

Life x 3

by Yasmina Reza

Translated by Christopher Hampton

Watermill Theatre until Saturday 28th February

This is a play about how choices and decisions can affect outcomes. By taking the same situation and playing it 3 different ways, it tries to show the impact language can have on the progression of a story. The words people use, and the way others choose to interpret those words and react to them, can lead to completely different results – except for those parts of the story that are already determined.

It's an interesting idea. Such a pity, then, that it's not a particularly good evening. Maybe it's the play itself – irritating, slightly smug, not a little pretentious; perhaps it's the delivery – slow, uneven, with fluffed lines and underplayed reactions. It is quite possible that the point passed me by entirely. But during the first act, I found myself writing 'What an annoying play', and nothing encouraged me to change my mind.

Sonia (Sarah Ball) and Henri (James Wallace) are bickering – exhaustingly – about their son, when the doorbell rings. Inès (Sara Crowe) and Hubert (Christopher Villiers) have come for dinner – but a day early. Henri's future depends on Hubert's goodwill, so he wants desperately to impress. Through conversations ranging from a laddered stocking to the flatness of galaxies, the 3 possible outcomes are demonstrated, as choices about words, emphasis and behaviours are made.

The play is mercifully short – just 2 hours. In the third iteration, Henri says 'Don't let's go through this again – it can't be very interesting for our guests.' Indeed, Henri. The audience would probably agree.

Pat Harper

17th February 2009