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The New Yorker has called Terrence McNally "one of our most original and audacious dramatists and one of our funniest." He is the author of such critically acclaimed plays as *Love! Valour! Compassion!*, *Master Class*, *The Lisbon Traviata*, and *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*. In *Corpus Christi*, McNally gives us his own unique view of the story of Christ, and in doing so provides us with one of the most vivid and moving passion plays written. McNally's controversial new play is an affirmation of faith and a drama of such power and scope that it has been called blasphemy by the religious right and hailed by audiences and critics alike as one of his best and most poignant works to date.

Corpus Christi Details

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From Reader Review Corpus Christi for online ebook

Scott says

It's probably unfair to put this as a book I've read since I'm in a production of it, but heck, I sure have read it....I've got it memorized even.

Having dated many guys (and perhaps having been one at times) who cannot wrap their heads around how religion and sexuality can overlap, I appreciate how McNally's play challenges the relationship between the two. While far from a perfect play, "Corpus Christi" makes a beautiful statement about love, sacrifice, and brotherhood of man.

Dusty Myers says

Here, McNally reimagines Jesus Christ as a gay man, and brings the story of his life up to date. Judas is written as his lover, moody, brooding, choosing to betray Jesus just for a spot in history. McNally's point in this exercise is to argue for a theology of inclusion:

Judas: What is His crime?

High Priest: Blasphemy.

Judas: Because He says He's the son of God?

High Priest: No, because He says you're the son of God as well.

Judas: We're all the son of God.

High Priest: Unless you're looking for trouble, I would keep that to myself. The son of God is a cocksucker? I don't think so. We need sinners. (65)

Something about the casting—all the roles except for Jesus and Judas are played varyingly by a "choir" of eleven other men—prevents the play from transcending beyond its central conceit. In other words, there are no real characters here we can attach ourselves to, just re-presentations of mythic figures. Kushner's approach at negotiating gay people within Judeo-Christian belief seems, perhaps only in its epic scope, a greater success.

Joseph Crupper says

Changed my life.

D says

While confusing at times, I thought the play was lovely. The dynamic between Judas and Jesus as lovers while Judas also betrays him was fascinating.

Christopher says

If this play didn't have McNally's name attached or had such a controversial opening, it would have long been forgotten. It is essentially the Jesus story told as if he lived nowadays and was gay. But really that isn't entirely accurate. It seems as though McNally had a lot of trouble figuring out when and where the story takes place.

The more disappointing aspect of the play is how it falls so far short of what it could have been. It could have added depth to understanding the hatred contemporary people (well, certain people) have for the homosexual community. But again it seems as though the author was confused about a lot as he wrote it. At times it is treated as though this story exists in a world in which Jesus didn't originally exist until now (now called Joshua), but then again there are times this doesn't fully fit. Then there are Roman Centurians policing the streets in Texas and people are still crucified. I'm kinda pissed at what a mess this play is. It is unfortunate.

John Vanderslice says

This seems to be a play that people either embrace wholeheartedly or have profound issues with; and based on the prefatory comments by McNally that are included in this text, it seems clear the playwright anticipated just such a reaction. The opening mini-speeches by each of the apostle characters, too, almost seem to act as advance apologies to the audience, the message of "Just stick with this, please, even if it's going to surprise you." I heard about the play, and its controversial opening, all the way back in the late nineties, and have been curious about it ever since. Because I'm always curious about new and alternative versions of familiar religious figures. Well, this one certainly was different! But, really, twenty years later, not so shocking. What struck me more than anything about the play was how personal--indeed, autobiographical--it must have been to the playwright. Not autobiographical in the strict sense, but autobiographical in the sense that it, even while it quickly encapsulates the life story of Jesus, it suggests--and even explicitly mentions--what must be the major tempestuous periods in McNally's lifespan, starting from the experience of being a not-so-subtly gay male high schooler in conservative 1950s Corpus Christi, Texas up to the revived anti-gay persecutions of the late 1990s, when the play was produced (especially the brutal 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard). Early in the play, there are lots of references to 50s movie and music stars--Marilyn Monroe, Elvis, James Dean--while not too much later we pass through the 70s disco era and then onto the terror of the 80s and early 90s AIDS epidemic. Like I said, the play seems extremely personal to McNally, even while it offers a rendition of a historical/religious figure from two thousand years earlier. Much of it is ingenious, and while I've never seen a production, I bet it would be very striking to watch on stage. My only problem with the play is that McNally attempts to keep the idea of Roman occupation and Roman rule even while the play is quite obviously set in modern day America. This idea of Roman presence is simply a fiction the reader has to accept. But it also seems kind of clumsy and unnecessary. Why not just transpose all the power and pitilessness of the Roman authorities, and the unfortunate actions of certain, obviously threatened, Jewish religious authorities, on to modern day figures, thus making the contemporary setting seamless? This is a very small bone to pick with what is otherwise a

successful play. I'm sure as experienced a playwright as McNally is must have considered this option before proceeding as he did. I'd be curious to hear his reasons.

Lukáš Palán says

Tak já nevím, na to, že tam bylo dvanáct buzik? a teplej Džízas, tak nic moc. Nedošlo ani na gangbang, ani na bukkake, ani na fisting, což je vzhledem k potenciálu ur?it? zklamáním.

Andrew says

As a bizarre Christian, I have always found the things that are supposed to piss us off more spiritually challenging (and thus engaging) than offensive. I actually didn't think this was all that bad, I thought it was well written and thought provoking.

Madeline says

Inspired by the events of Laramie, Wyoming and the tragic murder of Matthew Shepard, this play follows a version of the story of Christ in which "Jesus" is a young gay man named Joshua. The disciples, all of who have their own trials and tribulations, are inexorably drawn to Joshua as the modern day Messiah.

The show's true strength lies in its peculiar juxtaposition of two different stories: Jesus's story and Joshua's story. While the actors use their own names at the top of the show, they are routinely baptized and christened with the names of the twelve disciples. The show is definitely contemporary, with its high school dances and GoGo boys, and by keeping with the original, Biblical account of events and combining them with the modern day persecution of members of the LGBT+ community, it creates a powerful story that is hard to forget.

The language of the show is young and hip, even obscene at times, and it helps to bring the combined stories to life. Each actor in the show, with the exceptions of Joshua and Judas, play many different roles, and it creates a wonderful whirlwind of people that can be confusing, but which lends itself to the nature of the play. Every man you meet will be many different things, and will be capable of things you would have never imagined. Bartholomew, who is married by Joshua to his lover, the disciple James, is played by the same actor who will later cruelly torment Jesus as a Roman Soldier. The same actor who plays Mary, mother of Jesus, plays Simon Peter, the coward who threatens death to those who aim to harm Joshua.

This a gorgeous play, and forces the audience again and again, in many different lights, to "Look what they did to him. Look what they did to him." To Jesus. To Joshua. To Matthew Shepard. To everyone who has ever dared to be themselves and have been crucified for it.

RECOMMENDED READING: The Laramie Project (also about the tragedy of Laramie, Wyoming, is similarly stylized)

Susannah says

First read August 20, 1999

Bradley says

Terrence McNally has brilliantly retold the story of Jesus as a gay love story.

Anouk says

I'm on the fence about this play.

I'll admit to being drawn by the 'controversional' nature of its premise, as I in general am drawn to anything that doesn't take its religion too traditionally.

And therein lies the first problem *I* have with the play. We might get go-go boy Philip, coarse language, and a teenage Joshua happily going off on a love-affair with a teenage Judas (and doesn't that just sound like someone wrote a New Testament fanfic?), but the patronising feel of the canonical gospels is still there, together with the syrupy sweetness much of contemporary Christianity has often flavoured it with. (*A sidenote: I am not arguing against Christianity or its message, just against the way it is often communicated.*)

While I understand that might have been McNally's point, to show that these two worlds can go together against all odds, for me it chafes.

A second problem I have with this play is that, at least in written form, it seems to lack some of the oomph it could have had. I don't know why that is; maybe it's its length (pretty short), maybe it's that there is a lot happening in that very short time.

All the scenes seem more like snapshots, and rarely the dialogue seems to truly deliver a kick. There is enough humour sprinkled throughout, but not a lot of... meaning that 'clicks'. I have underlined only one single passage: Judas' introductory monologue, about how every retelling of the story of Jesus is told through the intentions of the one doing the telling, which I find true enough -and also rather meta, considering this play. If there'd been more passages like that, I would have enjoyed this play more.

I did enjoy the occasional absurdity, the actors taking on multiple roles, and the humour.

The one big regret I have is that I probably will never have the chance to see it staged, as I think much of its impact is in the quality of the acting rather than the words.

Losille says

Ješua: Pet?e, zastr? me?.. Kdo me?em zachází, me?em zahyne. Mysl?š, že bych si nemohl pozvat stovku and?!, aby m? bránili, kdybych cht?l? (P?istoupí ke zran?nému vojákovi.) Tady.

voják: Táhni. (*Ješua položí ruku na vojákovu hlavu a uzdraví mu ucho.*)

Ješua: B?h s tebou, brat?e! (Voják?m.) Jsem p?ipraven.

Jan: Ten muž velmi užasl.

voják: Tývole.

Jan: A my také. Než jsme se vzpamatovali, sebrali Ho. A už jsme Ho nikdy nevid?li. Jen Petr. Byli jsme srabi. Utekli jsme. Skon?ilo to celé hodn? rychle...

Knižnímu vydání holt chybí scénické provedení, nebo nejsem ten správný recipient (nebo obojí), ale kdo výjak m? to neoslovilo. St?ídání rolí jednotlivých herc? v pr?b?hu hry m? mátlo v této podob?, nevím, jestli by to bylo lepší na divadle. Spiš si to moc nemyslím. P?inejmenším by to m?lo v?tší (chce se mi ?íci “aspo? n?jaký”) spád. Dovedu si ale p?edstavit, pro? takový text n?komu m?že ležet v žaludku.

Maddsurgeon says

Retelling of the Jesus Christ story as a modern (gay) man; written in response to the murder of Matthew Shepard. Very moving piece; hits all the right notes and is structured simply but elegantly. I'd like to see a production at some point.

James says

Cannot remember if I have read this once before or not, but it was worth the quick review I gave it this afternoon. The content is not earth-shattering, but some of TM's devices cut to the quick.
