

THEATRE REVIEWS

Some sexual sentimentality and thoughts on a modern plague

Plutocrats

By Paul Goetzee
Starring Robert Astle
and Christine MacInnis

BY LIAM LACEY

The Globe and Mail

EDMONTON

Plutocrats, which opened Friday night at Edmonton's Jubilee Theatre as the Northern Light season opener, is another kind of well-made play by a rising young British-based, South African-born playwright, Paul Goetzee. Goetzee is an innovator, a writer who can play with the traditional forms of farce and allegory in surprising ways. Once you've hurdled the play's premise — a farce about an accident in a plutonium factory — you're well on your way.

The play takes place in two time frames: one contemporary, in which a worker has an accident at a plutonium re-processing plant, the other in seventeenth-century plague-ridden London. In the modern story, Jack's accident and his attitude toward it (he considers himself a "Buddhist-nihilist-existentialist"), and his bland refusal to accept his company's urge to lay him off, set off circumstances drawing in CIA operatives and terrorists, culminating in a round of juggling that involves plutonium canisters and Jack's baby daughter. Or, at least that's how the play culminates just before the world blows up.

But back to the seventeenth century, where a rich benefactor makes a deal with the local rat-catcher, to raise rats in his basement to keep the rat-catcher in work. The parallel between harboring plutonium and breeding plague-infested rats is obvious, and remarkably enough, the two story lines manage to converge.

Goetzee's writing is stylized and highly artful: short scenes, a broad, cartoonish acting style, elliptical absurdist dialogue punctuated by lightning flashes of black comic lyricism. Plutocrats is not weighty theatre in any normal sense, but the Edmonton production — with its solemn, futuristic blue set, eerie original music and excellent ensemble style — is first-rate.

The production bodes well for Northern Light Theatre under the guidance of Gyllian Raby, the director of the play and the theatre's new artistic director.



Fellow plutonium plant workers help Jack Pleasance (Robert Astle) out of nuclear trouble.