

Thickening the plot for Rhett and Scarlett

- Los Angeles Times 8 Sep 2006

As Hollywood legend has it, “Gone With the Wind” went into production without a workable script. In desperation, David O. Selznick, the film’s maverick producer, stopped production and hired famous script doctor Ben Hecht to distill Margaret Mitchell’s beloved but attenuated tale into filmable form. With the stalled project costing him a then-astronomical \$50,000 a day, Selznick locked himself, Hecht and newly hired director Victor Fleming in a room for five days, refusing to let anyone out until they had a viable scenario.

That true-life incident forms the basis for Ron Hutchinson’s “Moonlight and Magnolias,” now at the Odyssey. It’s a fruitful premise with plum roles for its three main actors, who under the direction of Scott Cummins exploit Hutchinson’s high concept and mordant dialogue to frequently hilarious effect. Unfortunately, Hutchinson inexplicably burdens his comedy with “meaningful” information about the plight of Jews in the Hollywood film industry — material that seems oddly inorganic in this comedic context, despite Hutchinson’s attempts to link it to Mitchell’s paeon to the antebellum South.

Cummins has an obvious talent for composition and pacing, but fumbles in helping some of his actors nail down their characters. Rob Nagle plays Selznick with just the right glint of zealotry in his calculating eye, although we fail to glimpse the street fighter

under Selznick's professorial exterior. Kip Gilman is pitch-perfect as the cynical Hecht, a wordsmith dismayed at the utter pap he has to convert into deathless drama. Greg Mullavey has some nice comic moments, but his compact stature and fidgety manner seem out of place for Fleming, who was by all accounts a strapping macho man. And Lynda Lenet, in her lesser role as Selznick's secretary, never explores the real person beneath the funny hair and adenoidal accent.

— F. Kathleen Foley