

SUPERFLUITIES

FRIDAY, APRIL 6, 2007

Requiem Aeternam Deo: A Play for Everyone and Nobody



Written and directed by Fulya Peker, based upon *Also Sprach Zarathustra* by Friedrich Nietzsche, translated by Graham Parkes; lights by Fabio Blanzina. With Michael Carlucci, Jeff Lyons, Aurea Tomeski, Israel Buffardi, David R. Duenias, Garbis Tavitian, and Ryan William Mooney. Presented by the **Nietzsche Circle. Through April 15 at The Kraine Theater, 85 East 4th Street, New York. Tickets via **Smartix** or at (212) 868-4444. 75 minutes; no intermission.**

If you're going to try to stage a philosophy, Nietzsche's is the philosophy to stage: its robust language and Nietzsche's preference for parable, metaphor, and the keenly-sharpened aphorism render it suitable for declamation, to say the least. It's the imagery that's the tricky part--finding a theatrical objective correlative for Nietzsche's apocalyptic vision invites a vast stage, smoke, the vision Strindberg explored in his dream plays. Director Fulya Peker, in whittling this vast ambition down to the essentials of costume, movement, and body, manages in *Requiem Aeternam Deo*, her adaptation

of *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, to concentrate Nietzsche's power more intensely, in the simplicity of her staging underscoring the humanity of the philosopher's moral vision.

Rather than trying to present a "Greatest Hits" anthology of Nietzschean quotations, Ms. Peker seeks a throughline, a narrative for a small closed space. In doing so she gathers a group of characters drawn from the book--Zarathustra himself, of course (an intent Michael Carlucci), a Madman, a Jester, a "Man Bitten by Leech"--but in translating the metaphysical content she also introduces a moving figure beneath a taut black fabric, this figure variously "Stillest Hour," "Solitude," "Life." Zarathustra's dialogues then aren't merely with the characters, but through this figure he struggles and engages in dialogue with the self, especially during the long middle section of the play which constitutes his Wandering in the Wilderness. Here, especially, Peker finds a correlative in a play of bodies and movement for the play of ideas and moral dynamics, the black figure alternately teasing and comforting Zarathustra: the doubt with which he struggles, the life which he attempts to shape with his own movements.


The final third of the play may be the weakest, as Zarathustra meets with a variety of characters through his reemergence in the world: the meetings becomes blackout sketches, illustrative of Zarathustra's teachings, but somehow too fragmented to hold together. This can't be held entirely against the director's account: Nietzsche isn't known for the systematic and logical nature of his thought, and trying to ease it into a narrative theatrical event is something of a lost cause. Peker has enough of the spectacular impulse, though, to encourage focused performances from her actors (among them Jeff Lyons should be singled out for his powerful presence and Ryan William Mooney for his fine physical work here).

Of modern philosophers Nietzsche seems the most ironically old-fashioned and declamatory; this method has proven influential less in the academy than in bizarre writers like E.M. Cioran (somebody Peker might like to take a whack at next time around). Nietzsche's texts, especially *Zarathustra*, owe more to the revelatory visions and journeys of figures such as St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila than to Kant and Hegel; for that reason, too, his work seems most accessible to us 21st-century

storylovers. Peker's play draws this inherently visionary and theatrical basis of Nietzsche's metaphysical conception quite well, and demonstrates too a sharp talent for approaching difficult abstract conceptions and a certain courage in attending to their aesthetic demands. She does so here, as Nietzsche does in his philosophy, in reducing the metaphysical experience down to its sensual essentials: the vision and texture of various textiles (the rags of the Madman, the ghostlike morphs of the black figure), the sinuous movement of the limbs seeking significance.

I suppose *Requiem Aeternam Deo* can be faulted for lacking a lighter touch (a touch which Nietzsche does demonstrate in his other work, rather less so in *Zarathustra*). But for theatre audiences seeking philosophy in the art once again, and philosophers drawn to the theatre, Fulya Peker's play is the event of the spring.

Update, April 7, 2007: David Kilpatrick's interview with director/playwright Fulya Peker appears in the April issue of the *Brooklyn Rail* [here](#).

POSTED BY GEORGE HUNKA AT 8:48 AM 

GEORGE HUNKA

George Hunka is a playwright and the artistic director of [theatre minima](#), and has also written about theatre for the *New York Times*, *Time Out New York*, and other publications. A member of the Dramatists Guild (which in July 2007 named him one of "50 to Watch" in its magazine *The Dramatist*), he is a 2007 recipient of an Albee Foundation Fellowship and lives in New York.

ABOUT THIS SITE

Superfluities debuted on the Web as a journal of theatre, arts and culture in October 2003. It is read by about 6,000 people each month and attracts an international readership.