



Photo: Keith Miller

Endgame-Test of endurance

by Beno John

The plays of Samuel Beckett exist in a dimension that maintains a precarious balance between the tragic and the comic. *Endgame*, now playing at the Citadel Too Theatre, is a case in point.

This balance is supported by the thrust of the dialogue, which is always couched in poetic terms. The words leap out of the actors' mouths in precise tempo, luring and seducing the unwary. To pull this sort of thing off on stage, a cohesive and tightly-disciplined cast is almost mandatory. Except for a few difficulties with the script, the play was performed with an ease uncharacteristic of

opening night. Each character in the quartet was explored with keen insight by the actors.

Maurice Good (Hamm) and John Neville (Clov) have a unique rapport as they embellish the motifs that are constantly juggled between them. Rapport is important in a play like *Endgame*; the actors have to work closely, supporting each other when the conditions of the play are at times quite terrifying. That is, most of the actors have to stay on the stage for the entire duration of the play. Hamm plays his part in total confinement (he is blind and crippled); Nell and Nagg crouch in barrels the whole time. Clov is allowed occasional

respite with his infrequent exits.

The demands made by the script are even tougher - not ones that are normally required in traditional acting, they are more of what one would expect of a musician tackling a written piece of music.

John Neville is fabulous (not to mention innovative). His portrayal of Clov is precise; he presents ever-changing moods of comedy, frustration and anger with a striking intensity.

Maurice Good as Hamm exercises his seemingly autocratic hold over the other characters with brilliance, maintaining his position through contrasting timbre; he bellows, insults, whines and cries with passion, though perhaps a bit too much.

Patricia Bell (Nell) and Keith Dinicol (Nagg) add a rich dimension to the performance, except for the fact that Bell looks much too young for her part.

The direction of the play must be commended - the tempo is well-thought-out and well-regulated. An admirable job, especially since this is the first Beckett play that Robert Armstrong has ever directed.

On opening night there was a sense of spirit behind the play. Here is a group of people devoted not only to the performance of the play but to the ideals behind the play, as well. I personally feel that this collaborative spirit will shape itself into even richer performances as the play continues. *Endgame* runs until Feb. 28 at Citadel Too.

The arts

Good: Beckett's world is

One big scream

by Beno John

The following is an interview with Maurice Good, who plays Hamm in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* currently running at Citadel Too. Good is an Irish actor presently living in Canada. He is an experienced Beckett actor, well versed in the style and techniques particular to Beckett plays. But what is most important is his genuine feeling towards Beckett.

Good on Beckett: He uses the play as a moviemaker makes films. He is always present in his plays as a director, no matter where they are performed. It is all laid down and given to you, and you feel he is really present. I think Beckett has evolved to what is the modern poetic drama. In a way *Endgame* is a symphony, as well as his other works. There are sequences that are purely musical. He himself has said that his work is mainly a matter of 'fundamental sounds.' Beckett's intense, scholarly learning permeates his plays. Yet his plays are meant more directly for performance. Despite the most demanding discipline, (required by Beckett's plays) despite the enormous effort required by the actor, it is all very enriching. Somehow what he gives us most particularly are the words - because that's his talent. But it is also the machinery to demonstrate our own talents. And in spite all the difficulties, his works are illuminated by a tremendous humor which provides an immense relief for us. And the interior humor of the dialogue is Beckett's way of exploiting the audience. His knowledge of the theatre is expansive.

On *Endgame*: We were under quite a bit of stress with this play, because we had only twelve days to rehearse. But now it has found its feet - it's quite secure. We have a quartet here - the contributions of Keith Dinicol and Pat Bell are tremendous. I say the same of Robert Armstrong, who has guided us carefully through the performance. It's a very exciting,

collaborative endeavour. In a play of this sort, the parts of Hamm and Clov are big undertakings. I (Hamm) am onstage in that armchair from beginning to end. And I am literally blind from the opaque glasses that I wear throughout the play. Nann and Nell have to spend the whole play confined in two barrels. Only Clov gets offstage once in a while. (Because of this) the actors need each other so much in Beckett, especially in this instance when we have no physical contact. It's extremely difficult, for one has to maintain an absolutely eagle-eyed concentration. The only thing that sustains you is the accuracy with which Beckett has plotted the course of his action. As in music he has pauses, but with Beckett they are indications of the tempo. This is a difficult discipline to achieve. What you find yourself doing during rehearsals is trying to 'hear' the play. Then once you get the tempo, the flow and the rhythm established, Beckett takes over. In other words, the best device in his plays is that you bring yourself to the play, as a musician would to a fine piece of music.

His set pieces are like arias. Nagg's piece is an aria. I have some and Clov has one. And Beckett specifies what approach should be taken towards these pieces. Clov's toneless speech at the end is just that. Beckett is saying in effect listen to this, this is important. The monotonous tone is like putting a spotlight on the words.

On despair in Beckett's plays: He has been criticized for writing about despair too much. But he answers that the world is one big scream - that there is despair everywhere. This is what the human condition is, and this is what he writes about. It's despair - but he writes about it nobly. Clov says: "You weep and weep for nothing, so as not to laugh." Or as Nell says: "There is nothing funnier than unhappiness. I grant you that."

On Canada: I fell in love with the country when I toured it in 1971. I like the mountains, the plains, the great rivers and lakes. I love the country and the people. The theatre is exploding here. The actors and directors are of a nomadic sort, they have a bit of the gypsy in them. These young Canadian actors are the best kind you can hope to meet. They love the risks and challenges and they work like hell. The actors here are very dedicated.

On the meaning behind *Endgame*: It means something different for everybody. But I think Beckett is writing about love most of the time. We all work through love to succeed with Beckett's characters; actors all get very close to Beckett. There is an incredible interdependence between the characters. They need each other - we all need each other. That is one of his messages - really. I think he is an intensely humane author. This is what transforms his art into glory.

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