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Cow. Slob. Pig. How many insults can you hear before you have to stand up and defend the woman you love? Tom faces just that question when he falls for Helen, a bright, funny, sexy young woman who happens to be plus sized-and then some. Forced to explain his new relationship to his shallow (although shockingly funny) friends, finally he comes to terms with his own preconceptions of the importance of conventional good looks. Neil LaBute's sharply drawn play not only critiques our slavish adherence to Hollywood ideals of beauty but boldly questions our own ability to change what we dislike about ourselves.

Fat Pig Details

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From Reader Review Fat Pig for online ebook

Jon Hewelt says

Absolutely disgusting, and terribly written.

I've written about my disdain for Neil LaBute before. Not only are his plays incredibly mean-spirited and misogynistic, but they're not really well-written either, so even if he IS doing something subtly skewering misogynistic characters, the writing isn't good enough to adequately distinguish between the opinions of the characters and the writers.

Case in point: Fat Pig, a play about a man coming to terms with his overweight girlfriend. Gag. Mistake number one is centering this play on the guy. Neil LaBute's protagonists, from what I've read, are ALWAYS guys, and they're always milquetoast and uninteresting, with stuff happening TO them rather than them making stuff happen.

But the worst part of Fat Pig is just the premise. Tom (the protagonist) starts dating a woman larger than himself and his co-workers ("friends", the play charitably calls them) make fun of him for it. And not only make fun of him for it, but one of his female "friends" keeps picking on his girlfriend because she herself is attracted to Tom. It's just . . . gross.

The whole play is horrendously gross, and it LaBute doesn't put in enough effort to justify its grossness. Maybe there IS a subsection of society that's not okay with fat people. (Okay, we KNOW there's a subsection of society that's not okay with fat people.) And maybe there's a Tom out there who's so fucking shallow that his friends criticizing his girlfriend's weight would actually give him fucking pause. But what does that ultimately prove? An asshole can't get over standard conventions of beauty? That standard conventions of beauty are dumb? Does LaBute assume that the majority of people out there would find this a worthwhile topic of debate?

It's been a while since I read this, so I'm a little fuzzy on the details, but the feeling has stuck with me: disgust. Disgust at such a shallow and gross play. Even if I didn't vehemently disagree with the fundamental premise, I'd still hate this play. Characters are one-note and have little room to grow and the dialogue is just horrendous. Stilted, awkward, gross. Gross! I'd still say check this out, because it's fascinating how terrible it is. But ugh. Fuck Neil LaBute.

Reese says

Neil LaBute's FAT PIG is dedicated to David Mamet. Really dedicated to Mamet. In fact, if a friend told me that Mamet actually wrote the play, I'd believe him/her.

FRIEND: Read this. I think you'll find it. . .

REESE: Of course. Interesting. . .and. . .

FRIEND: Yes, most people do. But you, more than most. . . will appreciate. . .

REESE: A work about. . .

FRIEND: Exactly. Besides, Mamet wrote. . .

REESE: This?

FRIEND: His hand's on every page. You do still enjoy. . .

REESE: Reading Mamet's. . .

Usually. And I did like FAT PIG -- even though Mamet didn't write it. Lately, titles have been controlling what I choose to read. LaBute's called out to me. The play's preface "sealed the deal." Although the biographical material in the preface is more closely connected to an earlier LaBute work, I had an appetite for the play entitled FAT PIG (I've been one) by a playwright who "set up a rather specific regimen for himself" without "read[ing] the Atkins book or consult[ing] anyone in the medical profession. . . . [a]nd. . . dropped sixty pounds"(ix). I did that -- around the same time that LaBute did it. The playwright didn't keep the pounds off; his best work is apparently tied to unhealthy eating habits. Having no career as a writer, I didn't feel the need to eat my way back into pigdom. But seriously. Oh -- I was being serious. Well, seriously more important is the subject of FAT PIG: the enormous importance that we attach to appearance. LaBute gives us a somewhat disturbing, occasionally amusing, and undeniably honest look at what we look at and look at and look at. See for yourself -- it belongs on the stage, but it's also good on the page.

david says

Man walks into a cafeteria for lunch, and immediately fixates on a corpulent woman, alone at a table, laden with viands. She asks if he would like to join her. He does.

What follows is; Simple. Honest. Lovely.

Flawless are they who have acknowledged their flaws.

Warning. This play is not for men who flex their muscles in sleeveless t-shirts, women who use superfluous foundation and makeup.

Derek Dewitt says

I loved it. Great, natural, realistic dialogue. A hard look at some real truths in modern Western society. And yeah, the ending is a bummer, but it's what gives the play the punch it needs to make a lasting impression. The two main takeaways from me are what others have written here - the fact that it is a conscious choice to change or not change, to allow what other people think and say to affect what you do, or not; and the old truth that we hate in others what we hate in ourselves, or in what we ourselves might become, or have lurking within us. It's easy to let the realism and flow of the dialogue blind you to the tight structure of this play, but that structure is there. Very challenging for actors, and also for audiences. Makes me want to read more of LaBute's work.

Aviecayl Uy says

"**Fat Pig**" by *Neil LaBute* was fast-paced, but it felt neither rushed nor incomplete. The premise was interesting enough, since it tackled body issues, discrimination, reality, and the nature of human beings. More importantly, it showed how an individual could not actually *change*, at least not immediately,

especially when surrounded by people who share the same thoughts and opinions. My only trouble with this was that I did not get much of the references, but other than that, it was a great read. It had a realistic take on how human beings could discriminate or look down on "fat" persons; it showed the cruelty of human beings toward those persons whose physical appearances failed to correspond with the expectations and ideals of some.

My actual rating for this was **3.5/5 stars**.

Dave Logghe says

I love plays about damaged personalities. I think they give great insight into pieces of ourselves that we struggle with, and its easier to look at them through a microscope focused on another person. The main character of the story isn't really a great person but he's got a believable flaw that inspires self examination, and I think that's a good achievement for any play.

Lauren says

Average guy dates fat girl. Social commentary follows.

I've heard people rave about this play for years. I don't get the hype.

Now, to be fair, I read *Fat Pig* after binge reading a bunch of plays published in the first half of the twentieth century, and it's not a fair comparison. *Fat Pig* is flat and amateurish when stacked against some of the giants of the twentieth-century stage. It lectures and postures in place of a story, and while I enjoyed Mr. Bute's style of vague, scattered conversation, it's overkill. I found Helen (the titular Fat Pig) more patronizing than empowering and, unlike works by Philip Barry or Terence Rattigan, there's no chemistry between the characters on the page. Ignoring the weight issue, I didn't get why these characters wanted to be with each other. And fine, I'll admit it. I hated LaBute's portrayal of women. If this is supposed to be empowering and postmodern: Yuck. Not recommended.

Payton says

I really enjoyed the story until the end. Tom's two "friends" were totally unlikeable and I thought Tom would evolve as a character, except he didn't. This play shows how useless men are and the only likable character was Helen. Helen you don't need Tom you are amazing and you'll find someone that loves you for who you really are not some child like Tom.

Rakisha says

I'm not a fan of Neil LaBute. I find his characterizations distasteful, and he seems unable to find a redeeming quality in any of his male protagonists. This play is no different.

Tom is a meely-mouthed, twenty-something account executive who falls in love with an obese librarian, named Helen. When his co-workers find out, they tease him mercilessly. Just when you think he has gathered up the strength to stand up for his woman, he falls prey to peer (societal) pressure. What makes it even worse, is that Helen, who had been very accepting of her own size throughout the play, becomes this pitiful fat girl who begs Tom to take her back. She even promises to get skinny for him. Why couldn't it have been a totally unclichéd ending, and have Helen be angry and gutsy instead of weepy and begging.

Rebecca says

At his best, Neil LaBute forces you to examine truths about yourself (and humanity in general) that you might not want to admit. Like many of his plays, *Fat Pig* is about obsession with physical appearance. Tom, the nice-guy protagonist, is caught between two women: the plus-size Helen and pretty co-worker Jeannie.

Here's the thing: I had a hard time understanding why Tom was falling for Helen. So she has a surprising sense of humor about her obesity. That wouldn't be enough for me, so I guess I am way more shallow than Tom.

On the other hand, I had a hard time understanding how Tom could ever have seen something in the spiteful Jeannie, although Andrew McCarthy's explanation tonight helped. Jeannie is pretty much your normal girl who's just trying to find a good guy, and it frightens her when she finds out she's been rejected in favor of someone who looks like... Helen. It rocks your whole belief system about what traits men value and what priorities they have, and when that happens, a lot of the times all you know to do is be petty and lash out.

That said, LaBute got some things absolutely right and in particular there were a few painful, exquisitely truthful moments. The first comes from Carter, the token a-hole buddy. Carter (played by McCarthy in the original staging) is an unabashed jerk, but he owns it, and in a way he's the real voice of truth in the play. When he explains to Tom just why he shouldn't be dating Helen, his point of view is so effed-up in its bigotry, and yet so coldly logical and, in a crazy way, a genuine piece of friendly advice. This is when I could finally understand how a guy like Tom could be friends with a guy like Carter.

The second comes toward the end, when Helen tells Tom she would change -- radically -- for him. This is the part that broke my heart for Helen and made me realize just who she is on the inside, the burdens and insecurities she must have carried her entire life and the sacrifice she was willing to make to hold on to a piece of ecstasy she assumed she'd never get to experience. This moved me far more than any of the "meet cute" witticisms from earlier in the play.

In short: we are all shallow bastards, even when we try hard not to be.

Ellesse says

Saw this originally in London, directed by Neil Labute.

Like all other Labute plays when you see them done- it rips you a new one and like all the other females in the audience I was gripping my seat in horror that this could be the common belief of man. But I am in love with the writing of this play. The wanting to be better, to better oneself and yet choosing against it. Choosing consciously not to progress.

"Every-time you'll wipe your mouth you'll think of me..." -Helen.

Gabby says

Does this play still apply? With the overflowing sentiments for healthy eating and self love sometimes in the form of workout clothes and detox receipts on Pinterest, I think LaBute's work can still function a decade after being published.

At first, I was hard set against this play. Both Carter and Jeannie didn't seem realistic and Helen seemed to be so destructively making jokes about her weight. As the play progressed, more believability sunk in. Carter's relationship with his mother. The way Jeannie finally confronted Tom.

The underlying turmoil of the human dilemma leaves the reader finding the moments within their own lives when they as weak as Tom.

Jordan says

I had to read this book for my Theater Appreciation class and I was not a fan at all. The play really had no plot line besides Tom stumbling around being a complete jerk. Everyone in this play except for Helen was so superficial. I really didn't like how much Tom cared about what others thought; he dumped a girl that he really liked because his buddies told him that he couldn't like a fat girl. It also made me angry that at the end when Helen bares her soul to Tom saying that she has never said this to any one else, but she loved him enough to change for him. And what does Tom do? He is still like nah, no thanks, my friends wouldn't approve. This play just really got on my nerves

Kaitlyn Lintz says

I absolutely adored this play! It is something that I could personally relate to since I've struggled with my own body image in context of relationships and highly recommend this read to other play lovers.

Rebecca Ryan says

This play makes me feel conflicted. I read it once I heard that a revival was being produced with Chrissy Metz (a hero of mine) but don't understand why I should love this show. I want to like it. I like the idea of a female protagonist who is very overweight and fine with it. I like that Helen doesn't need validated. I relate to her use of humor to defend herself against what people say about her. But that's where my applause ends. Each and every one of the characters were, at their core, unlikable. Tom was disappointing. Helen was snide and patronizing. Carter and Jeannine are just utterly horrible human beings. I respect the need to display individuals as flawed and problematic but I didn't understand the attraction or friendship on a personality level, overarching weight point on Helen's part notwithstanding. The preface and the premise of this play give the impression of wanting to be honest, but ultimately fall flat and end up disappointing at the end.

