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UNITY THROUGH DIFFERENCE: SOCIAL DEFINITION AND McNALLY'S *LOVE! VALOUR! COMPASSION!*

ANDREW MURPHY '98

Terrence McNally, in his 1995 play *Love! Valour! Compassion!*, presents an investigation of what it means to be homosexual in contemporary American society. Difference and unity, imaginatively interwoven, create a vivid portrait, not of gay identity, but of human interaction. McNally attacks stereotypes by presenting contrasting characters who depict homosexuals as no more than a group of individuals. At the same time, he illustrates the strong family and community connections that develop as a result of outside oppression.

Difference is prevalent in McNally's play from the very first page. Though the eight characters do share their gayness as a unifying characteristic, they are anything but similar. The opening scene introduces this idea by dealing with how individuals' views of objects differ. Gregory, a forty-something dancer, urges us to "appreciate detail" (10), as in his old farmhouse and collection of antiques. When a fellow choreographer gives Gregory a sled, he says, "It's flat here . . . No hills . . . What am I going to do with a sled?" (10), to which the man replies, "It's not a sled, Gregory . . . It's an antique" (10). John, on the other hand feels "it's not an antique," but "a piece of junk" (10). This exchange, though subtle, is not unimportant. It establishes, early in the play, the idea that there are many different ways of looking at anything—objects, situations, people, feelings, and so on. Gregory sees the practical value in the sled. The choreographer sees its artistic and aesthetic value, and John sees no value at all. This theme runs throughout the play.

One place this can be seen is in the characters themselves. They represent various occupational groups, nationalities, personalities, moralities, and dispositions, among other things. This implies that gay people come in all shapes and sizes, none of which is standard. Gregory, for instance, is a dancer/choreographer in his early forties. It is at his country home where the play is set. He is a

man with a "remarkably loving nature" (14), who, as implied by Buzz, "[does'n't] ever believe the worst about anyone" (42). He is a gracious host to his friends, opening his home to others—even those who take advantage of his generosity. He is nonconfrontational—one of the more neutral characters in the play—and dedicated to his work as a dancer. As a result, his body has paid the price, bearing the "scars of his dancing" (78) as his reward for a career of hard work and excellence.

Then there are Perry and Arthur, two middle-aged men who embody more "normality" and "masculinity" than do many male heterosexuals. Arthur says of himself, "I'm butch. One of the lucky ones. I can catch a ball. I genuinely like both my parents. I hate opera. I don't know why I bother being gay" (100), to which Perry replies, "I was so sure you weren't that first time I saw you. I came this close to not saying hello" (101). Perry is a lawyer and Arthur a middle-aged accountant. Though the two are lovers—and in a committed fourteen-year relationship—they have radically different personalities. A stereotypical man, Perry shouts obscenities while driving and forgets his and Arthur's anniversary. He is negative and, as Gregory states, cynical, always finding the worst in every situation. He is also somewhat unaccepting. In a conversation about starving children he says, "That kid is a picture in a newspaper who makes us feel bad for having it so good. But feed him, brush him off, and in ten years he's just another nigger to scare the shit out of us" (52). Similarly, Perry is self-centered. When he and Arthur discuss their avoidance of AIDS, despite the fact that many of their friends—including Buzz and James—are HIV positive, he says he feels "grateful" (120), a reaction quite different from that of his lover. As Perry says himself on being introduced to Ramon, "He's Arthur, I'm Perry. He's nice, I'm not," to which Arthur pleasantly replies, "We're both nice. Don't listen to him" (37).

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Arthur, although he is also very "straight-acting," is perhaps the polar opposite of Perry. Arthur has "too many convictions" (30), according to his lover. He is an optimist, always looking at the good, rather than the bad. He is soft-spoken, proper, and nice. While Perry shouts obscenities at other drivers, Arthur claims "it's never right to use words to hurt another person" (31). When Perry finishes his speech about the starving child, Arthur counters with, "Rather the man I shared my life with and loved with all my heart, rather he dissembled than let me see the hate and bile there . . . After a while, the hate and bile are for everyone. It all comes around" (53). In their conversation about AIDS Arthur feels not grateful, but guilty: "first I was just scared. Then the guilt. Massive at first. Why not me? That lingers, more than the fear" (120). Where Perry is unaccepting and self-centered, Arthur is loving and caring.

Next is John, an English man in his late forties and a pianist for Gregory's dance company. A more intense cynic than even Perry, John can be considered sour. From the beginning, John establishes himself as an outsider. He calls himself "that merry wonderer of the night" who is "obsessed with who people really are" and who "must know their secrets" (21). He invades Gregory's journal for this purpose, feasting on "words other eyes were never meant to see" (21). John is inconsiderate. He treats Ramon rudely on their arrival, embarrassing his boyfriend in front of someone he admires. In front of Gregory, John asks Ramon if they can "go upstairs and fuck" (29). He is also mean-natured. Of his brother with AIDS, John says, "He's not well. He needs me and I don't like him" (46). Other characters also comment on his disposition. Buzz says, "You still know how to clear a room, John" (29) and Perry asks sarcastically, "Who would willingly spend Memorial Day weekend at a wonderful big house in the country on a gorgeous lake with John Jeckyll when they could be suffocating in the city all by themselves?" (35). As the play progresses, however, it becomes apparent that John feels terribly alone. He resents his brother for being well-liked, claiming James "got the good soul. [He] got the bad one" (124).

Another interesting character is Buzz, who works for Gregory's company and volunteers at an AIDS clinic. Buzz is a thirty-something who has been diagnosed with AIDS. This aside, the dominating force in Buzz's life is the Broadway musical. According to Perry, "if it isn't about musicals, Buzz has the attention span of a very small moth" (16). A very dramatic, playful, and sometimes childish person, Buzz fits well the role of a stereotypical effeminate gay person. He is inept at sports, asking, "Which end of the racquet do I hold"

(66) before beginning a tennis match, and he constantly makes sexual comments and says things like, "He's gay, you know" (101). Buzz is also very witty, and keeps the other characters laughing at themselves and each other. Facetious as he may appear, Buzz does function at a more adult level. He likes musicals, not purely for their entertainment value, but because it is something he is able to manage; he "can contain the world of the Broadway musical. Get [his] hands around it, so to speak. Be the master of one little universe" (25). This allows a person who has little or no control over much of his life—including his health—to obtain a sense of stability and balance.

Bobby, a young man in his twenties, is another of McNally's characters. Bobby, like his partner Gregory, has, according to Perry, "a remarkably loving nature . . . never put[ting] himself first" (13). Also a remarkably determined and confident person, he is blind. He deals with his disability well, saying to Ramon, "I've been like this since birth . . . I get around fine. It'll surprise you" (38). Although Bobby is young, he seems overly immature, perhaps because of his blindness. He sees much of life as a game, "[his] whole life being a children's birthday-party game" (43), in his own words. He often gets into situations where he must rely on others to come to his rescue, especially Gregory, and he even says that "sometimes [he] get[s] tired of behaving like a grown-up" (43), even though he is in his twenties. Another strong trait of Bobby's is his faith. He believes in Gregory and is very supportive of his work, even though he has never been able to see him dance. Because he cannot judge appearances, he instead assesses people based on intuition. This allows him to love Gregory because his "heart is beautiful" (31), not for his appearance. Bobby also displays a great faith in God and His "unconditional love" (87). Despite his immaturity, he shows great insight in his belief that it is God, not "lovers, friends, [or] family" (87) to whom people should turn for their emotional needs.

Another young character is Ramon. A "horny Puerto Rican modern dancer" (65), also in his early twenties, he is, in Arthur's words, "hot" (18). Ramon's dominating characteristic is his sexuality. In addition to being nude during a considerable portion of the play, Ramon is obsessed with himself and his body. After swimming in the cold lake, he comments to the group that "[he has] no nuts" (26). "I had enormous nuts. I was famous for my nuts. Where are my fabulous nuts?" (26), he asks subsequently. Clearly he is out for attention. Later, after claiming to have had a sexual encounter with the Obsession man, he says, "Fuck you, all of you. I don't care.

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But the next time you see his picture or you're tossing in your beds thinking about him, just remember: somebody had him and it wasn't you. I know how that must burn your asses" (92). Like Bobby, Ramon is young. Unlike Bobby, however, he is extremely cocky and believes he knows it all at his young age.

McNally's eighth character is James, John's twin brother who, like Buzz, has AIDS. As different from one another as Arthur and Perry, James is his brother's antithesis. Gregory, in his journal, appropriately cites them "James the Fair and John the Foul" (65). James is many of the things John is not: pleasant, easy going, and well-liked. Aware of this drastic contrast, he humorously tells the others, "It's not who you think. I'm the other one. When John stops playing the piano, you can start getting nervous again" (69). James also possesses another quality John does not, the capacity for forgiveness. When John confronts his dying brother about the hate and resentment he feel for him, James is willing to love his brother anyway. As John describes it, "My brother was forgiving me . . . He presses his head against my hand now and cries and cries and cries as I try to tell him every wrong I have done him, but he just shakes his head and bathes my hand with his tears and lips" (125). John excluded, James is embraced into the group. "Who could not love James?" Gregory writes, "We have all taken him to our hearts. It will be a sad day when that light goes out" (113).

One scene, in particular, well illustrates the diversity of the characters. Ramon and Gregory are speaking about dance companies and financial difficulties. Ramon says of his company, "Right now we're all just hoping there will be a next season. We're broke," to which Gregory replies, "Every company is, Ramon" (28). Then Buzz chimes in and suggests they need a Diaghilev, "a rich older man who in return for certain favors funds an entire ballet company" (28). The ways in which these four men respond to this idea shows the different aspects of their personalities. Buzz brings up the idea, in a playful and joking manner. Ramon shows his arrogant sexual interest saying, "Where is this rich older dude? I'm all his" (28). John cynically attempts to belittle Ramon by asking "[doesn't he] want to know what these favors are first?" (28) and Gregory takes a practical, business angle, saying, "I'm in line first for him, Ramon" (28). Although the entire exchange is meant to be light and funny, it does highlight the different attributes of the four men. There is no agreement between them on the issue of money in exchange for sexual relations. Buzz takes a humorous point of view, Ramon a sexually adventurous one, John a negative and cynical one,

and Gregory a sensible and realistic one.

Just as the characters have diverse personalities and character traits, so do they have very different views on homosexuality and about living as gay people. As in other things, Perry and Arthur present an interesting contrast in the way they feel about, and deal with, being gay. Both men are far from the feminine homosexual stereotype. Perry refers to his partner as "[his] button-down, plodding Arthur" (135). Arthur, however, embraces his sexuality and appears to be very accepting of that aspect of himself. He says to Perry, "You're really lucky I'm a big queen" (100). At one point in the play he tries to convince his friends to go skinny-dipping, saying "No one is wearing swimsuits . . . What are we? Men or wimps?" (40). In convincing them he challenges their masculinity. The end result, however, is eight naked men. Clearly, even though he is an accountant and very conservative looking, he is not attempting to hide any of his identity. He even agrees to participate in Gregory's Swan Lake benefit dance, in women's clothing, and tries to convince his lover to do the same and "[help his] best friends out by putting on a tutu for five minutes in front of three thousand people in Carnegie Hall" (103).

While Arthur is at ease with his sexuality, Perry is uncomfortable with his own. Though he accepts who he is and does not attempt to hide anything, he is not in favor of displaying it as Arthur does. When asked to be part of the benefit Perry declines, saying that Gregory "[is] not going to find one *man*" to participate and that "men in drag turn [his] stomach" (47-8). He feels that being a homosexual relates only to whom one loves or has sex with, not to the way one acts. When Buzz tells James to "Play something gay . . . gay music written by a gay composer" Perry says "there's no such thing as gay music" (57). Similarly, when Buzz starts talking gay politics, Perry says, "It's the Fourth of July, Buzz, no gay rights stuff, please" (106). As the play progresses, Perry shows that he is not as much uncomfortable with displaying his sexuality as he is scared. Watching the others rehearse for the Swan Lake benefit, he says "[he] wanted to join them" but "[he] couldn't" (136), implying that he wants the freedom his friends enjoy, but cannot seem to find a way to obtain it.

Another character who seems to have problems dealing with his sexuality is John. Like Perry, he shuns anything "gay" oriented. When Ramon explains how he loves himself when he dances, John asks sarcastically, "Is this as a gay dancer, luv?" (55), mocking Ramon's sexual nature. When Perry refuses to dance in the benefit,

John agrees with his logic, claiming that "people are bloody sick of benefits" (49). Although John is involved in the performance, it is only indirectly as the pianist, not a tutu-donning performer. John looks unfavorably upon any legitimate discussion or depiction of gayness, as with Perry and Ramon, but does not have a problem dealing with the sexual side. In front of two of the other characters, he attacks Ramon by asking if they can "go upstairs and fuck" (29). He feels somewhat comfortable with vulgar representations of homosexuality, but with little else. His sexual life reflects this. When John and Ramon are preparing to make love, John says to Ramon, "Put your hands behind your back. Feet apart. Head down. Ready for interrogation. My beautiful bound prisoner. Look at me. You look so beautiful like that. I think I could come without even touching you" (94). The story he later tells Ramon offers a possible explanation for this behavior pattern. John explains one of his early sexual encounters involving an Irish boy with whom he practiced some light bondage. An emotionally unhealthy experience, John describes how it ended:

He moved to whisper something in my ear. My heart stopped beating. He was going to tell me he loved me! Instead, he said, 'I've doused this place with petrol, I'm lighting a match. You have three minutes to get out alive. Good luck, 007.' And then he laughed and walked out whistling. (97)

Love and caring seem to be lacking in John's life. Homosexuality to him is much like his secretive Irish boy experience. As a result, he deals with his gayness the only way he knows how, on a sexual level.

Unlike John, Ramon is very open and comfortable with his sexuality, on all levels. What he presents, however, is mainly sexual. He expresses his sexuality in a very open, in-your-face fashion. When asked how he loves himself, he replies, "I love myself when I'm making love with a really hot man . . . I love myself when I'm swimming naked . . . The rest of the time I just feel okay" (55). He incorporates sex into much of what he does. For example, when he is describing his Puerto Rican identity, he says that Puerto Ricans "speak American . . . think American . . . dress American . . . the only thing [they] don't do is move or make love American" (38). He tells Gregory about how he did "You Can't Hurry Love" in a high school talent contest, saying, "I was turning the whole school on. Girls, boys, faculty. I loved it" (115). He is concerned about his masculinity, however, because he "went into [his] tribute to Elvis .

. . . just in case anybody thought [he] was too good at Diana" (115). Ramon, like Perry, does not embody the stereotypically gay personae. He tells John "[he doesn't] know people like [him] and [his] friends," that "[he doesn't] know what [they're] talking about half the time" and that "[they] used to beat up people like [John] where [he] grew up" (93). Though he is very open about his homosexuality, maintaining a masculine image is very important to him.

An interesting contrast with Ramon is Buzz. Buzz is extremely open about his homosexuality, so much so, in fact, that it can be considered his main character trait. In addition, he has no reservation about appearing feminine, or appearing anything else for that matter. Without gayness there would be very little to Buzz. He is constantly making references to gay people, places, and things and he tells Perry, "They're all gay. The entire Olympics" (101). One of his favorite lines is, "[insert name] is gay, you know." Buzz likes to be surrounded by gayness. This is apparent when he asks John to "play something gay." He wants "gay music by a gay composer" (57), and this is exactly the way he goes about life.

In another contrast with Buzz, Bobby, although comfortable with his sexuality, does not define himself in those terms. Perry feels that dancing in a tutu would be humiliating. Bobby, who does not take this view, asks, "How would they be making fools of themselves?" (48). He is perfectly comfortable with the idea of playing that role. However, when Buzz says to him, "You are the only fairy in America who still wears white pants on the first holiday of summer," he responds with, "I was hoping I was the only *person* in America who still wears white pants on the first holiday of summer" (44). He does not want to be labeled in that way. He sees his gayness as irrelevant, or at least secondary to other aspects of his identity. Bobby's blindness is far more relevant to his character than gayness. He tells Arthur that "people think blindness is the most awful thing that can happen to a person." "I've got news for everybody," he says, "it's not" (13). A strong person, he deals well with adversity. Whatever comes his way, whether it be a visual challenge or homosexuality, he accepts it and moves on.

Comparable to Bobby, Gregory is also comfortable with, yet quiet about, his gay identity. "I. Um. I am a flaming fairy. I thought we all were" (48), he says in response to Perry's remark about looking negatively in the newspaper after doing the Swan Lake performance. Gayness plays a small role in Gregory's life, his main identity being centered around his dancing.

James is in a similar situation. He is also comfortable with be-

ing homosexual. He is not overly sexual like Ramon, not image-oriented like Perry, or gay-obsessed like Buzz. His reaction to gayness seems instead to be a curious one. He describes *Outing America: From A to Z*, a book John gave him, to be "the most extraordinary book" (69). "It gives the names of all the gay men and lesbians in this country in alphabetical order . . . I'm absolutely riveted" (69). He treats homosexuality sheepishly, almost as if he is amused that it exists at all. His English reservation affects his actions, but not his view of himself. As with Gregory, James's gay identity is overshadowed by something else, his battle with AIDS. It is this, first and foremost, which defines his character.

An example which illustrates the variety of ways the characters react to, and deal with, homosexuality occurs in the second act. Buzz enters the outdoor scene "wearing an apron, heels, and little else" (80). The reactions of the three others present are quite diverse. Perry reacts with, "Jesus Christ, Buzz . . . Put some clothes on. Nobody wants to look at that . . . You're not at a nudist colony. There are other people present" (81). James, who is busy reading says, "You could all be starkers and I wouldn't bat an eyebrow" (81) and, when asked, Arthur says, "It's not bothering me" (81). Perry's reaction is one of shock and disgust, fitting with his own view of homosexuality. Likewise, Arthur doesn't particularly mind and James seems indifferent. As with the "Diaghilev" example, there is dissension among the four men on this issue of exhibiting one's sexuality.

Despite their diversity, the eight men in McNally's play are not separated. To the contrary, they are very much connected—and not just in romantic or sexual ways. Throughout the play, the inner-group relations resemble that of a family unit. Independent of the four main relationships—Perry and Arthur, Gregory and Bobby, Buzz and James, and John and Ramon—characters often interact with one another in pairings of friendship, professional involvement, support, and rivalry. John and Gregory work together, for example, John serving as the accompanist for his dance company. Perry and Gregory have a similar working relationship, as Perry offers his legal services to the company. Buzz, too, works for Gregory, doing costumes.

In addition to these business-type pairings, there are several more deeply-rooted partnerships. Arthur and Bobby, despite their age difference, seem to share a special connectedness. In the first act, after Bobby has a sexual encounter with Ramon, he discusses the event with Arthur. Though he obviously feels attraction for Bobby, Arthur is very supportive. Bobby expresses his regret for

his actions, saying "[he's] not very strong that way," and Arthur agrees that "Most people aren't" (18). Later McNally reveals that Arthur has also been in the same position, having cheated on Perry years before. When Bobby asks whether Perry found out, Arthur says, "No, I told him and it's never been the same. It's terrific, but it's not the same . . . Don't fuck up. You are so . . . He's not that hot, Bobby. No one is" (19). The scene shows how Arthur, who is much older and presumably wiser, is offering what help he can to Bobby, who is relatively young and inexperienced.

Another such relationship exists between John and Buzz. Past lovers—also very different characters—they share one quality that brings them together: they are both considerably nosy. When Buzz stumbles upon John leafing through Gregory's journal, he scolds him, but cannot resist the temptation of taking a look himself. The discussion the two have about the contents brings them together and is one of their few interactions during the play.

A similar pairing is composed of Arthur and Buzz. Partners-in-crime at numerous points, they both have fun-loving, playful natures. They possess a free and easy view of their homosexuality and often conspire to poke fun at Perry or the others.

Perhaps a more significant bond exists between Perry and John. Like Arthur and Buzz, these two men share similar feelings about their sexuality. Arthur tells Perry in Act Three that he is "as bad as John" (113), due to his constant concern about what other people are doing. Curiously, the two men—the most un-gay gay characters in the play—are also McNally's main narrators. It is through them that the audience receives much of its information. Although they do not seem to like each other much, they do team up on several occasions to support each other's views. They are, for example, both unenthusiastic about dressing in tutus for Gregory's dance number. "People are bloody sick of benefits, Gregory," John says, with which Perry agrees: "That's the truth" (49). Despite this similarity, their relationship never develops into anything beneficial. When John discovers that Perry was hiding in the closet during his discussion with Ramon, he is furious, spitting in Perry's face and then telling him he "hope[s] [Perry] gets what [his] brother has" and that he "die[s] from it" (99). These severe actions result from Perry actually seeing John's self. Throughout the play, he never actually is completely honest and open with anyone. Only in this instance with Ramon is there a glimpse of who he really is. John let something out that Perry was never meant to see, a kind of emotional "coming out of the closet" experience, with which he can

deal only hatefully.

Bobby and Ramon also pair up in several places. Their sexual encounter aside, they relate well to each other on the basis of age. Buzz's constant references to Broadway personalities elicit recognition from the older characters, but mutual amusement and questions such as "Who's Gertrude Lawrence?" (49), "Who's Julie Andrews?" (50), and "Who's Judy Garland? Who are any of those people?" (50) from Bobby and Ramon. Buzz becomes quite distraught, saying, "I long for the day when people ask 'Who's Madonna?' I apologize to the teenagers at the table, but the state of the American musical [metaphorically speaking] has me very upset" (51). Perry behaves similarly when he remarks that "the younger generation hasn't put in their two cents" (53). These situations set Bobby and Ramon in a group by themselves.

Another relevant pairing is Gregory and Ramon. Their relationship progresses from mutual admiration to rivalry, and ultimately to mentor-protégé. In the first act, Ramon's reaction to Gregory is one of respect. When he learns that Gregory was present at one of his performances, Ramon says, "You saw us, Mr. Mitchell? . . . I would have freaked if I'd known you were out there, Mr. Mitchell" (28). He makes a similar comment to John, saying, "Look, I'm sort of out of my element this weekend. He's Gregory Mitchell, for Christ's sake. Do you know what that means?" (33). Gregory also looks upon Ramon favorably, writing in his journal that "John will also have Ramon Fornos, a superb young dancer, in tow" (65). The circumstances change a bit after Ramon's affair with Bobby. Ramon tells Gregory that "If [he] ever get[s] famous like [him] . . . and they ask [him] when [he] decided [he] wanted to be a dancer—no, a great dancer, like [Gregory was]" (115), he will tell them of his high school talent contest. Sensing his slip, he corrects himself: "I'm goofing. 'Great dancer you are.' I didn't mean it, okay?" (116). Not okay, he lets his arrogance take over, exclaiming, "Fuck you then. I'm sorry your work isn't going well. Bobby told me. But don't take it out on me. I'm just having fun" (116). Having had enough, Gregory grabs Ramon, twists his arm, threatening to break it, and attempts to force him to mutilate his hand in the garbage disposal. Buzz and Perry come to the rescue and the situation ends without another word. Later, when Gregory finishes his current dance piece, exhausted—"a forty-three-year-old man whose body had begun to quit in places he'd never dreamed of" (127), according to Perry—he decides that his career as a dancer is over and he will pass his tradition on to the young Ramon. "You're good Ramon. You're very

good. You're better than I was at your age . . . It would be your solo at the premiere" (128), he says. The peace offering is final when Gregory says "[he's] fine" (129) after Ramon's mention of the Bobby situation.

John and James also form a pair. As twin brothers, they are as different as night and day. John appears not to care much for his twin—in fact harboring a great deal of hatred and resentment toward him—the reason for which comes out in Act Three. "I resent you. I resent everything about you. You had Mum and Dad's unconditional love and now you have the world's. How can I not envy that?" (124), John asks James, "So what's your secret? The secret of unconditional love? I'm not going to let you die with it" (125). The brothers come together when James forgives John for his hatred: "just then a tear started to fall from the corner of one eye. This tear told me my brother knew something of the pain I felt of never, ever, not once, being loved . . . We could see each other at last" (125). Finally, John can release all the anguish he has been holding in. He is finally able to relate to his brother.

A final link exists between Bobby and James. Bobby, blind, and James, dying of AIDS, have something in common—they both face more adversity than the average person. Near the end of the play, they have a scene which parallels their two conditions. Everyone else is down by the lake. James is very sick by this point and out of bed against his best intentions. James says to Bobby, "I have a confession to make. I've never been skinny-dipping in the moonlight with a blind American." "I thought you were scared of that snapping turtle," Bobby returns. James replies, "I'm terrified of him. I'm counting on you." Bobby understands, saying, "Let's go then" (139) and the scene fades. This exchange is about confronting fears and, even more so, about people being there for one another. James cannot make it without Bobby's support, in much the same way that Bobby cannot make it without James's guidance. It is central to the meaning of the play.

These common bonds allow the eight characters to form a kind of family. Though they may not always like each other, they involve themselves in each others lives and are a source of support for one another. The men show concern for numerous aspects of their friend's lives. Gregory's problems with his work serve as a first example. John includes in his narration at the end of Act One that "it was raining when Gregory sat alone in his studio for six hours listening to a piece of music and didn't move from his chair" (62). Bobby says that Gregory has "started telling people the new piece

is nearly done when the truth is there's nothing there." He tries to tell him "just stay in the moment, not to think in finished dances. That it doesn't have to be about everything" (112). When Gregory finally overcomes his obstacles, Perry shows his excitement: "Gregory was working! The lights in the studio had been burning all that night and now well into the next day" (126). John, Bobby, and Perry all know just how important Gregory's work is to him. As a result, it becomes important to them, too. They all, whether directly or indirectly, offer their concern and encouragement.

Another example of the strong family structure is the inclusiveness it extends. John, although he is not the most well-liked or pleasant person to be around, is consistently welcomed in the group. They likewise welcome Ramon—even Gregory does, after he had an affair with his lover—despite the fact that he can be cocky and obnoxious at times. James is another example. The brother of a questionable individual, with whose death they must also deal, is embraced and loved. All three of these men are invited to both share their lives and become involved in the lives of the others.

A third example is well-illustrated in a scene between Perry and Buzz. Buzz contrasts real life with a musical, saying, "if this were a musical . . . it would have a happy ending" (130). Upset about his illness and approaching death, he offers an alternate ending to *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* in which "the only thing that happens is nothing and it's not funny and they all go down waiting." "Waiting for what?" he asks, "Waiting for nothing, waiting for death, like everyone I know and care about is, including me" (131). Their dialogue continues:

PERRY: You're my oldest friend in the world and next to Arthur, my best.

BUZZ: It's not enough sometimes, Perry. You're not sick . . .

PERRY: That's not fair. We can't help that.

BUZZ: I can't afford to be fair. Fair's a luxury. Fair is for healthy people with healthy lovers in nice apartments with lots of health insurance . . .

BUZZ: I'm scared I won't be there for James when he needs me and angry he won't be there for me when I need him . . .

BUZZ: Who's gonna be there for me when it's my turn?

PERRY: We all will. Every one of us.

BUZZ: I wish I could believe that . . . Can you promise me you'll be holding my hand when I let go? That the last face I see will be yours?

PERRY: Yes.

BUZZ: I believe you. (131-2)

This very moving exchange illustrates just how close these relationships have become. Perry is willing to stay with Buzz until the end, watching his health deteriorate and death approach, in order to make him feel safe and secure. Related by no biological connection, there is a love and commitment in this group which is greater than many nuclear families possess.

These relationships forge a unity of which each character is a part. The eight men are able to come together, despite extreme differences. Two points in the third act demonstrate this unity. The first, at the conclusion of the story, is the skinny-dipping scene where "Everyone [takes] off his clothes to go swimming . . . One by one . . . the men at the rear of the stage undress and go into the lake" (142). This action demonstrates the synthesis of lives that has occurred during the course of the play. No matter their appearances, feelings, actions, personality traits, they have all come together, moving in the same direction at the same time.

The Swan Lake performance works to much the same end. It depicts both the unity—with all of the characters involved in some way—and the support—with them all physically connected, hand over hand—present in the group. In addition, it pushes the idea of connectedness one step further. Just as they are tied to one another, so are they all tied to the larger gay community. The dance is being done as a benefit for AIDS. They are giving their talents and, in some cases, sacrificing something, for the good of others. As Gregory says, "Nobody's done enough. Um. For AIDS" (48). Isolating oneself from others' problems is clearly not the course to take. Rather, it is with unity and togetherness that improvements are made.

Love! Valour! Compassion! is a play that accurately depicts, but deliberately fails to define, homosexuality. McNally shows that it is nearly impossible to grasp such a complex concept. Sexuality is not something which can be condensed, or simplified, or wrapped up into a neat little package. Instead, being gay is as diverse, as significant, and as real as any other human characteristic. As Buzz says, "Shakespeare was gay . . . So was Romeo and Juliet. So was Hamlet. So was King Lear. Every character Shakespeare wrote was gay. Except for Titus Andronicus. Titus was straight. Go figure" (115). To Buzz everyone is gay. This, however, does not offer any explanation as to what being "gay" means. Being gay is what one makes it. It can be everything, it can be nothing, and it can be both or

neither. Whatever the circumstances, this play asserts that one definition is simply neither justifiable nor conceivable.

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