

Saved by the bell: examining love in david ives's "sure thing"



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In David Ives's *Sure Thing*, disagreements are avoided with a ringing bell, which serves as a device to shape consensus and allows the couple to fall in love at the end. Both characters are quick to judge and come close to giving up on each other dozens of times throughout the play, questioning the notion of two people falling in love the first time they meet. As a way of satirizing the concept of 'love at first sight,' the couple avoids talking about controversial topics such as politics and previous relationships and fall in love while discussing their taste for Brussels sprouts and crumb cake. The couple's first meeting exposes the ideal of 'love at first sight' as an unlikely possibility because of each character's tendency to make hasty judgments.

Both Bill and Betty are quick to judge one another, and in fact they almost miss the opportunity to meet because of their hasty judgments. For example, when Bill tries to sit down next to Betty for the third time, he tells her she "[does not] know who [she] might be turning down," hinting at the possibility of relationship forming (3). The ideal of love at first sight is meeting someone and not knowing if that person could be the love of one's life. However, Betty makes a hasty judgment and decides to decline his request, foregoing the opportunity to get to know him. Betty's immediate disinterest in Bill debunks the myth of love at first sight because it is unlikely to happen with such quick judgments. Bill and Betty also acknowledge the importance of timing and coincidence, yet continue to make these judgments and become disinterested in each other. Bill tells Betty that she "[has] to hit these things at the right moment or it's no good," (7) and later comments on how even though they both come to this café often, it must always be a "missed connection" that they never see each other (9). They are both aware of the

significance of timing and coincidence, yet immediately after this conversation Bill and Betty lose interest in each other and Bill calls for a waiter. The quickness with which the two of them draw conclusions about each other and forego the opportunity of a relationship shows how love at first sight is an unlikely possibility.

The concept of love at first sight is constructed so that the characters believe that consensus is what will make for a good relationship. On each occasion that Bill and Betty do not agree on something the bell rings and the two are literally saved by the bell, averting any conflict. The two tackle contentious topics such as previous relationships and politics, however the bell rings incessantly during these parts of the conversation and the dialogue progresses minimally. At one point, Betty gives an account of what could be regarded as a personal past experience with someone who used her for sex. Later, Bill references the “castrating bitch [he] dumped” the night before (13). Both accounts of their previous relationships are dismissed with the bell, which serves as a literary device used to force consensus. When discussing politics, four bells ring before Bill reaches the conclusion that he is “unaffiliated,” coincidentally just like Betty (14). The bell stops the couple from speaking about any previous relationships or political opinions and forces them to reach a point of agreement. The constant ringing bells shows how an idealized view of love at first sight demands that the couple agree on everything. Bill and Betty only commit to loving and cherishing one another “forever” after they agree on a series of mundane things such as Woody Allen films, crumb cake, and Brussels sprouts (17).

Bill and Betty falling in love at the end of the conversation undermines the idea of love at first sight because the couple avoids important topics and only fall 'in love' when agreeing on trivial things. Throughout their conversation, Bill and Betty constantly make hasty judgments about one another and as a result, risk missing the opportunity of forming a relationship. Bill and Betty only fall in love once they agree on things, even though they are trivial, which shows how love at first sight is misguided in believing that a couple must agree on everything in order for the relationship to succeed. Bill and Betty's conversation highlights the issues with the idealized concept of love at first sight. The missteps in their conversation around what appears to be a minefield of possible mistakes reveals the unlikelihood of 'love at first sight' because of the characters' hasty judgments.