

# Spring Awakening

Frühlings Erwachen  
A Rock Musical

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Book and lyrics by Steven Sater

Music by Duncan Sheik

Based on the play by Frank Wedekind



## Tuition Material

Arbeitsmaterialien für den fächverbindenden Unterricht: Deutsch – Englisch  
Advanced Version (Oberstufe Gymnasium)

The English Theatre Frankfurt

### Erläuterungen:

Diese Materialien sind für die gymnasiale Oberstufe und eine vergleichende Bearbeitung des Theaterstücks „Frühlings Erwachen“ von Frank Wedekind mit dem Musical von Sater/Sheik und seiner Aufführung in unserem Theater konzipiert.

Sie gehen von einem verbundenen Deutsch- und Englischunterricht aus, bei dem die Schüler sowohl englische als auch deutsche Primär- und Sekundärtexte untersuchen. Je nach Untersuchungsschwerpunkt und Schwierigkeitsgrad können Präsentation und/oder Unterrichtsgespräch in englischer oder deutscher Sprache stattfinden. Die Aufgabenstellungen sind variable Anregungen. An einigen Stellen gibt es Möglichkeiten für Sprachmittlungsaufgaben. Für den Deutschunterricht empfehlen wir die Textausgaben von Suhrkamp und Schöningh (s. Literaturliste im Anhang S. 26). Zum Musical schicken wir Ihnen gerne auf Anfrage das Script, auf dem unsere Produktion basiert. Eine einfachere Version für Schüler der Sekundarstufe I mit Aufgaben und Vokabelhilfen zum Verständnis des Primärtextes finden Sie unter **basic version** auf unserer Homepage.

Based on Wedekind's shattering play of 1891, this exuberant new musical tells the tale of a group of teenagers embarking on the terrifying and thrilling transition from youth to adulthood.

With an exceptional score ranging from power ballads to grunge anthems that capture the spinetingling highs and lows of youthful desire, Spring Awakening has all the energy of a rock concert and all the power of a great drama. A new generation of actors and actresses cast from open auditions in London, will take to the stage of **The English Theatre Frankfurt** to perform this Tony Award-winning musical for you!

See also <http://www.spring-awakening.de/Cast-creative-team-and-band.156.0.html>

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## **1. Introduction: A Glimpse into the History of Sexuality and Morals**

Nineteenth-century male society held an ideal of womanhood to which women were encouraged and forced to adhere: selfless and compassionate; the ideal woman's criminal counterpart was ruthlessly obstinate. Studies into prostitution emphasized the class divide in sexual morals.

Women were viewed as either 'sexless ministering angels or sensuously oversexed temptresses of the devil', with no middle ground.

Why did men impose these feminine ideals upon women? Men in general were supposed to possess greater mental power and activity than females; but that is why they ought to extend towards the latter that sympathy and protection to which they are entitled in virtue of their weak and unprotected condition. Despite male power, it was thought that women were 'morally superior', controlling their sensibilities and regulating their sexual desires in a way which was supposedly beyond male capability.

Women who lost their virginity outside marriage were frowned upon as illegitimacy was sinful: as they showed desire they must be slaves to greed and lust. Within marriage, chastity was supposedly upheld even more rigorously. Sexual excitement was seen as dangerous to the heart and nervous system; sex within marriage was perceived as safer due to its scarcity and the familiarity with partners' bodies: 'Between the husband and the wife, where there is a proper degree of chastity, all these causes [excitement and over-stimulation] either entirely lose, or are exceedingly diminished in its effect. Thus married women, mothers were believed on the whole healthier than the unmarried. It is not Nature that is to be blamed, but unnatural excess.

It was acceptable for men to sin, but women, kept in the pure ideal, could not. 'A woman falls but once', writes Miller, 'and society turns upon her as soon as the offence is known. A man falls many times, habitually, confessed by; yet society changes her countenance on him but little, if at all. There was also the clear display of hypocrisy with men loving one class of women (their wives) but using prostitutes for sex, all the while preaching purity for their wives.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, social purity campaigns became increasingly opposed to 'deviant' sexual practices, including homosexuality, resulting in a 'veil of silence' over sexual topics.

**From: "Prostitution and the 19<sup>th</sup> Century"**

**by Fraser Joyce, Department of History, Oxford Brookes University**

### **Assignment**

How do these moral attitudes and belief show in the script of the musical/play?

Focus on the Characters of Melchior, Moritz, Wendla and Ilse. Examine also carefully the conversation between Herr and Frau Gabor (Wedekind III, 3).

## 2. The Play

**Spring Awakening** (German: *Frühlings Erwachen*) is the German dramatist Frank Wedekind's first major play and a seminal work in the modern history of theatre. It was written sometime between autumn 1890 and spring 1891, but did not receive its first performance until 20 November 1906, when it premiered at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin under the direction of Max Reinhardt. It carries the sub-title *A Children's Tragedy*. The play criticises the sexually-oppressive culture of *fin de siècle* Germany and offers a vivid dramatisation of the erotic fantasies that it breeds. Due to the nature of its content, the play has been often banned.

It was first staged in English in 1917 in New York City. This performance was threatened with closure when the city's Commissioner of Licenses claimed that the play was pornographic, but a New York trial court issued an injunction to allow the production to proceed. One matinee performance was allowed for a limited audience.

There was a 1955 Off-Broadway production at the Provincetown Playhouse. In 1963, the play was produced in England, but for only two nights and in censored form.

### Assignment

Find out more about the life of Frank Wedekind, the themes of his dramas, their new style and the reception of his work. (Cf. Suhrkamp ed. Text + Kommentar pp. 119)

## 3. A Major Theme: the Naked Human Body – Shame and Excitement

### Wedekind I, 2

*Moritz: Do you believe, Melchior, that the feeling of shame in man is only a product of his education?*

*Melchior. I was thinking over that for the first time the day before yesterday. It seems to me deeply rooted in human nature. Only think, you must appear entirely clothed before your best friend. You wouldn't do so if he didn't do the same thing. Therefore, it's more or less of a fashion.*

*Moritz, Have you experienced it yet?*

*Melchior. What?*

*Moritz. How do you say it?*

*Melchior. Manhood's emotion?*

*Moritz. M-'hm.*

*Melchior. Certainly.*

*Moritz. I also . . .*

*Melchior. I've known that for a long while - Almost for a year.*

*Moritz. I was startled as if by lightning.*

*Melchior. Did you dream?*

*Moritz. Only for a little while -of legs in light blue tights, that strode over the cathedral - to be correct, I thought they wanted to go over it. I only saw them for an instant. (...) Oh, this feeling of shame! -*

*What good to me is an encyclopedia that won't answer me concerning the most important question in life?*

The discussion of the value of nakedness in art leads us on to the allied question of nakedness in nature. What is the psychological influence of familiarity with nakedness? How far should children be made familiar with the naked body? This is a question in regard to which different opinions have been held in different ages, and during recent years a remarkable change has begun to come over the minds of practical educationalists in regard to it.

In Sparta, in Chios, and elsewhere in Greece, women at one time practiced gymnastic feats and dances in nakedness, together with the men, or in their presence. Plato in his *Republic* approved of such customs and said that the ridicule of those who laughed at them was but "unripe fruit plucked from the tree of knowledge." On many questions Plato's opinions changed, but not on this. In the *Laws*, which are the last outcome of his philosophic reflection in old age, he still advocates a similar co-education of the sexes and their cooperation in all the works of life, in part with a view to blunt the over-keen edge of sexual appetite; with the same object he advocated the association together of youths and girls without constraint in costumes which offered no concealment to the form.



### Wedekind II, 3

**Hänschen Rilow** *ein Licht in der Hand, verriegelt die Tür hinter sich und öffnet den Deckel*

*Hast du zu Nacht gebetet, Desdemona?*

*Er zieht eine Reproduktion der Venus von Palma Vecchio aus dem Busen -*



*Du siehst mir nicht nach Vaterunser aus, Holde - kontemplativ des Kommenden gewärtig, wie in dem süßen Augenblick aufkeimender Glückseligkeit, als ich dich bei Jonathan Schlesinger im Schaufenster liegen sah - ebenso berückend noch diese geschmeidigen Glieder, diese sanfte Wölbung der Hüften, diese jugendlich straffen Brüste - o, wie berauscht von Glück muß der große Meister gewesen sein, als das vierzehnjährige Original vor seinen Blicken hingestreckt auf dem Diwan lag!*

*Wirst du mich auch bisweilen im Traum besuchen? - Mit ausgebreiteten Armen empfang' ich dich und will dich küssen, daß dir*

### Aufgabe

Vergleichen Sie den Text der Originalszene bei Wedekind (Hänschens Selbstbefriedigung) mit der szenischen Version des Musicals in Bezug auf

- den Einsatz theatraler Mittel
- die Anforderungen an die Schauspieler
- die Funktion der Musik
- die Wirkung auf den Zuschauer

*der Atem ausgeht. Du ziehst bei mir ein wie die angestammte Herrin in ihr verödetes Schloß. Tor und Türen öffnen sich von unsichtbarer Hand, während der Springquell unten im Parke fröhlich zu plätschern*

*beginnt...*

*Die Sache will's - Die Sache will's! - Daß ich nicht aus frivoler Regung morde, sagt dir das fürchterliche Pochen in meiner Brust. Die Kehle schnürt sich mir zu im Gedanken an meine einsamen Nächte. Ich schwöre dir bei meiner Seele, Kind, daß nicht Überdruß mich beherrscht. Wer wollte sich rühmen, deiner überdrüssig geworden zu sein!*

*Aber du saugst mir das Mark aus den Knochen, du krümmst mir den Rücken, du raubst meinen jungen Augen den letzten Glanz. - Du bist mir zu anspruchsvoll in deiner unmenschlichen Bescheidenheit, zu aufreibend mit deinen unbeweglichen Gliedmaßen! - Du oder ich! - Und ich habe den Sieg davongetragen.*

### Musical I,3

#### HANSCHEN

Darling, why - why - do you press your knees together? Even now, on the brink of eternity? Don't you see it's your terrible chastity that's driving me to ...

(A KNOCKING at the bathroom door. HANSCHEN freezes)

#### HERR RILOW

Hansch, that's enough in there.

#### HANSCHEN

Yes, sir.

#### HERR RILOW

Back to bed.  
(HANSCHEN does not move)

#### HERR RILOW

Son?

#### HANSCHEN

One minute.  
(HANSCHEN waits, listening. HERR RILOW goes. HANSCHEN redoubles his exertions)

#### HANSCHEN

One last kiss. Those soft, white thighs ... those girlish breasts ... oh, those cruel cruel knees ...

#### (FRAULEIN

GROSSEBUSTENHALTER claps, interrupting GEORG's playing)

#### FRAULEIN

#### GROSSEBUSTENHALTER

Repetez, s'il vous plait.  
(GEORG turns out and sings. We enter the world of his fantasy)

#### GEORG

WELL, YOU'LL HAVE TO EXCUSE ME, I KNOW IT'S SO OFF, I LOVE WHEN YOU DO STUFF THAT'S RUDE AND SO WRONG.

#### (FRAULEIN

GROSSEBUSTENHALTER rips open her bodice, exposing ...

#### 4. The play in Discussion

##### Emma Goldman:

##### *The Social Significance of the Modern Drama*

FRANK WEDEKIND,

THE AWAKENING OF SPRING



**Emma Goldman** (June 27, 1869 – May 14, 1940) was an anarchist known for her political activism, writing and speeches. She played a pivotal role in the development of anarchist political philosophy in North America and Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. During her life, Goldman was lionized as a free-thinking "rebel woman" by admirers, and derided by critics as an advocate of politically motivated murder and violent revolution.<sup>[2]</sup> Her writing and lectures spanned a wide variety of issues, including prisons, atheism, freedom of speech, militarism, capitalism, marriage, free love, and homosexuality. Although she distanced herself from first-wave feminism and its efforts toward women's suffrage, she developed new ways of incorporating gender politics into anarchism. After decades of obscurity, Goldman's iconic status was revived in the 1970s, when feminist and anarchist scholars rekindled popular interest in her life.

FRANK WEDEKIND is perhaps the most daring dramatic spirit in Germany. Coming to the fore much later than Sudermann and Hauptmann, he did not follow in their path, but set out in quest of new truths. More boldly than any other dramatist Frank Wedekind has laid bare the shams of morality in reference to sex, especially attacking the ignorance surrounding the sex life of the child and its resultant tragedies.

Wedekind became widely known through his great drama "The Awakening of Spring," which he called a tragedy of childhood, dedicating the work to parents and teachers. Verily an appropriate dedication, because parents and teachers are, in relation to the child's needs, the most ignorant and mentally indolent class. Needless to say, this element entirely failed to grasp the social significance of Wedekind's work. On the contrary, they saw in it an invasion of their traditional authority and an outrage on the sacred rights of parenthood.

The critics also could see naught in Wedekind, except a base, perverted, almost diabolic nature bereft of all finer feeling. But professional critics seldom see below the surface; else they would discover beneath the grin and satire of Frank Wedekind a sensitive soul, deeply stirred by the heart-rending tragedies about him. Stirred and grieved especially by the misery and torture of the child, - the helpless victim unable to explain the forces germinating in its nature, often crushed and destroyed by mock modesty, sham decencies, and the complacent morality that greet its blind gropings.

Never was a more powerful indictment hurled against society, which out of sheer hypocrisy and cowardice persists that boys and girls must grow up in ignorance of their sex functions, that they must be sacrificed on the altar of stupidity and convention which taboo the

enlightenment of the child in questions of such elemental importance to health and well-being.

The most criminal phase of the indictment, however, is that it is generally the most promising children who are sacrificed to sex ignorance and to the total lack of appreciation on the part of teachers of the latent qualities and tendencies in the child: the one slaying the body and soul, the other paralyzing the function of the brain; and both conspiring to give to the world mental and physical mediocrities.

"The Awakening of Spring" is laid in three acts and fourteen scenes, consisting almost entirely of dialogues among the children. So close is Wedekind to the soul of the child that he succeeds in unveiling before our eyes, with a most gripping touch, its joys and sorrows, its hopes and despair, its struggles and tragedies.

The play deals with a group of school children just entering the age of puberty, - imaginative beings speculating about the mysteries of life. *Wendla*, sent to her grave by her loving but prudish mother, is an exquisite, lovable child; *Melchior*, the innocent father of *Wendla's* unborn baby, is a gifted boy whose thirst for knowledge leads him to inquire into the riddle of life, and to share his observations with his school chums, - a youth who, in a free and intelligent atmosphere, might have developed into an original thinker. That such a boy should be punished as a moral pervert, only goes to prove the utter unfitness of our educators and parents. *Moritz*, *Melchior's* playfellow, is driven to suicide because he cannot pass his examinations, thanks to our stupid and criminal system of education which consists in cramming the mind to the bursting point.

### Assignment

#### Sum up

- the opinions and attitudes of Wedekind's critics!
- Emma Goldman's point of view

Have a **pro and con discussion** in class! Who would like to advocate Goldman's position? Find out more about her life!

**Drama style:** how can a literary text exaggerate its characters and turn them into types and still be "vividly true"? Explain !

Wedekind has been accused of exaggerating his types, but any one familiar with child life knows that every word in "The Awakening of Spring" is vividly true.

Yes, of what good is an encyclopedia or the other wise books to the quivering, restless spirit of the child? No answer anywhere, least of all from your own mother, as *Wendla* and many another like her have found out.

The girl, learning that her sister has a new baby, rushes to her mother to find out how it came into the world. 'It is hardly necessary to point out the revolutionary significance of this extraordinary play. It speaks powerfully for itself. One need only add that "The Awakening of Spring" has done much to dispel the mist enveloping the paramount issue of sex in the education of the child. To-day it is conceded even by conservative elements that the conspiracy of silence' has been a fatal mistake. And while sponsors of the Church and of moral fixity still clamor for the good old methods, the message of Wedekind is making itself felt throughout the world, breaking down the barriers.



The child is the unit of the race, and only through its unhampered unfoldment can humanity come into its heritage. "The Awakening of Spring" is one of the great forces of modern times that is paying the way for the birth of a free race.

(Boston: 1914; The Gorham Press, Boston, U.S.A.)

## 5. A recent production of the play

Text 5.1    Review: Great Britain



### Grid Iron unleash new production at Traverse, Edinburgh

*As Grid Iron unleashes a new production of Spring Awakening, Yasmin Sulaiman asks why Frank Wedekind's seminal play still resonates with modern audiences*

Frank Wedekind's seminal drama *Spring Awakening* has experienced a renaissance in recent years. The often banned 1891 play, which portrays 14-year-olds grappling with ideas of sexuality, death and religion in the prohibitive climate of late 19th century Germany, was adapted into a Tony Award-winning musical in 2006. However, novelist Jonathan Franzen also released a new English translation of the play in 2007 and a film of the musical is slated for 2011. The latest re-working of Wedekind's classic is a co-production between the Traverse and Grid Iron that has been six years in the making, in which the action is transposed to the Calvinist society of turn of the century Scotland.

Grid Iron has attracted acclaim for its innovative site-specific productions, such as last year's Charles Bukowski-inspired *Barflies* at the Barony bar. In contrast, *Spring Awakening's* Traverse 1 setting seems relatively conventional but director and Grid Iron co-founder Ben Harrison is excited about the possibilities of working in the space. 'We're trying to do it really simply,' he explains. 'The idea of the production is that it's all within the logic of a classroom even though many things don't happen in the classroom – they also happen in the bedroom, in a graveyard – but we tell the story with chalk, blackboards, desks and chairs. Everything should appear as if it's imagined by a 14-year-old.'

This stripped back ethos is also reflected in the script. Written by Scottish playwright Douglas Maxwell, who also wrote Grid Iron's show *Decky Does a Bronco*, the production culls *Spring Awakening's* usually large cast to just eight characters. And though the events of the play take place over a century ago, Harrison believes the existential and sexual anguish felt by its central characters transcends the limits of time. He says: 'I was clearing out my room at my parents' house the other day and I came across these terribly angst poems. They were terrible, but at the time they were everything. It's part of growing up – you go through a phase of believing that you're the only person who fell in love or had an amazing thought about the world. I was very certain about things. And then I spent most of my 20s and 30s feeling less certain about everything.'

Harrison, a fan of the Broadway version, insists that Wedekind's vision in *Spring Awakening* isn't a totally bleak one, describing Maxwell's script as 'much funnier than imagined'. 'So much work is about how miserable it is to be a teenager,' he says. 'Wedekind said this play should be full of joy and sunlight. When you read it on the page, you think that's a bit of a hard task, but he's right because there is an enormous and powerful potential in adolescence.' And despite the plethora of adaptations of Wedekind's drama, he believes that the Grid Iron-Traverse co-production still has something new to offer. 'I think it'll be interesting to see the perceptions people have of the play because of the musical's success. But ours is a very quiet piece of work, it's very restrained. Even if you're familiar with the play, it may surprise you.'

***Spring Awakening, Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, Fri 29 Oct–Sat 13 Nov.***



Text 5.2    Review: Germany

## Frühlings Erwachen 2009 - Wedekind für Heutige

### **Am Deutschen Theater Göttingen wurde das Stück modern inszeniert**

Alice Buddeberg hat Frank Wedekinds Kindertragödie für die heutige Zeit adaptiert. Zwischen Lust und Schmerz, Spaß und Tod spannt sich der Bogen der Szenencollage.

„Möchte doch wissen, warum wir eigentlich auf der Welt sind“, fragte der traurige Moritz Stiefel vor hundertzwanzig Jahren, und die junge Regisseurin Alice Buddeberg wollte wissen, ob das Publikum von heute auf Wedekinds Pubertäts-Klassiker noch einsteigt.

Dazu hat sie den Text umgestülpt, in Fragmente zerlegt, gnadenlos gekürzt und mit poppigen Elementen von heute versetzt. Das Zeitlose der Frage: "Wo positioniere ich mich in der Welt?" sollte für heutige Heranwachsende übersetzt und auf seine Gültigkeit geprüft werden. Eine umstrittene Inszenierung mit starken Bildern, die nachwirken.

### **Modernisierung eines Klassikers der Jahrhundertwende**

Es beginnt mit der Schlusszene auf dem Friedhof. Melchior Gabor taumelt durch das Gräberfeld, zitternd, spastisch zuckend, als wolle er seinen ihm lästig gewordenen Körper abstreifen. Zwar schreit er seinen Kernsatz heraus „Ich war nicht schlecht!“, doch er ist schuldbewusst und will sterben. Die beiden Toten, Wendla und Moritz, erheben sich aus dem Grab, dargestellt durch groteske Handpuppen, und ein schrilles Spiel beginnt. Es verbindet Szenenfragmente aus dem Original mit poppigen Songs, Fremdtexten und Improvisationen der sechs jungen Schauspieler. All dies schafft einen Spannungsbogen zwischen schrillum Spaß und verzweifelter Weltschmerz. Hektische Action wechselt mit quälend langen stillen Szenen, wenn Moritz sich erschießt und Wendla ihre Abtreibung vornimmt. Erwachsene treten im Stück nicht auf.

### **Die Erwachsenenrollen sind gestrichen**

Wedekinds Kritik, dass die Erwachsenen nicht da sind für ihre Kinder, wurde von der Regisseurin ganz wörtlich genommen. Sie hat ihre Rollen einfach gestrichen. Eltern, Lehrer und andere Autoritäten kommen nicht vor. So soll gezeigt werden, dass die existentiellen Probleme die gleichen sind, egal, ob bigotte Moral und strenges Leistungsdenken herrschen oder ob Erziehungs- und Leistungsdruck ganz wegfallen. In beiden Fällen sind die Jugendlichen alleingelassen mit der Frage: Wer bin ich und wo positioniere ich mich in der Welt? In beiden Fällen erfahren Sie keinerlei Unterstützung, die innere Not ist die gleiche. Ganz auf sich gestellt probieren sie alles auf eigene Faust aus und scheitern. Unaufgeklärt wie zu Wedekinds Zeit oder übersexualisiert wie heute – die Teenager stolpern orientierungslos ins Unglück.

### **Moritz Stiefel wird von einer Frau gespielt**

Die Charaktere sind nur skizziert und bieten verschiedene Identifikationsmöglichkeiten an. Die Geschlechterrollen sind noch nicht festgelegt. Daher wird Moritz Stiefel von einer Frau gespielt. Sarah Hostettler verkörpert den Jungen als ein empfindsames, zerbrechliches Wesen, das seine Geschlechterrolle noch nicht gefunden hat. Hänschen Rielow (Alois Reinhardt) verstrickt sich in homoerotischen Fantasien, Wendla (Johanna Falckner) ist frühreife Frau und Püppchen zugleich. Schon etwas reifer, aber zu abgeklärt, erscheint Melchior (Daniel Sellier). Gerda tut cool und bodenständig, Ilse gibt die jugendliche Hure und Hänschen führt eine groteske Masturbationsshow vor. Der vermummte Herr erscheint nicht, er wurde ersetzt durch Ilse, die Melchior am Ende ins Leben zurückholt.

## Das Bühnenbild von Sandra Rosenstiel: So viele Puppen!

Die Ausstattung beschränkt sich auf unzählige grob aus hellem Schaumstoff geschnitzten Gestalten, in die Puppengesichter eingelassen sind, und einige Schaumstoffblöcke. Ordentlich aufgereiht, symbolisieren die Puppen zu Anfang den Friedhof, auf dem die Kindheit begraben ist. Im Verlauf des Stücks bilden sie unterschiedliche Szenarien, bis sie am Ende zu einem wüsten Haufen zusammengeworfen werden. So spaßig ist das Leben inmitten einer freien Spaßgesellschaft eben nicht, ist die Botschaft. Dass das Ganze durch Popsongs (Musik: Stefan Goetsch) und Tanzeinlagen im Stil von Videoclips ergänzt wird, ist wohl als Zugeständnis an ein jugendliches Publikum zu verstehen. Die Premierenbesucher waren nicht einhellig begeistert, doch viele dürften einige starke Szenen mitgenommen haben, die die Essenz von Wedekinds Aussage bewahren.

### Aufgabe

Vergleichen Sie die Rezensionen der beiden Produktionen. Wie wurde der Originaltext für die Bühne bearbeitet bzw. umgesetzt?

Welche Art von Aktualisierung wurde angestrebt?

Wie beurteilen die Rezensenten die Aufführungen?

26.03.2009 Ruth Lisa Knapp

[http://regietheater.suite101.de/article.cfm/fruehlings\\_erwachen\\_2009\\_wedekind\\_fuer\\_heutige#ixzz14cWCdjx6](http://regietheater.suite101.de/article.cfm/fruehlings_erwachen_2009_wedekind_fuer_heutige#ixzz14cWCdjx6)

## 6. The Musical

***Spring Awakening*** is a rock musical adaptation of the controversial 1891 German play of the same title by Frank Wedekind. It features music by Duncan Sheik and a book and lyrics by Steven Sater. Set in late-19th century Germany, it concerns teenagers who are discovering the inner and outer tumult of sexuality. The original play was banned in Germany for a while due to its portrayal of masturbation, abortion, homosexuality, rape, child abuse and suicide. In the musical, alternative rock is employed as part of the folk-infused rock score. *Spring Awakening* received eleven 2007 Tony Award nominations, winning eight, including Tonys for best musical, direction, book, score and featured actor. The show also won four Drama Desk Awards, while its London production won four Olivier Awards.

### 6.1 Characters

#### The Children

- Melchior, headstrong, handsome, and charismatic. He knows much more than the others because of what he reads in books.
- Moritz, Melchior's insecure best friend whose dreams of women haunt him to the point that he is too afraid to fall asleep.



- Wendla, a childhood friend of the boys; she falls for Melchior.
- Ilse, another childhood friend who runs away from a sexually abusive home to become a Bohemian; (symbolically) Moritz's last offer of hope.
- Hanschen, a very humorous, almost arrogant classmate of the boys. An effortless perfectionist who easily seduces Ernst.
- Georg, another classmate who lusts after his older, busty piano teacher.
- Martha, one of Wendla's friends who is abused sexually by her father.
- Ernst, a naive classmate of the boys who falls deeply for Hanschen's seduction.
- Otto, another classmate who dreamt of his mother, as Melchior humorously reveals to Moritz in an effort to help him relax.
- Thea, one of Wendla's friends, a girl who tries to brush her feelings of sexual desire under the carpet to please adults.
- Anna, one of Wendla's friends, who cannot wrap her head around Martha's trials.



### Assignment

Complete the description of the characters after having seen the Musical production at the English Theatre in Frankfurt.

Assess the contribution and the achievement of the actors and actresses in portraying these characters!

### The Adults

- Fanny, Melchior's mother. Very open to the idea of her son understanding his body and desires.
- Herr Gabor, Melchior's father. He allows Fanny to dictate the way their son lives his life, but ultimately is the one to send him away.
- Herr Stiefel, Moritz's father. He has high standards for his son and is furious when Moritz fails.
- The Teachers, who favour Melchior in the beginning and who dislike Moritz. They see him as a bad egg, who will contaminate the others. They make him fail.
- Fraulein Grossenbustenhälter, Georg's piano teacher who he dreams of. She humorously becomes the object of his fantasy during the song "My Junk."
- Fraulein Bergmann, Wendla's mother. She doesn't want her daughter to grow up



## 6.2 Music

HANSCHEN

Come, cream away the bliss  
Travel the world within my lips  
Fondle the pearl of your distant  
dreams  
Haven't you heard the word of  
your body?

### Act I

- "Mama Who Bore Me" – Wendla
- "Mama Who Bore Me (Reprise)" – Wendla and Girls
- "All That's Known" – Melchior
- "The Bitch of Living" – Moritz, Melchior and Boys
- "My Junk" – Girls and Boys
- "Touch Me" – Boys and Girls
- "The Word of Your Body" – Wendla and Melchior
- "The Dark I Know Well" – Martha, Ilse and Boys
- "The Word of Your Body (Reprise)" – Otto and Georg (not on the cast recording)
- "And Then There Were None" – Moritz and Boys
- "The Mirror-Blue Night" – Melchior and Boys
- "I Believe" – Boys and Girls

### Act II

- "The Guilty Ones" – Wendla, Melchior, Boys and Girls
- "Don't Do Sadness/Blue Wind" – Moritz and Ilse
- "Left Behind" – Melchior, Boys and Girls
- "Totally Fucked" – Melchior and Full Company (except Moritz)
- "The Word of Your Body (Reprise)" – Hanschen, Ernst, Boys and Girls
- "Whispering" – Wendla
- "Those You've Known" – Moritz, Wendla and Melchior
- "The song of Purple Summer (Ilse, Ensemble)

### Assignment



In the interview (p. 18 ) Jonathan Franzen admits that he at least liked four musical numbers.

Which are your favorites?  
Give reasons.

Listen to them in class  
and explain:

- What does the song do for the respective scene?
- What does it add to the character?

*See also:*

<http://www.stlyrics.com/s/springawakening.htm>

### 6.3 A Disputed Scene

Steven Sater and Duncan Sheik had originally intended for Melchior actually to rape Wendla at the end of "I Believe," but decided to change that plot because they wanted the scene to be more loving between the two characters. In workshops, "I Believe" ended with Wendla's scream while being raped.

#### Musical

**MELCHIOR**

*Forgive me ...*

**WENDLA**

*It was me. All me.*

*(WENDLA cradles his head on her breast)*

**MELCHIOR**

*I can hear your heart beat, Wendla.*

*(MELCHIOR reaches to kiss WENDLA)*

**WENDLA**

*Oh Melchi -*

*(Then, hesitating)*

*I don't know.*

**MELCHIOR**

*(Cradling her head on his breast)*

*No matter where I am, I hear it, beating ...*

**WENDLA**

*And I hear yours.*

*(MELCHIOR leans close, kisses WENDLA)*

**WENDLA**

*Melchior ...*

*(He kisses her again. Presses his body onto hers)*

**WENDLA**

*No - wait - no -*

**MELCHIOR**

*Wendla ...*

**WENDLA**

*Wait - stop. I can't. We're not supposed to.*

**MELCHIOR**

*What?*

*(No response)*

*Not supposed to what? Love? I don't know - is there such a thing? I hear your heart...*

#### Wedekind II, 5

**Wendla:** Man liebt sich – wenn man küßt ---Nicht, nicht! –

**Melchior:** O glaub mir, es gibt keine *Liebe!* – Alles Eigennutz, alles Egoismus! – Ich lieb dich so wenig, wie du mich liebst. –

**Wendla:** Nicht! ---.....Nicht, Melchior!—

**Melchior:** ---- Wendla!

**Wendla:** O Melchior! ----nicht ----nicht --

#### Aufgabe

**Wendla und Melchior:**

Geschlechtsverkehr aus Liebe oder bloßer Neugier? Vergewaltigung?

Vergleichen Sie den Originaltext Wedekinds mit der englischen Musicalversion (Text und Bühnenhandlung).

Was ist vom Autor intendiert, was ist Interpretation von Regisseur und Schauspielern?

Wie würden Sie inszenieren?

Welche Bühnenhandlung würde dem Problem, um das es Wedekind geht, am ehesten dienen?

## 7. *The Musical in Discussion*

Text 7.1 THEATER REVIEW | 'SPRING AWAKENING'

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December 11, 2006

### **Sex and Rock? What Would the Kaiser Think?**

By CHARLES ISHERWOOD

Think of the Broadway musical, its past, present or future, and any number of phrases may spring to mind, depending on your affection for this embattled but persistent form of popular entertainment. Probably nobody thinks: pure sex.

That might just change. A straight shot of eroticism steamed open last night at the Eugene O'Neill Theater under the innocuous name of "Spring Awakening," and Broadway, with its often puerile sophistication and its sterile romanticism, may never be the same.

In "Spring Awakening," with a ravishing rock score by the playwright Steven Sater and the singer-songwriter Duncan Sheik, flesh makes only a single, charged appearance. And for all its frankness about the quest for carnal knowledge, it is blessedly free of the sniggering vulgarity that infects too many depictions of sexuality onstage and on screen.

But in exploring the tortured inner lives of a handful of adolescents in 19th-century Germany, this brave new musical, haunting and electrifying by turns, restores the mystery, the thrill and quite a bit of the terror to that shattering transformation that stirs in all our souls sometime around the age of 13, well before most of us have the intellectual apparatus in place to analyze its impact. "Spring Awakening" makes sex strange again, no mean feat in our mechanically prurient age, in which celebrity sex videos are traded on the Internet like baseball cards.

Wait a minute. Nineteenth-century Germany? Was sex even invented back then? Officially no. When the Frank Wedekind play on which the musical is firmly based was self-published by the author in 1891, Freud's "Interpretation of Dreams" was still almost a decade away, and the subject of adolescent sexuality was so controversial that it was 15 years before the play was produced, even in a heavily censored form.

The smartest decision made by the creators of this adaptation was to retain the original setting in provincial Germany, to resist a facile attempt at updating the material. It wouldn't have worked. The painful public silence on the subject of sex that warps the characters' minds and in some cases destroys their lives would make no sense in a contemporary

context. But the yawning gap between the force of desire and the possibilities for its release is not exactly an antique phenomenon.

Adolescents today may not have to sheath their hormones in itchy woolen uniforms, but the emotional essence of the story still transmits an ache that few will fail to recognize. “Spring Awakening” lingers almost painfully on those passages in youth when the discovery of sex temporarily disorders everything: relationships to family, friends and the piano teacher; the feel of your body; even the fabric of the world itself, which suddenly seems to shimmer before you like a mirage, alive with danger and promise.

This agonizing state may not sound like something you want to return to, but “Spring Awakening” has been created with such care and craft that the voyage back is a deeply rewarding one. Michael Mayer’s seamless direction works hand in hand with the inventive but unshowy choreography of Bill T. Jones to give potent physical expression to the turbulent impulses of adolescents living splintered lives. Outwardly, in narrative scenes written by Mr. Sater in a formal language appropriate to the era, they are obedient schoolchildren kept on short leashes by their stern parents and watchful teachers. But under their girlish frocks and constricting uniforms, the souls of incipient rock stars squirm and throb, bursting forth whenever a riff from a guitar signals the unquenchable force of their flourishing ids.

“Spring Awakening” has changed in small ways and improved in large ones since it opened last summer Off Broadway at the Atlantic Theater Company. It has moved further away from the Wedekind play, but only scholars are likely to care that a key plot turn, a sex scene with the central female character, the pubescent Wendla Bergman (Lea Michele), has been thoroughly softened from confused ambiguity into a consensual act.

Moritz turns to his friend Melchior for illumination on the subject of those disturbing nocturnal images that keep getting in the way of his Latin lessons, but Melchior’s informal textbook only sends his friend’s imagination careering down new erotic paths. Meanwhile Melchior’s fertile mind has followed his hormones down the road to freedom, and he’s ready to question every tenet of the social contract, and embrace every “ism” he can find, from social- to nihil-.

For the characters’ confusions are ultimately not sexual but existential too. Sex is a central expression of life’s mystery, and a metaphor for it too. But the awakening really taking place in “Spring Awakening” is to something larger than the insistent needs of the flesh. Mr. Sater and Mr. Sheik’s angst-riddled teenagers are growing into a new awareness of “the bitch of living” itself. And the beauty of living too.

Text 7.2 Interview with Jonathan Franzen

## ‘Spring’ Allergy: Jonathan Franzen



(Photo: Greg Martin)

Fairly or not, Jonathan Franzen—author of *The Corrections* and famous spurner of Oprah—has developed a reputation as a bit of a curmudgeon. It might not help matters that the former German-lit major has just published a new translation of *Spring Awakening*, Frank Wedekind’s century-old play about dangerously repressed adolescents—and that his foreword lambastes the “insipid” and “instantly overpraised” Broadway musical adaptation. Franzen spoke with Boris Kachka.

### So what’s your beef, exactly?

I care a lot about American theater, and I’m loath to criticize any spark of excitement anywhere. But what happened to the play is, I think, it became dishonest on the road to being that musical. The real way to

any theatergoer’s heart is to tell some kind of truth about their experience, not flatter them with some kind of pleasant lie they’d like to tell themselves.

### So this is why you decided to try your own translation?

No. Fifty dollars made me do it in 1986 for the Swarthmore College theater department. It was a memorable production. It sat in a drawer for twenty years, and when the musical came along I remembered it. I knew it was a good translation, better than anything else out there.

### One of the essays in your memoir, *The Discomfort Zone*, connects your love of German lit with your own sexual awakening. Is that why you love this play so much?

The play appealed to me primarily because it’s just rocking good. It’s funny and the characters are amazingly vivid. That’s why I’m so cruelly hard on a basically sunny Broadway musical. This stuff does matter to me—the German-literature stuff and the teen-sex part, it all matters.

### Surely there was something redeeming about *Spring Awakening*?

There are four good musical numbers in there. What was unsatisfying was the disconnect between the excitement of those rocking numbers and the ostensible themes of the play.

- Published Sep 10, 2007



## Text 7.3

**A Comment on Jonathan Franzen`s translation and his attitude towards the Musical**

In his Introduction translator Jonathan Franzen rails at length against the recent award-winning Broadway musical version of Wedekind's play arguing that the "maiming" it has undergone in this "insipid" adaptation is worse than the bowdlerizations it was subjected to a century earlier. Wedekind completed his play in 1891 but it was only finally first performed in 1906, and even after that remained hugely controversial. It isn't so much the frank sexuality that is seen as dangerous now, but rather the depiction of teenagers that necessitates destroying the integrity of the play to give it mass-appeal in modern times, so Franzen:

Frank Wedekind's most grievous offense: he makes fun of teenagers -- flat-out laughs at them -- to the same degree that he takes them seriously. And so now, more than ever, he must be censored.

Franzen finds that: "what's really shocking about *Spring Awakening* [...] is how casually and thoroughly amoral the play's action is." Yet Wedekind's play is surely meant to expose the dangers of a rigid moral code at odds with reality. It is the failure of adults (and the educational system) to make youths aware of moral issues that might arise that leaves them ill-equipped to deal with reality --and leads to catastrophe.

One girl is regularly beaten by her father, another envies her and would do anything to take her place. Lust is pervasive and all-consuming, but the teens remain in the dark about what it is that has come over them and don't know how to channel it; inevitably, there comes a point where they can't contain themselves and go too far. Suicide, beatings, rape, teenage pregnancy, abortion, masturbation: it's all here -- and almost every time one can't help but think: they know not what they do.

Pregnant young teen Wendla, who still believed the stork brought babies, sums it up with her too-late recrimination:

"Oh, Mother, why didn't you tell me everything ! "But it's a society so hide- and rulebound that the openness that could have saved the girl is unthinkable. As mom answers Wendla:

"Tell that to a fourteen-year-old girl ? Goodness, I'd sooner have watched the sun go out. "

Similarly, when confronted with a suicide epidemic at school the adults make no effort to determine (much less fix) what might be behind it. They refuse to even acknowledge the possibility that the system may be at fault; instead, they do whatever they can to preserve the system. It is all they know.

Much of the appeal of the play is in its comedy: these characters are indeed often shockingly amoral, or ridiculous in their adult rigidity, but Wedekind presents almost all the scenes with comic elements, an unnerving juxtaposition that makes all these terrible fates haunting in a far different way than a typical tragedy.

This isn't a play about innocent victims. There is little true innocence here. What the children -- and they are, largely, really just children -- are is often completely ignorant, trying to fit what they do know and -- more importantly -- feel within the set-in-stone expectations and demands of society. They're aware that something is off -- that what they're told and what is demanded of them doesn't square with reality -- but can't figure out how to handle that. Naturally, most are shattered by experience.

It's surprisingly effective, and though much of the detail is dated -- for the overwhelming most part children simply aren't treated this way any more -- Wedekind's theatrical craft makes the play as a whole still feel fresh. Constantly shocking as well as surprisingly funny, *Spring Awakening* remains very readable (and watchable).

Jonathan Franzen's translation is certainly adequate, and captures the spirit of the play well enough. He writes in his Introduction that his first priority was to: "leave nothing out", and that he also wanted to: "render Wedekind's lines in such a way that an English-speaking actor has some hope of sounding natural while speaking them", and he seems to have succeeded with these goals. There are any number of word-choices one can (and which we would) debate, but a quick, casual comparison suggests his overall approach seems a distinct improvement over the earlier translations.

### Assignment

#### *A Debate:*

#### Comparison of Viewpoints Texts 7.1 / 7.2 / 7.3

Compare the opinions of the three authors on

- The musical
- Franzen's translation of the Wedekind text

Why do you think is Franzen so critical about the Musical? Are his arguments convincing?



## 8. Comparison – Vergleich des Endes

### Wedekind Drama und Musical Version

Frühlings Erwachen endet bei Frank Wedekind mit Jugendstil-Symbolik: auf einem Friedhof unterm Novembermond. Auf dem Grabstein der Wendla Bergmann, die nur vierzehn Jahre alt geworden ist, steht die Lüge »gestorben an der Bleichsucht« sie ist aber gestorben an den Folgen einer Abtreibung, die ihre Mutter aus Furcht vor der Schande arrangiert hat. Wendlas Geliebter ist der vierzehn Jahre alte Schüler Melchior Gabor, er ist aus der Korrekptionsanstalt geflohen und wird an ihrem Grab von seinem Mitschüler Moritz Stiefel, der seinen Kopf unterm Arm trägt, angesprochen: Moritz hat sich erschossen, weil er nicht versetzt worden ist und diese Schande seinen Eltern nicht zumuten will. Zwei Tote in Frühlings Erwachen: Wendla ist das Opfer einer falschen Erziehung, sie stirbt als werdende Mutter und weiß nicht einmal, auf welche Weise sie Mutter geworden ist, sie meint, ohne Heirat könne man gar kein Kind bekommen, und Moritz ist das Opfer einer falschen Erziehung, er gibt sich den Tod, bevor er noch die körperliche Liebe erlebt hat, einer seiner letzten Sätze ist: *»Es hat etwas Beschämendes, Mensch gewesen zu sein, ohne das Menschlichste kennengelernt zu haben.«*

Unterm Novembermond auf dem Kirchhof, zwischen zwei Toten, zwei Opfern der Furcht vor der Schande - bei diesem erstickenden Ende bleibt es nicht: es erscheint der »Vermummte Herr« und wie der Selbstmörder Moritz Stiefel den unglücklichen Melchior zum Sterben verführen will, so will der »Vermummte Herr« Melchior zum Leben verführen, und es gelingt ihm. Er ist das Leben selber mit all seinen abenteuerlichen Möglichkeiten, er sagt zu Melchior: *»Du lernst mich nicht kennen, ohne dich mir anzuvertrauen«*, und er zieht Melchior von den Gräbern fort: wenigstens für Melchior erwacht der Lebensfrühling dann doch noch, wenn auch zwischen Toten, in einer Novembarnacht.

*Melchior: Leb wohl Moritz! Nimm meinen herzlichen Dank dafür, daß du mir nochj erschienen. Wie manchen frohen ungetrübten Tag wir nicht miteinander verlebt haben in den vierzehn Jahren! Ich verspreche dir, Moritz, mag nun werden, was will, mag ich in den kommenden Jahren zehnmal ein anderer werden, mag es aufwärts oder abwärts mit mir gehen, ich werde dich nie vergessen ...*

*Moritz: Dank, dank, Geliebter.*

*Melchior: ... und wenn ich einmal ein alter Mann in grauen Haaren bin, dann stehst du mir vielleicht wieder näher als alle Mitlebenden.*

### Assignment

#### *The Musical ends with two songs:*

- "Those You've Known" – Moritz, Wendla and Melchior
- "The song of Purple Summer (Ilse, Ensemble)"

Do the songs express the same idea like "Der vermummte Herr" or do the lyrics put a different emphasis on the final scene?

**MELCHIOR**

I'LL WALK NOW WITH THEM.

I'LL CALL ON THEIR NAMES,

AND I'LL SEE THEIR  
THOUGHTS ARE KNOWN.  
THEY WALK WITH MY HEARTAND  
I'LL NEVER LET THEM GO.

I'LL NEVER LET THEM GO

YOU WATCH ME  
JUST WATCH ME,  
I'M CALLING.  
I'M CALLING -  
AND ONE DAY ALL WILL KNOW ..  
(MELCHIOR *stands alone. The lights fade to black.*)

**MORITZ &  
WENDLA**

(*Receding from MELCHIOR*)

NOT GONE.

NOT GONE.

NOT GONE.

NOT GONE

**Scene 10 (Coda) #20 - The Song of Purple Summer ILSE**

***ILSE stands alone. A world washed in song light.***

LISTEN TO WHAT'S IN THE HEART OF A CHILD,  
A SONG SO BIG IN ONE SO SMALL,  
SOON YOU WILL HEAR WHERE BEAUTY LIESYOU'LL  
HEAR AND YOU'LL RECALL...  
THE SADNESS, THE DOUBT, ALL THE LOSS, THE GRIEF,  
WILL BELONG TO SOME PLAY FROM THE PAST;  
AS THE CHILD LEADS THE WAY TO A DREAM, A BELIEF,  
A TIME OF HOPE THROUGH THE LAND ...  
A SUMMER'S DAY,  
A MOTHER SINGS  
A SONG OF PURPLE SUMMER  
THROUGH THE HEART OF EVERYTHING.  
(*The BOYS, the GIRLS, and the ADULTS enter, joining her in song*)

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