

Raby directs *Plutocrats*

interview by Grant N. Winton

So what is a plutocrat anyway? This was the obvious question to ask of Gyllian Raby, the new Artistic Director of Northern Light Theatre, and the director of *Plutocrats*, which opens tomorrow night at the Kaasa Theatre. Raby comes to us after five successful seasons as Artistic Director or co-Artistic Director of the One Yellow Rabbit Performance Theatre in Calgary.

Plutocrats, which is making its Canadian premiere here, is a farce that walks the line between all out comedy and tragedy. It is about a couple who just want to live a quiet family life, pay off their mortgage, eat wholemeal bread, and discover the secrets of their past lives — then he has an accident at work, with smouldering plutonium, which affects him strangely. They must then dodge the machinations of corrupt union officials, paranormal psychologists, and plutonium smuggling terrorists.

In the 19th century, a plutocrat was an Industrial Revolution tycoon; the sort of person who owned factories where children worked 12 hours a day, and who in some cases printed his own money if there was something he wanted to buy. Paul Goatze, the author of this play, sees the government of the 1980's in a very similar way, as far as plutonium is concerned. No-one except the government is allowed to own plutonium, and to pay the \$1 million per kilogram it costs, they often print their own money. The name Plutocrat is even a shortened form of Plutonium-Beurocrat.

But for all the play's social content, Raby is convinced that the uproarious comedy involved will keep it light-hearted enough for a good evening's entertainment. She says she chose the play as much for the

challenge of the theatrical style, as social content.

The staging involved seems like a director's nightmare. There are eight locations required, two time periods, lots of telephone conversations, and to make it all worse, it must be performed on the Kaasa's thrust stage. These problems don't seem to slow Raby down. Instead, she plans to use all the switching to add to the comedy. She has been working with composer David Rimmer to give the play a complete musical score, and has taught her actors to rap (as in Run-DMC style) during the numerous telephone conversations.

Plutocrats is being used by Northern Light as this year's "Switch On Schools" production. The theatre is working extensively with school children to broaden their understanding of drama, the subjects of plays, and the workings of the theatre. The students will attend a special performance of the play, sponsored by Imperial Oil. Raby is very pleased with their participation, especially considering the subject matter, and compliments them for being environmentally and educationally concerned.

Northern Light Theatre will be presenting four other plays this season, including *Treacheries of the Blue Angel*, written by Raby herself. We can also expect impressive staging for this play, which sees the old Marlene Dietrich movie remade as a music video. It also examines the nature of videos, and how they present the '80s version of the femme fatale. Raby chooses all the plays for Northern Light on the basis of entertainment, social content, and an out-of-the-ordinary theatrical style. She insists that it is true theatre that is presented, and not just television on stage. *Plutocrats* runs from September 30th to October 16th in the Kaasa Theatre at the Jubilee Auditorium.



Dragos Ruiu

Gillian Raby is the new Artistic Director of the Northern Lights Theatre and a playwright in her own right.

Cronenberg film disturbing

Dead Ringers ★★★★★
Famous Players

review by Paul Sparrow-Clarke

Imagine two brilliant young men who are identical twins, impossible to tell apart. Imagine further that neither of these twins can fully experience something unless he describes it in detail to the other. Then imagine that the twins are not in fact separate identities, but are two parts of one soul. This is the disturbing new vision of Canadian director David Cronenberg.

The aforementioned twins are doctors Elliot and Beverly Mantle, both played by Jeremy Irons, and both gynaecologists who have caused a stir in their field with the invention of a unique surgical implement. Elliot is the womanizer, the smooth-talking seducer, the well-spoken salesman. Beverly is in many ways the complementary personality: quieter, more withdrawn and sensitive, and ultimately less successful in his relationships with women.

Into this scenario comes Claire Niveau (played by Genevieve Bujold) who is a patient at the Mantle twins' thriving gynaecological practice, which specializes exclusively in problems of female infertility. Claire, it turns out, has a trifurcate cervix, and is informed by Beverly that she is unable to bear children. Claire starts up a relationship with her doctor, totally unaware that she is in fact seeing two identical twins and not, as she believes, one person with strange mood swings. Beverly's strong attraction to her, which he does not want to share with Elliot, causes a rift to develop between the twins. This, combined with Claire's rejection of him when she discovers the truth, sends Beverly on his way to a mental breakdown.

During the rest of the movie the twins discover just how closely they are linked. Elliot begins to suffer from the same drug addiction as Beverly, even though he hasn't used any drugs. Beverly goes over the edge, proclaiming that the insides of the women he examines are "mutant", and commissioning a local artist to construct special "gynaecological tools" to use on these women. These are terrifying devices, all hooks and points and twisted arms of surgical steel. In a profoundly disturbing sequence he enters surgery, clad in bright red and looking like a member of the Spanish Inquisition, and attempts to use these instruments on a female patient. Both of the twins are propelled towards mental decay, ending in a symbolic separation of the psychological Siamese twins.

Dead Ringers is a deeply intense psychosexual exploration of the male identity. Beverly is too weak and emotionally insecure; Elliot is too carnal and insensitive. Both will ultimately slip into a maze of madness and death. As with all of Cronenberg's work, the film deals with the body, the flesh, and conceptions of it. The dream sequence where Beverly imagines himself and Elliot physically joined at the navel, and where Claire separates them by biting at the raw, distorted flesh that links them reminds one of Samantha Eggar in *The Brood*, licking the afterbirth off a mutant baby born of a grotesque womb that exists outside her body, and is an externalization of her inner rage. Such images are repulsive, certainly, but in Cronenberg's films they are an essential element of the complex territory he is trying to explore. To him, the horror comes not from some external supernatural force, but from within ourselves. Think of

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his last movie, *The Fly*, where Jeff Goldblum suffers a terrifying bodily transformation/degeneration which he is powerless to stop. *Dead Ringers* is slightly different in that it explores psychological territory to a much greater degree, but references to sexual repression and perversion, and fear and hatred of the flesh are classic Cronenberg themes that harken all the way back to his first major feature, *Shiver*.

The screenplay of *Dead Ringers* (co-written by Cronenberg and based on a novel titled *Twins*) and the acting are, overall, outstanding. Jeremy Irons is thoroughly convincing in his dual role, which is no mean feat. Cronenberg's direction is impressive, but never too flashy. The tightness of the directing draws one into the movie in a rather claustrophobic manner. After praising *Dead Ringers*, however, I do feel obliged to warn you that this is a very disturbing film. David Cronenberg once said in an interview, "... for me, horror films are films of confrontation, not films of escape at all, but in a horror film one confronts things that you might not really want to cope with in your real life, in a kind of safe, dreamlike way. But you will meet these things eventually..."

Winter Tan explores self

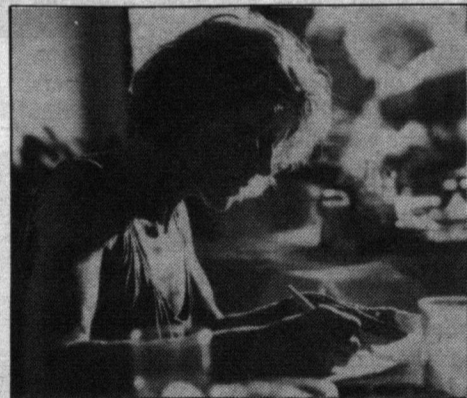
A Winter Tan ★★★★★
Princess Theatre
September 30 - October 6

review by Marg Ackerman

It is difficult to believe that Jackie Burroughs is only five foot four inches tall. As Maryse Holder, the New York intellectual murdered in Mexico in 1972 on whose letters *A Winter Tan* is based, she looms tall and lithe — albeit emaciated — on screen. Burroughs is Holder, at once elegant and gaunt, eloquent and gerrulous. She embodies the soul of her character so completely that it becomes impossible to separate them. Meanwhile the viewer is lured into the juxtaposed world of Holder's self-described "Alice in Sanchezland."

A Winter Tan is an exploration into self by the middle-aged Maryse Holder. She writes in one letter to her New York friend that she is "on vacation from feminism." On the streets of Acapulco, Holder explores the darkness lodged within herself. She is a woman whose motives may be interpreted as vulgar, pitiful and, ultimately, self-annihilative. The obsession for sexual encounters or love of some kind is so overwhelming as to strip the aging nymph of even the smallest wrinkle of self-respect. Spurned by one young, "smooth-skinned" Mexican boy, she offers herself to a series of others — all the while imagining she is free of the protective cocoon of her former feminist philosophy.

This film, however, is much more than a depiction of a middle-aged woman shamelessly displaying her sexual indiscretions. There is more emphasis on Holder's candid descriptions of her conquests than on explicit scenes of erotica. She is able to burrow into a world that reeks of desolation; a tequila-soaked nightmare, and often



Jackie Burroughs gives a riveting performance in a difficult role in *A Winter Tan*.

to retreat, examining objectively every detail of her actions. She faces the camera directly during these times, speaking in sardonic aphorisms. Holder is both self-deprecating and narcissistic — but she is also humorous. Her manner is inevitably that of a woman who knowingly approaches her end, with her sporadic struggles against this descent becoming less and less frequent as the film progresses.

A Winter Tan is painful to watch. The conflict between Holder's desire for autonomy, to "wring a masterpiece" out of her life and her desperate search for love is a dichotomy that rings familiar for anyone who has ever felt the futility and frustration of growing old and undesirable as Holder confides to the viewer at one point, "vomiting really seems to be my metaphor — too bad you can't vomit up age."

Chosen for the New York Film Festival, *A Winter Tan* is an unique film that personifies tragedy and passion. That it is the result of the collaborative efforts of five Canadians — Jackie Burroughs, Louise Clark, John Frizzell, John Walker and Aerlyn Weissman, who all co-directed — is an indication that Canadian film-making is on the move.