

Charlie Edwards

Theatre in London Journal Entry

### **Billy Elliot**

Billy Elliot was an amalgamation of a play, a musical and a ballet that were all fantastically done which made it different from everything else we had seen on the trip. Each individual aspect of the show was excellently done but the most impressive thing was the fact that they all worked together as a whole even better. The combination of acting, singing and dancing was woven together so seamlessly that it came to the point where you didn't feel that it was odd that miners were breaking out into song or dance. The emotional connection of all the actors was excellent and connected with the audience on more than a superficial level. There were moments in the show where I found myself empathizing with the characters because their pain felt so real that I was almost brought to tears.

The fact that it was a musical didn't take away from the depth of the show and the themes that it tried to show. One interesting example of juxtaposition in the show was the death of the town due to Margaret Thatcher's new laws that were implemented which affected the mines with a sort of 'birth' of Billy's dancing career. It acted as a sort of circle of life idea where the town's death was almost necessary for Billy to take off and succeed in ballet. Another thing that was clearly evident was the political messages that were being sent in this show which had a very anti-Thatcher quality to them, the woman who was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom at the time when the show was set. On more than one occasion Margaret Thatcher is ridiculed and made fun of, at one point being the focus of a humorous song. Much of the economic decline and death of the town is blamed on Margaret Thatcher. This political message, while very humorous and, conversely, serious at points, was probably appreciated more fully by the local audience because of their direct connection to the events that were taking place on the stage just as a play dealing with Ronald Reagan would be appreciated more by Americans.

Gender was another topic that was played upon all throughout the production. Many conventional gender roles were challenged in the play, such as the fact that boys that do ballet are 'puffs'. This notion

comes from Michael, Billy's friend who does boxing, yet spends his time trying on women's clothing, accessorizing the outfits he puts together, and putting on makeup. To take it even further Michael even mentions that it's fine to do those things because his father does them as well who is a mine worker. To emphasize the point that it's alright to do things that are associated more with women than young boys, they sing a number about the importance of being able to express yourself. The role of Debbie also goes against most conventions of gender roles due to the fact that she is the one making all of the advances on Billy when it's normally the opposite case when it comes to boys and girls. She even offers to show Billy her rear end which is pretty crude behavior for a young girl although it is quite funny at the time it happens.

Another issue that is touched upon is the idea of lower class versus upper class, in many different aspects. The first is the lower class economic system versus the upper class government which is shown through the whole premise of the play which depicts a town of miners on strike because of the attempts by the government to disband the labor unions. This also comes into play when Tony refuses the money from the 'scab' because it was made by breaking the picket line and, therefore, the upper class money that was suppressing the town. Another example of the class struggle is the idea of lower versus upper class art, or boxing versus ballet. Boxing, being a lower class sport or art, is something that Billy's father can understand him being interested in, but he is baffled by the upper class idea of ballet and can't comprehend why Billy would be interested in doing it. There is also the use of class in the fact that the lower class worker cannot afford to send his son to a school to focus on his dreams of doing ballet which, again, is the upper class form of sport.