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The Changeling



TheatreRats presents a revival of Middleton & Rowley's 17th century tragicomedy *The Changeling*. This description

is from the press release: "When Beatrice enlists Deflores and her maid, Diaphanta, to help her marry Alsemero, he play pushes the limits of lust, love, and sanity for all involved. At the same time, another trio of men battle for the heart of Isabella, in an actual asylum. The two seemingly separate plots converge on the question of where to draw the line: where do decisions we make for love turn to lunacy... and with what terrible consequences?"

Pictured: Sarah Tillson and Vince Phillip in The Changeling

nytheatre.com review

George Hunka · March 4, 2006

Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's 1622 play *The Changeling* is one of those Jacobean theatre masterpieces that is frequently praised (by T.S. Eliot, among many others) and little performed. It requires a large cast, considerable patience (for the plots in these things strain credulity), and a supple directorial imagination: the manifold rapes, disfigurements, and murders of the Jacobean sex tragedy invite both exaggeration and alienating irony that tend to undercut the plays' profound moral contexts.

High praise, then, to TheatreRats, a very young company under the artistic directorship of Alexis M. Hadsall, which is presenting a paltry eight performances of Lauren Reinhard's staging of the classic. The production vividly conveys the richness and sublimity of the Middleton's painful vision of lust, murder, and love without either the alienating exaggeration or irony that would render

VENUE
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OPENED
March 2, 2006

CLOSES
March 11, 2006

PERFORMANCES
Wed - Sat at 8pm;
Sun at 2pm

RUNNING TIME
2 hours, 45 minutes

TICKETS
\$15

MORE INFO
[Visit the show's official website](#)

CAST
Vince Philip, Sarah Tillson, Anna Chlumsky, Jess C. White, Jamie Askew, Robert Haufrecht, Cedric Jones, Joshua Price, Zac Springer, Ridley Parson, Ari Vigoda, Malachy Orozco, Michael Freeland, Brooke Hoover, Chris Speziale, Amy Kersten, Kenneth Naanep, Jen Cintron

AUTHOR
Thomas Middleton & William Rowley

DIRECTOR
Lauren Reinhard

SETS
Vince Lingner

LIGHTING
Lance Darcy

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it a Quentin Tarantino-esque parody of itself. Eight performances are not enough.

Beatrice is in love with Alsemero, a nobleman; unfortunately she is betrothed by her father Vermandero to Alonzo, another noble lord. Beatrice returns Alsemero's attractions in secret, but condescendingly spurns those of Deflores, Vermandero's psoriatic servant, who also lusts after her. Beatrice develops a plan: she sexually teases Deflores and urges him to murder Alonzo, vaguely promising him her maidenhead as reward. Deflores kills Alonzo and demands his payment from Beatrice; Beatrice withholds it; Deflores takes it by force. In the meantime, Alibius, the keeper of a nearby madhouse, has left his randy and sexually dissatisfied wife Isabella in the care and guardianship of his man Lollo, who is all too ready to allow Isabella to fulfill her fantasies right there in the madhouse, among the inmates.

The Changeling of the title refers specifically to one of Alibius's inmates, an idiot whose attraction to Isabella turns him into a quite able and eloquent lover, but all of the characters are changelings in one way or another. Beatrice's love for Alsemero turns her into a scheming murderess, and later she finds herself touched by Deflores's ironic concern for her honor; Alsemero's jealousy turns his love for Beatrice into a possessive self-love. And in the end all this love and lust and desire turns to death.

Director Lauren Reinhard displays the wisdom to stage the language and the passion rather than the plot, which is quite able to trundle along on its own with no help from the actors. The great beauty and chaos of the piece is in the heated, tactile quality of the language and the performances. Reinhard skillfully deploys a huge cast (nearly 20 in a theatre that may seat only three times that) across a nearly bare stage, and for the most part avoids the inevitable invitation to self-indulgence that these violent and sexual plays tend to engender. She doesn't avoid it altogether: those writhing Bedlam inmates upstage through the entire length of the play can grow tiresome and distracting. But by and large her staging is remarkably sensitive, and the first act closes with an astonishing image of fear, vulnerability, sexuality, and violence: daring, provocative, and accomplished.

The TheatreRats ensemble here collected ranges across a wide field of experience: Malachy Orozco as the leering and scheming Lollo, in his first role fresh out of Montclair State University, promises a great career ahead of him; film and theatre actress Anna Chlumsky as Isabella brings a cheery and sexy earthiness to her performance and makes a terrific impression as a faux-madwoman herself.

But the highest praise for the performances must go to Sarah Tillson as Beatrice and Vince Phillip as Deflores. Beatrice is as lustful in her own way as Deflores is in his, her lust like his leading to the perversity of murder, and in this they begin to find affectionate sympathies despite Beatrice's great beauty and Deflores's deformity. Tillson plays Beatrice at first in entire control of the situation, confident in her ability to manipulate Deflores; she then slips more and more into fear and madness, losing that control in the end, and demonstrating more and more nakedness and vulnerability even as her clothing falls more and more into disarray; the deeper into madness Beatrice descends, the more skillfully and emotionally Tillson deploys and embodies the language. Phillip, on the other hand, glories in Middleton's language more

COSTUMES

Chole Barrett

SOUND

Julie Pittman

STAGE MANAGER

Bob McNamara

PRODUCING COMPANY

TheatreRats

than any other member of the cast. Deflores is at first a villain, then a victim of his own desires. Phillip is fully the master of the violent imagery of the play and embodies it entirely and without reluctance, with much care given to the language's disturbing energy and grace.

I also want to praise Jamie Askew, who in the smallish role of Diaphanta, Beatrice's waiting woman, makes a quirkily intriguing character from a potentially dull part before being sacrificed to the lusts and fear of her mistress.

Credit for the spare but eloquent design is due to Lance Darcy (lighting), Vince Lingner (sets), Julie Pittman (sound) and Chole Marie Barrett (the often terrific costumes, especially for Beatrice, Lollio, and the madhouse inmates).

It seems that we are facing a revival of the plays of the Jacobean theater; between this production and Red Bull's *Revenger's Tragedy* earlier this season, the future bodes well for a new, fresh eye on these plays that more and more seem to reflect the violence, chaos, and oppressive puritanisms of our own 21st century's times. And our young directors are taking them seriously rather than as an opportunity for facile jokes at the expense of a lushly lyrical English stage verse. With directors like Lauren Reinhard and ambitious and talented young groups like TheatreRats, I'm persuaded that these plays are in good hands.



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