

I just had a marvelous evening with *The Oldest Boy* and his deeply affecting parents. The *Boy's* father, born in Tibet, was carried over the Himalayas by his mother to grow up as a refugee in Nepal. The *Boy's* mother was a disaffected writer and graduate student from Ohio. Their meeting is touchingly recounted as the story unfolds, and their marriage, which ultimately takes them to the US, is the second of the three ceremonies that create this wonderful play.

My appreciation runs deep. I have studied and lived with Tibetans, especially Tibetan scholars and meditation masters, on and off for nearly 50 years. The conversation between traditional Tibetan and contemporary American perspectives is part of my life and central to *The Oldest Boy*. Sarah Ruhl's play is incredibly skillful as it brings Tibetan and Buddhist perspectives to life in authentic ways and weaves them into the story of a family whose love and challenges we can all relate with, and at the same time moves the plot line right along.

The plot opens with a knock on the door. Mother answers. She is as surprised to see two Tibetan monks standing there as they are to see her. But anyone familiar with Tibetan culture recognizes they are probably here for reasons involving her three year old son, the boy of the title. The Mother herself does not guess this. She invites them in. There is a charming tea ceremony during which the two worlds start to speak to each other as Mother and the monks talk about their lives.

All of this is charming and also rings true. Lloyd Wayne Taylor gets just right the gestures of utterly personable and deeply practiced master; Nova Wang is equally compelling as more novice monastic. They are a delight; and Molly Wetzell is completely convincing an alternately tender-hearted and fiercely protective mother.

The conundrum the guests bring to the family impacts the American Mother and her Tibetan Father in different ways. Ruhl's skillfully wrought dialogue opens up for us all what it's like to live in a culture that sees each newborn as carrying the story of their own previous births. In the playwright's hands, this is not as an exotic or abstract theory, but something we easily understand lens of a loving family and the gently transcendent possibilities of each person in it. All of this palpably enhanced by the stage setting's delicate artistry.

The family's pain, love, and consternation meaningfully carries forward the significance of the earlier scene's poignant flashback of how Mother and Father, against all odds, meet and fall in love. Fong Chau as Father elegantly wears both loyalty to his native culture and to the family he has now established in the US. The monks and Mother all expand their horizons as they meet their own challenges, both catalyzed by the love they share for the oldest boy, a living puppet touchingly voiced by Pin Lim and adroitly animated by Ario X. Boentaran.

In short, *The Oldest Boy* is a moving and entertaining reflection on, among other things, the expansiveness of human possibility. It's quite a marvel for both mind and heart. Don't miss it!

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