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Passivity in *Port Authority*

Conor McPherson's mysteriously titled play *Port Authority* left a lasting impression. With the format of the play being three monologues with no interaction between the three characters, something I had not been exposed to previously, I found myself fascinated, always wanting to know what happened next in their stories. The talent of both the cast and the director cultivated a show that was engaging, relatable, and moving. Aside from just the acting, the themes of the play were very relevant and stuck with me after the play was over. Having the opportunity to speak with two of the three cast members also shed some light on the inner workings of the play and what it is like to perform in a play as unique as *Port Authority*.

One of the most difficult challenges an actor can face is building his or her entire world based off of recollection and then to successfully portray that world to an audience in a way that engages the audience and keeps them wanting to hear more. All three characters did this very successfully. They each let me into their world and I felt like I was there with them, relating to their experiences and shortcomings. With no props in the show, the actors were forced to use their bodies and their voices to convey their memories and it was refreshing to see that as an audience member. The direction by Ciarán O'Reilly was very effective and realistic. There was nothing artificial by any of the characters, even in the way they would sit in silence while the others gave the next

installment of their monologues. They also never broke character when they were sitting and waiting, either, which was refreshing.

What resonated with me most was Kevin's realization that he does not fight for anything in his life; he merely goes with the flow. However, his insistence that those are the only two types of people in the world I take issue with. In my personal experience, there have been times where I have absolutely gone with the flow of things, but there have also been times where I have remained stubborn and fought for things that I want. Perhaps I am just a strange hybrid, though, because I do see his point. It is just the sort of revelation that he needed in his life. From that point in the play, he has the ability to change his behavior and become someone who fights unless he concedes to the notion that this is his fate and he is destined to be a non-fighter for the rest of his life.

I think this is where all three characters end up in the play. Dermot has finally understood that his wife has always been there just to take care of him; Joe has let go of his love for his neighbor; and Kevin realizes that he'll never be with Claire but that Trish will always fight for him. They all just went with the flow, nobody fought for what they really wanted in life, either professionally or personally. This is a haunting concept for the audience, which is possibly why I left the show satisfied, yet sort of empty. Speaking to the actors afterward helped with this though. They two that spoke to us were really able to give some insight into their respective character's troubles and shortcomings. Billy Carter, the actor who played Dermot, was attracted to Dermot because he was an "epic loser" who never quite figured life out. And Peter Maloney seemed to resonate with the fact that his character tried to maintain his status as a good husband by denying

the fact that he had feelings for his neighbor. They are all in a sort of limbo at the end of the play; not much has changed.

What I cannot quite figure out, however, is how the title of the play fits with its content. *Port Authority* seems to be detached, irrelevant. But perhaps that is exactly what McPherson was going for when he titled the play. These characters are stuck somewhere in the in-between of life, not quite sure where to go next and maybe that is why McPherson gave the play this title. The characters have reached a point of self-realization and can go anywhere they want to from here...but where would they go? Would it be too much effort to try and change, especially for the old codger, Joe? Is it easier to just skate through life accepting whatever it is that may come one's way in life? For some, the answer to those questions is probably yes, and that is the beauty behind McPherson's play.

This seems to be a prevalent theme in the shows we've seen this semester, as it was the major theme in *This Is Our Youth*, as well. Yet this honest style of writing is perhaps the most beautiful of all. It does not fill the audience with happiness and false hope, but rather shows a raw side of life, that no, everything will not necessarily be okay. McPherson does not show this in a tragic way, though. He uses the beauty of lyrical language to convey these ideas peppered in with laughs along the way. His method, as well as Kenneth Lonergan's, are very effective and leave the audience feeling satisfied, but still thinking about the reality of the material. And these are timeless concepts, ones that do not become dated as the decades pass. With this style of writing, the author can convey serious, relevant themes without leaving the audience in a depression and, in fact,

feeling relatively good at the end. McPherson's *Port Authority* is no exception and will be engaging audiences for years to come.