

SCOTSMAN REVIEW OF DR GLAS

Dr Glas ****

Paradise in Augustines, until 28 August

The novel that scandalised Scandinavia, Hjalmar Söderberg's 1905 psychological thriller is brought vividly to life in this stage adaptation by Jeffrey Hatcher. Although "vividly" may seem an odd word to use when the stage is set with only two simple chairs, Dr Glas is brought to life in all his complexities with remarkable clarity by veteran British actor Daniel Gerrol.

Based on the David Barrett English translation first published in 2002, it's tempting to view as a proto Scandi-noir. Told as a series of diary entries, Glas is introduced as a man of strong opinions; he struggles with the women who come to him wanting to terminate their pregnancies, believing in their right to choose but forced to bleat weakly about the law. He believes in euthanasia and carries six potassium cyanide pills - for his own use - if his body begins to fail as badly as the "wrecks" he's forced to prop up. His career as a doctor has left him with a lingering distaste for humanity but when the young wife of a corrupt old priest begs Glas to help her because her husband's forced attentions are distressing her, Glas instructs the clergyman to forge his "marital rights" for at least six months for the sake of his ailing heart but he proves to be a slave to his desires.

With its remarkably progressive title character and its themes of abortion, assisted dying, adultery and murder, Söderberg's book triggered a vicious campaign against him in Sweden. It's as much a psychological study as a thriller and Daniel Gerrol tells the story remarkably, carefully etching all the supporting players with grace and ease. Simple yet effective lighting evokes Glas gradually losing his sense of self and this, combined with his symbolically laden dreams, lend this an almost Bergmanesque quality. Rory Ford