

This post is late, but what the heck. The subject is the Sunday matinee of *The Creditors*, the August Strindberg psychodrama at BAM's Harvey Theatre in Brooklyn. Directed by Alan Rickman, this Donmar Warehouse production has just come over from London, where it was warmly received. Rickman, in a *New York Times* [article](#) referred to the show as "Three characters dragged through a hedge backwards in 90 minutes," and that is indeed an apt description.



Set in a seaside resort in Norway, this tense drama focuses on one woman, Tekla, and two men, Adolph, her younger husband and Gustav, a mysterious stranger also staying at the resort. At the open of this roughly 90 minute show (no intermission, although it feels like 3 acts) we find Adolph, a self absorbed man who fancies himself an artist. He is in conversation with Gustav, a new acquaintance whom he has just met at the resort — the same resort where, some years past, he met the older, married Tekla, who threw over her first husband for the young and bright Adolph. The Adolph we meet now seems neither bright nor to possess any self assurance. He prevails upon the older, and quite self-assured Gustav for advice.

Gustav claims to have diagnosed in Adolph incipient epilepsy and prescribes abstinence as the only treatment. Though at first protesting, Adolph accepts this once Gustav succeeds in making him question both the love of his wife and the solidity of his marriage. Gustav is vicious and hateful in his views on women, and we can only imagine that he has had a bad time of it with the fairer sex, or, as Gustav would have it, "A fat boy with overdeveloped breasts, that's what you see. Basically, a badly made youth. A child who's somehow managed to shoot up to adult height without growing any muscle" a chronic anaemic who haemorrhages regularly thirteen times a year."

Gustav seems quite certain that Tekla is flirting with younger men — on the ferry, in town, at the resort — he seems to know exactly what is going on even though he admits to not having left the resort where they all are staying. It isn't long before we in the audience start to suspect the true motivation behind Gustav's actions, but I shan't spill that here.

By the end of this first scene, Gustav has convinced Adolph that Tekla is playing him for the fool, and that he need only lay in wait for proof. This Adolph does, as Tekla returns from her outing. Soon she is engaged in a familiar *pas da duex* with Gustav, unaware that Adolph is right outside the door listening to it all.

"Creditors" the title is explained a couple of times in a sort of massive transactional-analysis

manner by both Gustav and Tekla in separate scenes. We owe those we have wronged, and they may sometime collect from us. This show takes this idea to the extreme as we see three players, or are they three pieces, push each other's buttons and pull each other's strings in fits and outbursts of painful jealousy and retribution. The final scene, tho the most contrived of the script, is none-the-less believable, and most painful indeed.

The cast, Anna Chancellor as Tekla, Tom Burke as Adolph and Owen Teale as Gustav, are all as fine as one could wish for in this taught production. Rickman's direction is spot-on, the dialog utterly natural and unforced, no matter how banal or vicious it may be. The set, by Ben Stones, is light and airy and feels just right for the action and setting. I've seen Donmar in their London home, and can tell that this set was built for that thrust stage. Plopped down here, in the Harvey's deeper proscenium, it still works just fine. Costumes by Fotini Dimou, lighting by Howard Harrison and music and sound by Adam Cork round out the technical credits. And to their credit, in the finest tradition of current London standards, their pure naturalism and adherence to history serve to make them fall from view. We see the characters and the story, not the trappings of theatre.

This was a great day at the theatre, and Rickman has succeeded in his goal of not just getting out of the way of his performers, but of getting them out of their own way. This not only lets the script shine through, but more importantly lets it do so as compellingly believably as possible.

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