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The Appeal

An expert on the English Romantic poets would know for sure, but I assume that William Wordsworth never called his friend and fellow versifier Samuel Taylor Coleridge “fuck-face,” and then moaned later to his sister, Dorothy, “I wasn’t an asshole, was I?” Trashing the historical record, Young Jean Lee’s *The Appeal*, a profane and tough-minded literary example of literary vandalism, gleefully deploys such gratuitous vulgarity, as well as drug taking, childish tantrums, and genuinely thoughtful discussions about nature, poetry and the self. Lee take the great poets down several notches, making them act and sound like mopey undergraduate brats.

Peter Simpson’s acting in the part of Wordsworth, come from the Richard Maxwell school of minimalist stiffness, which make discomfort hilarious while Michael Portnoy’s Coleridge is more of a few stoner type. Playing against her pretty ingénue looks, Maggie Hoffman turns in a chirpy and deranged Dorothy. Rounding out the fiercely talented cast is James Stanley as the dandyish Lord Byron, who confesses that his greatest fear is to have microscopes for eyes.

Not surprisingly, the avant-garde pedigree of the cast – Maxwell, Radiohole and the National Theater of the United States of America – indicates the type of audience that might enjoy Lee’s brainy absurdism. The performances are taut and the language is energetic and muscular. Best of all, this likeable *Appeal* clocks in a one hour; any longer would wear out the poetic conceits.

-David Cote