

.. on YUP's stupid decision to produce 'Dylan'. But that's David McCaughna's opinion, since..

by David McCaughna

I shall not go to see the play the York University Players will be putting on this spring.

They are going to do 'Dylan' which is an atrocious excursion of little dramatic quality. This type of play may be well-suited to places like Broadway, where quality doesn't seem to matter much, but I really don't think a university should insult its students by presenting such second-rate rubbish.

'Dylan' is an attempt by Sidney Michaels to picture the last days of the great Welsh poet Dylan Thomas. But what it does is merely prey upon the sordid aspects of a tragic man in his decline and fall. It neglects the man and concentrates upon the leg-

end that has grown up around his excesses. It is a foul and lurid peep-show in true Harold Robbins fashion.

The play doesn't try at all to get close to the actual Dylan but shows a blabbering cardboard lecher and dipsomaniac squeezing women's breasts and being generally nasty. It is a portrait of the artist as a real bastard, it isn't Dylan Thomas but a blow-up of a legend spread by a lot of old milkmaids.

Dylan Thomas said he wrote his poems 'for the love of Man and in praise of God, and I'd be a damn fool if they weren't.' Sidney Michaels' motivation in writing 'Dylan' surely must have been something a little more base and he was a damn fool to

do it. I refuse to giggle at the slandering of the memory of an ill and sad man.

I don't mean that Sidney Michaels should have written a play that would have made Dylan an angelic figure. I know he wasn't that. If there must be a play about Dylan then I would like to see the real man. Like all men he had his weaknesses and strengths--even the near-God of our time, the late Kennedy, had a few mortal flaws (but whisper it). There is no purpose or insight in Michaels' play. One could just as soon stay home and read the memoirs of Hedy Lamarr.

Plays like 'Dylan' are written for the undiscriminating audiences of the commercial theatre--not for univer-

sity theatres. If our Players insist upon dealing in trivia why don't they do plays like 'Barefoot in the Park', 'The Odd Couple' or even 'The Mousetrap'. These are nice trashy plays that don't resort to distorting the picture of a pathetic genius in the name of entertainment.

But I think we should have something more than just a little entertainment from the Players. Entertainment is not the sole purpose of drama. Is it too much to ask for good plays? Why should one go out to a theatre for two hours of drivel when one has the television at home. I want to see plays with pathos and wit, plays that, if you will excuse the cliché, have something to say--some depth. There are so

many great plays that are rarely seen around Toronto. I mean works by people like Shakespeare, Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Pirandello, Brecht, and from our time: Beckett, Ionesco, Pinter, Arden and Osborne. The list could go on for pages. I might even suggest that the Players do Dylan Thomas' 'Under Milkwood' which proves that he was capable of far more than boozing and fornication.

Our university should be presenting the best classical and avant-garde drama. I hope that no one will have the gall to complain about poor audience turn-out for 'Dylan' for the play and the Players deserve nothing but an empty theatre.



Dylan Thomas, about whom all this fuss is.

START HERE and follow the line to read a biting attack...

.. Don McKay defends YUP's choice

by Don McKay

March 1, 2 and 3 York University Players are presenting Sidney Michaels' play 'Dylan', the story of Dylan Thomas in America. The question has been raised about the wisdom of choosing this production. As stage manager of the YUP production I have become very close not only to this play, but especially to the character of Dylan.

The play is a very tightly constructed piece of theatrical literature. The author avoids trite dialogue and unnecessary use of Thomas' poems, which could have been misused as very melodramatic filler. According to all available biographies, the play is historically accurate and gives a just portrait of Dylan in the last years of his life. The author remembers that the primary purpose of theatre is to entertain and he arranges the incidents so that the result is two hours of highly entertaining theatre.

The play only attempts to portray Dylan during his last two years of life. So very little is seen of the creative side of Thomas, as he was very unproductive except for Under Milkwood during this time.

By limiting himself to this period of Dylan's life, Michaels made it very difficult to show a true portrait of Thomas as the sensitive poet with a child-like love of life and nature.

To describe this side of Dylan, the playwright has included many scenes which could be pure fiction in which Dylan talks about himself and his life. The sensitive playgoer leaves the play remembering these scenes rather than the raucous boob-pinching scene or the lusty session with stripper Thelma Wonderland.

There are two very poignant scenes between Dylan and Caitlin, Thomas' wife, in the first act

in which Dylan shows his fear of life and his pathetic disgust at his recent lack of productivity. Dylan opens himself again in the second act to his mistress, Meg, and to his doctor.

Personally, I think the highlight of the play comes when Dylan reads Baa Baa Black Sheep. He turns this simple nursery rhyme into his life story and in this scene Thomas' sensitivity and creativity is revealed.

If the audience leaves Dylan with a picture of Thomas as a lusty lecherous fool, either the production is a failure or they lack the maturity to extract the sensitive from the erotic.

Dylan is a particularly suitable play for YUP. In choosing a play for York, a primary consideration must be how it fits the theatre. Dylan was originally presented on a complex of turnables and stairways. This concept was adapted with relative ease to the Burton Auditorium's thrust stage, with the changes achieved by moving the actors rather than the stage and by adjusting lighting. As complex lighting is very necessary, this will be the first full scale production at York to use the tremendous flexibility of Burton's lighting system.

For a university with a student population of approximately 3,500, York has a large group of talented people both in the acting and technical field. With a cast of 14 and a complex technical background, Dylan provides an opportunity for these people to find an outlet for their talent.

Ultimately the choice of a play is the director's choice. In this case the director, Nicholas Ayre, frankly admits he chose the play because he loves it, and loves Dylan as a character. Why not? The play is excellent theatre and is the story of a great and lovable man.