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Beckett Play At Charles

'Godot' Funny, But Ideas Missing

The audience at the Charles Playhouse leaves the theatre still chuckling at the bawdy slapstick they have seen, but the perceptive playgoer feels that something important has been left out. "Waiting For Godot" is too complex to be as meaningless as this production would indicate.

When staging a play, a director has the opportunity to promulgate his own ideas by vivifying those points in the play that he likes and de-emphasizing those that he disagrees with. Michael Murray is a capable director; his facile use of the Charles' theatre-in-the-round stage without blocking anyone's view indicates this. Unfortunately, either he disagrees with Samuel Beckett entirely, or he did not understand the play, because the intellectual content is completely de-emphasized.

Intellectually, this play, a *tragicomedy* according to Beckett, shows the absurdity of modern man's search for salvation. Two tramps, Gogo and Didi, sit by the side of a road waiting for Godot (God), who will, they hope, save them, although they are not sure exactly what from. Gogo and Didi do not realize that they, symbolic of the dual sensual and intellectual nature of man, have it within themselves to be saved, as interchanging the syllables of their names indicates. Nothing happens, except for an encounter with Pozzo and his haltered servant Lucky, again symbolic of the dual nature of man. Lucky is tied to Pozzo and does his bidding while leading him because, to Beckett, this is the relationship of the intellect to the senses. Lucky's speech-thought-dream is an indication of the inability of the intellect to cope with the problems of God and death. Pozzo and Lucky are lost, in all senses of the word, in the second act because they tried to find something. Gogo and Didi are not saved, but at least, by inaction they manage to be no worse off than before. The boy, possibly the Christ child, who comes to tell them that Godot is not coming, but may come tomorrow, is as elusive as Godot because he too is a figment of their imaginations and a projection of themselves.

In several places, in this production, Beckett's stage directions are ignored. The boy charges off at Vladimir's first approach rather than almost playing tag before he exits. This bit is designed, by Beckett, to show the boy's elusiveness and give an inkling of his unreal nature.

Gogo and Didi fail to show the significance of the word "critic" at the end of the round of insults in the second act. This is really the ultimate insult, for, in reality, the tramps are critics who comment upon without joining the actions, if any, around them. None of the actors make any use of timing. By speeding the short exchanges between Gogo and Didi and lengthening the pauses between these exchanges, the director could both gain humor and accentuate the essential boredom and desperate futility of the situation. At times, all of the acts are handicapped by their inability to express a subtle change of emotion with the tone of their voices.

However, as slapstick, "Godot" goes over very well. Mickey Deems, who is featured, is an accomplished comedian. He blunders about the stage like a younger Ed Wynn, and can appear as pompous as Ollie Hardy or as woebegone as Stan Laurel. Dan Morgan, as Didi, is not as versatile, but performs capably, especially in the second act. The most noteworthy of the minor characters is Luois Negin as Lucky. Although he has only one speech, that speech is the most significant in the play. Negin knows it and gives this the hysterical, frantic reading it deserves. In the second act, the tree, the cross, bears leaves to indicate weeping at the fate of man. In this production, it might be weeping at the fate of the author's idea.

— Allen S. Krieger '62

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