

Samuel Beckett wrote "Footfalls" for one actress onstage in the role of May. May's mother was to be an offstage voice pre-recorded by the same actress. In 1989 in the former Czechoslovakia, Margo Lee Sherman performed "Footfalls" in this manner.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, JUNE 5, 1980

Stage: 2 Beckett Works

By MICHIKO KAKUTANI

ALWAYS a master of the minimal, Samuel Beckett has continually worked at refining his vision, and his later plays are so short, so intense, that they seem to pivot on a single image. In the case of "Footfalls" and "Not I," which Lawrence Sacharow has staged with appropriate austerity at La Mama, those images, a woman pacing a thin, white line on the floor and a spectral mouth floating in the dark, are stark indeed. But they are also powerful in their attenuation. They compress the author's lasting preoccupations with death and guilt into one dramatic gesture.

A kind of fugue for two voices, "Footfalls" is the first and more substantial work. Suffering from a kind of meta-physical insomnia, a middle-aged woman named May, the name of Beckett's mother, walks back and forth endlessly, the clap of her heels on the floor marking the passage of time as insistently as any clock. It is a striking if somewhat self-contained tableau, and the vacant-eyed May, played with deliberation and restrained emotion by Margo Lee Sherman, looks hauntingly like the woman in Edvard Munch's painting "The Scream."

As May walks, her ancient mother, portrayed dispassionately by Gretel Cummings, whines, questions and probes. What unspeakable thing happened to May that she should now spend her life walking the bare floors of

Compressed Images

NOT I and FOOTFALLS, by Samuel Beckett; directed by Lawrence Sacharow; setting and lighting by Geoffrey P. Hall; costumes by Deborah Benson; stage manager, Georganne Rogers; assistant stage manager, Hallie Kuppelmann. La Mama E.T.C. presents River Art Productions. At 74A East Fourth Street.

FOOTFALLS

May Margo Lee Sherman
 Woman's Voice Gretel Cummings

and

NOT I

Mouth Margo Lee Sherman
 Auditor Gretel Cummings

this house? Why does her memory fail to make sense of the past? When will she stop "revolving it all" in her mind? Talking desultorily to herself as much as to her mother, May tries to find some answers, but of course there aren't any to be found.

In the second play, "Not I," the futility of language and memory is dramatized by the Mouth, a pair of chattering lips, caught in a spotlight. It has spent a lifetime, nearly 70 years, in silence, unheard and unloved, and now as death approaches, it tries desperately to articulate its past. Yet like the voluble characters in Beckett's novels "Molloy" and "Malone Dies," it ends up delivering an elliptical and wholly self-absorbed monologue. As spoken by Miss Sherman in crisp, toneless syllables, it is a voice crying in the wilderness, and the silent, virtually motionless Auditor (Gary Tacon) who looks on from the side can neither still its cries nor alleviate its pain.