

A biting, aristocratic satire – The Malcontent

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Pauline Adamek

Charting the capricious vagaries of a regional Italian court, circa 1600, and currently being staged by **Antaeus Company**, is **John Marston's** seldom-staged Jacobean tragicomedy, *The Malcontent*, now at the **Deaf West Theatre** in NoHo.

| *Review by Pauline Adamek*

This rollicking tale of Royal Italian court intrigue relates the amusing saga of the deposed Duke of Genoa. The dukedom of Altofront (**Bo Foxworth**) has been usurped by Pietro (**Mark Doerr**), whose regime is propped up by a marriage-cemented alliance with the superior city of Florence. Rather than disappearing into exile, Altofront has adopted the alter ego of Malevole, a bitter and discontented cynic. He remains in court under this disguise, all the while striving to regain his lost dukedom and be reunited with his steadfast wife Maria (the lovely and aristocratic-looking **Ann Noble**).

Malevole is a vitriolic satirist-figure who attacks the corruption and decadence of the grasping, sex-obsessed and politically fickle court in which he dwells. Meanwhile, he exploits the shifting nature of fate, such as the capricious favors of the adulterous new duchess, Aurelia (**Jules Wilcox**), in order to exact psychological vengeance on his supplanter Pietro. Eventually, he joins forces with Pietro against the greater evil embodied in the sly and ambitious Machiavellian schemer, Mendoza (**Ramon DeOcampo**).

Playing the 'wise Fool' character of Altofront/Malevole, **Bo Foxworth** is excellent, though repellently vicious, muttering insults under his breath. In his motley coat of rags with a matching cap, teamed with a fright wig and glasses, Malevole's true identity is well obscured and his disguise affords him the liberty to comment "foolishly and carelessly" as well as with biting satire. Technically his is the central character of this amusing comedy of manners mixed with devious murder plots, but it is **Ramon DeOcampo** as who gives the more flashy, impassioned and alluring performance. Handsome and charming, **DeOcampo** is greasily suave as well as comical as the conniving 'Lothario,' seducing – or attempting to seduce – whomever takes his fancy and blithely arranging the disposal of perceived enemies.

Driving the various stratagems, the sparkling dialogue consists mostly of jolly witticisms as the courtiers trade clever insults and use language both for sport and as weapons, in order to score points in the hierarchy of the court and curry favor with each other for personal gain. **Marston's** high-flown language is rendered more accessible by the excellent direction from **Elizabeth Swain** who has guided her actors to punctuate certain archaic terms and suggestive allusions with hilarious explicit gestures that fully convey their lewd meaning.

Thanks to an energetic pace and clean and crisp scene transitions, this production of *The Malcontent* is never slow or dull.

Of note are the lavish and gorgeous costumes realized by designer **A. Jeffrey Schoenberg**, comprised of lush silks, rich velvets and smooth leather, with embroidered pantaloons and pleated neck ruffles. An amusing dance number by choreographer **Heather Allyn** is well executed, as is the swordplay by fight choreographer **Rick Sordolet**. **Peter Bayne's** sound design, and original music composition, is also noteworthy for its appealing flavor and urgency.

Background:

The Malcontent was first performed in 1603 by the Children of the Chapel, one of the troupes of boy actors active in the era, in the **Blackfriars Theatre**. It was later taken over by the King's Men, the adult company for which **William Shakespeare** worked, and performed at the **Globe Theatre**.

In fact, director **Elizabeth Swain's** staging and **Tom Buderwitz's** set design recreates the **Blackfriars Theatre**, complete with a pew on either side of the stage each seating four lucky audience members. On occasion, those viewers are lightly included in the stage action, much to their delight.

As the production will be staged with two separate casts, the titles 'Cuckolds' and 'Wittols' are simply a designation for each cast. There is no greater significance than that.

Incidentally, you probably already know that a 'Cuckold' is a man whose wife is cheating on him, whereas a 'Wittol' is a cuckold who doesn't mind.

It may have been written over 400 years ago, but this is a marvelous production of a seldom-seen classic work of theatre that despite its complex poetic language feels fresh, contemporary and accessible.

Highly recommended.

The Malcontent

Antaeus Company

At Deaf West Theatre

5112 Lankershim Blvd.,

North Hollywood CA 91601

(one block south of Magnolia; free parking available in the uncovered Citibank lot on Lankershim Blvd. south of Otsego St.)

Performances:

Runs until Sunday June 19, 2011

Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 8 pm

Sundays at 2:30 pm

Running time:

Approximately 2 & ½ hours, including a 10-minute intermission

TICKETS:

Thursdays and Fridays: **\$30.00**

Saturdays and Sundays: **\$34.00**

Box Office:

Purchase tickets [here](#) or call (818) 506-1983

*The **Antaeus Company** strives to keep classical theater vibrantly alive by presenting professional productions with a top-flight ensemble company of actors. Taking their company name from the Titan who gained strength by touching the Earth, **Antaeus** members – many of whom are familiar to movie and television audiences – regain creative strength by returning to the wellspring of their craft: live theater performances of great classical plays.*

*All **Antaeus** productions are fully double cast, with two equally talented actors sharing every role. This means that audiences never see an understudy and frequently come back to see each show a second time in order to see the same play in the hands of an equally excellent but very different set of actors.*

Members of the company and its board span a wide range of age, ethnicity and experience; they have performed on Broadway, at major regional theaters across the country, in film and television, and on local stages, and are the recipients of multiple accolades including Tony, Los Angeles and New York Drama Critics Circle, Ovation, LA Weekly, and Back Stage Garland nominations and awards.

Pauline Adamek

Pauline Adamek is a Los Angeles-based arts enthusiast with eighteen years' experience covering International Film Festivals and reviewing new Theatre, Film and Restaurants.

