

On 14 October *Petrichor* was given a dramatic reading at the Finborough Theatre in West London. The auditorium, small and cockpit like, brings the audience close to the drama and the space fizzed with the energy of the play. It was quite brilliantly delivered by four actors who transported us to its setting in South Yorkshire, a place Hannah Morley clearly knows well. Set in and about Doncaster it conveys a clear sense of place with a roll call of Yorkshire place names that drew a familiar sigh of recognition from one member of the audience.

At the very beginning of the play we met a street preacher whose rhetoric deliberately plays to a sense of victimhood among men at a job centre; men who have been made redundant, stripped of their pride, who feel left behind and need someone to blame. The preacher's racism and misogyny find plenty of fuel in the biblical texts that he quotes. As the play unfolds we discover there is an urgent and desperate need behind his cynical manipulation of people in need of hope.

After this we meet the two women at the heart of the play: Chloe, who is the worse for wear and Jo, a street pastor who is genuine, kind and resourceful. As the play unfolds, it pivots about the growing relationship between these two women and the discoveries they make about each other. Both the women are hiding secrets that disguise a deep sense of loss. Jo has a room that Chloe is forbidden to enter; Chloe tells constant lies to prevent anyone trampling on her vulnerability.

The fourth character is a young lad called Wiggy by his friends. He really likes Chloe. One of the comical and explosive moments in the play comes when he tries to kiss her. Wiggy offers Chloe a road that could deliver her from some of her troubles: near the end of the play he tells her that his mum is willing to give her a new home but she turns his offer down, for by then her journey has taken her beyond the need for a house or a job.

The question of 'God' is never far from the surface of the play. A question that is refracted through each of the characters. Wiggy reminds us that the 'Christian' God is not the only god. The Preacher's rhetoric about God proves to be empty and cynical. Jo needs God because he is the only guarantee that she can redeem her lost family. Chloe is the one who presents the greatest challenge to the audience. In the beginning she refuses to believe; hooked on a rolling news programme she is overexposed to a stream of bad news about the cruel world we live in. What kind of god could be responsible for it? Challenged by Jo she articulates the question of God through the popular paradox of Schrodinger's cat in which nothing is ever certain. Ultimately her need for a sense of connection leads her to proclaim that everyone is loved by the god who can be found in the air we breathe. Deprivation and loneliness do strange things to the human mind. Chloe seems to advocate a kind of pantheism and while her message may be appealing in its simplicity, she stands on a refuse bin, hungry and emaciated, to deliver it. The questions she raises are never resolved yet there is a tantalizing sense of hope at the end.

*Petrichor* is a play with great characters, humour and brilliant dialogue. It can be enjoyed as a tense drama of urban life in Yorkshire and at a deeper level too as it explores profound questions about faith and the way 'god' functions in their lives. The dramatic reading at the Finborough Theatre as part of their Vibrant festival, celebrating new writing, was a great way of launching this prize winning play on the world with the hope it will find the full performance it deserves in the future.

Romilly Janes

