

The Baltimore Waltz by Paula Vogel

Summary #1

Brother Carl and sister Anna take a whirlwind trip to Europe after they learn that Anna has a fatal illness (ATD or Acquired Toilet Disease) contracted from being a teacher of elementary school children. That wacky disease and several other clues alert the audience to the fact that Anna is not the one who is really sick-- that Carl is dying of AIDS and Anna is imaginatively creating this whole trip which they could never take since Carl was dying in a Baltimore hospital.

The entire action of the play takes place "really" in the Baltimore hospital, though the audience follows Anna in her fantasy trip to Paris, Munich and Vienna. When Anna shows slides of their European trip, all the shots are scenes from Johns Hopkins University Medical School. The preface to the play includes a very touching letter from Paula Vogel's brother, who died of AIDS in 1987.

<http://litmed.med.nyu.edu/Annotation?action=view&annid=1192>

Summary #2

When Anna, an unmarried schoolteacher, is diagnosed with ATD, Acquired Toilet Disease, a fatal new malady with a high risk factor for elementary school teachers, she and her brother Carl take flight to Europe.

Anna decides she wants to drown herself in the sensuality of food and sex, while Carl becomes involved in a wild Third Mannish espionage scheme to find a cure for his sister on the Continent.

Something is not quite right with the scenario, and the largest hint is dropped when Anna shows slides of their trip to Europe where each frame looks exactly like Baltimore.

Carl's quest for a cure dead ends with a mad Viennese quack. Their European idyll is broken by Carl's death, and the tragic revelation that the entire play was Anna's valiant fantasy to keep alive her brother's spirit when she could not save his life.

Winner of the Obie Award

http://www.stageplays.com/products/the_baltimore_waltz/Paula_Vogel