The Civil Wars: a tree is best measured when it is down (Act III, Scene E, Act IV, Edmond and Epilogue). At the American Repertory Theatre, through March 17.

And naming publics, the American Repertory Theatre has started its performances of The Civil Wars. The play’s premiere, Robert Wilson, is all of a sudden the focus of attention in theatre-minded parts.

It has too always been this way. Robert Wilson is one of those prophets who find their story always performed. After the new legendary opera Eisenstein on the path (in collaboration with Philip Glass), most of his large-scale works have topped in Europe and Asia, where such far avant-garde theatre tend to be more readily available than here. The Civil Wars was no exception. Conceived by Wilson as a twelve-hour giant staged in Europe and produced in pieces only, all but one abroad. The ART now presents the “German” section, which was previously performed in Cologne. It consists of sections of the third and fourth of the five acts.

One might argue about the viability of a diminutive small portion from a heavily tratified whole. But Wilson himself (in a separate interview) compared his work to a park, parts of which can be appreciated without knowledge of its grand whole. The theme and title of The Civil Wars is generic. The drama concerns the struggle and strife in general, from family conflicts to the work to a park, parts of which can be appreciated as an abstract composition. It should be valued first for its grand spectacle, and perfect: every move, every pause, every sound, every silence has its just measure, its perception, synchronisms and cross-references are perfect composition.

In this Wagnerian synthesis, the text is the most problematic component. Indeed, its many subtle points are often submerged in the overwhelming impression of the overall war, and its extensive references (from Empedocles to Kafka)) are sometimes hard to recognize as such. But this is inessential: it merely implies that there is yet another level of meaning in this drama, which might eventually add to its significance.

To illustrate this, consider the Epilogue. During its fifteen minutes, we see Abraham Lincoln crossing the stage, while King Lear and the Earth Mother hold monologues. Lincoln’s austere, black-coated image is blown up and distorted to Gisometti-like proportions, as if to stress his isolation and fragility. Walking slowly, very slowly, he mutters a sequence of two-word phrases juxtaposing the dualities addressed in the play: tempus succendi, tempus moriendi, tempus bellus, tempus pacis, tempus amoris. It is not necessary to know Latin to be captivated by the cadence of this meditation, nor to understand at that point that it sums up the play. Nor is it necessary to know that the shriek and shrill cries of a giant owl with which it is contrasted are actually Hopi Indian prophecies. Throughout intellectual content is translated into emotional impact.

This is an unusual kind of theatre. It is rumored that during preview performances people walked out at an alarming rate. But Wilson’s star is rising in America; this will most likely turn out to be the country’s major theatrical event for this season. Deservedly so, I would say.

Michel Bou

The title of the film discribes the basic plot. Gib (John Cusack) is a freshman in a small Ivy League College in New England. Amid the throngs of people he wants to win the heart of classmate Alison Brad¬(Daphne Zuniga). Gib’s boisterous and vivacious personality is not appreciated by Alison, who finds him silly and obnoxious. When his high-school buddy, Lance (Anthony Edwards), calls him from California informing him of the vast sexual opportunities available at the West Coast university he is attending, Gib decides to pay Lance a visit for Christmas break. But when the plane takes off in a ri¬de-board, only to discover that Alison is in the same car en route to California. The Sure Thing refers to what Gib is trying to achieve: a guaranteed sexual encounter with a “bitchin’” beautiful way-radical Californian chick. On this premise the movie fails miserably.

Admittedly, I found myself laughing on a couple of occasions at the slapstick dialogue, but they were rare compared to the number of times I felt like leaving the the¬atre. The relationship that develops be¬tween Gib and Alison on the way to the West Coast is nicely choreographed but far out-weighted by the common plot.

The Sure Thing continues its promotional tour of the Northeast. Last Monday night she held a press conference at The Ritz Carlton for the college press. I suppose we college students are the target audience; after all, the Sure Thing is a three year old Daphne was justifiably confident of her performance: With flings like Quarterback Princess and The Initi¬ation to her credit, she can be very pleased with her leading role as Alison. Daphne was very pleasant and willing to answer to all questions (even when I asked her if there were any men in her life). “Many!” she answered.) She is a woman striving for career in her profession. Of all possible “losers” she could have picked to star in The Sure Thing is probably one of the bet¬ter roles, a subject of an important token half-reality scenes omnipres¬ent in other films of the same genre.

Daphne Zuniga is probably con¬sidered to take the blame.

Corrado Guerriero