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Observed Rehearsal of Director White

I attended a rehearsal by director Molly White on November 11, 2024, from 7:00 to 8:00 PM within the academic McMichael Hall. The space was set up for a relaxed, small-group rehearsal. One end of the room was set up with chairs and desks for Director White and her two assistant stage managers, Hoth and Em. The stage was arranged with a small kitchen table in the direct center of the room. Surrounding this table on all sides were four chairs. When the scene begins, there is a birthday cake that is brought onstage and placed in the center of the table. Although they were unable to use a prop or real cake, they were lucky enough to have the part of The Cake played by Hoth’s plush. All actors, Vea and Lilly, were present for this rehearsal, they showed up early and were ready to perform even before I got there. Director White started rehearsal with a broad plan of what she wanted accomplished for the night. She laid out how they would run the scene a few times and clean up minor things with the blocking.

From the beginning, the atmosphere was light and fun for everyone present. People were laughing and chatting, and more than just within their jobs for the production. There was plenty of conversation between actors, assistant stage managers, and the director, creating a well-connected environment for working. Because of this easygoing and relaxed mood, I feel like the actors were able to very easily slip into the down-to-earth characters that Cariani wrote for this scene.

The setup of the room was very interesting and, in my opinion, the arrangement played perfectly into the mood of the scene. With a table in the center surrounded by chairs, the actors were brought closer together and took up less overall stage space, creating a close and intimate feel. Also, because this is at the beginning of the scene, there is almost nowhere for the actors to move with the exception of being apart from each other. This lends itself beautifully to the message of the scene as well, as this is a couple who, after many years of marriage are drifting apart from each other due to differing expectations of marriage. Because the table was so centralized, it felt as if it were a focal point or pivot for the rest of the scene to orbit around. And with the birthday cake being the start of their argument, it made for very impactful movement as metaphorically, they orbit around their problems without ever coming into contact and working on them.

There were many moments from my observation of the scene that stood out to me, however, the most impactful one was at the beginning of the scene after Vea’s character remarks on the cake. Lilly’s character breaks out into maniacal laughter, which carries us into the conflicts of the scene. Lilly’s laughter slowly grew from an introverted chuckle into a raucous guffaw, which was greatly supported with her physicality of clapping, slapping her knee, and so on. Her performance was able to very effectively set the tone of the scene as while it was a very good laugh, traces of uncomfortability were woven throughout. Although I had seen this scene before in the read through, this initial laugh made the scene darker and more serious as the topics spoken about within it are very grounded in reality and Lilly’s performance did these ideas justice.

That said, not everything went amazing from my observation. There was a strange problem present that I had not run into before: they were too prepared. The scene itself was in very good shape; I would even say performance-ready. And while it is a great thing that they are so ahead, it created some unique problems. The one that I mainly took note of was the amount of conversation that was happening. In between runs, there would be a couple of minor notes given. However, after that, there would be a conversation about unrelated things that would last almost as long as another run through. And while I fully understand that it was one of their last rehearsals, in my opinion the time could have been used better.

Overall, this rehearsal was open, friendly, and productive, balancing work with the communal aspect of theatre. Director White’s relaxed approach helped the actors to feel comfortable and productive. Although there was some downtime in between runs, the rehearsal met all of its goals, and the scene ended up looking strong and performance ready.