

The New Criterion

Theater

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Tough love

by [Brooke Allen](#)

On *Becky Shaw* at the Second Stage, *The American Plan* at the Manhattan Theater Club, and *Sleepwalk With Me* at the Bleecker Street Theater.

Finally, finally! A really good new play that I can recommend without reservation. It has been such a long dry spell that I had begun to despair of the whole season, both on- and off-Broadway, until seeing Gina Gionfriddo's *Becky Shaw* at the Second Stage. The play is full of surprises, both aesthetic and thematic, and Gionfriddo produces the kind of sharp, high-speed, and high-potency dialogue that so many playwrights aspire to and so few achieve. She writes in a peculiarly masculine style, more akin to Mamet than to any other contemporary author I can think of (though her work is in no way imitative of his). Consulting the program at intermission, I was actually shocked to discover that this rather hard play, as bracing as a cold wind, which resolutely works against the grain of contemporary ideals of sensitivity, had been written by a woman.

The action begins a few months after the death of the b ...

Brooke Allen's latest book is *Moral Minority: Our Skeptical Founding Fathers* (Ivan R Dee).

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