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My Purple Summer: A Comparative Analysis of Frank Wedekind's Play "Spring Awakening" and Steven Sater's Adaptation "Spring Awakening: A New Musical"

Joel A. Garza
University of Texas-Pan American

MY PURPLE SUMMER:

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FRANK WEDEKIND'S PLAY *SPRING AWAKENING* AND STEVEN SATER'S ADAPTATION *SPRING AWAKENING: A NEW MUSICAL*

A Thesis

by

JOEL A. GARZA

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COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dr. Marian Monta
Chair of Committee

Dr. Brian Warren
Committee Member

Dr. Philip Zwerling
Committee Member

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this academic thesis is to study and analyze Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* and its adaptation *Spring Awakening: A New Musical*, written by Steven Sater. This study includes an analysis of musical theatre and its history, an analysis of Frank Wedekind's original work and a comparative analysis with Sater's adaptation. Also, the thesis explores the "Post-Modern Musical," a new form of production currently being produced on Broadway. The main focus of the thesis is to analyze how *Spring Awakening* affects contemporary audiences, this is done through an analysis of the music and themes associated with the modern production.

DEDICATION

I would first and foremost like to dedicate this thesis to my mother, Annie Garza, who always instilled the value of an education within me and my two sisters, Jennifer and Ginger. Without your love, guidance and support this would not have been possible.

I also dedicate this thesis to the cast and crew of All Star Theatre's production of *Spring Awakening: A New Musical,* who brought these characters to life and took them to heights I never thought possible.

Finally, I dedicate this work to the Melchior's, Wendla's, and Moritz's of today- you are the leaders of tomorrow and, though it may not seem like it now, the trials and tribulations you face now will one day be a distant memory.

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To the cast and crew of All Star Theatre's *Spring Awakening: A New Musical*. Thank you for your dedication to these characters and the production. Your talents are beyond measure, and I am humbled to have been your director. Thank you for giving these characters life and sharing my vision.

I would like to thank my Assistant Director, and best friend, Russell Licciardello, who has seen me at my worst, yet has always remained loyal. Thank you for your efforts regarding the production, and our friendship, I could not have done it without you.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank Carlos Perez, who took the most beating during the production and the formulation of this thesis, and yet continues to support me and my dream. Thank you for joining me on this journey, and here's to many, many more.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> Although I am a sentimental romantic who loves old fashioned musicals I am a member of a very unsentimental, unromantic generation, who basically thinks musicals are corny…But if I want to try to cultivate a new audience for musicals, I must write shows with a score that MTV ears will accept. If you were me, which audience would you write for?[1]
>
> Jonathan Larson, author of *Rent*
> Journal entry, 1986.

When *Spring Awakening* opened on Broadway in 2006, it astonished both audiences and critics alike. Many posed the question, "is this the best musical of the year, or the best musical of the generation?" Based on Frank Wedekind's controversial play, *Spring Awakening* combined elements and ideas of the original production with modern and post-modern musical elements to create an experience unlike any other.

Suffice it to say, *Spring Awakening: A New Musical* would follow the ideas of individuals like Jonathan Larson, who believed that Generation X was full of uncreative individuals who were more interested in instant gratification from music videos rather than spending their time in a Broadway theatre. The need was introduced to develop a new form of Broadway musical that would appeal to a new generation of theatregoers; the post-modern rock musical. Paving the path for a new genre of musical theatre, *Spring Awakening* has become more than a play on Broadway, but an anthem of a generation. To fully understand the

magnitude of the production's influence, we must take a closer look at the elements utilized to create the contemporary musical that has changed Broadway.

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a comparative analysis of Frank Wedekind's play *Spring Awakening* with Steven Sater's musical adaptation, *Spring Awakening: A New Musical.*

Within my analysis of these two works, I have divided the content into three primary sections; adapting *Spring Awakening* to a musical for modern audiences, the music of *Spring Awakening* and understanding the themes that arise from the songs, and finally the differences between the original text and the musical adaptation. I have studied both texts to determine similarities and differences, as well as to determine both authors' reasoning for various inclusions and exclusions. I have found that Sater utilizes the original text as the framework for revealing the ideas of a modern audience. Although many of the themes found in Wedekind's version still resonate today, Sater takes it a step further to discover what has changed within the last one-hundred years. Sater takes the original ideas and applies them to a modern context, therefore making the production, and its content, more relatable for a contemporary audience. Utilizing this form of expression, Sater furthered the post modern musical genre by creating songs that would further the inner monologue of the character through song. It should be noted that this comparative analysis will provide detailed information on the post modern musical. This new type of musical is changing the form of the traditional Broadway musical, and relies heavily on current situations, music genres, and celebrity draws. Utilizing *Spring Awakening*, we can begin to understand the purpose behind this new style of musical, and expand our knowledge of musicals of this nature.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORY OF THE ROCK MUSICAL ON BROADWAY

The decades of the 1960's and 1970's brought immense change to America. With a society more concerned with personal expression individualism, and less on being "one of many," Americans were changing their form of thinking. The aforementioned changes were not only limited to what can be found in history books, aspects of change at this time can be found on the Broadway stage as well.

Though the American musical theatre is an art form that has never been more blatantly vigorous or experimental than it is now, one must review the process of change felt by the theatre to understand this immense change. Sex, drugs and rock and roll have collectively become the life blood of this new postmodern golden age, an era rejecting the morality and modernism of Rodgers and Hammerstein, an era that began in the mid-1990's with rule-shattering shows like *Bat Boy; Rent; Hedwig and the Angry Inch; Songs for the New World; Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in da Funk;* and others (Miller, 1). Sex, drugs and rock and roll may be, historically, the most powerful innate forces for an individual. All three ideas have always stirred up irrational fears in many because all three come from very primal human drives. These three ideas remind us that there is still a primal side to humans, one we often forget. In sex, we seek connection. In rock and roll, we seek emotional expression. For many, the acknowledgment, or worse- the indulging- of those primal urges means anarchy and chaos.

Broadway lyricist E. Y. Harburg wrote,

> "Words make you think a thought. Music makes you feel a feeling. A song makes you feel a thought. A song can degrade your culture, debase your language; can pollute your air and poison your taste or it can clear your thoughts and refurbish your spirit. It is the pulse of the nation's heart, the fever chart of its health. Are we at peace? Are we in trouble? Are we floundering? Do we feel beautiful? Do we feel ugly? Are we hysterical? Violent? Listen to our songs. "[2]

To take Harburg's explanation further, we can understand music trends to be a historical timeline. There are many musical theatre traditionalists who believe fervently that musical theatre should look or sound more or less like *The Pajama Game* (1954). These purists still wish rock and roll would fade away, leaving it as an era of musical theatre less discussed. *The Pajama Game* has a beautiful, tuneful score, but it holds little relevance for today's world of urban violence, terrorism, and new media. America was a different country with a very different culture when the classic musical drama (the Rodgers and Hammerstein style) and the classic musical comedy (the George Abbot model) were born and perfected. Everything changed in the 1960's and 1970's, with Vietnam, Watergate, the sexual revolution, and so much more. Music styles too have changed with the rock revolution, the creation of rap and the rise of popular country music. America is no longer the same country Rodgers and Hammerstein and Jerry Herman wrote about.

Rodgers and Hammerstein revolutionized musical theatre with their style of writing and expression. Yet this, like all revolutions, had its antecedents. Joseph Kern and Guy Bolton explored better ways to write musicals in their Princess Theatre shows during World War I; in the 1920s, Kern and Hammerstein created an integrated musical play in *Show Boat*, and *Pal Joey* and *Lady in the Dark* demonstrated how musicals could treat story and characters realistically. These were models for Rodgers and Hammerstein, and later Sater and Sheik, to build on. Many musical researchers classify the years 1943 to 1959 as "The Rodgers and Hammerstein Years." Six of their nine shows became hits, dominating the Broadway musical stage for those sixteen years, and their musicals influenced other librettists, lyricists, and composers by establishing both a model and a standard for a new kind of play. Further, Rodgers and Hammerstein demonstrated that musicals could be "idea-bearing," socially conscious, and socially responsible, yet still entertain audiences and produce a profit. Like *Spring Awakening,* Rodgers and Hammerstein entertained the idea of expressing social issues on the Broadway stage. However, unlike Sater and Sheik, Rodgers and Hammerstein were forced to censor their work, thus becoming masters at disguising social issues through their productions. Although many still feel great affection for the classic Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals and their imitators, the style of musicals has once again changed. These productions once had their metaphorical finger on the pulse of American hopes and dreams and fears during the mid-twentieth century. They certainly moved the art form forward, but it's a different world now, with different music, and America is now a very different county. Many Americans no longer feel the nostalgia for the turn of the last century or the venerated "rugged individualism" that built our nation. No longer does ragtime or Broadway's longtime workhorse, the foxtrot, represent America's musical voice (Miller, 3). In contrast, the musicals of the 1960's and

1970's really did change almost everything about musical productions. Musicals like *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas, Cabaret, Chicago, Hair, The Rocky Horror Show* and *Sweeney Todd* contrasted with the wholesome productions of the "golden age" of musical theatre (1934-1964).

The 1960's and 1970's were an explosive period for musical theatre as a serious art form and for our national culture. Once the experimental theatre movement exploded in New York in the '60s, commercial theatre began to borrow its devices and philosophy, and Broadway itself became more widely experimental. The influence of German director and playwright Bertolt Brecht took hold of the musical theatre around this time as well, with shows like *Cabaret, Man of La Mancha, Company, Follies,* and many others (Miller, 10). The American musical theatre got adventurous and ironic in the 1960s, and it got sub textual in the 1970's (Miller, 11).

Rock musicals of the 1970's led to the pop rhythm musicals of the 1980's- thus enhancing theatregoers. However, producers were left wondering, "How do you keep them entertained?" As stated here and in the quote by Jonathan Larson, Broadway executives were faced with a dilemma. As older audiences began to make way for a younger generation of theatre attendees, it became increasingly difficult to engage individuals who were no longer interested in the "flash and trash" of old Broadway. Thus, the need to create a new genre of musical was much needed. In 1985, Roger Miller took this as an opportunity to convert the play *Big River* into a country music musical, a genre of musical very popular in the 1980's.

Collaboration with Pop Composers

By the mid-1990s, musicals were still continuing its quarter-century-long search for a contemporary sound, and Broadway producers sought new ways of capturing the Generation X audience. It was then that many big-name pop composers were contributing scores to

Broadway. Elton John made his Broadway debut in 1997, working with Andrew Lloyd Webber's former partner, lyricist Tim Rice, on the transfer of his film score for the stage version of *The Lion King*. After receiving much acclaim for their work on *The Lion* King, Disney offered John and Rice a chance to write a new version of Verdi's *Aida* for Broadway. Both artists leapt at the chance, overjoyed to create a stage show from scratch. John applied his ebullient eclecticism to a score he wrote at an amazingly fast rate of about one song per day: "Its truly a pop musical, with spoken dialogue. There are black songs, very urban based, rhythm and blues, gospel-inspired songs, and kind of 'Crocodile Rock' songs, and ballads, of course."[3] Although John was dubbed the least involved composer for his lack of participation in the Broadway previews or the trials and tribulations felt "on the road" his name and music brought in record number audiences for a production with little fan base. The same season that John made his debut with *The Lion King*, another major figure in the pop world from the 1970's, Paul Simon, brought his first score to Broadway.

Simon had often been invoked by critics as a natural for Broadway, for his sense of narrative was extraordinary and his songs had already provided strong emotional backgrounds for several films. Simon's Broadway project could not have been less conventional; it was based on the true story of a sixteen-year-old Puerto Rican gang member, dubbed "The Capeman," who stabbed two Anglo children in 1959 (406, Maslon). Simon's look at urban history was both uncompromising and sympathetic, but was not enough to engage an audience. *The Capeman* lasted only two months, costing $11 million. When it folded due to a convoluted narrative and lack of direction, it took with it one of the most thrilling musical scores written for Broadway in the last twenty years.

Billy Joel was a Big Apple baby who grew up in the suburbs and sang songs about the boys and girls in his blue-collar community with an unforgettable pop beat in the 1970s and 1980s. In 2000, choreographer Twyla Tharp wanted to create a large-scale theatre piece and settled on Billy Joel as her composer. Tharp's *Movin Out* tells the story of three Long Island friends and the girls they leave behind during and after the Vietnam War. Although the show hit some shoals on its way in from Chicago, it opened in New York in the fall of 2002 to glowing reviews (Maslon, 407). As with Elton John, Billy Joel too was absent for most of the premiere and production. Tharp explained: "It's been a collaboration with his music. That's very different than a collaboration with him. We agreed from the beginning that his job was done once he started [writing]."[4]

As variously effective as these productions have been, their creative processes also provide the ultimate retort to anyone who wonders why there is not more of a rock sound on Broadway: a Broadway collaboration is a very different prospect from a date in the recording studio. Not only do rock and pop composers have to stretch their narrative range to produce songs that work together over the course of an evening, they have to surrender to the grueling politics and unpredictability inherent in creating a Broadway show (Maslon, 407). As the saying goes, Broadway Babies are born, not made. Because these pop composers are coming into a Broadway narrative after successful careers in the music industry, their interest is often less concentrated than composers who have devoted their lives to this craft. In any event, big name composers draw in audience members and fans. This was one tactic that Sater found to be beneficial for his production. The use of Duncan Sheik would prove to be invaluable to the show's success both commercially and musically. However, to fully understand how Sheik and

Sater created a ground-breaking musical, we must first analyze the one production, *Rent,* that laid the ground work for their style.

Rent

Arguably one of the most successful rock-influenced musicals in recent years- and, in fact, in the history of the rock musical subgenre- is *Rent*, with book, music, and lyrics by Jonathan Larson. Because of its phenomenal success, as well as several stylistic and structural similarities, *Rent* is often compared to *Spring Awakening* and even *Hair*.

Rent was originally developed at the New York Theatre Workshop on East Fourth Street in Manhattan. Similar to *Spring Awakening* , *Rent* is a retelling of Puccini's *La Bohème* set in the early 1990s, Larson's musical follows a group of young, East Village idealists over the course of a year. *Rent, Spring Awakening,* and even *Hair* are probably most similar to each other in their use of amplification and musical presentation. All three productions made use of standing microphones downstage, as well as a radio microphone worn conspicuously over each actor's face. This aspect was one original Broadway production director Michael Mayer felt was essential for the production:

> It was the image that finally sold me. The cover of Edward Bond's translation of *Spring Awakening* has a photograph of German schoolboys, in their little caps, jackets, and breeches. And I said, "Can they pull out microphones and just wail these songs? That's the juxtaposition. That's where this thing could live." I said, "Then Duncan, we're honoring exactly what is crucial to you. The music can do anything it needs to do." The truth is, they're not even in character in those moments, they're just the actors being the rock stars.[5]

Indeed, this aspect became synonymous with the *Spring Awakening* production. Actors wearing visible microphones or symbolically pulling hand microphones out of the pockets of their costumes made the characters more relatable to the audience member. No longer were they children of an antiquated society, but now they are just like the viewer, a person of today's world who holds dreams and secrets within their being.

Spring Awakening was also like *Hair* and *Rent* in that it was able to transcend its subject matter and appeal to mainstream audiences in several ways. *Rent*, for example, relies heavily on a number of classic musical theatre structures and images. The romantic leads, Roger and Mimi, are flanked by two other couples. One, the ever-quibbling Joanne and Maureen, function primarily as comic relief; the other, the optimistic HIV-positive drag queen Angel and his devoted boyfriend Tom Collins, is tragic. In keeping with tradition, Act One closes with a lively, full-sized production number, "La Vie Bohème," during which a budding romance between Roger and Mimi is established (Wollman, 172). In its noisy celebration of youth and nonconformity, the number is reminiscent of *Spring* Awakening's "Totally Fucked" or the anthem "Hair" from the musical of the same name; simultaneously, however, "La Vie Bohème's" lyrics – built almost entirely of long lists- pays obvious homage to the works of Stephen Sondheim (Wollman, 172).

Like *Spring Awakening* and *Hair*, *Rent* attempts to provide a snapshot of a particular place and time, and tackles themes that would seem unapproachable by traditional musical theatre standards, including AIDS, heroin addiction, and homelessness (Wollman, 170). This is where the post-modern musical differs from the modern or even the golden age musical, which tackled difficult issues by disguising them with clever writing or satirical songs.

The ideas expressed through the music and story are cutting edge topics that reveal more about the unpleasantries of living in a modern world. One cannot fathom the characters of *Guys and Dolls, The King and I,* or even *My Fair Lady* focusing on debilitating diseases or unpleasant living circumstances. And why? Why change *My Fair Lady* to a story about a young prostitute who rises up the social ladder only after she discovers she is infected with a sexually transmitted disease? Would audiences still accept the beloved tale? Of course not! Once again, the audience of the 1950's found release in a theatre form that took them out of their daily lives, and into a fantasy world where everyone lives happily ever after. Today's modern audience is clearly centered on realism and truth. We know that not all lives end "happily ever after," and we realize now that it is okay. As an audience we have learned to take the good with the bad and continue on. That is the main message behind *Spring Awakening*; the truth is life in 1890's Germany is no different than the life faced in 2010 America. Although technology has made rapid advances in communication, we still find ourselves victim to negative stigmas associated with homosexuality, teen pregnancy, and even failure. *Spring Awakening* has opened our eyes to this concept, and taught us that we are not as advanced as we believe ourselves to be. That is the true message behind the post-modern musical, to allow the audience to leave the theatre thinking about the message of the production, not so much the feelings emerging from the song. Consequently, it can be seen as a call to action for the audience member, pushing us to get out of our seats and make a difference. That is the real force of the theatre.

CHAPTER III

ADAPTING *SPRING AWAKENING* FOR A MODERN AUDIENCE

Origins

> Certainly, my original vow was to remain true to Wedekind's text. Still, I have been alternately touched and bemused that so many critics have spoken so highly about how faithful we have been to the original, how admirably we have distilled it. *Maybe*. But, at the same time, we have fundamentally altered it.[6]

As stated before, *Spring Awakening: A New Musical* is essentially the reworking of a German production ahead of its time. Written by Frank Wedekind in 1890, *Spring Awakening: A Children's Tragedy*, the play's original title, was not well received by the turn of the twentieth century audiences and critics. In fact, the original staging in 1917 closed after one performance in New York amid public outrage and charges of obscenity. The play's content was radical indeed: teenage sex, suicide, abortion, masturbation, and sadomasochism performed by actors under the age of twenty infuriated the conservative individuals who frequented the theatres of New York. What is truly disturbing about the production is not the subject matter of the plot, but the fierce truth with which Wedekind presents it. Wedekind's story traces the dawning of sexual awareness among four teenagers who, in their painfully funny contradictions, are at once too innocent and not remotely innocent at all. For this reason, the production would not return to the stage until a full century later. However, the revitalized production took the elements created by Wedekind and modernized them to suit the audiences of a new millennium.

"Suffice it to say, by the time I thought of introducing Wedekind's Masked Man to the American musical theatre, those same "bourgeois ideas" had more than managed to rise again" Here Sater discusses a quote by Berthold Viertel who stated that "Frank Wedekind was the Masked Man of our *Spring Awakening*. This was the turn of the century. Bourgeois ideas lay in their agony." The Masked Man discussed by the two writers is a character from the original production of *Spring Awakening.* The character of the Masked Man has been the subject of research and analysis by many theorists for his dramatic inclusion in a production breaking ground in many aspects. Ultimately, the Masked Man represents the hope for a better future, leading the hero of the production to find a better tomorrow. I will discuss the Masked Man in further detail within chapter VI of this thesis.

It was a completely new century when interest in *Spring Awakening* would rise again. In fact, it was the Columbine shootings that urged writer Steven Sater to adapt the play that had ignited his interest nearly twenty years earlier. It was obvious the adolescents of this new millennium were hurt, and looking for a way to be heard. Sater felt the issues that arose within *Spring Awakening* would not only captivate an audience, but also shed light on the tough topics with which adolescents were dealing. Sater knew that he wanted the play to resurface as a musical, but he was unsure of how to express the ideas from Wedekind's play for a new generation. " Subtitled 'A Children's Tragedy,' Wedekind's play is full of the unheard, anguished cries of young people. It stuck me that pop music – rock music- is the exact place that adolescents for the last few generations have found release and expression from." (Sater, 8) Thus, Sater began a quest to discover a composer of merit to score a new type of musical play, experimental for the Broadway stage. "I am often asked why I thought *Spring Awakening* could work as a musical. My only real answer is that I knew and loved the play, that I had long felt it

was a sort of opera-in-waiting, and that somehow I could "hear" Duncan's music in it." (Sater, 8)

Duncan Sheik was a much sought after music artist of the late 1990's. Although well known for various projects, Sheik initially found success as a singer, most notably for his 1996 debut pop single "Barely Breathing." Although his solo career was short lived, Sheik continued to find success composing music for motion pictures and later Broadway. A lay Buddhist, Sheik's involvement with Soka Gakkai led him to meet Steven Sater who at the time was a struggling poet and writer. Both Sater and Sheik drew upon each other for inspiration in their respective fields before collaborating on projects together. When work began on *Spring Awakening,* Sater felt Sheik's background in rock and popular music gave him the basis needed to not only make the production a success, but to properly convey the message behind both sources. Thus, Sater and Sheik began work on their new musical, a process that would control their lives for the next eight years.

The Book

As previously stated, *Spring Awakening* weaves a tale of adolescent love, the trials of puberty, and the understanding given to the confusing world of a teenage adult. Frank Wedekind was impressed and enamored with both expressionalism and early forms of theatre of the absurd, both of which influence his writing in the play version of *Spring Awakening*. Various critics have written that Wedekind's intent within the original play was not to exploit teens, but rather to laugh at them, while also taking them seriously. This is one component that does not transfer to the contemporary version of the play. Rather, teens are painted to be hormone-raged rock idols, more interested in their own self-gratification over their exploration

of sexuality. However, before we explore the differences in text, we must first understand the plot of the musical itself.

Act One

As with the original text, the musical version begins in nineteenth century Germany. Young Wendla Begrmann, the lead female, laments that her mother gave her "no way to handle things," and has not taught her the lessons she needs to learn by singing the opening song "Mama Who Bore Me." Specifically, Wendla would like to know where babies come from, as she will be an aunt for the second time. Wendla's mother explains to her daughter that for a woman to conceive a child she must love her husband with all her heart, but does not explain further. Meanwhile, at school, the males of the town are learning Latin. Moritz Stiefel is chastised for falling asleep in class, but not before his best friend, male lead Melchior Gabor, defends him. The instructor physically punishes both students before the class to make an example. From here Melchior sings "All That's Known," expressing his intent to change the narrow-mindedness of school and society. The next scene is one of the most impressive for the audience. Mortiz explains to Melchior that he has been falling asleep in class because he fears an erotic dream will return if he sleeps at night. Mortiz fears this because society has expressed thoughts of this nature are indications of insanity, a thought already plaguing the young student.

The boys sing "The Bitch of Living" one of the most poignant songs, to express their disdain for feeling inadequate due to society's views on sexuality. From this point on, the production becomes more sexual. The next song/scene "Touch Me," is sung by a young homosexual man who masturbates to an erotic postcard he has found, and the young girls who desire physical intimacy, while struggling to understand their feelings. The final scenes of the act lay the foundation for the climax of the play. Young Martha admits to her friends that her

father physically and sexually abuses her nightly, while her mother remains oblivious or uncaring. Later, Wendla finds Melchior in the woods and explains to him Martha's situation. A product of society's depiction of a proper upbringing, Wendla has never experienced physical pain brought on by another human. Wendla asks Melchior to strike her with a switch to understand her friend's pain. After first refusing profusely, Melchior finally obliges, even getting carried away and taking out his frustrations on Wendla before she is thrown to the ground. He runs away disgusted with himself, and she weeps on the ground.

Finally, Moritz is informed that he has failed the semester at school, leaving his father very embarrassed by his son's "inadequacies." In an effort to escape his father's wrath, Mortiz writes to Melchior's mother for money to escape to America while singing "And Then There Were None." Unfortunately, Mrs. Gabor does not give Moritz the money, which leaves him to contemplate suicide.

The final scene of the act is the most dramatic. In a stuffy hayloft during a storm, Melchior sits in frustration over what has happened, where Wendla finds him once again. She returns his journal and Melchior apologizes for what happened the last time they met. Before long they begin to kiss, but Wendla resists Melchior's advances. Confused, Wendla reluctantly allows Melchior to mount her, and the act ends with the two making love in the loft while the other characters sit around them singing "I Believe."

Act Two

The act begins where the last ended, in the hayloft, where Wendla and Melchior reflect and discuss what has just happened through the singing of "The Guilty Ones," the song which can be seen as the "11 O'clock Number" of the production. Moritz, having been thrown out of his home wanders the town with a pistol. He finds a former friend Ilse, who has left her home to

run with a free spirited art colony. Ilse invites Moritz to join her, but he refuses and she leaves upset and rejected. Changing his mind, Moritz calls out to Ilse to join her, but it is too late. She is gone. Alone and rejected once again, Mortiz commits suicide by shooting himself.

At Moritz's funeral, his friends leave flowers on the coffin as Melchior sings "Left Behind," one of the most moving songs of the production, to Moritz's father. This song expresses Melchior's disdain for the treatment of his friend. Meanwhile the professors, knowing Moritz's death is a result of their actions, go through Moritz's school belongings to see if they can find another explanation. They discover an essay on sex written for Moritz by Melchior and use it to explain the death of the young student. Although he knows he is not to blame, Melchior realizes there is nothing he can do to fight back against the professors and takes his expulsion by singing "Totally Fucked."

Wendla has become ill, and her mother takes her to see the local doctor who explains to Wendla that the illness is only anemia, but aside informs her mother that Wendla is pregnant. When confronted with the information, Wendla is shocked, ignorant to how it could have happened. Realizing her mother has lied to her about how children are conceived, Wendla berates her mother for leaving her ignorant. Mrs. Bergmann rejects the guilt and forces Wendla to tell her who fathered child. Wendla reluctantly surrenders a letter written by Melchior after the consummation of their relationship and Mrs. Bergmann goes to inform Mr. and Mrs. Gabor. After hearing about their son's act and expulsion from school, the Gabor's have no choice to but to send the child to reform school where he can be away from Wendla and the shame of both families.

While at school, Melchior discovers that Wendla is with child after catching the boys reading her letter to him during a masturbation game. Melchior escapes the institution to find

Wendla. When he arrives he sends a message to Wendla to meet him in the cemetery at night so they can discuss their future. While there, Melchior stumbles upon the grave of Moritz and he expresses the need to raise his child in a supportive environment. It is then that he realizes there is a new grave in the cemetery. Melchior wanders over to it to discover that it is the gravesite of Wendla who died during an underground abortion forced upon her by her parents. Convinced he cannot live without Wendla and their child Melchior finds a razor and intends to kill himself when the spirits of Moritz and Wendla rise from their graves to offer him strength. Melchior reconsiders and decides to journey on with the memories of his lost love and dear friend. It is then the free spirited Ilse appears on stage to sing "The Purple Song of Summer," a song of hope and love with the entire cast of characters. Thus the adolescents place their futures in hope rather than pain.

Differences in Texts

Steven Sater said it best when he stated "I love Frank Wedekind, but our play is a different animal, a completely different take on those characters. I think Wedekind created something that is much darker and fragmentary. It is the work of a young man who is an angry social journalist. In a way, his primary concern was to give this scabrous account of what was going on in society and how young people were unheard and the damage that did to them." Understandably so, the *Spring Awakening* written by Steven Sater is more interesting for the modern day audience, not only because of the music, but also because of the ideals. In the reading of both texts, one will find *Spring Awakening* the musical is a well-written adaptation of Wedekind's wording. However, after reading the analysis by Jonathan Franzen, who translated Wedekind's text to English, one can understand the differences brought upon by music and popular culture. He reviewed the musical in his preface for the play:

> The hand-wringing young Mortiz, whom Wedekind had kill himself over a bad report card, is transformed in the musical into a punk rocker of such talent that it is unimaginable a report card could depress him. The causal rape of Wendla Bergmann by the play's central character becomes a thunderous spectacle of ecstacy and consent. As for the working-class girl Martha Bessel, who is beaten by her father in the original play and ardently envied by bourgeois masochist Wendla Bergmann: what else could she become in the 2006 version but an emblem of sexual abuse. All in all, the main selling point in Sater's version is teenage sex.[7]

As stated by Franzen, it can be deduced that the most significant component to the musical version of *Spring Awakening* is selling sex. It is interesting to see this unfold within the reading of the new text. In the original version of *Spring Awakening* we see Hansy Rilow fight the urge to succumb to masturbation, going as far as destroying a piece of pornography before it "eats away his brain," resurfaces in the new production proudly masturbating on stage before the audience. In Wedekind's version, the idea of masturbation is seen as a shameful act because it is done in solitude. However, the 2006 version celebrates the act, glorifying the act rather than bringing shame.

To that end, the next sexual tactic used to engage the audience is Wendla's agreement to intercourse with Melchior. The original play has Wendla resist Melchior's advances to the point that he rapes her, rather than stop the act. The contemporary version has Wendla resist until her inhibitions are overcome, and she allows, even almost enjoys, the intercourse with Melchior. This furthers the understanding that sexual depiction on the stage today is seen as more of a selling tactic, rather than a shameful

desire of Wedekind's time. Furthermore, it is interesting to note the difference in depiction from the original to the contemporary production. The character of Wendla is one who represents the ideal teenage girl. It is interesting then, to find that she is fully consensual in her sexual relations with a boy she hardly knows. Is this a statement made by Sater about all teenage females? Is this then a correct depiction of them? One thing is for certain, the fact that Wendla submits to Melchior and, in turn, becomes pregnant by him, changes the original message of Wedekind. In Sater's production, Wendla wishes to carry and give birth to the child because the act of consensual lovemaking has convinced her that she is in love with Melchior. In Wedekind's original script, Wendla is forced into an abortion by her mother who feels that, aside from shame to the family, a pregnancy brought on by rape is not the sort of child that should be brought into the world. To that end, the character of Wendla is not seen much in the latter half of the original production, adding to the mystery of the condition of her character.

The issue of using sex to change the message of the production can be found again at the beginning of the musical version of the production. Originally found in the second half of the work, Wendla begins the production by singing about the sexual repression she feels because of her lack of knowledge. Wendla asks her mother the age old question "Where do babies come from?," and once again is dismissed. However, Wendla knows there is something about her body she does not understand and links the two ideas together. It was stated by Sater that the scene was brought to the beginning of the production because this is one of the original messages of the production, and the main idea behind all that is unknown; children experiment because they are dismissed and kept ignorant by their parents. Children look to their parents for guidance when it

comes to understanding their bodies from their parents, but embarrassment often takes the lead in these situations and they do not receive the information they need or deserve. Thus, experimentation begins and this can lead to terrible consequences for an adolescent. This is the message behind Sater's production, because Wendla's parents kept their daughter ignorant about the sex and babies, it ultimately led to her demise.

CHAPTER IV

THE MUSIC OF *SPRING AWAKENING*

The Lyrics

> As we began work, I vowed to remain true to Wedekind's fierce original intent. But I soon found that once we had access, through song, to the inner workings of our characters' hearts and minds, we engaged with them differently- we embarked on journeys with them. Before long, we found ourselves altering the structure, even the substance, of our source to account for the places these songs had taken us.[8]

Here Steven Sater discusses the journey taken by Duncan Sheik while working on *Spring Awakening*. True to his word, Sater used the characters to convey their inner feelings by representing the ideals of today's society. Had *Spring Awakening* been written as a musical in the times of Wedekind, we would have a very different score than that of today. Within the musical there are seventeen songs, all representing the ideals, ideas, language and views of today's society. Critic Charles Isherwood stated "…it was like watching a rock concert. Microphones appeared from pockets and suddenly the nineteenth century met the twenty-first century. The songs were more than Wedekind's ideas, they were the ideas of generation X. It is also exhilarating. When was the last time you felt a frisson of surprise and excitement at something that happened in a new musical? For that matter, when was the last time something new happened in a new musical?"[9]

Indeed the songs were representations of the radical new generation, but further than that, the stylings were new and exciting. Never before had audiences seen teenage actors sing about their sexual frustrations with such ferocity and vulgarity. Interestingly enough, the very message that upset Franzen about the musical, engaged the Broadway audience.

The summer of 2012 brought a dynamic understanding of the musical adaptation of *Spring Awakening,* as it was the summer I directed *Spring Awakening: A New Musical*. Utilizing the research I had previously done for my thesis, I strove to awaken new ideas and expressions within the actors of my production, and the Rio Grande Valley theater patrons as a whole. Directing this musical allowed me to gain a deeper understanding the characters within Sater's adaptation, and realize the many changes he implemented from the original text.

"Instinctively, I felt I did not want to write lyrics which would forward the plot, so I chose not to follow that golden rule of musical theatre. I wanted a sharp and clear distinction between the word of the spoken and the word of the sung. And yet I also wanted to create a seamless and ongoing musical counterpoint between the languages of those distinct worlds.[10]" As Sater states, the lyrics do not function as forwarding devices, rather, they explain the inner feelings of each character. The words within the songs explore the depths of each character's being, share feelings and emotions that each one hides, rather than illustrate their future or past as with most musicals. Sater further stated that his characters would sing inner monologues, rather than duets to each other. This furthered the idea that the songs would function as a release for the character, rather than a clarifier for the audience. To that end, I have found that the songs function as a

release for the modern day audience member. Sater takes Wedekind's message, and adds compelling themes found with adolescents today. Sater then takes these themes and weaves them into the songs sung by the characters. Sater utilized this tactic to further the audience's understanding of the production and the music. By utilizing individuals who seemed to be so moved by the music, that they must stand and sing with the actors on stage, Sater's understanding was expressed, demonstrating for the audience that these themes are evident today.

The Bitch of Living

As stated before, *Spring Awakening* is a rock musical for a new generation of audiences. Following the music styling's of today, the music for the production was raw, deep and real. In reading the lyrics, it is clear that the characters explain their frustrations by using terms and phrases from the twentieth and twenty-first century, rather than the language of the nineteenth century. Sater used this device not only to relate the characters to a modern day audience, but to give the characters a chance to break free from their societal constraints. One of the most shocking aspects of *Spring Awakening* is the use of vulgarity, both in the songs and their titles. Sater utilized this aspect to relate the characters to their modern day audience, while also allowing them to express their disdain for their current situations. In the song "The Bitch of Living," all the young male characters sing of their addiction to masturbation, and their need to discover if there is more to gratification than pleasuring yourself. What Wedekind explained with one scene in his play, Sater explains with a full fledged musical number. What is interesting to note about "The Bitch of Living," is that the term masturbation is never mentioned within the song. Rather, the boys allude to it by using phrases like "living in your hand," or

"work that silver magic and aim it at the wall." By refusing to utilize "dirty" terms, Sater's song remains a true representation of the character's feeling, rather than a pornographic spectacle.

One of the most compelling arguments I find myself making, begins within "The Bitch of Living." In directing the production, and my readings between the two texts, I have found various themes result in Sater's version, themes not evident in Wedekind's version of *Spring Awakening*. I would argue that one of the strongest themes of the musical production, is the theme of shame. You will find in watching the boys sing of their masturbatory purgatory, that they are not so much disgusted with the act, as they are with themselves. Within the scene before the start of the song, Melchior and Moritz discuss the first "wet dream" experienced by Moritz the night before. Moritz is so overcome with disgust for himself that he can hardly sleep or concentrate on anything other than his "dirty deed." Once "The Bitch of Living" begins, we discover the boys are all slaves to self-pleasure, and all feel various forms of shame.Ernst, the shy and slow classmate, reveals to the audience the shame he feels is about being a closeted homosexual. Through his lyrics "See there is showering in gym class…" "God my whole life is like some test," we discover Ernst is ashamed of the fact that he cannot control his erection during the showers after gymnastics. Furthermore, Ernst feels the shame associated with passing for straight, as he feels his "whole life is like some test." Will he pass for straight? If not, how will he endure the shame associated with homosexuality?

Another character worth exploring in "The Bitch of Living," is Otto. Otto sings about his rejection by Marianna Wheelan, who has yet to return his call. Otto feels the shame of being rejected by yet another female. As with the other boys, Otto wants to feel accepted, yet various females continuously reject him, leading to the shame associated with feeling inadequate as an adolescent, another important aspect to explore for the adolescent generation.

Also expressed within the song is the idea of a non-life, as associated with the theme of shame. The true meaning of the song is the feeling of a non-life associated with the sexual frustrations felt by they boys. Sater discusses this in his latest book *A Purple Summer*:

> Yes, the Angel of Sex assures Moritz that he is not alone in the dizzying world of "sticky dreams." She will teach him how to handle "all the sadness in his soul" – by aiming it squarely at the wall. Still, when the day is done, he is left with no one, living life as someone he can't stand: "Do they think we want this?" A life where the full, glorious view of our piano teacher's breasts leads only to further frustration? Further useless rebellious rage? "Oh who knows…"[11]

Sater utilized this idea to, again, reveal the ideas of a modern audience. This is where the true difference lies between Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*, and the contemporary musical version. Although many of the themes found in Wedekind's version still resonate today, Sater took it a step further to discover what has changed within the last one-hundred years. Sater then took these developed ideas and portrayed them within the songs of his new musical.

The Dark I Know Well

> Between our final *Spring Awakening* workshop, in February 2006, and the beginning of rehearsals Off-Broadway, we had to dig in our heels a bit and fight to keep this song in the show. "Wasn't the original material dark enough?" I was asked. "Did we really have to bring incest into the picture?" The answer was yes.[12]

The issue remains quite pervasive for today, as it was within the time period of the production. Furthermore, many audience members have felt an attachment to the song, and it has become an anthem of pride for women everywhere.

Teased by Wendla and Thea for her hair blowing free on a windy day, Martha suddenly blurts out to her friends that her papa beats her. Pressed for more details, Martha reveals that her father thrusts her out on cold nights when she does not "do as he likes." What Martha does not express to the girls, nor anyone else, is that her father steals into her bedroom to force himself on her sexually. This is the part that the young girl cannot tell.

One of the aspects of musical theatre that has always intrigued me is the idea that the songs express what a character cannot with common dialogue. The idea that a character can be so overcome with emotion that they cannot express themselves except by song fascinates me. This idea is evident within "The Dark I Know Well."

The lyrics of the song speak for themselves. A young girl is lusted after by her father. Her mother, meanwhile, is too overcome with duty to her husband to stop it. Obviously, the one lyric repeated often within the song is "the dark I know well," which is the secret Martha cannot reveal to anyone for the shame she associates with it. Again, we see Sater resurface with the theme of shame in a song. Martha is clearly ashamed of the fact that her father abuses her in unimaginable ways, so much so that she cannot reveal her secret with words alone. Thus, Martha expresses herself internally, using the inner dialogue created by Sater. However, Martha is not the only character sexually abused by her father. The song leads to an interlude with another character of the production, the rarely seen Ilse. Although one of the major characters of the production, Ilse is rarely seen because she has escaped her father's abuse by running away and becoming a bohemian child. Choosing to live a free life versus the rigid life of her friends,

Ilse unknowingly lays the path for feminists everywhere. The explanation that she will refuse to take the abuse, and prefers to live a hidden life shows the strength of her character, strength that Martha does not have.

It is important to note that, again, Sater utilized "The Dark I Know Well" to express a new idea, common today, but not felt in the original production. In Wedekind's version, we see Martha and Ilse deal with physical and mental abuse by their fathers, but their characters do not endure the sexual abuse. This is another prevalent difference between the two texts, the forms of abuse felt by the characters. After a long debate with myself, I am pleased with the fact that Sater included the song, and the issue, in the production. Although "The Dark I Know Well" was a song I was apprehensive about portraying for the audience, I understand now its importance and significance. The song, much like the expression of the characters, is a release for the audience members who too hold dark all too well. Whether it be the same abuse felt by the characters in the song, or your own personal turmoil, the song is a chance to show that you are not alone. I find this is one of the most important aspects of Sater's version of *Spring Awakening*, the connection between story and character. Within Wedekind's version, we see his struggle to make the story realistic for the audience of his day. Although many of the issues presented by Wedekind still ring true, Sater adds modern issues to remain true to Wedekind's idea of incorporating story and audience.

And Then There Were None

One of the most overlooked songs of the production, "And Then There Were None," originally had very little meaning to me personally. Although fun to listen to as a duet between two individuals who have no direct connection, it nonetheless seemed odd and pointless to me. Upon further inspection, I find that nothing could be further from the truth.

"And Then There Were None" is sung by Moritz after he has been beaten by his father for having failed out of school, a most embarrassing offence for prominent families of the time. In a moment of despair, Moritz realizes that the only way out of his current situation is to commit suicide, or to run away to America, with the latter his first choice. Realizing the only way to America is through an expensive voyage, Moritz writes to his best friend's mother, Fanny Gabor, for the fare needed. "And Then There Were None" is a song sung as Moritz reads Gabor's response.

Mortiz finds that Fraulein Gabor refuses to lend him the fare needed to escape to America, which then leads to his growing frustration throughout the song. It is interesting to note that the song is not as eloquent as the songs for Melchior, Wendla or Ilse. Moritz is separate from the other characters through his simple vocabulary and more rock based music. By utilizing lyrics like "uh-huh….uh-huh…uh-huh…uh-huh well fine" and the short verses differentiate Mortiz's song from the others.

> Moritz continually feels less than he words he has to express himself; and syntax belongs to the world of stability that he feels has already rejected him. So what is he left with? A kind of desperate staccato of frustrated intention:
>
> *Uh-huh… uh-huh…uh-huh… well, fine.*
> *Not like its even worth the time.*
>
> Not worth the time to try and express how bad shit gets- how the world has already closed in and turned its indifferent back on him.[13]

Here, Sater begins to discuss why he chose such simple lyrics for the character of Moritz. Not all adolescents are eloquent; in fact a majority have difficulty expressing their

feelings with language. Thus, Sater expands on this idea, expressing this individual through Moritz and displaying for the audience a different kind of adolescent scenario.

Although humiliated and disavowed by his father, Moritz truly blames himself- not only for his failure, but for *being* himself. It seems that the only way to stop himself, stop his repeated failures, is to STOP *being* himself. Throughout the song we see Moritz struggle with this idea. The idea is that his second plan, suicide, becomes more real and clear than the former. Except, of course, that is too crazy. Or is it?

By the song's end, Moritz can hear all his friends in his head, adding their voiced to his urgent chant of despair. Then, all at once, it cracks:

"Just fuck it – right?! ENOUGH! That's it"

Thus, Moritz reaches for his weapon of choice, taking refuge in the old nursery rhyme: "One little Indian boy, left all alone. He went out and hanged himself. And then there were none." By the time Frau Gabor calls Mortiz's threat of suicide a "veiled threat," the boy convinces himself to end his life. He has no other way out and he refuses to be seen as a failure again. Thus, he will show his parents, Frau Gabor, his professors and his friends- Mortiz is not a failure.

Don't Do Sadness/ Blue Wind

It is appropriate to analyze "Don't Do Sadness" after analyzing "And Then There Were None." Consumed by his frustration and sadness, Moritz steals away from his family and his home and runs into the woods where he is committed to killing himself. As Moritz is so completely overcome with the sadness he feels from failing his schoolwork, his family, and himself, he in fact denies that he "does" it. I compare his feeling to that of an individual with so much work, that they simply decide not to do any of it. This is further understood as Mortiz

simply decides that since he does not do sadness, the only way to end the feelings is to put and end to himself. Thus, the thoughts reassure Moritz he is doing the right thing.

Through the lyrics, we find that Moritz looks back on his life with regret. If only he could be the "little butterfly" he sings of "just winging over things with nothing deep inside. Nothing goin', goin', wild in you you know/ you're floatin' by the riverside or floatin high and blue." In some way, Mortiz longs for that. He longs to become something so simple, so helpless and meaningless, yet also so free. Mortiz has spent his life in the prison of his own sadness and now, looking down at the world that has failed him, he only longs to be something with no meaning at all.

In many ways, "Don't Do Sadness" is a song about the helplessness felt by an individual who is about to kill himself. Because the individual has chosen to end their life, he or she feels they have nowhere to go, no meaning, no purpose, and so they must GO.

One of the most beautiful moments of the production happens once Moritz is through singing this song. Thoroughly convinced that he is ready to kill himself, Moritz stares at the cold gun in his hands. Ilse, who is conveniently walking through the woods, then suddenly startles him. Upon my researching of the Ilse character, I found that she was indeed infatuated with Moritz. Once Ilse senses something is wrong with Moritz, she begins to try and distract him from whatever it is he is about to do. In an effort to show Moritz the hope for a brighter future, a hope she found when she ran from her father, Ilse sings "Blue Wind."

When I first heard "Blue Wind" I was not at all intrigued. It seemed to me a pointless song amidst all the tension felt from "Don't Do Sadness." As I began to review the scene, and dissect the song, I realized "Blue Wind" was probably one of the most important songs within the production.

Ilse sings "Blue Wind" in an effort to cheer Moritz from his despair. The song is clearly full of symbolism and allusions to give Moritz the hope for a better tomorrow. One of the most blatant symbols are the seasons utilized in the song and throughout the production. Obviously, *Spring Awakening* is a term used to signify the "spring" of someone's life, or the adolescent period dealt within the show. In "Blue Wind" we hear Ilse sing of "spring and summer/ every other day." This lyric alludes to the fact that as an adolescent, one is torn between the "spring" of your life (childhood) and the "summer" of your life (adulthood.) Although one does not feel at home in one or the other, someday you will settle in to the latter, leading to a clearer understanding of your self. Ilse goes on to sing about the "autumn" of your life, the slow creep to the inevitable winter of death. Here she says:

Sure, when its autumn
Wind always wants to
Creep up and haunt you-
Whistling, its got you;
With its heartache, with its sorrow,
Winter wind sings, and it cries[14]

Here, Ilse tries to unconsciously discourage Moritz from entering the winter of his life so quickly. Although the wind (depression, despair), will always haunt, there is so much more to look forward to in life.

By the end of the song, Ilse has Moritz entranced, asking Moritz to walk her home and play with her, just like they did when they were children. Ilse has Mortiz so convinced, then he breaks and realizes what he is indeed there to do. Thus, Moritz breaks out into a second chorus of "Don't Do Sadness" to demonstrate his commitment to his despair. However, he is symbolically combated by Ilse's pleas to look forward, rather than at the present. They sing their songs to each other, symbolically fighting the other's stance. Regardless, Moritz has made

up his mind, he will die. Realizing she has failed, Ilse runs off in a fit and leaves the broken Moritz alone to review what has just happened. In one last attempt, Moritz chases after the Ilse in an effort to make amends, but it is too late. Failed again. It is at this moment he returns to his spot where he delivers his symbolic monologue, an ode to his past and his future in heaven.

Although originally one fourth of a page in the script, Moritz's monologue is one of the most poignant scenes of *Spring Awakening*. A young man was about to take his own life for the shame he associated with failing. Full of more allusions, as though almost a continuation of his song, Moritz tells the dead air around him that he will tell the angels he led the free life Ilse shares with him, and he is committed to becoming something better than his human form. Most symbolic of all is the final lines of Moritz's monologue:

> Ten minutes ago, you could see the entire horizon. Now, only the
> dusk- first few stars…
> So dark. So dark. So dark.[15]

Clearly the "horizon" Moritz speaks of is more than the physical horizon of the sun, rather the horizon of his adolescent life- the bright future each young person has before them. Now, only the dusk is evident, the end of the brightness- the end of a life. The stars are continuous throughout the death scenes of *Spring Awakening*- the musical. Sater utilizes stars as symbols for death, their brightness symbolic of the young life lost. The first "So dark" as Moritz's physical present- the darkness that is quickly surrounding now that the sun has set. The second "so dark" is treated as Moritz's past- the dark guilty life he led as a failure. Finally, the last "so dark" is treated as Moritz's future- the darkness that will consume him within a coffin. Each of these was important to assess, and gives the viewer a clearer understanding of why Moritz died.

Totally Fucked

Another song worth exploring within the musical is one that is not only the most vulgar, but also the most energizing throughout the musical. "Totally Fucked" is a song sung by Melchior when he is expelled for writing a letter explaining sexual intercourse to Moritz. When the song is performed it becomes a complete rock song, with all the characters on stage presenting their teenage angst.

> I always knew these lyrics were mischievous, but I didn't realize they would cause such a stir. To me, the sentiment seemed logical. Melchior stands, watching his options run out- the grown-ups hold all the cards, and they are making up the rules as they go.[16]

There comes a moment in everyone's life, when you know- you're fucked. Melchior is dealing with this situation now. Although he has had no hand in the demise of his best friend, the school is out to protect its reputation, and the sexual explanation given to Mortiz by Melchior is the best evidence found for Moritz's demise. Throughout the song, we hear Melchior sing about how desperately he would like to run and hide from the madness, to disappear and end the chaos. But there is a moment that he realizes, irrevocably: they will get him. No matter how hard he tries, no matter how strong of an argument he makes, he will fail. It is at this moment that Melchior accepts what is about to come, and exclaims that he did indeed write the letter and will face the punishment for it. If you can't beat them, join them. As Gloucester says in William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, "As flies to wanton boys, we are to the Gods."

One appreciation of "Totally Fucked" is the blaring rock music and the dynamic choreography. Although *Spring Awakening* is labeled as a rock musical, most of the songs seem to have a heavier beat to them than the average musical. "Totally Fucked" is one of the only

songs in the production that relies heavily on guitars and drums to relay the message. It seems fitting that a song like "Totally Fucked," a song about oppression and loss, should be underscored by rock music, the music of the generation that feels oppressed by authority.

Those You've Known

This song completes the transformation of Wedekind's original story- and with that, of Melchior's journey. In Wedekind's original text, Moritz rises from the grave, head in his hands, and beckons Melchior to join him. Moritz functions, thus, as a personification of Melchior's despair upon discovering Wendla's death. In the musical version, however, both Wendla and Moritz arise within his heart to assure Melchior that life is still worth living. Wedekind's Moritz tells his friend that the dead stand high above- looking down on this world of busy joy and despair- each alone. Our Moritz assures Melchior that those we have loved, still walk behind us. Knowing how dark the world can feel without them, they offer us the consolation of knowing we have loved them. Those we have loved and known will never depart from us, so long as we determine to hold on to them.

Those you've pained
May carry that still with them…
All the same,
They whisper: "all forgiven"[17]

Although Wendla still is pained by the memory of all that has befallen her, she offers Melchior the forgiveness promised them in the hayloft. She assures him that the "shadows bring the starlight"- it is only through the darkness that we discern light.

One large missing component is the Masked Man in Wedekind's original play. In the graveyard scene, Melchior meets a Masked Man who promises him a better future than death. Sater uses Wendla as a form of the Masked Man in the musical version, for his primary purpose

was to remove Melchior from the graveyard. Here, we hear Wendla sing of the "shadows bring the starlight"- leading to something more than the darkness we may feel. There may be within each of us, dark we cannot tell. But our darkness is not something to repress or try to flee- how can you escape something inside of you? Rather, we must embrace our darkness as part of us, something we must challenge ourselves to transform into (star)light.

Finally Melchior rises and sings:

All alone,
But still I hear their yearning;
Through the dark, the moon, alone there, burning

The stars, too,
They tell of spring returning-
A summer with another wind that no one yet has known

As the story comes to a close, Melchior is able to assimilate the voices of his friends- to hear their yearning and with that to find his place in the world again. He discerns from the position of the stars' constellation the coming of another spring another summer wind. He determines to live in order to carry his friends' spirits forward- and through the winter light, to read all their dreams to those stars.

Song Of Purple Summer

Why, after all the action on stage, the final goodbyes of our major characters, do we continue with one more song? Then it dawned on me, the song was meant to give the audience hope for the future, to allow them to leave knowing that despite the bad within the world, life continues and we will prevail. This song can be used to bring the entire cast on stage and shed their characters- they were to address the audience as themselves and tell us of the promise ahead.

And what exactly is the song of purple summer? Symbolically, "purple summer" represents a time of maturation- a time when the fields will yield crops, and the mares will bear foals again. It is the time when the painful spring of adolescence reaches the maturity of summer. Over the course of the show we have gone through so much heartache with our characters. We never meant to deny all that with some final anthem. Rather, I wanted to affirm that, in spite of the darkness, life somehow goes on.

Sater assess that the color purple is symbolic of many things throughout the production:

> I have been asked if the "purple" here refers back to "the wound" Wendla and Melchior sing of in "Word of Your Body." To the extent that we carry with us the bruises of our adolescence, it does. But it also represents the purple sunset and the blossoming of the long spring into summer's day. For all those we have lost, for all that we ourselves have lost, our sorrow will recede, the earth will burgeon and bear once more.[18]

Early on, in the classroom scene, Melchior determines to set aside what's "scripted in the Bible" and follow Plato's dictum- to pursue the path of "wonder." As the play concludes, our young characters determine that, through their song, "all shall know the wonder of purple summer."

"And all shall know the wonder": a spring endured, a fulsome time of youth, and a rich purple summer still to come.

CHAPTER V

UNDERSTANING THE MUSIC OF *SPRING AWAKENING*

Closing Thoughts on the Lyrics of *Spring Awakening*

As stated before, the lyrics of *Spring Awakening* hold much of the meaning for this new musical. Through more detailed analysis, we can now understand Sater and Sheik's intention of making this musical not only impactful, but also symbolic. I have divided my analysis of the lyrics into three subgroups: themes, purpose, and connection with the original story.

Themes Emerging from Lyrics

Thematic elements are essential to any successful musical. In a form which seeks to integrate drama, music, and dance, the qualities of all its elements must hang together; and what they must hang upon are the characters and action they have been created around (37, Engel). Musicals of the 1930's displayed for us the importance of adding thematic elements, when non-plot musicals failed to engage audiences. Aside from plot, characterization and principles, theme is the message of a production. Within Sater's adaptation of *Spring Awakening*, we see various themes emerge. Although most theorists believe "sex" is the central theme of the modern production, the lyrics provide a deeper understanding of the message behind the production. Albeit true that "sex" is a major theme for both Wedekind and Sater productions, I saw two specific themes emerge. For the sake of my comparative analysis, I will explore the theme of shame and of consequences as attributed to the message of Sater's *Spring Awakening.*

Shame

> *16 October. The question is: shame. What is its origin? And why are we hounded by its miserable shadow? Does the mare feel Shame as she couples with the stallion? Are they deaf to everything their loins are telling them, until we grant them a marriage certificate? I think not.*
> *To my mind, Shame is nothing but a product of Education. Meanwhile, old Father Kaulbach still blindly insists, in every single sermon, that it's deeply rooted in our sinful Human Nature. Which is why I now refuse to go to church-* [19]

This excerpt from Melchior's monologue illustrates one of the major themes evident throughout the Sater production, shame. Interestingly enough, much of the dialogue throughout the modern adaptation is quite short and primarily response oriented. The few sections of the production that are monologues, give us a deeper understanding of the issues currently faced by the characters.

As Melchior asks in his monologue above, what is shame? Shame is an idea created by man. As Melchior has just pondered, do animals feel shame for gallivanting about naked, fornicating with various partners, with little regard to fidelity? Do animals need a marriage certificate to clarify their sexual conquests? Of course not! Melchior identifies this throughout his journal entry, detailing that shame is actually a product of education and religion, which reinforces that the idea is embedded in our "sinful human nature."

The idea of shame is proven to be a force of control. By definition, shame is identified as the painful feeling arising from the consciousness of something dishonorable, improper, ridiculous, done by oneself or another. Michael Lewis documents shame in his book *Shame:*

The Exposed Self. In the book, Lewis details how shame factors into our lives as humans, and affects our communication. Lewis states that shame is scientifically proven to be a secondary emotion, one created by humans, not "wired." All humans are "programmed" to posses the six primary emotions; happy, sad, anger, fear, surprise and disgust. Secondary emotions develop from our primary emotions, but are learned, rather than embedded. As we mature from children to adults, our guardians reinforce the idea that to stray from the "right path" is to fall victim to shame. To bring shame to oneself is to disrespect your family, your heritage, and primarily, yourself. Thus, we continue to follow the "right path," always mindful not to bring shame to the family or ourselves. It is not until adolescence that we begin to take the risks that compromise our shame, primarily because we are more self-conscious at this point in our lives. Thus, it is only fitting that Sater includes this theme within his production, as many adolescents can identify with this theme at this point in their lives.

In reviewing the modern adaptation of *Spring Awakening*, we notice the element of shame arising in almost all the characters of the production. Most often the theme surfaces throughout the songs of the production, rather than the dialogue. After further review of the production, I have divided the types of shame evident in the production into three groups: shame of the self, shame of the family, and narcissism (the opposite of shame demonstrated by at least one character.)

Shame of the Self

Quite obviously, shame of the self is one of the most common, and uncomfortable, forms felt by any person. As I have demonstrated earlier, the two songs that hold most allusions to shame are "The Bitch of Living" and "The Dark I Know Well." Lewis defines shame of the self as our actions, feelings, or behaviors which conclude that we have done wrong. It

encompasses the whole of ourselves; it generates a wish to hide, disappear or die. We find these definitions within four characters in the two songs provided above: Marta, Otto, Ernst and Georg.

The character of Marta is the only "major" character who experiences shame of self throughout the production. As discussed in "The Dark I Know Well," Marta is ashamed of her home life, specifically the abuse and incest she endures under her father. Although never mentioned in the dialogue with the other characters, Marta endures her shame in private, expressing it only through song. As Lewis stated in his description of shame, the endurance of the feeling generates a wish to hide, disappear or even die. This is Marta's frame of mind. Her shame is so difficult to endure that she retreats to the recesses of her mind and tries to disappear, choosing instead to just "lie there and breathe."

One of the clearest references to the shame Marta feels during the song is the repetition of the line "there's a part I can't tell, about the dark I know well." The "part" Marta cannot tell is the shame she feels for enduring this pain by her father. Marta knows the act is wrong, even by religious standards. Why else would her father try to calm her fears by saying "child, the Lord won't mind"? As the definition has provided above, in order for a person to feel or exhibit shame, they must be conscious of the fact that what they are doing is considered wrong by some standard. Thus, Marta is aware that what she is enduing is not correct, or even common, and she finds herself experiencing shame. Shame is brought to her by an act forced on her, rather than one she chooses to endure. This is the primary difference between the shame felt by Marta in comparison to the other characters in the production. Marta's shame is one forced upon her, the other children make choices in regard to their shame.

As discussed in the section on the differences in texts, and the section analyzing "The Bitch of Living," the idea of shame seems to resonate quite profoundly with the male characters of the production. As previously discussed, "The Bitch of Living" refers to the act of masturbation among male adolescents. Because the act is one of solitude and privacy, it is often referred to as a selfish and shameful act. Sexuality pioneer Helena Wright wrote:

> It is very difficult even for an adventurous-minded person to find and hold a reasonable point of view on this subject… it is perhaps… the fact that masturbation is purely selfish that is the root of the spontaneous feeling of shame experienced. [20]

Interestingly enough, this is only a portion of what theorists say leads to the shame felt after performing the act. As the boys demonstrate throughout the song, the true shame lies within their fantasies and shortcomings, not only with the act itself. Georg sings about the shame he holds for lusting after a much older woman. Whereas most adolescent boys desire girls their age, Georg lusts after his busty piano teacher, a fantasy Freud would associate with a mother figure. In fact, Moritz and Melchior engage in friendly banter during class, discussing the fantasies of their classmates:

> Melchior: You mean a dream
>
> Moritz: A nightmare, really. Legs in sky blue stockings, climbing over the lecture podium.
>
> Melchior: Oh. *That* kind of dream.
>
> Moritz: (*Indeed*) Have you ever suffered such mortifying visions?

Melchior: Moritz, of course. We all have. Otto Lammermeier dreamt about his mother.

Moritz: Really?!!

Melchior: Georg Zirschnitz? Dreamt he was seduced by his piano teacher…

Moritz: Fraulein Grossebustenhalter?!

Why does Melchior decide to highlight the uncommon fantasies of his classmates, rather than the common ones? Although innocent, the friendly banter highlights that these boys are aware that the fantasies these boys experience are unnatural. These secrets are withheld by Otto and Georg because both boys know they will be ridiculed for their unnatural fantasies. The boys are aware that not only should they be ashamed for engaging in masturbation, but also for the object of their fantasies. Lewis states that shame and guilt arise from self-failure in regard to standards, goals, or rules. Both Otto and Georg are aware of their failure to control their sexual desires, not to mention their self-pleasuring. Thus, both boys are shamed for their lack of self control and desires. Is there something wrong with them? Why are they not like the others? Adolescents all over the globe often pose both questions, and Sater brilliantly attaches these ideas to his production. In an attempt to reach the audience at a different level, Sater makes the content of his production relatable.

Also making the production more relatable is the shame felt by Ernst. As discussed earlier, Ernst feels the shame associated with being a closeted homosexual. Because he does not find sexual pleasure in the opposite sex, Ernst is ashamed. As a result of developing and living in an environment of hostility towards homosexuality, homosexuals inevitably internalize anti-

homosexual views (Allen, 33) It is true that the character of Ernst developed in a society that placed a great influence on being a "straight" individual rather than the homosexual. It is interesting to note that Ernst as a character is much more shy, quiet, and reserved than his schoolboy companions. Research has shown that closeted homosexual students tend to perform poorly in rigorous education systems, much like the German school Ernst attends (Allen, 39). This is because these students have higher rates of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem as compared to students who do not internalize their feelings. Thus, the character of Ernst fits very well into this model, almost stereotypically. Ernst is then given a chance to be released from his inner turmoil when Hanschen, the only character who ironically does not feel the same shame felt by the other students, pursues him.

In the song 'Word of Your Body Reprise,' Hanschen discovers Ernst walking alone through the churchyard. As the two make small talk, Ernst finds Hanschen getting dangerously close to him and shies himself away. It is not until the song begins that Ernst releases his inner shame, and allows himself to become enveloped by Hanschen and the love he promises. Here, Sater discusses his purpose behind the songs, scene and characters:

> "The Word of Your Body" articulates such a profound theme of *Spring Awakening* that, for some time, Michael [director] felt its title should serve as a subtitle for our show. At the tail end of the classroom scene, as the boys head home, Hanschen suggestively proposes to Ernst that they "huddle over the Homer," and "maybe do a little Achilles and Patroclus" – that is, that they privately meet and pore over the adventures of that classic pair of ancient Greek lovers. As our show draws to a close, we see those two boys together again – this time, by themselves just at sunset. There, in the scene and privately in song, Hanschen beckons the

> awkwardly adoring boy to him, offering the rich dessert of his kiss: *Come, cream away the bliss/ Travel the world within my lips*. All Hanshen wants out of life is to "skim off the cream." And if that cream comes with a little boy's heart, then so be it. [21]

Although Hanchen's main goal in life is to reap the benefits of carnal pleasure, without the harmful effects of "love," the scene provides one primary goal: to release Ernst from his inner turmoil. As if in a fairy tale, Ernst is released from his spell by "true love's first kiss." Once Ernst has had his first experience with another man, he loses his inner shame and "almost" embraces his sexuality. Although the scene is written to be comical, due in large part to the heavy content of act two, the characters are portrayed with dignity and respect. There must be a change in Ernst. Now that his inner shame had been released, his eyes should be wide with excitement and interest. It is as if he had been living life as a dead man, and now he was given life. That is the true secret behind the message of "The Word of Your Body," all who experience it see themselves in a different light once the song is concluded. Melchior and Wendla fall in love while singing this song, and their lovemaking is actually underscored with the music to set the tone. Here, we see Ernst shed his shame and embrace who he truly is, something profound for the reserved person he once was.

Shame of Family

Although shame of the self does play a central role within Sater's production of *Spring Awakening*, we also see an emergence of the shame of the family. As I explored *Spring Awakening*, I noticed the significant differences in shame felt by the characters. As Marta, Georg, Otto, and Ernst experience the internal shame of the self, two characters experience shame placed on them by their families. Moritz and Wendla both undergo a deep shaming by

their parents with regards to an act that has brought shame to the family. Through this shaming, both characters undergo transformations that add both emergence of character and depth.

> What is Frau Bergman's [Wendla's mother's] greatest fear? For it to be revealed that she is of a lower class than she is trying to be. Explaining sexuality to Wendla is a real bad thing. That is a real no-no, that's too progressive. The people who do that are bohemians, gypsies… people of the lower class. [22]

As explained by Christine Estabrook, Adult Women character in the original Broadway cast, Frau Berman is truly disturbed by her daughter's constant questioning over babies and sex. Although her daughter is already "in bloom" at the opening of the production, Frau Begman purposely withholds sexual information over fear of her status in society. Because her mother refuses to give her the information she needs, Wendla begins to search for answers elsewhere. Sater elaborates:

> Wendla is so desperate to feel. It's mixed up. It's a confused, impulse desire. Wendla is a girl looking for answers. She is a girl trying to understand how babies are born, what life is about. Melchior is looking in books, Wendla is asking questions. She doesn't understand how her lack of knowledge will hurt her. She doesn't understand what she is getting herself into.[23]

Wendla is primarily concerned with understanding the dark areas of life. She has had little guidance from her elders, yet she strives for more. Although always seemingly curious, Wendla's true change in character comes when she discovers Martha's welts and bruises. Hearing Martha talk about being beaten turns Wendla's world upside down. Wendla has never

"felt *anything*," as she states when she asks Melchior to beat her. Although the most obvious assumption is the connection to the physical beating Martha endures, we can take this a step further. Wendla is now beginning to feel a connection to Melchior, a connection not evident in the Wedekind script. In Sater's production, we can actually see the awakening happen in both Wendla and Melchior as they encounter each other in the woods. This makes the connection much stronger once the two meet in the infamous hayloft. It is in fact this connection that leads to Wendla's downfall.

Although seemingly unaware of what she has just performed, Wendla seems more mesmerized by the sensuality of feeling something, rather than the act and its consequences. Thus, it should come as no surprise when Wendla is flabbergasted to discover that she is carrying a child. Since my first reading of the script, I have found the following lines heart-wrenching:

> Frau Bergman: Wendla…? What have you done? To yourself? To me?
>
> (No response.)
>
> Wendla?
>
> Wendla: I, uh, don't know.
>
> Frau Bergman: (Not a question) You don't know.
>
> Wendla: Doctor von Brausepulver said I'm anemic.
>
> Frau Berman: Well probably. You're going to have a child.
>
> Wendla: A child?! But, I'm not married!
>
> Frau Bergman: Precisely. Wendla, what have you done!? [24]

Wendla is so blissfully unaware that the sensual moment she shared with Melchior, actually leads to the conception of a child. In fact, I find it so heart breaking when she states "but I am not married." Wendla has been withheld vital information, she truly believes that to

bring a child into the world she must be a married woman. Thus, she explores the feelings she senses for Melchior freely, with little regard for consequences that may follow. On the subject of shame, Frau Bergman begins the process upon reentering the room. "Wendla what have you done? To yourself? To me?" This line shows the mother's immediate reaction to something that can be her downfall. As Estabrook stated earlier, Frau Bergman's biggest fear is for it to be revealed that she is of a lower class than she pretends to be. Once she realizes that her daughter is soon going to be the topic of vicious gossip, Frau Bergman panics, placing the shame she feels awaits her, on her daughter.

If there is one thing we take away from James Lapine and Stephen Sondheim's *Into the Woods*, it is that "children will listen." Whether it be praise, discouragement, celebration or hindrance, children take the words of their parents to heart. Once Wendla realizes that her mother has been lying to her for so long, she begins to process her life. Frau Bergman, however, can only concentrate on the shame she must endure as the grandmother of a baby born out of wedlock. This infuriates Frau Bergman, and she begins to place blame on her daughter, rather than taking responsibility for her daughter's lack of knowledge. Interestingly enough, Wendla seems withdrawn from her mother for the remainder of the scene. Wendla seems entranced by her newfound motherhood, whereas Frau Bergman begins to review options to save face. It is at this time that Wendla begins to sing "Whispering," a song which reviews the shame the child has placed on herself and her family, and debates the future.

"Wendla's "Whispering" has a heart-rendering lament- an unwed young woman, who's learned she's with child, soulfully regrets that she has become nothing but "another summer's story." Here, Sater discusses the emotion behind the song Wendla sings before her demise. Over the course of the song, we see Wendla actually undergo a transformation. True the song

begins with a sad, shamed young woman who seems lost in a new world. However, as the song concludes, we see a woman who, like a Shakespearian heroine, takes ownership of her shame and shows defiance in her new role. Sater states:

> In her moment of shame, Wendla hears the ghosts- Ibsen's Pillars of Society- in the moonlight, whispering about her. The word of her "shameful act" has prompted a fresh dance of death through their bones. She stands listening to them, her heart aching for the young fools in love who, like herself, are fumbling rudely, scarcely knowing what they are doing. [25]

Wendla cannot exorcise herself from the harsh judgment that still echoes within her. Perhaps, like Juliet, she has even a premonition of her own death:

See the father bent in grief
The mother dressed in mourning
Sister crumbles,
And the neighbors grumble
The preacher issues warnings…

Wendla sees, within her mind's eye, the judgment cast upon her by her family, the clergy and society. She now knows she has done wrong by society's standards, and it brings her the shame and self-deprecation these individuals would place on her.

History…
Little Miss didn't do right
Went and ruined all the true plans –
Such a shame, such a sin

Here, Wendla actually sings of the shame she to experience. Wendla sings of her new image in society, and understands how she will be received in the future. Interestingly enough, you can almost hear the town gossips criticizing Wendla for her wild ways, and her mother for her unruly upbringing. But as her song continues, Wendla is able to turn from her child language of sin and death to embrace the "mystic wisdom" of what she has felt for Melchior. Interestingly enough, we can actually hear the song shift from sin and shame to the longing Wendla feels for her lover.

Had a sweetheart on his knees
So faithful and adoring
And he touched me
And I let him love me
So, let that be my story

Here, Wendla casts lament aside. She chooses to ignore the ghostly whispers and embraces the growing life within her. More than that, she *owns* those whispers as her story- " Yes, there was a boy, he touched me, and I let him love me. Let that be how I am remembered." Like many a Shakespearean hero, Wendla claims her version of the tale just told, which will be told again for another. Thus, the character of Wendla has come full circle. The young woman "already in bloom" as the play began, now indeed is in full bloom with child. Wendla finally knows the truth to the conception of babies, learning it from the child growing within her.

Sadly, the production loses Wendla to shame. Driven by grief and shame, Frau Bergman risks Wendla's life in order to save face and position in society. Unfortunately, the young life cannot sustain the abortion methods of the time and she succumbs to her death. Interestingly enough, shame follows Wendla even in death. Once Melchior discovers Wendla's tombstone,

he reads aloud "Wendla Bergman… born… DIED.. of *anemia.*" As if unable to face the judgmental society, the Bergman parents state forever on stone that their daughter succumbed to anemia and not any other death. This is to justify the loss of their child, and to remain well positioned in society themselves.

Wendla Bergman, however, is not the only character lost in death by shame. The production revolves around the shame felt by another major character, one who has the most difficulty dealing with the humiliation placed upon him by his family, Moritz.

On the subject of shame, Lewis states:

> If distress is the affect of suffering, shame is the affect of indignity, transgression and of alienation. Though terror speaks to life and death and distress makes of the world a vale of tears, yet shame strikes deepest into the heart of man.... shame is felt as inner torment, a sickness of the soul....the humiliated one feels himself naked, defeated, alienated, lacking in dignity and worth.[26]

Moritz Stiefel exemplifies this definition in every sense of the word. From the start of the production Moritz battles with the shame placed upon him by the society in which he resides. His story is one of a child that has constantly been repressed; first by his parents, then by society. In the school scene, we see Moritz's current state of suppression by the school headmaster. From Moritz's first entrance, we can deduce that he must be the lowest of the students in the class. His difficulty with the oration and lack of discipline in the classroom exemplify his struggling situation. It comes as no surprise when we discover that Moritz has, in fact, failed his year and will not be returning in the fall.

As the audience watches Moritz transform through the first act, we see his struggle with school and sexuality. We see this struggle through the character as compared to the other

children. Moritz has been repressed differently from the other characters in that he cannot grasp the changes happening around him. As discussed earlier, Moritz feels inferior to the other children. It is for this reason that he constantly finds himself failing. Research on communication teaches us that self -comparison is one of the strongest components behind low self-esteem. If we continue to fail in comparison, to the others around us, our self-esteem is greatly diminished. This is what is happening to Moritz. His self-esteem has begun to fall because of his shortcomings at both the education and sexuality levels. With regard to Moritz's shame in the production, I will focus on his educational failings.

In the events that lead to Moritz's demise, none is more affecting than the scene where he discovers he is going to pass to the next level in school. As Moritz emerges from the school, he can hardly contain his excitement. It is as though he has just learned he no longer has a fatal disease and he will live. This is significant because he actually only quicklyfalls to his demise after this discovery. It then creates much more anxiety in the audience when they discover that he in fact will fail out of school. Once Moritz's greatest fear has been realized, he has no other option but to fall to the mercy of his father or reach his own end. Moritz decides to go to his father and confess his failings; it is as if he feels his father may accept his flaws for the sake of his son. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Moritz's father is outraged by the fact that his son has failed at something as significant as an education. Moritz reaches into his pocket and reveals a letter from Frau Gabor dictating her reasons for denying him the fare to America. As discussed earlier in my review of "And Then There Were None" and "I Don't Do Sadness," Moritz uses the next two songs to channel his anger and shame towards the audience. However, Moritz's most poignant moment in the production comes before his death, after he has spoken with Ilse and sung "Don't Do Sadness." Alone with only his thoughts in the woods, Moritz sits

back and reviews his life and his choices. Shame has led him to his current state, and he too will lose his life because of the shame he has brought his family. Moritz sits alone with the cold steel of the pistol in his hand and looks up to the stars as if in review of his future "home." Although his final monologue is rather short, ten sentences to be exact, I asked Christopher Montalvo to hold on to the scene for as long as possible. This was truly his one and only chance to spend any alone time with the audience, and they should feel every emotion Moritz is currently feeling. Thankfully, Montalvo took my guidance and executed it better than I could have imagined. I asked Montalvo to review every line he recited before he said it, asking himself "why is Moritz saying this?" and "why are these his final thoughts?" This would aid him in reciting the lines and, more importantly, relaying the emotion. In speaking with Chris, he stated:

> "The scene before Moritz takes his life is probably one of the strongest scenes in the show. There is a lot of symbolism around the scene, both in the lines and on the stage. After Ilse leaves, Moritz is left alone with nothing but the flowers she leaves behind. I found that this symbolizes a lot of the past for Moritz, as well as his connection to Ilse. The flowers represent the beauty in Ilse, both inside and out. Now that he is alone with them in his hands, he has time to think about Ilse and her life, and what she means to him. The flowers are primarily what drove my purpose behind the lines for the scene. Moritz begins thinking about what he wants to do with his life after death. He asks himself "who am I?" and "what will I tell the angels?" It is as if he must review and prepare for what he will tell the angels in the "new worlds" about his life in the old world. As Moritz looks at the flowers, he is reminded of the wonderful world Ilse lives in, one free of oppression and worry. Ilse is free and Moritz has no idea what that feels like. This is another form of shame he feels. Not only

does Moritz associate with the shame placed on him by his family, but also the shame of not living a worthwhile life. He has always wanted to live life as anyone but himself, which could explain why he clings to Melchior so much. Either way, the idea that he can leave life in his current state and be something better (an angel), I feel, is what truly interests Moritz about death.

More than anything else, Ilse is the true motivation for Moritz's monologue. She truly embodies everything Moritz feels he wanted in life. I feel this is most evident when Moritz talks about telling the angels that he "played pirates" in his past life. When he talks to Ilse about "playing pirates" he reverts back to a happy period in his life, which are few and far between. When Moritz thinks about the times he played pirates he remembers feeling happy and content. However, when Ilse talks about playing pirates, her version seems so much more exciting. Although both individuals experienced the same thing, they have very different interpretations. Ilse represents this angle in Moritz's life, which is ironic because she wears white in the production. I see Ilse as the purity for Moritz, even though she is not a pure character in the production. Ilse is Moritz's ultimate [woman] and he will never have her. So, he decides to reach self actualization and be the best that he can be.

The final words Moritz says are the most important. When he is talking about he horizon, we [Joel and I] decided to make it the prime of his life. The sky is brightest at the horizon, with promise for a better tomorrow. This symbolizes the future of a young man like Moritz. Although he has failed, there is a promise of a better tomorrow. However, after the horizon comes dusk, or darkness. This symbolizes the state that Mortiz is currently in. Although there was promise, he has decided not to follow it.

> Therefore, Moritz decides to end his life, rather than face another dawn. The final lines are very important. Joel stated that no two words in a play are written to be delivered the same way, everything has a significant meaning. The fact that Mortiz says "So dark." three different times is symbolic. Joel and I decided to make each one its own entity. The first "so dark" would symbolize Mortiz's past life, with his father and the education system that failed him. The second "so dark" would symbolize Moritz's present state, because he sits alone in the dark of the night in sorrow. The final "so dark" is representative of Moritz's future, and the darkness that will envelop his corpse in the earth."

It can be deduced that Moritz not only died because of the shame placed upon him by his father, but also the internal shame of not having lived a worthwhile life. This is clearly evident within Mortiz's final monologue. As Moritz reviews his life and what he plans to tell the angels, he decides to paint a picture of a life lived well, rather than the oppressed life he led. This is what comforts Moritz, the idea that he will live a new life where he can also shed his past one. As with many suicide victims, the primary purpose behind ending one's life is to end the pain of life. Dr. Alex Lickerman, an internal medicine physician at the University of Chicago stated that most individuals end their life for six primary reasons: depression, mental issues, impulse, a cry for help, a philosophical desire to die, or to repair a mistake[27]. The most obvious reasons for Moritz is that he is trying to undo his mistake in school, and because he is crying out for help with regard to the shame caused by his family and himself. The message behind Moritz's suicide is one of great importance for a production revolving around the issues plaguing adolescents. Moreover, the issue of shame and its effect on adolescents is an idea few consider,

and its inclusion in the musical version of *Spring Awakening* is brilliant with regard to its execution.

Narcissism

With regard to shame, one must also review the reverse effect of the emotion, narcissism. A review of the production would not be complete without analyzing the character of Hanschen, the narcissistic character within the production. It would not be too forward to proclaim Hanschen as one character who causes the most anxiety within the audience. His proud masturbation act within "My Junk," his forceful gay kiss with Ernst during "Word of Your Body Reprise" and his overall demeanor in comparison to the other boys makes Hanshen one of the characters most difficult to identify with. Regardless, Hanschen's display of self-appreciation identifies for the audience the opposite attitude of Wendla and Moritz. It is Hanschen's defiance that truly makes his character stand out among the rest. While singing "The Bitch of Living," we see all of the boys dealing with the shame they feel as a result of their self-pleasuring whereas Hanschen celebrates it. As the boys sing about their own private hell, Hanschen boasts about his conquests and fantasies. While the other boys are ashamed to admit their sexuality, Hanschen proclaims his homosexuality proudly. As he sings it is as though he is seducing the audience with his words, phrases and movements. With respect to his homosexuality, Hanschen is a nice foil for the closeted Ernst who is ashamed of his homosexuality and the arousal associated it. For the sake of understanding, I call this issue the homosexual dichotomy, two perceptions and expressions of one's own homosexual interests.

The second instance of the homosexual dichotomy can be found within "The Word of Your Body Reprise." Here, as discussed earlier, Hanschen seduces Ernst for his own pleasure. Once again motivated by his own narcissism, Hanschen claims the heart of another, only to give

it up once he has attained his goal. It is interesting to note that Hanschen seduces Ernst in such a way that Ernst cannot resist. In fact, the song they sing is ironic in the sense that they both know the attraction is not for the better, but both concede to reach a moment's pleasure. It is also interesting to note that it is Hanschen's seduction that ultimately aids Ernst in accepting his homosexuality and overcoming his inner shame.

Consequences

As previously discussed, shame is not the only theme that arises within the musical version of *Spring Awakening*, we must also discuss the theme of consequences. As a young child, my mother instilled in me that "life is full of choices. With each choice comes consequences, and everything comes with a price." Nowhere is this more evident than in *Spring Awakening.* For the sake of analysis, I will review the relationship between Melchior and Wendla and the consequences of their actions.

It goes without question that Melchior and Wendla are the central focus with regard to consequences of their actions. Because Wendla was raised with little information on sexual reproduction, it comes as a complete surprise when she discovers that the act she performed in a hayloft led to a baby. One of the primary differences between Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*, and Sater's *Spring Awakening* is that the original production had Melchior meet, rape and lose Wendla. In the modern version, Sater took the relationship and removed the rape aspect making the act consensual. It is this change that made a big difference. By changing the context of scene, Sater added the theme of consequences to the modern production. Melchior is well aware of the consequences he faces when he decides to engage in sexual reproduction with Wendla, and yet the benefits seem to outweigh the risks. However, Wendla has been sheltered from understanding herself and her body, allowing her to remain sheltered from understanding the

consequences of sexual intercourse. Sater leaves the message to the audience to decipher and decide. Ultimately, the idea to include consequences in the modern adaptation of *Spring Awakening* is essential, as it changes the message of the show. At first glance, the production can be perceived to be a nearly pornographic detailing of adolescent sexuality. However, when Sater added the consequences component, the true message behind the story, and sexual reproduction, changed. The story was no longer a negative outlook on sexual acts, but rather a call to action between writer and audience member to become informed on the dangers of unprotected sex, as well as their bodies.

Ultimately, *Spring Awakening* is a show about consequences, not sex. The production is not intended to shock the audience, rather it presents the truth behind all humans. It is true that carnal desire runs rampant within all human beings, but the key is how one expresses this desire. As the audience watches Wendla unknowingly engage in sexual intercourse with Melchior, they can deduce what will eventually happen to the young woman. This is primarily because most of the audience has been informed on sexual reproduction, and knows well the consequences of having unprotected sex. With regard to the production, Wendla and Melchior discover the consequences of having unprotected sex quickly. Once Wendla's mother discovers her daughter is pregnant, she whisks her to an abortion clinic where the poor child loses her life, paying the ultimate consequence for her actions. During "Whispering," Wendla's final solo song in the production, the young girl laments over how her actions have changed her life. Throughout the song, Melchior's parents discuss what to do with the young boy with regard to the consequences of his actions. Their dialogue is the perfect contrast for the song being sung:

Frau Gabor: Herman this is our son

Herr Gabor: For fifteen years my darling I have followed your lead., we have given the boy room and now we must eat of the bitter fruit. Melchior has shown himself to be utterly corrupt.
Frau Gabor: He has not.
Herr Gabor: Hear me out.
Frau Gabor: But I have. Melchior wrote an essay- every word of which was true. Are we so afraid of the truth we will join the ranks of cowards and fools. I will not have Melchior sent to some reformatory, pent up with degenerates and genuine criminals. (SONG)
Herr Gabor: And now I must break your heart. This afternoon Frau Bergmann came to see me. Bearing a letter Melchior wrote to the young Wendla, telling her he has no regret for what transpired in our hayloft.
Frau Gabor: Impossible!
Herr Gabor: The he only longs to find again that bit of Paradise-
Frau Gabor: (taking the letter) Let me see that.
Herr Gabor: The wretched fact is Melchior knew precisely what he was doing. And as that letter shows he knew the dangers of doing it. And yet, he went ahead. Defiling himself and all but destroying that girl. So I ask you Fanny,- what shall we do?
Frau Gabor: What you will. A reformatory.[28]

Melchior's parents, in fact, take more offense to the fact that Melchior knew "precisely what he was doing" and yet went ahead "defiling himself and all but destroying the girl." It is as if the knowledge of the act and the consequences of performing it are what upset the Gabors, as Frau Gabor seems rather lenient before she discovers that her son understood what transpired in the hayloft. Once she discovers that Melchior understood the "dangers," or consequences of his actions, she is much more inclined to punish the boy.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, during the dialogue between the Gabor's, we see Wendla sing her song of lament over her actions. Sater states that "Whispering" is a heart-rendering tale of an unwed young woman, who's learned she's with child , and soulfully regrets her decisions, prepared now to deal with the consequences of becoming "another summer story" Truth be told, Wendla was supposed to end her story with tears and disbelief at the state of her life. Sater felt this idea was not significant for a character who had finally learned the answer she asked at the start of the production. Thus, Sater created "Whispering" in order to allow Wendla to express the emotions she felt. As discussed earlier, Wendla sings about the shame she now feels associated with her family, but more than that, Wendla sings about the consequences she feels she will face. Wendla believes that she will carry the child to fruition, that she will become a young mother and lead a blissful life in the arms of Melchior Gabor. Sadly, she is tragically mistaken.

In review of the modern adaptation of the production, one can understand why Sater included the theme of consequences. Because Melchior is well read and informed, he knows the dangers of sexual reproduction, but as stated earlier, the benefits seem to outweigh the risks. With regard to Generation X, we can see why Sater felt the theme was necessary to include. A study conducted by the Guttmacher Institute, revealed that seven in ten males and females before the age of nineteen have had sexual intercourse. This means that almost 70% of adolescents between the ages of thirteen and nineteen engage in some form of sexual activity with 75% of those teens remaining sexually active thereafter. What is interesting to note about these adolescents is that they are aware of the consequences of having unprotected sex, yet one in five women engages in sexual intercourse and does not use any method of contraception. These numbers are shocking when one realizes that they contribute to the almost 750,000 U.S.

women between the ages of thirteen and nineteen becoming pregnant every year. These number are disturbing, and yet little is done to improve them. When looking at the post modern musical as an attraction for adolescents, it is easy to see why Sater included issues of consensual sex in his production. The consequences associated with the issue become more real when depicted on a stage, rather than just verbally relayed by a parent or teacher. In fact, the Denver Center created a field guide for teachers who chose to use *Spring Awakening* to teach the dangers of sexual reproduction stating:

> "While feelings of their own sexuality are not going away, and social, academic and adult pressure will be there no matter what, all we can really do is help them cope. Life doesn't come with an owner's manual. We have to figure it out for ourselves. When it comes to growing up adults don't have all the answers. Some who think they do quickly discover they are not always the ones teens want to hear. Without options, teens may become disillusioned and make bad choices, like Wendla and Moritz and Melchior and even Wendla's mother, who chose a dangerous abortion procedure rather than bear the shame of her daughter's pregnancy."

Using theatre to teach difficult issues provides a genuine and engaging mode of communication for a generation that otherwise has a short attention span. In *It Opened My Eyes: Using Theatre in Education to Deliver Sex and Relationship Education,* the Theatre in Education Program discovered that using theatre to spread information on sexual intercourse and teen pregnancy not only expanded awareness, but also reduced numbers by 40% over a period of five years. By using the thematic element of consequences in *Spring Awakening*, teens and parents can open their eyes on the subject and become better informed for their own

protection.

CHAPTER VI

THE PURPOSE OF SONGS WITHIN *SPRING AWAKENING*

In 1943 Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* established a successful pattern for the integration of music and lyrics in a musical, setting a phenomenal precedent. The standards for the musical were now high, and all who succeeded these creative partners were expected to meet the challenge. Previously lyricists and composers wrote songs, but now they became dramatists, using songs to develop character and advance the plot. Rodgers and Hammerstein abandoned the sure-bet formulas of their day; slapstick comedy and chorus lines of scantily clad females. All elements in the musical now had to have a dramatic function. *Oklahoma!* demonstrate several techniques of integration that Rodgers and Hammerstein continued to use throughout their career (Spurrier 148-54).

First, the script, often referred to as “the book,” has priority; all other elements exist only to further the dramatic needs of the book. A good book provides the narrative skeleton for a musical as well as ample opportunities to allow singing and dance to enhance the story. The book for a musical may be based on a play, novel, film, or develop from an original idea. The story for *Oklahoma!* came from a play, *Green Grow the Lilacs*, thematically unmemorable except for its musical transformation. Also developed by *Oklahoma!* is that opening numbers help to establish

the mood and setting and to prepare for the themes of the musical. The slow beginning with a lone baritone singing offstage, "There's a bright golden haze on the meadow" set a different tone from the usual opening spectacle of high-kicking chorus girls. Reprising this number near the end of the show also creates a sense of unity for the entire production. *Oklahoma!* also triggered collaborators to achieve smooth transitions from script to music. Lyrics begin as a continuation of dialogue, as when Will Parker warns his girl Ado Annie that with him it's "All or Nuthin'" in their relationship. In this manner songs do not interrupt dramatic dialogue but develop and expand it. From *Oklahoma!* we have also learned that songs should express the deepest thoughts and feelings of the characters at that moment. Lyrics describe specific actions and events within the story and follow the natural speech patterns of the characters in the vernacular of the play. The characters of *Oklahoma!* speak and sing as westerners, not opera virtuosos. In *Oklahoma!*, the style of music relates closely to the specific lyrics, as heard in "The Surrey with the Fringe on Top" with its steady, clip-clop rhythm mimicking the sound of horses' hooves. Also, Reprises are often used to show development of character. During "People will Say We're in Love" Laurie and Curly caution each other that they should not stand too close or talk too long, or else people will get the wrong idea. Near the end of the show, the reprise changes the lyrics to "Let People Say We're in Love," revealing a shift from their initial reluctance to a mutual acceptance of their relationship. Finally, *Oklahoma!* featured an innovative role for dance in its dream ballet, in which Laurie imagines a deadly confrontation between Curlie and Judd at the hoedown. Rather than choreography for its own sake, Laurie's ballet tells a story through music and movement. The ultimate expansion of this idea came with *West Side Story* (1957) conceived as a dramatized ballet by choreographer-director Jerome Robbins.

It should come as no surprise that the most important component of a post-modern musical is in fact, the music. When Duncan Sheik and Steven Sater were creating the music for *Spring Awakening*, they quickly realized the songs would need to be different for this unique musical. Sheik stated, " I got lucky in terms of being naïve about how songs function in a traditional musical. I wrote the songs for the score the way I would write them for one of my albums. All I am really worried about is the song functioning on its own, within its own context. For this generation, it has to be music I want to listen to. I'm just not interested in telling a story or being part of a larger narrative."

This is exactly what Sheik accomplished with the music from *Spring Awakening*. Using his popular music background, Sheik created songs that would function independently of the musical. In fact, one can listen to a song from the musical, and see how it can function alone before even realizing it is part of the score of a Broadway musical. By utilizing songs set in a contemporary time, using contemporary phrases and scenarios, the music successfully attracts the generation it targets. This allows the production to entertain, educate, and properly execute the important aspects of a musical. Sater, too, wanted the music of the production to function differently than the music of a traditional musical. Sater crafted the lyrics to relay what was needed at that moment in the scene, rather than supplement the interaction. One of the dynamic differences of *Spring Awakening* the musical, is the music itself does not forward the story or the plot, rather it forwards and deepens the emotion of the scene and of the character. Here we will review Sater and Sheik's message behind formulating the songs of the production, more specifically using songs to forward the emotion and using songs as interior monologues for the character.

Using Songs to Forward and or Deepen Emotion

In many respects, Sheik and Sater took the framework laid by Rodgers and Hammerstein and reformatted it in such a way that it would suit their needs, while also adding interest for Generation X. True, the words sung express desire, history, or state; yet, their primary purpose is to express the emotion currently felt by the character as a result of the scene or situation. Musical theatre expresses what you cannot say with dialogue. To that end, *Spring Awakening* expresses what our characters cannot express in their scenes. Martha cannot express the "Dark I Know Well" to her friends with ordinary words, thus she expresses to the audience how the situation makes her *feel* rather than the situation itself. In *Spring Awakening*, music now functions as a vessel for emotion, rather than to forward the plot, and now paves the way for many future productions.

When reviewing the songs and lyrics of *Spring Awakening*, I found myself getting more and more entangled in the emotion of the character, rather than the character's story. A song that clearly exemplifies this idea is "My Junk." The song begins after a scene in which the girls (Wendla, Thea, Martha and Anna) engage in, as most young girls do, talk about the boy of their dreams, in this case Melchior Gabor. This scene, although short, is a dynamic way for the audience to make a connection between the characters they see on the stage, and either themselves, or someone they know. Amidst the gossip, Hanshen takes a seat behind the girls, as he begins touching himself in masturbatory play. The scene, although seen together, is intended to be interpreted as two different situations representing the same concept, junk. The song is a lament, much like "The Bitch of Living," for adolescents dealing with the "junk" of their lives; love, lust, and longing. As teens, we begin to develop feelings for others that are different from

the ones we feel for our families and ourselves. Undeniably, this is what makes our "teen years" most awkward, as it stirs foreign emotions within us. Sater uses the scene to lay the foundation for the idea, but it is the song that provides the audience with a connection to themselves.

As the song begins, we find the girls singing about the longing they feel for attaining some form of love or attraction by the opposite sex. This represents the "junk" of the girls, as they must deal with these emotions on a daily basis. In reverse, we see Hanschen pleasuring himself behind the girls who, when the chorus picks up, begins singing along in his own representation of "junk" for a man of his age. In review of the lyrics, we can see that the children sing of their "junk" in such a way that it provides disdain for it, yet they cannot live without it. This is the emotional connection the audience can make with the scene at hand. We can clearly understand the "junk" the characters sing about, because we ourselves have gone through this emotion. Within these lyrics and songs devised by Sater and Sheik, we discover the songs to be more relatable than the traditional Broadway musical song.

Another song that clearly exemplifies the intensifying emotion is "Left Behind," the song sung by Melchior during Moritz's funeral. The song is a response to losing a child to suicide. However, rather than having it be sung by Moritz's father, Sater chose for Melchior to sing the ballad to Moritz's father, representing the emotions Herr Stiefel must feel for driving his son to suicide. "Left Behind" is an excellent representation for using song to deepen the emotion of the scene. Melchior sings the song as a representation of the many things Moritz left undone, primarily in response to his father's actions. The scene as the song is sung, is to be staged facing the audience, while Moritz's father faces out towards the audience as cold and emotionless as a statue. As an actor who has played the role of Moritz's father, I found it easy to get lost in the song, as it clearly defines the emotions which would be felt at that moment in

time. It is not until the end of the song that Herr Stiefel lets his guard down, and allows himself to mourn his son, weeping uncontrollably. In listening to "Left Behind" one can see how the song can stir many emotions within the audience, especially for those who have lost a loved one to suicide. To look at the scene without "Left Behind," or replaced with dialogue, one could say that the emotion itself would be removed from the setting. It is the song that clearly identifies the emotion for the audience members, allowing them to once again take what they hear and apply it to their own life.

Using Song as an Interior Monologue for the Character

> "I thought about the songs they way I think about a rock concert. Primarily, it's a musical moment of emotional intensity. Half the time, I don't think listeners know all the words anyone is singing at a concert. They're swept away by the power of that song and that set of chords, that melody and rhythm moving them in some way."[29]
>
> Sheik on writing the music of *Spring Awakening*

Sater and Sheik not only utilized the songs within *Spring Awakening* to demonstrate the emotion for the audience, they also used them to represent the interior monologue between the character and the audience. True, the music is intended to represent the character on a contemporary basis; however, the songs still express the current emotional state of the character. As stated earlier, Sater utilizes the song to give the character an outlet for emotion that cannot be expressed with words. Sheik states, "Steven's lyrics can seem amorphous and poetic, kind of moody. But if you scan them really closely, they are extremely specific to each moment in the show. They're not necessarily advancing the plot, but they are deepening the emotional moment of those characters within the scene."

Each song itself functions independently as part of the whole, in this case, the story at hand. There is much to be said for the ending sentence of Sater's comment: the song deepens the emotion of the scene without advancing the plot. As the characters converse, their song begins once the emotional peak has been reached. To that end, most scenes conclude once the song is over. To coincide with this, it is interesting to note that more stage time of *Spring Awakening* is spent singing, rather than in conversational dialogue. This is done to state the facts of the scene with dialogue, and the emotion with music. As Sheik stated earlier, the music is a moment of emotional intensity, rather than an explanation of the scene, or a continuation of the dialogue. Take, for example, the opening scene of act two. Here, Melchior and Wendla are seen directly after their sexual encounter, and process what has just happened. The only dialogue heard within the scene is delivered from Father Kaulbach, who symbolically delivers his sermon over the lovers. As the sermon lays the scene for the "sin" that has just taken place, the song itself delivers the internal feelings of the characters, feelings that cannot be expressed in simple dialogue.

The internal monologue delivered within "The Guilty Ones" is primarily newfound territory. To that end, I personally feel "The Guilty Ones" is the awakening period of *Spring Awakening*. As with any monumental change in a person's life, the acknowledgement does not come until after its completion. Melchior and Wendla have just experienced something foreign, yet beautiful, and neither know how to deal with the many emotions they feel. The response, of course, is through song. In review of the song, both characters are filled with emotion they have never experienced. Thus, the lyrics of the "The Guilty Ones" express the internal monologues of the characters at this time.

One can actually see how the song is a reply for the monumental event that has just occurred between the two characters. The song could have very well been a dramatic interchange between both characters, yet Sater chooses to keep both separate, allowing both to detail their experiences alone. As Melchior reviews what he has just committed he sings:

Pulse is gone and racing –
All fits and starts
Window by window,
You try and look into
This brave new you that you are[30]

Melchior has just discovered a new world, a new "him," and does not understand how to deal with what has just occurred. His interior monologue details the events that occurred between him and Wendla, after which he details the excitement he felt discovering his new self. Wendla, too, details her experience as the following:

Something's started crazy –
Sweet and unknown
Something you keep
In a box on the street –
Now it's longing for a home[31]

Quite obviously the "something" Wendla sings about is the exchange between her and Melchior. More than that, however, Wendla details the newfound guilty longing she did not understand before the encounter, but now must live with. On a deeper level, both characters are expressing the notion that they have undergone a change, one that is to be blamed on carnal desire (the body) rather than the mind. The song itself is emotional consolation for the

characters that what they have just performed is acceptable because it was innate, rather than wrong or shameful.

One must recognize that all the songs in the production are primarily utilized to deepen the audience's understanding of the character, not to advance the plot or the story. Sater stated that the songs were "crafted for what was needed at that specific moment of the show." This clearly exemplifies how the music functions as the emotional outlet for the character, as each song has its own symbolic connotations. Utilizing this method, Sater was able to make the clear definition between Wedekind's original work, and his own adaptation.

Music and its Connection to Wedekind's Original Message

As previously exemplified, Sater utilized Wedekind's original work to lay the dialogue for the characters, whereas the lyrics make the contemporary connection to the emotional message of the production. This is the true key to connecting the two works. Sheik states that he felt the Wedekind text to be "a bit difficult to parse." True, the original play version of *Spring Awakening* tends to run very quickly, with little response to emotion and more attention placed upon a factual depiction of life. Sater states:

> I love Frank Wedekind, but our play is a different animal, a completely different take on those characters. I think Wedekind wrote something that is much darker and fragmentary. It's the work of a young man who is an angry social journalist. In a way, his primary concern was to give this scabrous account of what was going on in society and how young people were unheard and the damage that did to them.[32]

The musical adaptation of *Spring Awakening* took the original message of Wedekind, the lack of knowledge adolescents had about their bodies and how it affects them, and created a work of art that was much more relatable for a contemporary audience.

In a reading of Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*, one will notice there is little character development, or even an arc present for the story or the characters themselves. This is accomplished because, as Sater states, the production is very rapid and episodic. This form of text is not conducive for developing an understanding of a character, but well presents the factual evidence needed to solidify an argument. In reading the original and the adaptation, I discovered the two primary differences, which also account for the lack of arc in the original work, the relation of the sexual intercourse between Melchior and Wendla, and the lack of the "Masked Man" in the adaptation.

There Once Was a Pirate

One of the primary differences between the two versions of *Spring Awakening* remains the context of the sexual relations between Melchior and Wendla. In Wedekind text, Melchior has no real emotional connection to Wendla at all; rather, his connection to her is one of convenience. Wedekind's Melchior is similar to Sater's in that both versions depict a boy who longs to have his questions answered. However in Wedekind's version, Melchior succumbs to animal instincts, rather than carnal desire. In the Wedekind version, Wendla discovers Melchior in the hayloft, much like the Sater version, however, their exchange is interrupted by Melchior's recognition of the fact that the setting is perfect for conquering the sexual desires he has been longing to quench. Melchior rapes Wendla in the Wedekind version, and shows little remorse for his actions or their consequences. This provides for the lack of arc within the Wedekind production, as intercourse does not change Melchior. Sater toyed with the idea of leaving the

intercourse between Wendla and Melchior as Wedekind had written it, a voiolational act by a disturbed young man on an innocent young woman. Sater wrote a song called "There Once Was a Pirate," in which Melchior sings of his "stealing" of Wendla's virginity, much like a pirate would steal valuables. Doing this, however, would change the audience's perspective of Melchior, as he would be perceived as a terrible person who only wished to satisfy his sexual urges. Thus, Sater wrote "The Guilty Ones," where, as we have just discussed, both lovers sing about the consensual act they have just committed.

When Sater decided to change the context of the intercourse between Wendla and Melchior from rape to consensual, he made the choice to make the message of his production different from the Wedekind production. By making this minute change, a connection between the two lovers suddenly developed at a deeper level than one night of sex. Suddenly the characters now developed an emotional connection, allowing for them to be more relatable to a wider audience. In speaking with Diego Gonzalez, who played Melchior in my production of *Spring Awakening* hereafter referred to as Diego, we discussed the connotations of the relationship Sater depicts in his production:

> I don't know if Melchior loves Wendla. After they have sex, both characters are awakened in their own right. Each one has experienced something beautiful, and they acknowledge that they will be different people from now on. When we get to "Those You've Known," we see that Melchior has now developed feelings for Wendla. He is distraught about losing her, and the song leads us to believe that he will now move forward, while not forgetting Wendla, or the feelings and experiences he associates with her. [33]

True, it is difficult to decipher whether Melchior and Wendla have a "love" connection within the Sater version, but I feel this is intentionally left for the audience to decipher. As Sater

has set the tone for the production by making the act consensual, the audience member is allowed to apply their own understanding of the scene based on their own experiences. Some believe that Melchior truly does love Wendla, and displays this by engaging in intercourse with the young woman. Many, however, believe that Melchior does not recognize this deep connection until after the intercourse has occurred. I must agree with this connection, as it provides the meaning Sater intended for the audience to infer. Ultimately, both Melchior and Wendla connect on a separate level than the characters seen in the Wedekind production. I feel Sater was correct in his choice to create the emotional connection, as it successfully makes the production more relatable for a modern audience.

Those You've Known and The Masked Man

As stated earlier, one of the largest changes from the Wedekind original to the Sater adaptation was the removal of the Masked Man character in the contemporary version. To that end, in the Wedekind version, Melchior meets and converses with the ghost of Moritz once he arrives in the graveyard. Much like the styling's of Henrik Ibsen, Wedekind has Melchior converse with Moritz to understand life after death. To that end, Moritz tries to console the distraught Melchior by attempting to convince him to commit suicide in order to overcome the current trials in his life. Moritz describes death as a pleasant experience, one in which Melchior can live happily, with little regard to sorrows of the heart. It is the Masked Man who arrives and convinces Melchior to continue on through his grief, and also shows Moritz as a liar and conniving "friend". Ultimately, Moritz reveals the truth about life after death, stating that he attempted to have Melchior commit suicide so as not to be alone anymore. The Masked Man succeeds in convincing Melchior to leave the graveyard and continue to live his life, giving the young boy hope for a better day.

In reviewing Sater's adaptation of *Spring Awakening*, the ending has a completely different meaning. As Sater had already made the change regarding the sexual relations between Melchior and Wendla, it seemed nonsensical to have Melchior arrive in the graveyard, lose his newfound love, and attempt to commit suicide by the provoking Moritz. The scene would not satisfy the audience, nor would it satisfy the new story Sater had created. Thus Sheik and Sater created a song that would culminate the journey of Melchior's character from the beginning of the show to the end. Michael Mayer, director of the original Broadway production states:

> "The final scene in the graveyard underwent huge changes on the road to Broadway. Before the Atlantic production, Melchior was torn between the ghosts of Moritz and Wendla. Moritz was saying "Come with me to the afterlife," and Wendla was saying, "Don't do it, Melchior!" By the time we were in production, that seemed false. Our Moritz, as he had evolved in our show, would never have tried to get Melchior to kill himself. We changed the scene so that Moritz and Wendla were manifestations of Melchior's psyche, the part of him that keeps him alive. The part that knows that, as much as he might want it to end, he can carry their spirits on, into the world. And on Broadway, Steven wrote a new ending which restates Melchior's call, "One day, all will know." And it was so potent, we knew we had our final moment." [34]

Truth be told, the character of Melchior as created by Sater would never have taken advice from a masked adult. Throughout the entire production, Melchior prided himself on defying the adults of his society, leading his own life free of adult rules. Thus, it would make no sense for the character to journey through the production, only to be ultimately saved by an adult. Melchior was a boy of individual power; to overcome this struggle, he would have to look within. Therefore, the ending created by Sater is much more satisfactory with regard to the character's journey.

Utilizing "Those You've Known," Sater not only gave Melchior the will to continue, but also gave closure to Wendla's character. In a most shocking way, Melchior and the audience discover Wendla's death, allowing them to infer that it was caused by the abortion that was forced upon her. However, in the Wedekind version, the audience never sees Wendla after she enters the abortion quarters. There is no closure for her character other than the notion that she died in her own shame. Sater chose to remove this idea and allow Wendla to return like Moritz as a ghostly manifestation for Melchior. This gives the audience, as well as Melchior closure with the Wendla relationship. Lea Michele explains:

> "Wendla and Moritz come up from the graves to stop Melchior from killing himself. We tell Melchior, "*We will be in your heart and we will be with you.*" And she says to him, "*Those you've pained, they may carry that with them… but all the same, you're forgiven*." Everything is going to be alright."[35]

True, the Melchior created by Sater must feel some form of remorse for the fact that the act he committed with Wendla led to her demise. It seemed only logical that he must hear from Wendla in order to carry on with no regret. Allowing Wendla to return to the scene gave Melchior that closure with Wendla, the chance to know that all is fine and he must now go on. I feel the ending created by Sater was brilliantly executed to provide *Spring Awakening* with not only the proper closure needed for the production, but also the strong ending it deserved. The original Wedekind text left much to be desired with regard to the closing of the production, where Moritz sat, holding his head in his hands, reciting a poem of sorrow and woe. After watching a moving production like *Spring Awakening*, the characters needed to pay their respects to one another, as well as the audience. In a symbolic way, "Those You've Known" is not only a song for Melchior, but also for the audience's closure. Each audience member can

now leave the theatre with the haunting words of Wendla, Moritz and Melchior; relaying that the message is now within them as they leave. *Spring Awakening* is very haunting, and numerous audience members leave the theatre reviewing the message they have just experienced. This is the true message behind the closing created by Sater, the fact that once experienced, like sex, *Spring Awakening* will change you- for better or worse.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Suffice it to say, *Spring Awakening: A New Musical* proved to be more popular than anyone could have anticipated. More than that, however, the production touched the generation it targeted on a completely different level. Neil Pepe, Artistic Director for the Atlantic Theatre Company where *Spring Awakening: A New Musical* found its first home stated:

> " When we got into previews at the Atlantic, one of the things you couldn't have predicted was the effect of having fourteen teenagers onstage singing these incredible songs and talking very truthfully about what it means to go through that time in your life. It was definitely the youngest audiences we had ever gotten, and the most diverse."[36]

Ultimately, Sater and Sheik accomplished exactly what they set out to do, create a new form of theatre that would attract the younger generation. By taking a century old text and reformatting it for a modern audience, Sater and Sheik successfully adapted literature with a modern twist. The message behind Sater's adaptation is far more powerful than the Wedekind production because, as I have just stated, the emotion created by the music makes the experience more relatable for the modern audience. Steven Sater successfully transferred the Wedekind text to the modern stage, removing what was not necessary and adding components that would make the production a Tony award-winning musical. On a personal level, directing *Spring Awakening* has changed me both as a person and as an artist. I chose to direct the production, not because of

the shock value, but for the message Sater created behind his work. I feel Michael Mayer summed up the production perfectly, he states:

> "When all is said and done, what I find most satisfying about the *Spring Awakening* experience is sharing the palpable, abundant joy the show brings to every audience. Despite the moments of darkness in the play, it is truly wonderful to watch these magnificent young people on stage transform their deepest feelings into pure energy by giving voice to these emotions through music. The incandescent spirit released by the performance transcends age, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and politics. We celebrate the power of expression to answer a century of repression. When I watch the play from the back of the house- as I often do- I get to watch the audience watch the show, and I am always moved by this idea that these 1,100 people will go out into their lives remembering the journeys they've taken so far, and facing the journeys ahead with courage, hope and love."[37]

This, ultimately, is the theatre. The idea that one group of people can watch live action onstage and leave with their own understanding of what they have just seen is far more powerful than anything experienced in a movie theatre or on television. This is why the crusade led by Sater and Sheik to attract Generation X is so important. To move a generation is to motivate the future, and the future of theatre is in the hands of this generation.

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FOOTNOTES

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Joel A. Garza received his Bachelor of Science in Corporate Communication from the University of Texas at Austin in 2007, with a Certification in Business Foundations and a Certification in Conflict Mediation. He received his Master of Arts in Communication- Theatre from The University of Texas- Pan American in 2013. He has always had a deep appreciation for performance art, having performed in over thirty productions in less than ten years. He has served on boards and committees, in various capacities, regarding theatrical arts, and formulated All Star Theatre, the first non-profit theatre organization in Edinburg, Texas. Joel can be contacted at 3905 W. Schunior Edinburg, Texas 78541.