O”Dell Tucker

Professor Olivia Trees

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Odd Couple Audience Paper

Written by Neil Simon in 1965, *The Odd Couple,* is a sitcom-esque comedy about two, divorced middle-aged men have both been divorced living with one another. The first was Oscar, a laid-back slob who tended to run away from his responsibilities, while the other was Felix, an uptight, neat-freak who couldn’t seem to get over his recent divorce. As the plot developed, the two men began treating one another as if they were married, and their polarizing life-styles slowly drove each other (mostly Oscar) mad. However, in the end, the two eventually come to realize that their unwillingness to change is what caused the death of their marriages. So instead of letting the same happen to their friendship, and Oscar and Felix decide to part ways in order to to deal with their respective issues on their own. Obviously, divorce and marriage are common themes throughout the play; However, I believe that the most interesting aspect of *The Odd Couple* was its message about acknowledging your personal issues and learning to move on and grow as a person.

Firstly, These themes were especially well represented throughout the production’s costume and visual design. *The Odd Couple* took place around in a mid to late 1960s New York City, with all scenes occurring within Oscar’s eight-room apartment. Muted, and earthy tones, such as browns, greens, and grayscale colors in general, tended to dominate the color pallet of the visual design. This helped to give both the set and costumes a more grounded and realistic aesthetic which complimented the themes of domestic life present in the story. However, as a side effect, this meant that the occasional uses of more saturated colors, such as Oscar’s blue baseball cap and Vinny’s vacation shirts, tended to stick out far more than they would normally. For the most part, these few exceptions were implemented purposefully and often helped to emphasize contrast between characters in the story. One great example was when Felix’s brown blazer was placed in between the Pigeon Sisters’ pink and purple dresses. The drab-looking jacket stuck out like a sore thumb against the vibrant colors worn by the flamboyant Englishwomen, and the disconnects between the two opposing tones helped to enhance the awkwardness of the situation.

Despite this play’s more restrained visual design, the costumes still had enough freedom to emphasize each character’s traits. Nowhere else is this is more apparent than with the two main characters, Oscar and Felix. At the beginning of the play, Oscar wore a stained, bright blue baseball cap with a grey t-shirt and baggy pajama pants, which characterized him as a laid-back, washed-up slob. On the other hand, Felix’s thick glasses, plain white dress shirt, and high waist line reminiscent of Steve Urkel painted the picture of an awkward nerd who obsessed over meaningless details. This clever use of visual characterization reinforced the contrast between their personalities while also illustrating the development of their interpersonal relationship. For example, when Felix wearing his brown apron while nagging Oscar for not calling about being late scene perfectly displayed the pseudo-marital relationship between Felix and Oscar. The brown apron Felix apron wore casted him as the stereotypical housewife chastising her husband, and this wouldn’t be nearly as apparent without this wardrobe choice.

This kind of meaningful costume design was mostly consistent with other characters, with Roy being the only exception. As Oscar’s accountant, Roy’s formal attire matches well with his rather bland occupation. However, despite having such a similar outfit to Felix, he is a much more laid-back character than him, and he even became annoyed with Felix’s obsessive tidying. Honestly, this is just a minor nitpick, but I feel like this was the only wardrobe choice that I disagreed with because it somewhat undermines the correlations I will discuss in a moment. Instead, I think that his shirt maybe should have been a little totally different to distance himself from Felix’s character, but I digress.

Above all, if you analyze how Oscar’s outfit changed over the course of the play in relation to Felix, you can see how he had developed over the course of the play. As stated before, Oscar started out looking like a slob, but as he spent more time living with a neat Felix, Oscar gradually became more like his roommate, to the point that he started dressing around the third act. At first, this came off as a simple mockery with Oscar imitating how he obsessively paced around the room while untidying. He even going as far to spray cleaner in Felix’s face while he was eating. However, after Felix left, Oscar began mimicking his former roommate’s nervous, wishy-washy mannerisms and overdramatic outbursts. After Felix “lifted the curse” off of Oscar’s head and the two-part ways, Oscar puts back on his blue baseball cap and returns to playing poker with his friends. I believe that this symbolizes Oscar returning back to his laid-back self, but in comparison to how he looked at the start, Oscar’s outfit suggests that he is now a more well put together person because of his time with Felix.

As the first theatrical production that I have watched in years, this iteration of the Odd Couple exceeded my expectations. Romance and love are so often discussed and media that it’s refreshing to see a something a explores ideas that pertain to marriage and domestic life. As two middle-aged men who had been left scarred by divorce, Oscar and Felix both cope with their loss in different ways. However, what they both have in common is that they both haven’t properly dealt with their baggage, and they hurt one another because of that. Instead of continuing on their self-destructive paths, they acknowledge their flaws and choose to better themselves. As a child who has experienced being in the crossfire of their parents’ messy divorce and as a young adult who has beginning to tackle ideas about long-term relationships and marriage, a message like this holds a great deal of value to me. And I would not of imagined a deep message like this to comedy such as *The Odd Couple*.