

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2013 Review – Economy Of Thought ****

Economy Of Thought, Odd Rituals.

For a disease-carrying fly-on-the Wall Street exposition of the complex causes and effects of the 2008 financial meltdown – the film, *Margin Call* (Dir. J.C. Chandor, 2011) – comes recommended. However, an asymmetrical grasp of events (embracing the true Fringe Spirit) might better be a stiff dram, thwacking your head on the plinth of Adam Smith's statue outside the Fringe Office* or experiencing this provocative and disturbing production. Being stuck in a lift with Robert Peston is beyond imagining. The play's ambivalent title, *Economy of Thought*, is enough alone to contextualise the venal arrogance behind the financial crash.

Amoral sixth-floor investment banker, Reece, portrayed with charismatic evil by Johnny McPherson, sneers down on a 'Bash The Bankers' protest street-march. He makes a cynical bet with colleagues Rich and the rather supine Tom. The power-dressed, up and coming, Amanda, isn't so sure. He drops a £50 note on the marchers. If one pockets it Reece is the winner. They are all dogs, slags and scroungers in his eye. To his disgust the catcher burns it.

Reece has to pay out in spades. Next day they learn that the note-burner was viciously beaten by the riot police and is on life-support. Amanda's investigative journalist sister smells a story. Amanda's increasingly compromised sense of morality versus corporate loyalty becomes sorely tested and lends mounting tension to the manic denouement. The writing crackles with sexist profanity and testosterone powered banker-braggadocio and all the more convincing for it.

Events are more a montage of set-piece conflicts and character deconstruction than plot-driven. Patrick McFadden's writing drives the characters at literally, coke-snorting pace as does John Higgins' direction. Katherine Davenport's portrayal as the imploding Amanda is empathic but raises issues of compromised morality and 'glass-ceilings' – hers is about to come crashing down on her. The restaurant scene where journalist, Collette, parries with Tom as to who dropped the £50 note, sometimes becomes entangled within the discourse on eco-ethical business models. Inevitably, the lizard-tongued Reece turns up to contribute his toxic patronage.

There ought to be a prize for the audience member who can unravel the mixed-metaphor, business-babble that CEO Milton (Sir – 'But not yet knighted) humiliates Amanda with. The ghost of CJ from Reggie Perrin haunts The City still. There is little redemption to cling on to by the play's end but that is surely its message. It has particular resonance in a city where Fred 'The Shred' struggles by on a £5,000,000 pension per annum – allegedly.

Very strong language through out – though it is at its most offensive when the characters attempt sincerity.



* The Edinburgh Reporter accepts no liability for those adopting this option.

Assembly George Square. Vn3. August 1-26. £10/12/14 – check dates.