

British Theatre Guide

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The Maddening Rain

Nicholas Pierpan
Old Red Lion Theatre
(2010)

Nicholas Pierpan's monologue is a potent distillation of the times we're in: it's about the disconnection between the soul and the world, and more than anything, it's about London. North London in particular - it name-checks Tufnell Park, Archway Tower, Camden Lock, and Big Red bar on Holloway Road. These are all the haunts of the main character, played by Felix Scott, when he first moves to London from a nondescript upbringing in Leicester. Like thousands of others he wants to make it in the big city; only he has two A-levels and no real idea what his ambitions are, just a vague longing for excitement.

Pierpan really gets that messy, detached life of temping in a new place, trying to find connections or some sort of anchor; he also slips in a nice social comment, as our main character briefly gets a job he enjoys in construction, before falling back on the standard type of job available to those with little experience - "customer service", as he says with a shudder. Once he's working in a longer-term dead-end job, he watches the tramp on the corner every day and wonders how far away he is from him.

And then he falls into a job with a city trading firm, through his friend Will, an old schoolfriend who's now a high-flying accountant. Here the play changes tack, as it begins to explore the morass of the City, into which our main character plunges himself. Pierpan has done his research, so when his character begins to learn the ins and outs of the trading game, he reels off a lot of quite convincing knowledge about how the market will affect the price of Chilean lithium, etc. It's nicely detailed, but really, of course, it's not about economics, it's about the psychology of city workers.

Such a theme has been explored before (very well, for example, in Steve Thompson's [Roaring Trade](#)), but Pierpan still moves the audience with his narrator's devastating personal anguish at what he is experiencing. He witnesses the atmosphere of macho aggression and backstabbing in his workplace; and what's more, he's forced to make these people, his colleagues, into some approximation of friends. They drink and joke together, each using the occasion to subtly brag about their latest achievements and their level of wealth. He gets involved with a girl from his workplace, and feels her weighing him up and then trying to mould him into the sort of boyfriend that would help her status. There's a constant sense of despair at how the modern world defines people by their work - why do we constantly ask people what they do? is the recurring question. For Scott's character, what he does is drift through his life, trying not to balk upon hearing the cost of the skiing trips his workmates all splurge their cash on - all going to the same resort.

A big theme is the difficulty of making connections. He runs into his old high school girlfriend, and as they catch up he feels her genuinely listening to him, in a way that none of his workmates do. He then develops an obsession with her which is not really romantic - just a fixation upon her as being the only person who really understands him and appreciates him for who he really is. Based on the little information she gives him about her current life, he sets out to find her again, by

scouting out every branch of M&S in London. Why he doesn't just find her on Facebook or ask another old schoolfriend for her number is something the play doesn't answer. But when he does find her again, inevitably it's disappointing; a single conversation with an interested party can't redeem him.

Most of all it's about the lack of control. He describes nicely the illusion of control that the traders have - in reality "governments push certain policies, consumption goes up and down, and we all just ride the wave". The things which made him happy were the accidental things - meeting his friend Ross and doing the construction job with him, building a bowling alley out of recycled materials, creating "Frankenstein machines". When he tries to engineer happiness for himself, based on the received idea of how he should be living, he can't. And so the sheer unpredictability and uncontrollability of life eventually pulls him under.

It's a great performance by Scott - quietly riveting, and maintaining an essentially sympathetic everyman quality. The design too is interesting, placing us "backstage" facing a wooden façade which we're to imagine is the back side of a stage set. The doors in the façade open outwards to reveal Scott's character's little office, with his computer monitor flashing complicated trading graphics - he steps through from this space and turns his back to it to speak to us. It's almost as though we're inside his head, listening in on his interior monologue, while the office is the public arena, the face and persona that he presents to the world.

There's a particularly powerful spike to the tale in what happens to his friend Will, who "used to be a skinny left-winger" before succumbing to the life of a city accountant. He's another casualty, you might say, of the randomness of the world - and this is what sets off the main character's life crisis. Towards the end he recalls a story Will wrote when they were in school, and this is where the title comes from: the idea of being caught in a deluge of events beyond your control, which applies cleverly both to his life and to the economy as a whole, and of deliberately making yourself insane in order to partake in the world you find yourself in. The play gives us a view of the wider world subtly, stealthily, from a series of oblique angles; it's powerful stuff. And the ending is a quiet, precise blow. Like the rain of the title, this is a play that seeps in, gets under your skin, and goes deeper than you realise.

Until 18th September

Reviewer: [Corinne Salisbury](#)