

Review

Copies

Théâtre du Rideau
Brussels

Strong French-language version of Caryl Churchill's play about identity.

Do our genes make us the people we are? How much do we owe to our parents and how much to some shapeless genius that we cannot clearly identify? Is it fair to blame our inadequacies on our parents? What happens if our children disappoint us, either by fulfilling or failing to fulfil our ambitions for them?

Caryl Churchill's *Copies* is a one-hour play with enormous intellectual ambitions. It discusses the theme of cloning through two actors playing a father and a series of cloned children, dissects the nature of love, parenthood and identity, with the debate over nature versus nurture at its centre.

I was lucky enough to see the play when it premiered in London in 2002 as *A Number* with Daniel Craig and Michael Gambon. Like all Churchill's work, it combined searching social

commentary with pointed insight into the human heart. In its first French outing at Le Rideau, *Copies* does not just stand its ground; in some respects it betters the Royal Court version.

Copies dissects the perplexity of families and also our aching, consumerist desire for perfection, which extends to the most intimate human relationships. Churchill's genius is to cloak this exploration in casual language that mirrors the banal direction of everyday life while still producing a dark thriller that suggests tantalising terrors and family secrets. The audience is kept searching for the truth, but the crimes, when they surface, are oddly both horrifying and satisfyingly logical.

Adrian Brine's direction is flawless. He builds the father into a loathsome malign figure, seething with Beckettian immobility and intensity; a perfect canvas for Jules-Henri Marchant, who manages an edgy combination of avuncular good nature and withered malice. The series of sons are lovingly played by Sébastien Dutrieux, who explores the potential of identical/dissimilar clones with elegance. Brine makes intelligent use of the stage by narrowing the action down to two chairs and two mirrors, creating a simultaneously energising and suffocating effect. An excellent soundtrack and the usual exquisite scenography make for intimate and visually powerful theatre. **Andrew McLroy**

Théâtre du Rideau, Palais des Beaux-Arts, 23 Rue Ravenstein, Brussels, until November 30. Tel 02.507.83.61.



DANIEL LOCUS

Attack of the clones: *Copies* poses some uncomfortable questions

THE BULLETIN
24 novembre 2005