughs.

There seems to be a strong link in this play, and perhaps others of Shakespeare's comedies as well, between the gay man and the fool. Both serve as comic relief in a very complicated way. Shakespeare's fools always use their positions and humor to say things that no one else could say, the classic example being the fool in *King Lear* who alone is able to speak the truth to the king. Fools have this privilege because, through their humor, they make the truth safe, and something that doesn't have to be taken seriously. I think the gay man in Shakespeare's plays normally has a comic part for a similar reason. If the audience can laugh at gays, then they don't have to take homosexuality seriously. Interestingly, this puts the audience

them man who would ignorantly mock another. Further, on a third level, the way these jokes play on the audience's prejudices may condemn the audience that laughs along with the character who makes the joking accusation. In this way, all Shakespeare's jokes surrounding sexual ambiguity, cross-dressing, and confused gender roles may turn as much on the audience preoccupied with such issues as th

playing the lead swan simply couldn't lift him in the same way dancers normally lift women. This seemed like a weak excuse even at the time, however. Men aren't that much heavier than women, and even from what little I know about contact dancing I realized that properly executed lifts, which use momentum, angles, and well-aligned body positions, absorb a great deal of a partner's weight.

Then came the second act, in which a man played by the same dancer who plays the lead swan enters a royal ball via the balcony, seduces all the women present, including the Prince's mother, and publicly rejects the Prince. The Prince is then sent by his mother to a mental hospital, given a lobotomy and perhaps castrated, seemingly in an attempt to 'cure' his homosexuality. At this point I was literally fuming, and suddenly the earlier lack-luster dancing between the Prince and the Swan made complete sense. The two did not dance well because two men should not work well together; it's just not natural for men to dance together. In this light,

it is very possible that this ending scene is the Prince's dying dream, and therefore that his redemption happens only in his own mind. This dream conjecture also helps to make sense of the lead swan's seemingly contradictory behavior: the swan actually rejects the Prince at the

have been completely in the King’s power to

fails her when she confronts Flora and Pig, who are empowered by their realization of the

(http://www.theatre.com/story/id/3003973). However, I think this reading drastically oversimplifies the play. Both the humor and brutal honesty that come from drinking play extremely important roles in allowing these men to continue living.

Rather than taking a simple, moralistic stance on drinking, *The Seafarer* seems to view drink along the same lines as the ambiguity it assigns to the "hole in the wall." Normally, "hole in the wall" is a slang term for an ATM, a place from which one can receive the gift of cash. In the play, however, Mr. Lockhart uses this term to indicate the gates to Hell, telling Sharky that once Sharky loses the poker game for his soul, Lockhart will take Sharky to "the hole in the wall." This ambiguity emphasizes that the hole in the wall is foremost a portal that reveals the state of one's accounts. If one is in good shape, the hole in the wall is a confirmation of prosperity; however, if one has accounts that need

implies that God himself values people whom others value, as if Richard and Ivan's love for Sharky persuaded God to spare Sharky's soul.

Laughter seems like the audible manifestation of both the positive aspects of alcohol and the intense bonds of friendship. The most remarkable thing about this production to me was the tone: although the subject matter is depressingly heavy, the actors effectively recreate the safe, comfortable feeling of hanging out with a close group of friends. Even when serious outbursts threaten the group, the viewer intuits that people who can wake up drunk on each others' sofas, and laugh together over the course of many decades, exist in a deep enough social space that they

Neither Therese nor Laurent is ever given sufficient psychological depth to explain their actions. Although there are a number of 'reasons' given to explain how the two could decide to commit murder, these reasons seem extremely abstracted from the individuals themselves, more like rationalizations than actual explanations. Therese's long statement to Laurent towards the beginning of the play completely fails to justify her character because it seems so out of context. There's no good reason why she would be telling Laurent, who after all grew up with her and has been her lover for some time, the details of her childhood. This speech is obviously and transparently a way to bring the audience up to speed, and for this very reason, sounds like an invention that doesn't have any real relevance to Therese's life. Laurent's later protestations that he was just a good, simple farmer boy before Therese corrupted him ring equally false. Further, the domino discussion about unsolved murders that prefigures Therese and Laurent's act seems entirely too convenient. This play, in line with its 'scientific' outlook, is obviously trying very hard to justify itself from every angle, but since these moves are so heavy-handed, they only succeed in making the entire play feel false and unbelievable.

I suppose it could be possible that my harsh condemnation of this play has as much to do with my own views on adultery, as with the play itself. Recognizing as I do that loving a single person does not blind one to the beauty of others, and that individuals in a relationship can change, sometimes falling out of love with each ot

Therese's husband, with very little consideration of the idea of simply running away together. Here again, the play rationalizes itself quite well, for, as Therese keeps repeating, she has never said no to her mother-in-law aunt. All this really seems quite ridiculous, however. Therese hasn't the strength to run away from an old woman, but she can assist in killing a man?

I think that here I return to my initial position: my own propensity to become frustrated with plays about the horrible effects of adultery

idea. Both Dominick and Esme attempt to harness the powers of discrimination in favor of their respective artistic causes. As a professional passer of judgments, Dominick makes his living by valuing some cultural objects over others, and even relishes the chance to debunk what he deems an over-hyped work. In this way, although Dominick constantly harangues Esme for her snobbery, and disparages elitism in art in general, he participates in the same type of enterprise through his criticism. Rather than relying on a platitude, such as art is in the eye of the beholder and all forms of art deserve equal attention, the play's end at least partially vindicates the idea that some forms of artistic expression are higher than others. The play does not seem to imply that one should love Dominick's bloody blockbuster and Esme's small, emotionally truthful theater production at the same level.

On a human level, Amy's own fate seems to invalidate her mantra. Although she loves Dominick basically without conditions, acquiescing to his every demand, Dominick eventually leaves her, and she dies alone in a freak accident, seemingly estranged from her mother and ex-husband. Further, while Amy lives she is never able to reconcile Dominick and her mother. After her death, her words seem to have more

for his entire life. I don't think this is the case. Rather, this view that an act of love is worthwhile if the object is important enough to the lover, no matter what future that love entails, or what its conditions may be, seems extremely sophisticated to me. Rather than making a calculated investment focused only on a profitable return, Amy chooses to vest her interest in a particular object simply because of what it is, not because of what will become of it. In this way, understanding Amy's view of unconditional love as a metaphor for the appreciation of art takes on a number of unforeseen dimensions. Unconditional love is intimately linked not to blind acceptance and unthinking affirmation, but to but to carefully considered judgment. However, this discrimination is based on the object itself, not on the object's popularity, profitability, or critical acclaim.

This reading resists further elaboration, however, because of the fragmented and contradictory way that the characters espouse various opinions. Amy herself says a number of things which seem to contradict both Dominick's articulation of her "view" of unconditional love, and my contention that she loves the object, not its reception. When Esme asks Amy if she's staying with Dominick because of her "famous view that love conquers all," Amy replies,

and defining ‘Amy’s view’ to other people, so it’s rather unclear if the viewer is really getting Amy’s view at all.

bash

The middle section of this play powerfully and sickeningly demonstrates the danger of certainty. John and Sue, the two young college students in “A Gaggle of Saints,” seem completely at ease with their world. Their parents are rich, they go to the right school, and Sue repeatedly claims that the two are planning to get engaged the upcoming summer. Everything in their world has been comfortably and irrevocably ordered by their social position and religious beliefs. Questioning this order would not only be unnecessary, but might undermine the privileges the two enjoy, so of course they refuse to see anything that could lead them to question what they have been taught to believe.

The gay man in Central Park forces John to confront aspects of his entrenched beliefs that would normally remain out of sight. John sees the gay man almost as a challenge or an opportunity to prove himself. John’s inability during the dance to forget his chance encounter with the man seems to show that John believes that if he is really certain, he would do something about the abomination he had witnessed. Indeed, this is exactly what he does: by later beating the man to death, John proves the extent of his conviction both to himself and to his friends. The most sympathetic excuse that one could possibly

Earlier in the play, John tells of how he beat Sue's ex-boyfriend unconscious for absolutely no reason, and both John and Sue are excited when John pricks his finger putting Sue's corsage on her, and gets a drop of blood on his white tuxedo shirt. Both these events point to John's

Billy Elliot

This play highlights the discrepancy between Marxism's ideal of an enlightened, artistic, and cultured workforce and the actual attitudes of much of the working poor towards art. This theme has recurred in a number of the productions we've seen, from Max's vision in *Rock 'n'* Roll that all people can be workers in the morning, politicians in the afternoon and artists at night to Dominick's frequent assertions in *Amy's View* that art should be brought back to the people. Classical Marxism does seem to hold to the idea once workers are educated, the poet and the statesman will spring from the heart of every man, and indeed this redeeming vision of human possibilities is one of the most uplifting and positive aspects of Marxism.

However, many disillusioned Marxist theorists, including Max in *Rock 'n' Roll*, come to at least partially blame the working class's seeming inability to care about the grand, noble projects of art and human advancement for the failure of socialism. Indeed, the quickness with which people tend to abandon artistically challenging works in favor of mass-produced, mindless entertainment seems to indicate that the masses really don't care about art, and that Marxism's high sentiments cannot compete with the cheap thrills of capitalism. *Billy Elliot* shows another side of this working-class reflexive rejection of high culture. When Billy's father and brother first hear about Billy's audition, they begin to mock him, then grow increasingly angry that he could waste his time on such nonsense in the middle of what Tony deems "class warfare." Further, both immediately assume that Mrs. Wilkinson must be an enemy since she's a member of a (slightly) higher class – something that she immediately calls the two out on.

Although Billy's family's initial response to his dancing would seem to play into the stereotype of the culturally ignorant worker, both Billy's dad and his brother quickly come around when they realize how talented Billy is. In this way, the musical does not represent the

workers' rejection of art as the result of stupidity, or being seduced by cheap entertainment, but rather as the temporary knee-jerk feeling that preserving their jobs and way of life is simply more important. After Billy's dad sees him dance, he realizes that Billy deserves a chance. He goes to Mrs. Wilkinson, and upon learning that he will need money to send Billy to London to audition, he is even willing to betray his class by working for the police. Of course, the community assures that this is not necessary, and they all raise money to send Billy off, taking great pride

affirms all of creation, including its deepest suffering. Nietzsche expands on this observation to realize that the key to a deep and ecstatic life is to recognize this interconnection, and therefore affirm the entire spectrum of experience. "My formula for the greatness of a human being is *amor fati:*," he comments in *Ecce Homo*, and continues, "that one wants nothing to be different – not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it – all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary – but *love* it" (EH 258).

There Came a Gypsy Riding powerfully illustrates this idea during its emotional climax. Since Margaret is a humanities university professor, it is possible that she is familiar with Nietzsche's ideas, and recognized the full pathos of Leo's comment that he would not change his son through the lens of the eternal return. However, whether or not the two were aware of themselves in this fashion or not—or indeed if McGuinness himself has any knowledge of Nietzsche— is rather immaterial. Their affirmation of their son despite his tragic suicide powerfully illustrates the depth and pathos of Nietzsche's conception that one must love the pain,

hypocrites, and celebrates an individual's right to live his or her life as s/he pleases. But perhaps I'm being a bit too polite with inclusive pronouns, for the Don actually doesn't seem too concerned with women's right to choose the course their life will follow. For example, Elvira chose to live by a certain code under which she would not have sex until marriage. If the Don were really that concerned with the individual's right to self-determination, he would have respected Elvira's choice and stopped pursuing her once he realized that they want fundamentally incompatible things. Indeed, Elvira herself realizes that the Don's promiscuity isn't itself the problem; rather, his propensity to deceive women in order to sleep with them is what makes him a morally reprehensible figure.

The play itself seems to at least partially realize that its hero is not an unambiguous figure. The statue that haunts the Don and ultimately delivers him to the place of his death names itself not "Death" or "Judgment" but "Recognition." The statue is like a cultural mirror that reflects the Don back to himself through an understanding of something greater than himself: it is the part of the Don that acknowledges his implication in a larger order, for it is the part of him that feels the need to be punished. In this way, it is fitting that Recognition should bring the Don to the dark alley in which Elvira's brothers kill him. At some level, the Don recognizes that he is not the great individualist he pretends to be, for to be a true individualist, one must respect the positions of others, and deal with others honestly.

Even with all these neat justifications of the Don's fate, however, the play definitely does lionize him and his ideals. His refusal even when faced with death to apologize for his actions seems very heroic, and the viewer is left applauding him for not renouncing his views. The parallel between the Don and the Muslim who refused to profane Allah is painfully obvious, and the play seems to fiercely celebrate conviction. In light of the way the statue seems to function

as the Don's own condemnation of himself, however, I wonder if the play does not mean to celebrate the Don's irrational refusal to apologize, but rather to comment on the way certainty and conviction are perceived as positive traits even when they lead to disaster. By getting the audience to side with the Don, the play achieves a bit of a coup, for presumably the majority of the audience, like the majority of Westerners in general, affirms monogamous values and would certainly side with Elvira if she were a friend or sister instead of simply a foil for the Don's philosophizing. Just as he tricks women into abandoning their loved ones with false promises of marriage and wealth, he seduces the audience into condoning his lies through his unapologetic bravado.

Throughout the play, Stan serves as an Everyman with whom the audience can identify because he is also under the Don's spell. However, Stan knows more about the Don than the audience does, and his additional knowledge leads him to condemn his master, therefore prefiguring a savvy viewer's ultimate rejection of the Don upon further reflection on the play. In this way, the play manages not only to condemn the prudish repression that the Don rails against and exploits, but also the Don's hypocrisy in claiming that he alone is not a hypocrite, and further chides the viewer who would be naïve enough to fall for the Don's act.

Spamalot

I thought it was interesting how the least effective parts of this musical were the gags lifted word-for-word from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Considering the intense love that many have for this original, and the fact that many people in the audience have probably enacted these parts late at night with their friends while laughing hysterically, it would seem that sections of the musical that closely paralleled the film would have a guaranteed positive reception. And yet

many of these skits, including the Holy Hand Grenade bit, one of my personal favorites, fell rather flat. I wonder if the audience's intense familiarity with the genius of the original may have actually hurt the production at these points. Since we know every tone, every inflection of every word, I guess it's easy for us to be put off by slight changes in delivery, almost as if we still feel like we're in our dorm rooms, and can jump up and yell, "No! You did it wrong! It's supposed to be like *this*!," promptly executing the gag ourselves.

In this way, the most effective parts of *Spamalot* were not the verbatim jokes from the *Holy Grail*, but the show's satire and parody of musical content and form. Although I am not a musical expert, I've seen enough musicals to recognize the genius with which the music and lyrics in general, and specifically Hannah Waddingham's wonderfully distorted virtuoso vocal performance, mocked the form. The only addition to the plot of the original that I did not particularly like was Sir Robin's insistence that one must have Jews on board to be successful in show business. This struck me as odd and slightly anti-Semitic. At first, the Lancelot-is-gay subplot also seemed unnecessarily stereotypical, but this gag completely redeemed itself with Lancelot and his lover's hilarious one-liner about how their marriage will still be controversial in 500 years.

The audience interaction was also a nice touch, as was the shower of confetti that ended the show. I know that these are kind of cheap tricks, but honestly, I've never been showered with confetti before, and I really enjoyed it. All in all, *Spamalot* is much more of a feel-good production than *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, but it preserves enough of the original's spirit of gleeful mockery to be highly entertaining on its own.