



The Dark Side of the Moon: A Review of Moonlight

Take advantage of student theater! The final performance of Harold Pinter's Moonlight is tonight at 8 o'clock in the Lerner Black Box. Go and be literary!

Harold Pinter's *Moonlight* is in no way the typical drama performed by eager undergraduates and Sarah Wansely's choice to take on this work reflects a certain courage and confidence both in her own talents and that of her cast and crew.

Pinter is famous for word play and subtext and *Moonlight* is no exception. The script challenges the actors cast to grapple with big emotions and big fears without their usual emotive volume. Here, Wansely offers an almost all too real look at familial relations, intimacy and the responsibilities they respectively entail.

Against Birdy Sahagian's stage, designed all in blacks, whites and gray, the actors explore the blurry boundary between secrecy and intimacy that plagues almost every family's home. Surrounded by shades gray, the characters quite literally inhabit this nebulous state and subtly voice questions families often are too scared to ask.

The action of the play surrounds the declining physical health and mental complacency of Andy (Thomas Anawalt), the play's protagonist and patriarch. Bedridden, he delivers surly rants and pompous homilies to any audience he can muster, usually his disinterested wife, Bel (Maura McNamara). While Anawalt booms with both repressed and irreverent rhetoric, McNamara sings her lines sarcastically and returns his jabs with her own bittersweet venom.

Andy has no qualms enumerating his affairs and recounts his former adulterous behavior with a definite sense of pride and nostalgia. Anawalt and McNamara capitalize on the paucity of Pinter's words, however, when they slow down and let their pauses and sighs hang in the air. When Anawalt lowers his voices to a whisper he poignantly, if perhaps unwittingly, exposes himself as a crumpled man terrified by the prospect of death and grasping for comfort. Intent that his adult sons, Jake and Fred, visit him before he dies, Anawalt delivers a powerful monologue chastising his prodigal sons. In Anawalt's desperate reiteration of "Where are they?" it is uncertain whether his desire to see them is born of love or of a need for respect.

Unfortunately Jake and Fred struggle to either love or respect their father. David Gerson gives a stellar performance as Jake and handles Pinter's subtext with an impressive synthesis of restraint and urgency. Delivering his lines with a coy grin and an almost poetic rhythm, Gerson's Jake is all confidence and bravado. With a commanding presence, Gerson as Jake at first seems to have both emotionally and geographically distanced himself from his family. Over the course of the play, however, both the audience and Jake himself begin to doubt his easy detachment. Eventually Jake, like his

father, begins to question his confident actions and speeches. With alarming rawness, Gerson three times repeats "What is being said?." Each time he asks this his voice grows more and more fragile and the audience fully comprehends Jake's struggle to realize the meaning, or lack there of, of his words.

Wansely demonstrates her directorial skill when she encourages her cast to capitalize on the drama and tension that are inherent to Pinter's script. This, of course, is very difficult because at first glance Pinter's script seems to lack dramatic conflict entirely. Nonetheless the drama is there, latent in Pinter's words. As Wansely and her cast demonstrate, *Moonlight* is most powerful when language breaks down, when words fail and when silence is the only adequate response.

In her introductory note, Wansely mentions the initial grumblings the ostensibly inscrutable script received at the first read through. Perhaps the play takes time to develop, but, by the end, Pinter's meaning is clear. The witty banter and the meandering monologues that characterize the opening scenes of the play are in fact laced with meaning. The questions Anawalt and Gerson ask may be too large for the neat answers they are looking for, but nonetheless they reveal a universal and timeless loneliness that unfortunately, as Pinter suggests, only intensifies as death approaches.

http://www.bwog.net/articles/the_dark_side_of_the_moon_a_review_of_moonlight#jump