

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Fractured Families

Two Weeks, Twice a Year. Colin Thomas. Scirocco Drama, 1994. 95 pp. \$12.95 paper. ISBN 0-9697261-5-5.

Few children today are untouched by the impact of divorce. If they don't experience it directly, they have friends or classmates who do. When a family fractures, children must negotiate the disruption on their own terms. Time becomes divided into "life before" and "life after" the divorce, and time often continues to be divided between parents and between homes. In Thomas's play, *Two Weeks, Twice a Year*, the rift in time, space and contact caused by divorce is vividly manifested. Thomas invites the audience to witness the struggle involved in getting beyond alienating emotional injuries so that people can move forward in relationships.

Through the divorce experience, every character in the play has lost connection with the others. The central character, "Joe," is split into two characters: Joe at six (Gogo) and Joe at twelve. The two Joes are visible only to each other and interact in the privacy of their room like siblings. This device is explained to the audience early in the play. The interplay between the two enables Joe's private concerns to be visible to the audience so they can see how past events and memories affect present thoughts and actions.

Joe, at twelve, is the dreamer struggling with the turmoil of adolescence. His mother can do no right and his father's past transgressions are forgotten or excused. He is consumed with the half-remembered promise of being allowed to live with his Dad when he gets older. Each scene builds the dramatic tension of the play to the moment when he asks his father if he can live with him.

Gogo, at six, has remained the age he was when his parents split up. Functioning as Joe's emotional memory, Gogo is the doubter. He remembers the fights, the tears, the difficult transition of living without his father and the strain of sporadic visits. As Joe watches, Gogo reenacts these memories, effectively pulling the past into the present for analysis.

The characters of Mom and Dad are loving and supportive of Joe, but they are obviously struggling with their own problems and priorities. Flashes of bitterness keep the reality of divorce alive in the action.

The fifteen short scenes weave together past events and present action. In the present, Joe anticipates Dad's arrival and the reunion is an extravagance of forbidden indulgences. In the past, broken promises and emotional injuries are replayed. Joe (with help from Gogo) wrestles with his memories and dreams,

trying to negotiate a plan for his future. Part of him is willing to gamble on his Dad's promise; part of him worries that change will only mean more pain for everyone. This structure allows the audience to flip back and forth in time, building tension over Joe's dilemma.

Thomas's sparse dialogue is supported by clear physical images and actions. He has not sugar-coated Joe's emotional turmoil or the residual tension between the parents. Yet the play is positive: it may not be possible to mend the rift of divorce, but Joe is able to build a bridge of connection which allows his family to move into the future with a clearer understanding of each other. It's a bold examination of a child's growth through one of life's tougher lessons. Like all well-written plays, *Two Weeks, Twice a Year* raises questions that teachers and parents should be prepared to discuss.

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Dying to be Thin is Dying to be Seen

Dying To Be Thin. Linda A. Carson. Scirocco Drama, 1993. 48 pp. no price, paper. ISBN 09-697-2613-9.

In her semi-autobiographical, one-person play, *Dying To Be Thin*, Linda A. Carson, herself a survivor of bulimia, provides an insightful, if slightly flawed, portrait of a young woman struggling with an eating disorder. Successfully personalizing the formidable statistics of young women who suffer from negative body-images into a very accessible piece of theatre, Carson attempts to remedy, or at least address, this widespread cultural obsession.

Seventeen-year-old Amanda Jones resolves at the beginning of the play that today she is going to have her "Last Ever in My Whole Life Binge," before fasting away to her ideal weight. As she prepares the copious amounts of food for this binge, Amanda recounts the details of her bulimic history with great candour, explaining how it began, why it has persisted and her own helplessness to stop what she sees as a "stupid" habit. Bulimia is portrayed as the controlling factor in Amanda's life — "I'm always waiting until I'm skinnier before I let myself go out" — keeping her away from school and friends.

There are moments of touching honesty in this play, as for example, when Amanda explains her reasons for purging: "... while I eat, this tiny part of me watches, and sometimes tries to make me stop, but it's way too small so I just block it out. That way I can finish eating and throw up. Throwing up is the only route back to *this* me." The poignancy in Amanda's speech is underscored with humorous interludes, such as her impersonation of "Ms Upperchucker, here to talk to you all today about toilets."

Carson tackles the debilitating effects of his disease with no apologies, depicting in graphic detail the extremes to which Amanda will go in order to