

“THE TALENTED MR RIPLEY” – Dunstable Rep

The outstanding word here is ‘talented’, because that is undoubtedly what the cast were, Alan Clarke has a way of getting under the skin of characters, whether directing others or acting them himself, transmitting this understanding to his cast.

The play is rather strange –a psychological thriller – charting the life the insignificant Tom Ripley, who sets out to get the better of people by any means possible.

The set was fairly minimalistic, but life was given to it by the different colours lighting the backcloth, with cloud formations that drifted over it. Some were beautiful, some rather less so, depending on the mood. Good sound effects and atmospheric music enhanced the play as a whole.

I liked the coffee ‘bit’ in the first scene, and there was humour injected to lift the mood.

Justin Doherty was an excellent Tom Ripley – showing us the nuances of this paranoid character. Conning people for his own delectation it seems, eventually murdering several times over.

Justin, who is a striking looking man, managed to create a rather nondescript-looking character, who came to life occasionally, particularly when assault or murder was on his mind. The question-mark over his sexuality was also a constant, particularly in his relationship with Richard Greenleaf. The murder scene on the boat when Tom realised that Dickie was tiring of him was done very well, and the subsequent return of Dickie as an apparition was good too, you could sense the confusion.

It was good to see James Trapp back on stage as the playboy Dickie – the suggested relationship between him and Tom was nicely played out. Two very strong characters. Miranda Larson created a very believable Marge, who was confused by the pair and didn’t trust Tom.

Miranda also played a contrasting role as Sophia, who Tom assaults and then urges Dickie to rape, surprisingly Dickie complies, until a passerby interrupts. A really telling scene from all three actors.

Malcolm Farrar gave us two contrasting roles, as Dickie’s father Herbert, trying to deal with his wife’s terminal illness, then as Roverini a police officer, investigating Dickie’s disappearance. Two differing but good portrayals.

Jenna Ryder-Oliver played the unfortunate wife Emily with good understanding, and then after a quick change, played Tom’s Aunt Dottie, a backwoods type of lady, who had obviously had a hand in creating this psychotic young man. Again differing, but well-acted roles.

Marc Rolfe, a Rep first-timer, played the debonair Marc Priminger, and Freddie Miles, an old acquaintance of Dickie’s, who Tom eventually murders because he was getting too close for comfort. A very engaging young man who brought good understanding to his roles.

The final cast member was Luke Howard who played three contrasting people, all of which he brought a different upbeat persona to, with accents and characterisations. Nicely done.

The whole play was a challenge to both actors and audience, but was excellently acted throughout. I loved the contrasts created and the interaction of the characters, and I thought this was on a par with some of the best the Rep has done.

Nova Horley