JFK Death Plot Play Defended

Parody Lampoons the Johnsons and Kennedys

By MORT YOUNG


An off-Broadway play, "MacBird," which implies that President Johnson plotted John F. Kennedy's assassination and casts Sen. Robert Kennedy as a power-hungry avenger, was defended today by its co-producer as "thought provoking."

The play was called "tasteless" by a printer, Jay Rosenblatt, who refused to run off programs for the free verse Parody, which lampoons the Johnsons, the Kennedys and Adlai Stevenson.

Miss Julia Curtis, co-producer of the play, commented that, "this is one of the best things about a play, if somebody finds something offensive about it. Too much, theater is in good taste—and is terribly dull."

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"They can attack Johnson's policies. I couldn't care less," Rosenblatt insisted. "But to paint the man as a conspirator is crazy, lunacy. It's wrong. Somebody has to say it before the play opens, not afterward when it's already done."

"Showcard," in his plant at 588 Ninth Ave., explained his decision was not a business choice, but a highly personal opinion. "I'm shocked. They do a parody on the Macbeth theme, where Macbeth is MacBird and MacBird is obviously Lyndon Johnson. It's the worst possible taste. I don't want to be associated with it. I'm ashamed."

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WRITTEN BY STUDENT "MacBird" first appeared in print last year as a free verse pamphlet of satire, written by Mrs. Barbara Gerson when she was a student at the University of Washington, 20,000 copies have been sold across the nation.

The script depicts President and Mrs. Johnson as MacBird and Lady MacIlird, parodies of Shakespeare's Macbeth and Lady Macbeth whose overweening ambition lead them to murder Duncan for his crown.

Although hewing closely to the Shakespearean version, Mrs. Gerson has turned "Macbeth's" three witches into an elderly liberal, a beatnik and a Black Muslim who intone -- instead of "bubble, bubble, burn, baby, burn.

Witches assure MaeBird that he need fear no man "with beating heart or human blood."

MacBird then arranges the murder of Ken O'Duno (President Kennedy).

Lady MacBird is portrayed with all the single-minded viciousness of Lady MakBeth. But instead of the jutting, washing of a bloody "damned spot," Lady MacBird warns; "Flowers by the roadside, let these flowers, let the land be lined with living corpses."

MacBird finally dies of a heart attack, as Robert plays publicist. Then Robert reveals that his father had replaced his and Ken O'Dunc's hearts with steel and their blood with "antiseptic brine" to fit them for "roles of world, authority."

The 25-year-old authoress, Mrs. Gerson, and her husband now live in Brooklyn. She is writing a second play, with the help of a $5,000 grant from the Yale School of Drama, which she won as a result of winning the National Endowment for the Arts Playwriting Award.

The producers have raised $30,000 for backers to stage the play at the Village Gate, 180 Bleecker St. It opens Feb. 8, said Dorothy Ross, the play's publicist.