

## The Church criticized in *Hadrian*

**Hadrian the Seventh**  
Citadel Theatre  
Run ends October 18

review by Mike Spindloe

The Citadel's 1987-88 Shoctor season opened last week with the presentation of Peter Luke's *Hadrian the Seventh*, a play based on the novel of the same name by the eccentric Frederick William Rolfe. The story is fictional, although abstracted from Rolfe's character and real-life ambitions.

The premise of the play is an intriguing one. Rolfe is a bitter, aging would-be priest whose main failing is an inability to fit into a societal mold. He's been kicked out of seminary college for what he considers insufficient reasons, and passed over for summoning to the priesthood so often that when the Archbishop finally calls, he can only pour out his bitterness. Yet he receives his orders and by a political quirk of fate is elected Pope in the absence of a candidate from within the Vatican who is acceptable to the various factions of Cardinals. Far-fetched, of course, but the dramatic possibilities are numerous.

What ensues is fairly mild satire criticizing the Catholic Church. It is nonetheless well done and provides enjoyable entertainment. *Hadrian the Seventh* was first produced in England in 1967, and the Citadel was fortunate enough to engage the original director, Peter Dews (who received a Tony award for his work when *Hadrian* appeared on Broadway in 1969), to direct their production. Along with English actor Alan Dobie in the misanthropic yet somehow likeable role of Rolfe, he brings a polished sheen to the staging.

Dobie, however, is the story of the play. He appears in all but a few scenes and carries off his role with admirable restraint, never letting Rolfe's idiosyncracies become a parody of themselves. Rolfe's irreverent attitude towards the Catholic Church and its offices, despite his unwavering devotion, provide the play's most interesting and amusing moments.

For example, upon being informed that a parish church in England has been charging pew rents, he admonishes the appropriate Cardinal by saying, "Pew rents are abominable and so are pews. Abolish them both. And



Alan Dobie as Hadrian VII

Photo Mark Seemann

if they cannot survive on the free will offerings of the faithful then let them starve and go to heaven." Ironically, Rolfe has never been the parish priest he for so long yearned to be, but despite his inexperience, he manages as Pope to unite the uncooperative Cardinals under his leadership.

Less interesting than Rolfe's machinations as Pope is the central conflict of the story, between Rolfe and his old rival Jeremiah Sant (played by Wesley Murphy). Sant is an Irishman, as much a political fanatic as Rolfe is a religious one, who finds himself taking his grievances to the Vatican and confronting Rolfe. Sant's histrionics, while essential to the resolution of the plot, seem less believable even than Rolfe's unlikely ascension to Pope.

Religion is the key to *Hadrian the Seventh*. One could say that it helps to be religious to appreciate this play; certainly a basic terminology is invaluable. Rolfe's criticisms of the Catholic Church are for the most part thoughtful and well-directed; they shouldn't cause offence to religious enthusiasts of the common variety. And when Rolfe pontificates that the "Church exists for the service of God in his creatures," and proposes to give away the treasures of the Vatican towards just that goal, he makes a remarkable amount of sense.

## "Hazardous profession" suits actor Murphy

When asked to give a brief chronology of his career, Wesley Murphy strokes his moustache thoughtfully and then apologizes: "I'm growing this moustache for the play and I can't stop twiddling with it."

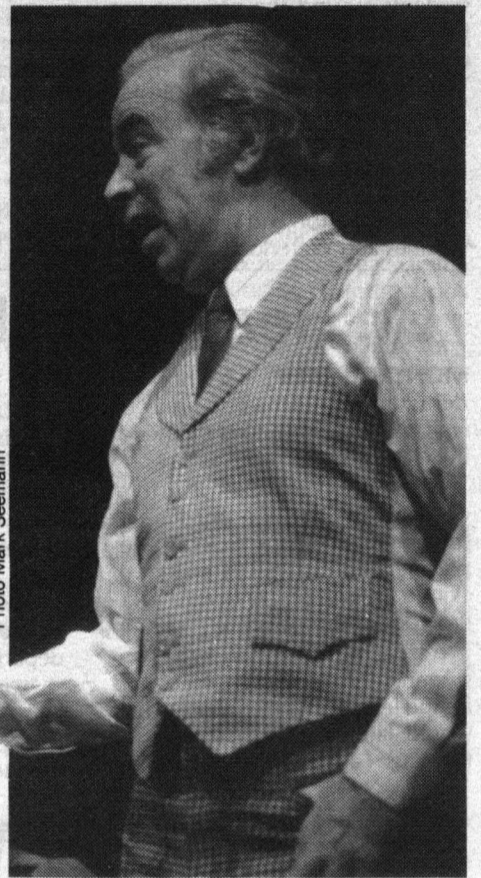
Murphy has come to Edmonton to play Jeremiah Sant in *Hadrian the Seventh* at the Citadel. The Irish-born actor worked in Dublin and London before moving to Toronto in 1975. This is his first visit to Edmonton. Murphy has played a wide variety of roles, from Macbeth to Ralph Nickelby to Sherlock Holmes. He has also acted in several television plays.

In *Hadrian the Seventh*, Murphy plays the Ulster Orangeman-cum-assassin who kills Hadrian. The play is a "fantasy-comedy" in which the reign of the first English pope since Hadrian IV in 1154 is speculated. The play was adopted by Peter Luke from a book by Frederick William Rolfe, and Luke made the villain an Ulster man to make the political situation of the play more topical.

Obviously, the play deals with current political matters. The Orangemen (a radical Ulster Protestant group) even refused to lend part of their regalia, the Orange sash, to the production because they consider the play to be anti-Orange.

The politics of *Hadrian the Seventh* do not faze Wesley Murphy. As an Irishman, he is familiar with the political tension between his country and England. In fact, he recently played the Reverend Ian Paisley in a play called *England's Ireland*, which satirized this political leader. The play was "very, very controversial" and toured Holland, England, and Scotland.

Murphy chuckles as he recalls the time during the early seventies when he was directing Franz Kafka's *The Trial* at Dublin University. This was a period of great tension in recent history. Murphy had unknowingly cast the daughter of the American ambassador in an important part. A few days before opening night, the girl told him that she might not be there ("there's word out that we might be kidnapped.") Murphy insisted that she come and she did. At the dress rehearsal, her parents arrived and asked if they could watch the rehearsal, as it would be too dangerous for them to attend the play



Wesley Murphy as the assassin

Photo Mark Seemann

during its run. They were attended by a few American marines, who were, as Murphy describes cynically, "very very tough." Murphy imitates their stern expressions and shakes his head, smiling.

Murphy describes his role as Hadrian's "nemesis." Jeremiah Sant is "a very stereotyped Orangeman — almost a comic character."

When asked if *Hadrian the Seventh* had a message for the audience, Murphy laughed and said: "We're not postmen! We're actors. We're telling a story."

Actors, claims Murphy, are "professional liars, sodomites, parasites, pedophiles, you name it...because theatre reflects everybody." The profession, he says, has traditionally been received with a great deal of derision. "Plato didn't allow actors into his Republic," Murphy comments, "and they were buried with whores and thieves at crossroads in Moliere's time."

Although the acting profession commands a greater respect nowadays, Murphy still calls it "a most hazardous profession," citing 90% unemployment in the major theatre centres of London, New York and Los Angeles. Murphy points out caustically that Canada is the only society in Western democracy in which actors don't get unemployment insurance.

Even though the government has been generous to the Arts with grants, Murphy warns about the dangers of too much government involvement. "The government," he says, "wants 'canned culture.' Everything, including the arts, is to be consumed."

Murphy prefers a simpler production than is evident in the current trend towards the spectacular. He advocates a return towards the "two boards and a passion" school of drama, in which the script is the most important aspect of a play, and not overshadowed by special effects and fancy scenery.

Murphy also believes that the teaching of drama in a university is ridiculous, that one can only learn on the job. "I don't believe one can teach drama in university at all," he claims, basing this statement on his experiences teaching drama at the University of Guelph from 1975-1977. "The greatest English actors, Olivier and Gielgud, never went to university. Shakespeare's players couldn't read or write."

Despite the drawbacks, Murphy enjoys his work, especially the travel. "I'm a gypsy," he declares. He views his purpose as an actor as "trying to find expression, however humble."

Has he any plans for the future? "I'm looking for a rich widow," he replied. "You wouldn't happen to be one would you?"

## Parachute Club soars

**The Parachute Club**  
Dinwoodie Lounge

by Sherri Ritchie and Dragos Ruiu

Fun. The new lineup of the Parachute Club has taken the band on a turn for the better. Their performance last Friday in Dinwoodie Lounge was smooth, exciting — fun.

The opening act, Nick Danger, had a great stage presence, a huge stage presence. One might say he is a big man. Danger performed slick covers of 70's classics, including Supertramp, and his version of the hit "Life in the Fat Lane." The crowd was taken a bit off track by Danger's hard rock style which did not complement the Parachute Club's Latin rhythms.

However, the crowd showed, considerable enthusiasm, almost too much enthusiasm, for the Parachute Club by standing around the stage when the band came on.

### The Parachute Club never stopped moving and bopping around the stage

This made it quite difficult for others to dance to the Club's pervasive beat. The urge to dance is almost impossible to avoid, as the Parachute Club has one of the most charismatic shows around. The Parachute Club never stopped moving and bopping around the stage. They were energetic and did in no way lack the ability to interact with the crowd. Segato had the crowd primed to sing



Rebecca Jenkins and Lorraine Segato singing in style

"Rise Up" at the closing, and even passed the microphone to several people in the front to sing the chorus.

The changes in the band have helped to promote this charismatic performance. They play very well together and Rebecca Jenkins, the new second vocal, has more personality and a greater vocal range than Juli Masi.

The smaller, more intimate Dinwoodie

Lounge also helped to enhance the charisma of the band members. The Convention Center last year was much too large and much too empty for the group; all the audience could do was watch. On Friday at Dinwoodie, the audience was part of the show.

All in all, the Parachute Club's efforts to get back to their roots of an exciting, interactive live show, is working.

Photo Dragos Ruiu