

“Rx” by Kate Fodor

at Primary Stages 59 E. 59th Street (opening 2/7/12, closes 3/3/12)

Big Pharma on the Couch-Freud Gets the Last Laugh

With psychoanalysis down, but not out, the revolution in psychopharmacology rolls on. In this new comedy Kate Fodor puts the American addiction to the development of drugs for newly minted (eg, sadness) disorders or escalating numbers of patients with diagnoses such as ADHD on the couch.

In this fast paced quirky and witty drama, the venality, corruption, deceitfulness, marketing strategies and bureaucratic obsessions of the pharmaceutical industry are as exposed as Meena (Marin Hinkle) who is placed in a trial for a work depression disorder. Biweekly physical examinations of Meena wearing disposable paper gowns accompany her receiving either SP 925 (nine-to-five) or a chalk placebo for her work related unhappiness. Boundary violations as well as corporate exploitation show that human nature has changed little since Freud first delineated our infantile sexual predilections over one hundred years ago. Even a variant on foot fetishism makes an appearance. What has changed in the past half century is the treatment paradigm of our twenty first century. There is a possible pill for almost every ailment including Phil’s heartache. However, since heartaches can be reversed by a new love object in no time, Schmidt Pharma puts its millions into work related depression.

Dr. Phil Gray (Stephen Kunken), a Schmidt Pharma researcher, finds himself smitten by Meena’s prose poetry side, thereby violating the FDA ethical codes. Allison (Elizabeth Rich) head of marketing who has made her job her life is appropriately managerial. Somewhat surprisingly she does not cover up the boundary violation. Richard, a two dimensional CEO and Ed another marketing researcher whose apparent ADD makes him think he has much in common with Einstein are each played by Paul Neiback. The corporate shenanigans are interrupted by a touching relationship between Meena who goes to a department store when she is morose and meets up with an elderly widow, Frances, (Mary Louise Burke) whose life is rejuvenated by the purchase of new sail size, on sale underwear. The original music (Lindsay Jones) and versatile set (Lee Savage) are recognizably 21st century.

The audience may wonder what meaning is there in the lives of these 21st century characters and what can actually make a difference in their moods and lives; a drug, a placebo effect, the anticipation of feeling better, a new relationship, shopping? These are questions the pharmaceutical industry has few answers for. Freud whose insights are quickly slipping away, would have the last laugh and be unsurprised by an America gone mad.

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