

To Hold the One-Way Mirror Up

By

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ACT I

Scene 1

The stage is a theater, set up almost like a reflection of the audience. The performance space is DS, the audience US. The audience is raked, and we can easily see the expressions of each member. The performers have their backs to the house, direct everything to the onstage audience. The actors are all visibly male, the audience all visibly female.

There are at least five and no more than ten actors. There are at least fifteen and no more than thirty audience members.

The actors follow in the classical tradition. They are booming, over-the-top, highly emotional, and also clearly talented. The audience responds most favorably.

We enter mid-play; a particularly funny line has just been said, and the audience is laughing happily. At the peak of the laughter an actor speaks:

ACTOR

Could I find out
The woman's part in me! For there's no motion
That tends to vice in man, but I affirm
It is the woman's part: be it lying, note it,
The woman's; flattering, hers; deceiving, hers;
Lust and rank thoughts, hers, hers; revenges, hers...

The audience makes sympathetic and intrigued sounds.

ACTOR

'Tis the strumpet's plague
To beguile many and be beguiled by one!

The audience sneers and laughs disdainfully.

ACTOR

How easy is it for the proper false
In women's waxen hearts to set their forms!

The audience hisses delightedly.

ACTOR

If that the earth could teem with woman's tears,
Each drop she falls would prove a crocodile.

(CONTINUED)

The audience cries and nods their heads.

ACTOR

Should all despair
That have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind
Would hang themselves.

The audience laughs and laughs and laughs. In an obvious, ridiculous imitation of a female:

ACTOR

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here!

Thrusts hips and makes sex noises. The laughter of the audience builds...

ACTOR

Frailty, thy name is woman!

The audience laughs uproariously. They are hysterical. The actors pat each other on the back, congratulate each other as the laughter, some time later, dies down.

An actor goes into the audience and begins surveying the crowd. The women are all eager to be chosen, raise their hands, pick me, pick me! He takes one of the women, an ingenue type, onto stage with him. The audience claps politely, if resentfully. The chosen one is clearly and prettily excited.

The actor takes her hands and sweeps into a kneeling bow. He then rises and, bending her backwards, gives her a long, chaste, romantic kiss. He then spins her to the next actor, who also kisses her, then she is given to the next actor and so on. Each time she is given to the next actor it becomes less whimsical and more sexual, more forceful. The clapping and laughter of the audience grows with each hand-off. The ingenue should become increasingly dazed and uncomfortable, and finally downright traumatized. After the last actor, she finds herself in front of a cheering audience. The energy of her audience rewrites her emotions, and she ends up feeling loved and victorious, bowing delightedly, and then, with a gesture from the first actor, returns to her seat to much cheering.

(CONTINUED)

ACTOR

Frailty, thy name is woman!

The actors come together and bow three times, SR, US, SL. As they turn DS all noise ceases.

The actors spread out and come to the very edge of the stage. They are subtle now, and horribly menacing. The audience in the house should feel as if at any moment the actors might leave the stage and attack them.

Overlapping (but not simultaneous):

ACTOR

It is the woman's part: be it lying, note it,
The woman's; flattering, hers; deceiving, hers;
Lust and rank thoughts, hers, hers; revenges, hers...

ACTOR

'Tis the strumpet's plague
To beguile many and be beguiled by one!

ACTOR

How easy is it for the proper false
In women's waxen hearts to set their forms!

ACTOR

If that the earth could teem with woman's tears,
Each drop she falls would prove a crocodile.

ACTOR

Should all despair
That have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind
Would hang themselves.

ACTOR

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here!

ALL ACTORS

Frailty, thy name is woman!

Silence. The men join hands and slowly raise their arms into the air. A moment. And then the women behind them jump to their feet, clapping wildly. Vigorous applause. The men, still linked, turn and exit SL or SR. The light focuses on the women in the audience, still applauding passionately, as the rest of the stage dims. Then the lights fade on the women as well.