

11-3-1978

'Virginia Woolf': Stripping Illusion Invites Collapse

Walter Lazenby

Follow this and additional works at: http://thekeep.eiu.edu/lazenby_reviews

Recommended Citation

Lazenby, Walter, "'Virginia Woolf': Stripping Illusion Invites Collapse" (1978). *Walter Lazenby Reviews*. 43.
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/lazenby_reviews/43

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Theatre Arts at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walter Lazenby Reviews by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.

Friday 3 November 1978

'Virginia Woolf': Stripping Illusion Invites Collapse

By WALTER LAZENBY

"Let there be truth, though the world perish."

The plot and certain specific incidents in Edward Albee's best (I think) and most readily understandable full-length play might have been built on such a motto, or on a variation: Let people's illusions be stripped away, even if various individuals' worlds seem to collapse.

I refer to the controversial "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" which, evidently because it was so painfully honest, failed to win a Pulitzer award.

To some, the play will still seem aimed at destroying reputations of "nice" people who reside in academe.

To some, it will present an unflattering and unwelcome view of human nature, since the characters seem ill-bred and cruel, or of marriage tempestuous!

In some it will arouse shock at the "Games People Play" in order to get through lonely evenings or unrewarding lives.

To more thoughtful spectators it will present a bleak picture of a world in which one who cannot create destroys; a world in which parlor games (of an unconventional sort) are raised to the level of an existential gambit, a mechanism to deal with alienation and universal emptiness; a world in which the illusory consolations of

A Review

History (accumulated values of the Past) and Science (the promise of the Future) no longer belong.

What should not go unnoticed in this love-hate classic is that there is at least some love and that the chief combatants have the strength to pick up the pieces of their shattered illusions and plan new strategy.

And what I think few will deny is that the Eastern production, which is scheduled for three more performances this Homecoming weekend, has enough power and polish to make the painful material pleasing in its artistic form.

Contributing to the effect is the drastic cutting E.G. Gabbard has done. He has reduced playing time from over three hours to something like two and a half, yet in watching I did not notice that anything vital had been omitted. Even so, he has included some very effective long pauses.

And the cast — the cast manages surprising maturity, surprising to me even though beforehand I knew the actors to be seasoned ones.

Katie Sullivan ably commands the

spotlight which inevitably focuses on Martha and the actress playing Martha. Her perfect delivery of the line "I don't bray!" establishes a norm for subsequent speeches. Hers is an earthy Martha, yet successful also in conveying the character's vulnerability. Yet I had hoped for a slightly more tearfully pathetic soliloquy at the opening of Act Three — in the fine metaphorical speech about ice cubes.

Peter Samuel as George outdid all his previous performances in roles at Eastern, with fine timing and especially effective facial contortions. His speech on reality in Act Two is a highlight of his interpretation. At the end he seems to feel genuine love for Martha.

Randy Haeg, who has usually been cast in eccentric roles up to now, shows that he can handle a serious role as well. He walks a tightrope between making Nick too passive and too belligerent (Too much belligerence would call into question Nick's reasons for staying through all the turmoil.)

And Janet Fox brings out a great deal of the neuroticism of her character (Honey); at times she is frighteningly good.

A well-designed and executed set, interesting in its own right, provides an appropriate environment and needed opportunities for movement.