

arts & entertainment

History repeats itself in Dal Theatre play

by Tara Gibson

The new Dal Theatre play, *The Art of Success* by playwright Nick Dear, beats the hell out of any of last year's productions. But beware! (Or be tempted!) Play-goers may be offended by what they see and hear.

The play deals openly with aspects of human fear, morality and passion which are usually 'under-the-table' issues. It is, at times, both brutal and vulgar, and contains much that would not be said and done at a 'respectable' (and usually boring) theatre.

However, it's not all dark and despairing. It's laced with witty jokes, some of which send the audience off into hysterics.

Mike R. Cowie, the assistant director, thinks the university administration will not like much of what happens in this play. It is rather amusing to entertain the thought of the Board of Governors

reserving a row at the theatre and managing to sit through the whole thing. Actually a special place in the front row, a rather comfy one at that, has been reserved for Howard Clark. Hmmmm.....

This play comes to Dalhousie at an opportune time. Despite being chosen last April, it portrays some of the controversial issues surrounding Dal in the last few months.

The main theme seems to be morality, the way we view it and how it influences how we act and what we create. The play also explores what effects creativity has on each of us, and on our culture as a whole.

William Hogarth (James Fowler) is a painter and 'artiste' in 18th-century England. He supposedly wants to be an adversary, but wants to do it "in an amusing sort of way". In other words, he wants to keep his hands clean and make money by creating art that is respectable to the upper-class.

This disgusts his best pal, Henry (Jason Charters), an energetic, radical

playwright. Henry believes that art "should abuse, it should disturb!". This view on art is shared by Mike, who believes that one of the main points of theatre is to "shock and offend".

"I know people will walk out; hopefully not because they hear the word 'fuck' and are offended, but because they are uncomfortable and don't know how to deal with the situation with which they are being confronted... you can't have all things for all people".

Both William and Henry feel the weighty hand of censorship pressing down on them. This power takes the form of the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Wampole (Stephen Calder).

He has a house full of paintings and claims to love art, "so neat and compact in those little rectangles of wealth".

But he is perturbed with art's subversive form and asks "where did the thinking come from that art must necessarily mean trouble?".

Wampole is trying to pass a bill that would make it so one would be required to apply for a license for each new play. This would be a way of censoring Henry's plays without coming off as a dictator.

William sucks up to Wampole in order to not be censored, but Henry refuses to 'sell out' and stands true to his beliefs in radical theatre.

Mike Cowie doesn't want people to think Dal Theatre is doing this play because of the cuts. "It's not an issue thing". He sees it as a very ironic situation. "History repeats itself whenever you know it's going to or not".

When pressed further about the link between the play and the issues at Dal, Mike said "people like Howard Clark who say theatre is frill have never learned about it beyond what they see on stage".

Many aspects of morality are explored. The play takes on a surrealistic quality through the 'slitherers' that plague William. They seduce and then horrify him by committing such acts as cutting off his penis with dress-

The play deals with aspects of human fear, morality and passion.



Unlikely allies take control. (Sarah, Louisa, Will & Jane)

DALPHOTO: MIKE DEVONPORT

making shears.

The slitherers represent his own guilt about his 'immoral' lifestyle and passions. Though recently married to a 'pure' upper-class woman, Jane (Patricia Zentilli), he still takes great pleasure in drinking himself "into oblivion", swearing affluently, and frequenting a prostitute, Louisa (Jennie Raymond), who satisfies his most bizarre sexual appetites.

The deceit overtakes William's life in the form of the slitherers. "There are nightmare things that I've got caged up... sometimes they slither out". He wants to be rid of them, yet is slave to their passions. "How did they get there? What is it in me that I can't seem to tame?"

The murderess, Sarah (Shannon Cunningham), represents the desire to abandon morality for a higher sense of pride. There is a strong link made between Sarah, who is far from an 'artiste', and art. She wants to be remembered as "an insult, a spit in the face...not fallen angel, not mildew rose. I want to be evil through and through".

Sarah describes her most peaceful moment of her life as "that second I abandoned trying to be good". William never abandons trying to be good, and is tormented by guilt and slitherers.

It comes to a point where neither Will nor the audience can tell the difference between nightmare and reality.

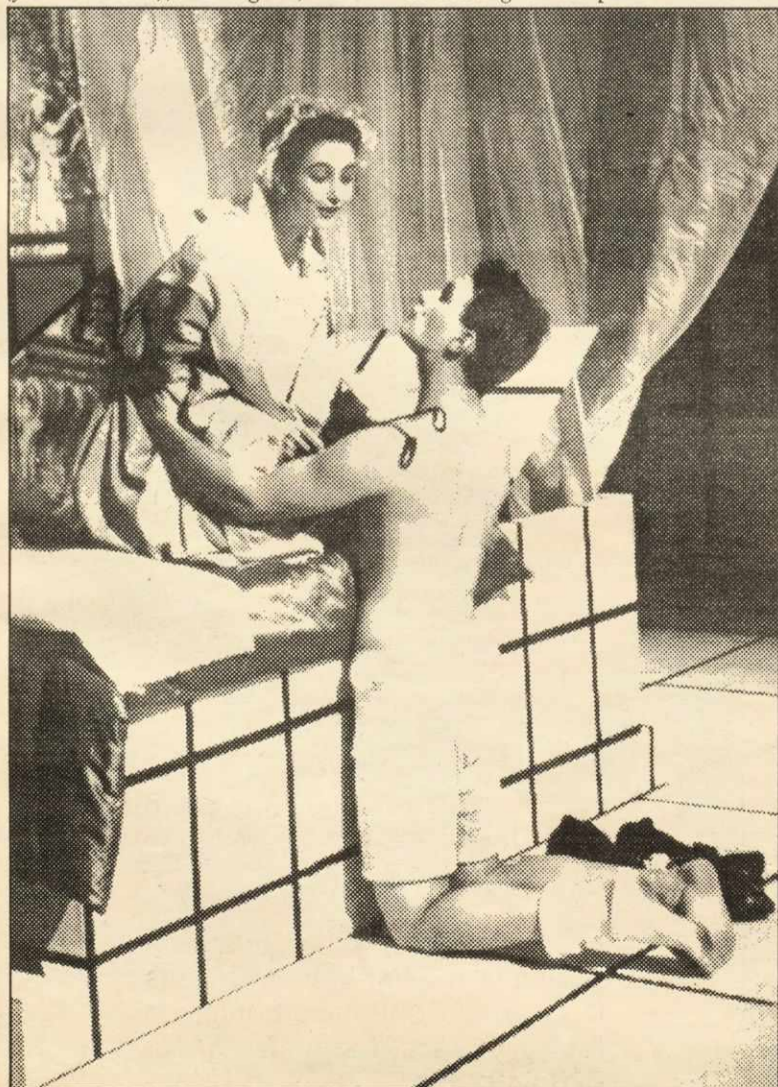
It is evident the actors know their characters and understand the play.

The acting is superb, with many individual brilliant performances. The director, Patrick Christopher, let the actors discover the play, rather than explaining it to them.

According to Mike Cowie, many of the actors have come a long way, "having to portray characters whose sexual and moral beliefs are in sharp contrast to their own".

The set is also far from standard. It is flexible and is something the actors can use. "It's not the four walls, the dinner table and painting that can't change".

The costumes are both elaborate and exquisite. A high quality performance all around. *The Art of Success* runs through 'til Saturday at the James Dunn Theatre.



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