

The Harvard Crimson

The Poetry of Duality

Savage/Love Directed by Paul Warner '84 At the Nucleo Eclettico Theater through February 26

By [Gregory M. Daniels](#), February 19, 1983

SAVAGE/LOVE at the Nucleo Eclettico theater is modern love poetry set to music, set to an actor and actress, set to life. The playwrights, Sam Shepard and Joseph Chaikin, combine drama and poetry to explore all the problems and possibilities of communication between a MAN (Kelvin Kerage) and a WOMAN (Maryann Bergonzi). Itself an experiment in communication, this stylistic compromise of genres achieves a rare and successful blend of sensitivity and irony.

The title, *Savage/Love*, suggests the play's dualism; two words, joined and separated by the slash, are flip sides of the same coin. The two actors embody this ambiguity. They slip back and forth between unsynchronized attempts to provoke each other and cooing reconciliation, between absorption in their parts and ironic detachment. In a scene/verse called *Acting*, they walk arm in arm, dressed in curtains, with mock solemnity, down an imaginary aisle. "Now we are acting the partners in love," says MAN.

They repair to an improvised breakfast table in the rear of the stage, and she leans over to kiss him. He leans over too, but only to get the newspaper, which he promptly picks up and reads, ignoring her completely. She ignores him too, at first, but after a while she pokes her shoe through his paper and they start to fight. "Now we are acting the estrangement," says MAN, and, a little later. "Now we are acting that our love has been deepened by the crisis."

A few vignettes later, however, they swing back from the sarcasm verging on the theater of the absurd in *Acting* to the tender sincerity of *Watching the SLEEPING Lover*. As MAN sleeps, WOMAN contemplates him, musing. "You look like my child." The familiar form of the words--a monologue addressed to a silent lover--assists the poetry in the lines: "I embrace you in sleep; my arm moves with your breathing."

Bergonzi puts an impressive emotional intensity into her next lines: "I want to strangle your dreams...I want to know that I'll die before you--I want to know that I'll die before we aren't lovers anymore." Bergonzi radiates energy, skipping across a wide range of expression from a throaty Mac West to wounded silence. Although she overacts a little when in her coquettish voice, the rest of her performance is polished and professional.

THE SAME DUALISM extends into the two characters. While Bergonzi is energetic, bouncing at times along with the music of the three-piece band, Kerage is reserved, reading several of his first Race deadpan from a script that WOMAN gives him. Kerage gets a chance to display his ability, oddly enough, in a scene in which MAN cannot express himself. He deftly executes the complicated task of communicating a communications breakdown. Kerage's rather emotionless stutterings raise the unsettling possibility that MAN does not care whether he is being understood.

Director/Set designer Paul Warner '84, too, seems to want the audience to think. His set is more cerebral than realistic: In the wings, chairs float above the floor; on stage is a clutter of props and a telephone hanging down from the ceiling. By an occasional gesture within the play, Warner raises his own questions about the reality of theater: WOMAN pours MAN a drink of something from a while

prop bottle and actually spills liquid onto his hand through his make-believe wine glass. Mostly, however, Warner plays it straight, competently choreographing MAN and WOMAN'S sexual tangle on the floor at one point and making imaginative use of trunks, screens, and mirrors. Before his first entrance, MAN can be seen in a full-length mirror at the back of the stage, an effect borrowed from cinematography.

The most inaccessible thing about the show is its location, for the Nucleo Eclettico theater is well hidden beneath the European Restaurant near the Haymarket T station. The position gives the play a North End flavor. Bergonzi, especially, injects occasional Italian words into the dialogue.

Composer Peter Melnick adds a fun polish to *Savage/Love*, providing hummable original scores for the little bit of singing and making the band a sort of character by its intrusions among the lines and occasional interaction with WOMAN. *Savage/Love* is a poetic dialogue about the nuts and bolts of human relationships; the performance at the Nucleo Eclettico theater captures all its beautiful bitter/sweetness.