

A Review:

the Front Runner

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For a university-sponsored Reader's Theatre group to commit itself to the presentation of a gay novel shows a certain courage. This is particularly true when the novel is Patricia Nell Warren's The Front Runner, a book which suggests the "dangerous" idea that gay love may be as romantic and meaningful as "straight" love; that gay lovers may find not only sexual satiation but emotional and spiritual fulfillment as well. This is a big pill for some people to swallow, and the UNC-CH Reader's Theatre showed great courage in deciding to offer this necessary social medicine in the painless and pleasant form of a Reader's Theatre production. Sadly, this courage seemed to falter in the actual performance, robbing it of a great deal of its human impact.

Reader's Theatre is a marvelous form to work with, a flexible blend of oral interpretation and acting in which the audience may have the scope of non-dramatic literature and the living flesh-and-blood immediacy of human relationships taking place before their eyes. It is a daring form which allows great risks and offers great results; with its tremendous flexibility it seems the perfect vehicle for the love story of Coach Harlan Brown and his exciting young runner Billy Sive. We see their first meeting, their tempestuous courtship, their tenuous moments of love and joy and the brutal act which ends it for them. Narration speeds the tale, giving us the intellectual framework from which our hearts can absorb the significance and meaning of these two magnificent men in love.

Sadly, however, the heart absorbs very little from this particular production, because very little is offered. The bravery which selected

this novel for production is seldom seen in the performance. The principal fault lies with the direction, which is timid in the utmost. Although stereotypical puffs and pansies are stoutly avoided, they are replaced not by three-dimensional gay men but by neutral figures whose brief appearances add little more than a line here and there. Judging from the brief flashes of character which would slip out now and then, some of the actors deserved better treatment.

The crux of the problem was an almost universal lack of commitment in on-stage relationships. Whether through inhibition or simply lack of direction, characters fought, suffered and swore love to each other with little if any physical commitment. This was fatal for the two lovers--we were told movingly again and again of their love, but we never saw a physical commitment more intense than that between two boy-scouts on a hike. I am not suggesting that any of the novel's splendid sexual scenes should have been put on stage, but there are a thousand and one non-sexual ways in which gay lovers (or straight lovers, for that matter) relate physically, in ways that communicate the depth of their bond more eloquently than a dozen silver-toned narrators ever could. Randy Hedrick, whose portrayal of Billy gave the show its most human moments, came close to exploring some of these areas, but for the most part they were virgin territories.

I left UNC-CH's Front Runner unsatisfied, with the feeling that a potential moment of fine theatre had been wasted. I do feel, however, that the total experience was valuable. The education of the heterosexuals around us is perhaps most effective through theatre, and we certainly owe gratitude to a group with the courage to attempt serious gay material.

SWEDISH GAYS STAGE 'SICK-IN'

Members of the Swedish national gay group, Riksforbundet for Sexuellt Likaberättigande (RFSC) recently won a victory for gay rights using an unusual approach.

In order to protest the placement of homosexuality on the government's official list of illnesses and disorders, RFSC staged a "sick-in". Approximately 30 lesbians and gay men in Stockholm phoned employers to re-

quest sick leave. When the employer of RFSC president Kjell Rinder asked if his illness were serious, Rinder replied, "Ja, sure, I'm seriously homosexual."

Under Swedish regulations, the employer was required to grant compensation.

In October the Swedish government officially removed homosexuality from its list.