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Democratic Republic) 1979.

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Theatre in Review

ROSEMARIE K. BANK, Editor

WALLENSTEINS TOD. By Friedrich Schiller.
Deutsches Theater, Berlin, German Democratic Republic. November 28, 1979.

In the Deutsches Theater's new production of Schiller's Wallenstein trilogy, Wallenstein is a quixotic figure whose traitorous machinations against the Empire forcefully contrast with his self-indulgent procrastination. Strongly influenced by superstition, he is a hero neither ideal nor tragic, but torn between irresistible historical forces and his own vaulting ambition.

The major conflict in *Wallensteins Tod* is Wallenstein's decision to ally himself with the Swedes and thus betray the Empire during the Thirty Years' War. This decision is based principally on Wallenstein's desire to become King of Bohemia, but the production tends to de-emphasize the personal and to focus instead on the political aspects of that decision, namely peace and a partial unification of the separated German states. Wallenstein's dallying with the idea of a separate peace with the Swedes allows Octavio Piccolomini to set forces in motion which bring about Wallenstein's ultimate destruction and the end of any hope of saving or uniting the German people. Despite the epic presentation of this conflict, political implications are clear, especially to audiences in divided Berlin.

Director Friedo Solter emphasizes the political component of the play through Terzky and Illo, who seem level-headed and almost idealistic in their insistence upon collaboration with the Swedes, thus lending credibility to the view that Wallenstein, in fact a prince, had a right to conduct "negotiations" to give respite—however brief—to a torn and bleeding Germany. The production's design also favors betrayal. Scenes played in Wallenstein's residence are always in black and white—flowing white draperies contrast with flat black backdrops, costumes are also black or white, and the lighting is stark and

direct, with practically no color modification. In this highly rational world, where everything is black and white, Wallenstein wavers and waits for the stars to guide him. In contrast, the residence of Octavio Piccolomini is a box-set in sharply forced perspective, rich and varied in color, emphasizing the narrowness and decadence of the Empire (significantly, characters enter and exit through enormous pictures on the walls). With treachery everywhere, Wallenstein's betrayal begins to assume the proportions of an act of national salvation.

Much of Eberhard Esche's effectiveness as Wallenstein derives from admirably underplaying many scenes where another actor might have succumbed to melodramatic histrionics. The scene with the Swedish ambassador, where Wallenstein's defection is openly debated, is characterized by tightly controlled phrasing and an extraordinarily muted eloquence. By contrast, the scene in which he addresses the cuirasseurs of Pappenheim before the battle is an explosion of rhetoric. In Wallenstein's soliloquies, Esche flows back and forth between a kind of realism and a despairing introspection. In the end, Esche's Wallenstein takes on stature by recognizing that he has been duped as much by his own fatalism as by his enemies.

This is a striking production, and much credit is due director Solter for the exquisite pace and the overall tightness of the ensemble's work. The acting with few exceptions is excellent, but of course a production of *Wallensteins Tod* can go no further than the actor who plays the leading role can carry it, and this one benefited immeasurably from Esche's control, focused energy, and masterful use of verse. Esche is primarily responsible for the unquestioned success of this production at the Deutsches Theatre—now the state theatre of the German Democratic Republic.

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Two views of Eberhard Esche in *Wallensteins Tod*. See *Theatre in Review*, p. 388.