

The Wedding Cup: or Sophonisba's Chalice, and Other Tales

Thomas Geisler

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The title play, a semi-finalist for the 2006 Eugene O'Neill Playwrights Conference Competition, traces the evolution of Sophonisba, a political pawn in the Second Punic War. While the premise may be obscure, the inherent tension makes for great drama and Geisler works the story to full potential.

Geisler, a graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School, teaches at the University of Connecticut and the University of New Haven. This collection brings together three other short pieces, all of which are modest compared to the dramatically meaty title play. "No Woman Is An Island" reimagines the myth of Theseus / Ariadne, wherein Theseus abandons Ariadne on the Isle of Lesbos to the delight of Sappho. The premise is fun, and the interaction playful, but ultimately, the piece leaves the reader a bit disappointed as it rarely rises above the myth's central idea.

"In the Beginning" suffers from the same problem. God speaks to Moses and Moses translates; hence the discrepancies in religion. Again, the gag supersedes the development of the characters. By God's second description, the joke is busted wide open. The humor and the idea both need to continue evolving to make the piece compelling.

"CAFeFIEND" tracks a date between an uptight intellectual and the emotional hippie girl he is trying to impress. The characters here are cliché, the dialogue stilted and the exposition obvious and overpowering. The title play, however, has a great deal of situational merit and tension. Sophonisba, daughter of a Carthaginian general, is betrothed to Massinissa, Prince of Eastern Numidia, and she is besotted. Massinissa fights on the side of Carthage, against Rome, in order to secure her hand. Unfortunately, as power shifts, Sophonisba must choose between duty and love. Geisler creates a clear arc of character that audiences hear in Sophonisba's dialogue. Initially, she speaks like a young woman naively in love, but by the end of the play, she plays a dangerous role, full of political machinations and torn allegiances. Impressively, Geisler makes the drama real for all of his major characters; each has much to lose and much to gain and though history reveals the winner, Geisler unveils all the personal consequence for the characters. Occasionally, the exposition overwhelms the scene, as in the Roman senate scenes, but largely the play makes real the players of a largely forgotten moment in history.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (September 4, 2010)

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