

THE Arts

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A Beckett Tale, Reimagined in Movement

The latest addition to the French Institute-Alliance Française's Crossing the Line festival takes a little-known story by Samuel Beckett and examines it from multiple angles.

DANCE REVIEW

GIA
KOURLAS

The story, "The Image," is an uncommonly long sentence that crystallizes the last moments of a man's life as he recalls the memory of a spring day spent with a woman and a dog.

In "The Image," performed Thursday night at Le Skyroom, the French director Arthur Nauzyciel proposes an "improved" reading featuring interpretations by a musician (Mileece), an actress (Lou Doillon, in her stage debut) and a dancer (Damien

The Image

Le Skyroom

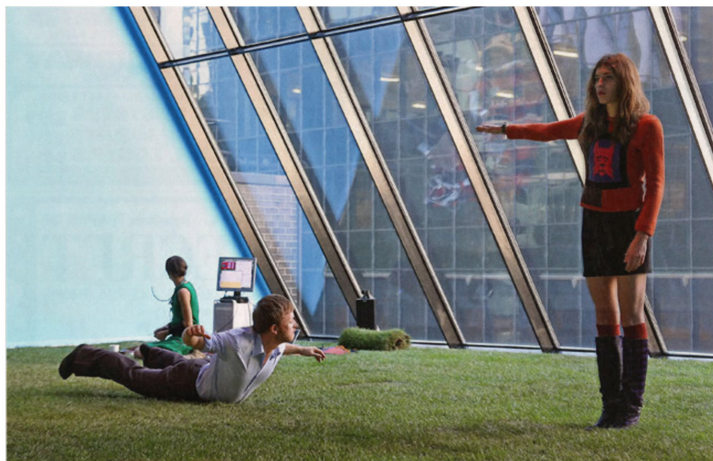
Jalet). Since 2006 Mr. Nauzyciel has recreated the work only three times; the set — in many ways a fourth character — is one reason. Designed by Giulio Lichtner, the stage is covered with pungent green grass. The earthy scent is intoxicating, but most arresting is how the space's large slanted window, overlooking the city, creates the sensation of being transported to a miniature park in the sky.

Before the performance begins, Ms. Doillon stands next to a wall with her back to the audience. Mr. Jalet is face down in

the grass, and Mileece, wired with sensors, sits in front of a computer. Her sensitive sound score, which emits a harmonious blend of environmental noises and her breath, quietly fills the space as Beckett's text, translated from French into English, is shown on a wall in the form of a nonstop subtitle.

When Ms. Doillon steps forward to recite the words, she hauls us into the present. Embellishing her reading with concise gestures and unswerving phrasing, Ms. Doillon — the daughter of Jane Birkin, the actress and singer, and Jacques Doillon, the director — uncovers the rhythm of the language, which suddenly brings meaning to the cryptic tale. Her performance is the most fascinating of the three; in body and voice she belongs on the stage.

Mr. Jalet tackles the sentence with a fierce carnality. Flipping onto his back and stomach like a fish out of water, he takes many of the story's images literally — playing up, for instance, Beckett's reference to a dog by transforming himself into one. Growling and biting the leg of his pants, he thrashes on the grass like a wild animal. Ms. Doillon, lying on her side, giggles. It's a singular moment, in which Mr. Nauzyciel, peeling back the layers of a haunting memory, finds sensation and pathos within a single, unwieldy sentence. It's no longer just an image, but alive.



ANDREA MOHIN/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Lou Doillon, right, Damien Jalet and Mileece in "The Image."