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### Children

If children were innocent, Kevin from *Symphony Dream* would not have intentionally wounded his sister Célia's eye. If children were nonviolent, Melchior from *Spring Awakening* would not have been coerced into violating Wendla. Children act without limits, because inexperienced individuals taste every function of their physicality until they reach a reaction. Then, the children meet a wall and remember that reaction. An mature adult is one who has processed enough reactions to become competent and moral, although competence and morality are decisions based on experience. It would be genial if adults conveyed these experiences to their children, yet both Wedekind and Liberano insist that, in order for adult characters to be believable, they must be flawed; both playwrights script their adults as individuals with imperfect didactic principles. I see Wedekind and Liberano as the ghosts of children, buried within their own worlds. Their respective plays display violence and maturity, but the playwrights merely sing of walls. Wedekind and Liberano choose not to edify as adults would, for they see adults as incommunicative; the actors and audiences must interpret the lessons.

Diogo Liberano taught me that his language is sometimes empty but never unintentional. Powerful images, such as Tomas' balloon-fueled ascension, are meant to be powerful but lack intended symbolic meaning. Regardless, when critiquing *Symphony Dream*, the image of Tomas's death is too developed to be ignored. Thus, it is the critic's role to personalize the subject, applying meaning to the balloons and relating it to Tomas' role within the play. The

image is always in the foreground, for it can be felt without any effort made towards interpreting theme. The image sticks, and it is best to think about and toil with the language. I cannot get confirmation that Wedekind applied the same sensibility to the images in his work, but it can be safely assumed that he dearly valued the children's ability to feel their experiences. In the third scene of *Spring Awakening's* first act, Martha, Wendla, and Thea emerge with exclamations of physicality. By proclaiming their interactions with nature—the rain, wind, and so forth—the girls feel the world around them. To interpret the moment beyond the girls' description of their physical sensations would be to project one's own ideas onto the scene. The idea of pure feeling can be seen again before Moritz commits suicide. He ponders, "When the time comes, I'm going to concentrate as hard as I can on whipped cream. Whipped cream is so innocuous" (Wedekind 48). The image of whipped cream is explicitly used to distract from the horrors and implications of the oncoming violence.

Both playwrights choose to depict violence through a lens of futility. Liberano excerpts his violence from a school shooting in Brazil; the horror was therefore implemented into the play for no more reason than it happened. Of course, within the context of Liberano's story there are additional thematic discussions that could play into a critique on the central act of jarring violence. Yet, it seems almost disrespectful to try and justify the action when the event was real. A more appropriate response would be to recognize the event's psychological damage on the children and try to understand how the violence might act as a pivotal role in a child's life. Moritz's suicide seems unavoidable when his situation is fully considered. He lacks support from his parents, as they are the ones who pressure him into valuing his grades on par with his life. He has very little chance to succeed, as the school system is arranged so that it would be impossible for everyone to pass: there are not enough seats in the next grade. All of his friends are already

advancing to the next grade, and his only lifeline is Ilse, who offers a change in lifestyle far too dramatic to be taken seriously. Her Bohemian life so greatly contradicts those of the students that Ilse appears intangible. Thus, in spite of his efforts to amend the situation, Moritz sees death as the only possible alternative to failing at school. We must feel it, for we know Moritz's limits as a child. We must respect the futility of his suicide, and absorb the lesson that he is unable to learn because he is dead.

We know there are lessons to these violent situations because the events are not singular; they develop as motifs. Unfortunately, the adults of both plays are unable to adequately convey the morals of these circumstances, and the unprepared children are doomed to confront their limits without adult guidance. In *Spring Awakening*, Mrs. Bergmann tells Wendla, "...you have to —love—the man—you're married to—love him, I tell you..." (Wedekind 41). Mrs. Bergmann leaves her daughter confused; Wendla becomes pregnant because she assumed that it could not happen if she were not in love. Mrs. Bergmann attempts to keep Wendla safe, but the girl's ignorance about sex is what harms her. With a great gap between the parents' intention and action, the adults of the play are not reliably competent in conveying morals and lessons to the children.

*Symphony Dream* shows the inadequacy of adults using a different method. When Kevin poked Célia's eye, he most likely did not intend to blind her, but acted with the intention of poking her. Célia says, "...it's okay because [Kevin] promised Mom that it was an accident and she believed him" (Liberano 44). The girl's statement reveals her parents' inability to confront the situation and address it in an acceptable manner. In both *Spring Awakening* and *Symphony Dream*, we end up focusing more on the relationships between children and adults. The lessons that should be at the forefront fizzle out, because of the flawed adult figures in both plays.

As each play concludes, the stage is shrouded with death—violently in *Symphony Dream* and subtly in *Spring Awakening*. The end of each work seems to introduce a new presence not felt before. The figure is most obvious in *Spring Awakening*, with the mysterious Masked Man taking stage. While the character's identity is unknown, he explicitly summarizes the concept that is primarily *felt* throughout the play. The Masked Man speaks, "Morals, I understand to be the real product of two imaginary quantities. The imaginary quantities are Supposed To and Want To. The product is called Morals and its reality cannot be denied" (Wedekind 74-5). We can relate the ideas of "Supposed To" and "Want To" to expectation and desire, as *Spring Awakening* often emphasizes that people act against their intentions, by accident as if by fate. The Masked Man refers to these concepts as "imaginary," which draws similarities to the idea of feeling horror without knowing what it means literally. The purpose is to get an ethereal sense of the subject, which is then translated to something *real* called "Morals." This final idea in *Spring Awakening*, of taking what's intangible and articulating it, seems to be the core essence of *Symphony Dream* as well. We are meant to feel these plays first. The presence introduced in the ending of *Symphony Dream* is miniscule, present in the stage directions. The final line reads, "Kevin sings anything. But it no longer matters" (Liberano 63). The image conveyed is one of pure emotion, in which meaning seems irrelevant in the face of death. We witness the authors come out of their works to give a small hint as to why the violence is there.

I found it incredibly difficult to classify Wedekind and Liberano. I initially referred to them as children, as I merely felt that at heart they were children. Yet, I found this assertion to be disrespectful as well as fruitless, and I could not write it. So, I concluded that the playwrights were adults, albeit ideal ones. I started writing this essay, but I felt that I was betraying my feelings about the plays, and that I was betraying the plays themselves. The ghosts of children

are those who have experienced futility and death beyond limit; they teach through experience, rather than doctrine. I was allowed to feel and write for myself, so I felt and wrote.