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Desire and Pursuit
by Becca Kaplan | 11/07/2014

Etcetera Theatre, London

2.0
REVIEWER'S RATING
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

A trio of one-act plays must walk the fine line of having a unifying theme and not falling into the trap of redundancy. Unfortunately, *Desire and Pursuit* falls off this balance beam. The three plays are certainly united – all addressing the conflict between soul, desire and the unknown through the eyes of older gentlemen. *Angel* sees a devotee priest confronting the source of his temptation of the flesh. *Now We Are Pope* gives a glimpse into the life of real life writer Frederick Rolfe, alone in his room reliving his most famous novel and embracing and chastising the beautiful Venetian gondoliers. And lastly *Tadzio Speaks...* shines the spotlight on an older Tadzio, the source of youthful beauty and obsession in Thomas Mann's classic novel *Death in Venice*.

Angel saw Christopher Peacock take the stage in the role of the priest. In his quieter or emotionally exhausted moments, Peacock captures the essence of a tormented priest fighting his inner demons. However, with a script prone to poetics and fire and brimstone, Peacock often turns to histrionics, becoming painful to watch. Nonetheless, *Angel* proves a solid start to delving into the inner conflicts in a man devoted to the soul yet tempted by the body.

Now We Are Pope, with Christopher Annus taking the stage as the cantankerous old Rolfe, settles into the poetic language more naturally. Annus is largely to credit for this, as his raspy voice and more grounded performance balances out the languid monologue. The delusion the old man wraps himself in, the paranoia and the misanthropic disdain seeps into every word. Yet this repetitious self-pity and blame needs to be edited down. As in the real world, it can get tiresome listening to someone's tale of martyrdom woe.

Christopher Peacock returns to the stage in *Tadzio Speaks*, capturing the sense of childlike boyhood despite the aged character Tadzio now is. Yet despite this, *Tadzio* is certainly the weakest of the three plays. While intriguing in concept, the agonized childishness of a grown man and the detailed recapturing of an entire novel in a one-act play grows tiresome and painful. The flowery language becomes uncomfortable to watch in the hands of an actor not quite up to the challenge. While dedicated to the part, Peacock does not deliver on the naturalism or truthful, painful confrontation of the character, instead coming across as angst-ridden and rehearsed. Overall, while there are nuggets of beautiful dialogue, interesting thematic exploration, and solid acting, *Desire and Pursuit* is overwhelmed by its length and redundancy of characters and content.

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Drama
By Martin Foreman
Director: Martin Foreman
Cast includes: Christopher Peacock and Christopher Annus
Etcetera Theatre, London
Until 13th July 2014
Time: 19.30
Review by Becca Kaplan
9th July 2014

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