

Theater Review: Days to Come

By Eric Uhlfelder

So I said to myself, "The fate of the fool will also befall me. What then have I gained by being wise?" And I said to myself that this too is futile. For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise, just as with the fool, seeing that both will be forgotten in the days to come. Alas, the wise man will die just like the fool! So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. For everything is futile and a pursuit of the wind.

The intensity of this play can be read by Lillian Hellman's decision to title her second drama from this passage of Ecclesiastes 2:16. The story is a morality tale in which no one escapes unscathed. This two-hour foray into an early 20th century Ohio town is one of the most intense stories the Mint Theater has ever produced during its 23 years of resurrecting lost plays.

If the drama were more nuanced it would have been extraordinary. But as an early work of the famed American playwright, who was just 31 when the play premiered in 1936 at

mirable workers, personified by their spokesman Tom Firth (Chris Henry Coffey). The men are long-time friends, with a long history of working together collegially.

The tale turns tragic when, despite their best efforts, they hit an impasse. The owner's lawyer suggests a way out that will break more than the will of the workers. Thus, the die is cast, and the story careens towards the futility alluded to in the referenced Scripture.

Hellman's dialogue displays the era's evolving hard-edged realism:

HENRY ELLICOTT (Andrew Rodman's lawyer who's having an affair with Rodman's wife): I want to know where we stand, Julie. It's time for me to know.

JULIE RODMAN (Rodman's wife): We stand nowhere. We've always stood nowhere. I knew about you—and you knew about me...things start as hopes and end up as habits...one of the things that brings people like you and me together is the understanding that there won't be any talk about it at the end.

The playwright uses Rodman's devolving



THE STORY IS A MORALITY TALE IN WHICH NO ONE ESCAPES UNSCATHED. Larry Bull, Chris Henry Coffey, Ted Deasy, Roderick Hill, and Janie Brookshire in *Days to Come* by Lillian Hellman. Photo by Todd Cerveris.

the Vanderbilt Theater on Broadway, *Days to Come* is a compelling, daring work for having taken head-on, capitalism's Achilles heel: the struggle to create and manage a business and workers' ability to secure a living wage, especially during the hard times. The underlying theme: the train wreck caused when well-intentioned leaders naively start down an aggressive track to solve an existential problem.

Designer Henry Feiner has set the play on a stunning Art Deco stage with furniture that could be right out of a period auction at Christie's.

The ensemble, deftly directed by J.R. Sullivan, works together seamlessly—led by the quixotic factory owner Andrew Rodman (played by Larry Bull), his scheming lawyer Henry Ellicott (Ted Deasy), Rodman's beautiful, feckless wife Julie (Janie Brookshire), the sharp, intelligent labor organizer Leo Whalen (Roderick Hill), and the nefarious strike-buster Sam Wilkie (Dan Daily).

One can sense Hellman's early experience in Hollywood in this film noirish tale relying on direct, confrontational dialogue, sharp pacing, and various subplots. But at the core of this Depression-era story is a decent, caring factory owner pitted against equally ad-

marriage to echo the larger conflict tearing apart the company and town, foreshadowing the changes that were to come to small towns across America.

ANDREW RODMAN (speaking to his wife): I don't care who wins. If it were that simple, it would be fine. But it isn't that simple. I can't fit the pieces together. That's what is happening to me. I suddenly don't know where my place in the whole thing is. Don't tell me that's one of the things I was lucky to worry about late. That doesn't do any good. I've only loved two things in my whole life: you and this town...Remember how I never wanted to go to Europe or to anyplace else—even when you went? This was my home, these were my people, I didn't want much else. But that's been changed. I don't know how. And I don't know where I stand anymore.

Days to Come is less subtle and more contemporary than most Mint productions. But its message resonates formidably in this very satisfying revival.

Days to Come runs through October 6 at the Beckett Theatre at 410 West 42nd Street.

See: minttheater.org



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