

The New Criterion

Theater

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The end of the line

by [Brooke Allen](#)

On *Exit the King*, *Happiness*, *Our Town* & *God of Carnage*.

Aging actors, longing to showcase skills they have spent a lifetime perfecting, are often obliged to dig deep for suitable and interesting projects. After all, there are relatively few plays that provide starring roles for older men, and New York can only handle so many Lear's per decade. In his search for an interesting new role, Geoffrey Rush has turned up a forgotten masterpiece, for which he is magnificently suited: Eugène Ionesco's *Exit the King*, first performed in France in 1962 and subsequently produced in England with Alec Guinness in the title role. Its only Broadway outing to date was in 1968, when the Phoenix Theater launched it in repertory for a season.

Seeing what the grandly outrageous Mr. Rush has been able to do with this absurdist tale of an absolute monarch being forced to confront his own death makes me wonder why it has not been a Broadway and West End staple for ...

Brooke Allen's latest book is *Moral Minority: Our Skeptical Founding Fathers* (Ivan R Dee).

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