



Raymond “Fight” Beck: An Account

By Kristina Polidano for tpepsis

Raymond “Fight” Beck is a play concerning fighting, yes, it is, I feel like this has already been established. Written by the young writer André Mangion and directed by Teatru Malta’s Sean Buhagiar, this production focuses upon Raymond Beck (John Montanaro), a retired boxer who makes his way back into the world of boxing as he challenges his old rival Dyson Cumbo (Davide Tucci), the current boxing champion.

Both of the main protagonists, Raymond and Dyson, came from different social strata, with both of them fitting into the mould of certain characters that one would find within Maltese society. Raymond is your typical local, hardworking guy whilst Dyson is the pompous, over-confident rich type. The way that this was shown in the play was not only within the way they dressed, where Dyson

constantly sported blue and Raymond wore red, but it was also translated within the dialogue itself. Raymond spoke in a Żejtun dialect, and so did his grandmother (Lilian Pace) and his trainer 'Il-Gustuż' (Żep Camilleri). It made their characters become actual people. Although seemingly minor, this feature added a dimension of reality that I felt was truly needed within the play. This manner of speaking was then juxtaposed by Dyson's "ingliż immaltizzat". Unfortunately this contrast fell short. I'm not saying that the acting itself was bad, on the contrary, I think that Tucci's portrayal of an ultra-competitive and ambitious athlete was spot on. I'm mostly referring to the dialogue itself, which seemed quite forced and lacked the flow that was present in other characters. That said, this attempt to try to manipulate the manner of speaking to show contrast was quite smart, but ended up being awkward and at times, it seemed to downplay the character's emotions.

The contrasts between the two characters are then focused upon as they enter the ring. Their motions are different, Dyson's were flamboyant and showy, whilst Raymond's were calculated, further adding to the utter differences that are present between these two personalities. This then all ends as the plot properly unfolds. I remember a particular scene where Blair and Raymond's grandmother joined them in the ring. That scene shocked me. Their inclusion seemed to make Dyson and Raymond into one, into individuals that had their own battles, into people who brought their baggage into their passion which is something that is incredibly true for many many athletes. Contrastingly enough, this oneness never appears in their trainers Il-Gustuż and is-Sindku (Peter Galea). Where the latter acts as the abusive father and power-hungry politician and Il-Gustuż acts as the father that Raymond never had. There's a further dimension of contrasts within the play, but I don't feel like I should speak about it, it was a process to notice it, and it's a process that you can only properly notice as an audience member.

The juxtapositions and contrasts in the plot were admirable to say the least, but the plot itself carried the classical mode a bit too much for me. Certain actions that were meant to shock were predictable and many many characters remained flat. A case in point is Blair's character (Kim Dalli), who I felt had at least some potential for complexity but took the place of many many female characters that came before her. The only two characters that sort of came close to this complexity were Victor, who was played by the writer himself and, oddly enough, Il-Grillu (Jesmond Tedesco Triccas). That said the play's pace was enjoyable, it was fast-paced, and exciting, just as a play concerning a sport such as boxing should be. Personally, I think that the comedic intervals perfectly alleviated the tension after particularly grueling scenes. It helped a lot see veteran actors such as Hector Bruno (Il-lover), Jesmond Tedesco Triccas, and

Ic-Callie (Toni Busuttill). Their comments, especially towards the end of the production were incredibly witty and definitely got a chuckle or two out of me.

The strongest element by far within the production was the direction. The boxers' movements within the ring were true to life, I could distinguish whether they were actors or not when they were in the ring. The use of light was incredibly well placed; from the stark late showing the shadow of the policeman at the begin at the beginning of the performance to the flashing lights that focused on the tension that was present between the two boxers. All of these elements reinforced the intense, roaring emotions that were presented by Montanaro and Tucci. The minimalist approach towards the production really allowed the actors' performance to shine. The absence of certain characters allowed the audience to focus on their mannerisms, and personally, these choices to completely ommit certain characters from showing up made me completely focus on the actors properly, and deeply empathise with them.

This production had many good points. Technique-wise, parallelisms were well-placed and smart, the direction was incredibly but I still think that it had some elements that could've been revised in a better way. That said, the production had to go through many constraints; from the budget to time (they only had about 6 weeks of rehearsal and only had a few proper rehearsals on stage). Even though the plot was quite predictable, the direction compensated for that shortcoming quite well and humanised the characters in such a way that I personally had not witnessed before.

Photo by Lindsey Bahia