

'No exits' in Sartre play

By ANN NUGENT

Huis Clos by Jean-Paul Sartre, presented by Theatre Franais of Melbourne, in French, directed by Caroline Stacey, at the Hawk Theatre, Narrabundah College, June 3, at 8pm. Amateur.

For its third visit to Canberra the Theatre Franais of Melbourne has chosen Jean-Paul Sartre's very transportable play, *Huis Clos*.

In *Huis Clos* Sartre predicts the ultimate condition of three characters who have chosen to live "inauthentic" lives. Gradually the audience is led into the characters' personally constructed hells.

The two women and one man are trapped, not in a fictionalised hell of fire and brimstone, but in repetitions of their own limiting pasts. The dramatic energy of Sartre's script stems from the disjunction between the perspectives of the audience and the characters. The audience knows that, despite some brief looks into the everyday present, the three are living in an eternal past in which they have relinquished any possibility for change, while the



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characters still act as though they have options.

Director Caroline Stacey has orchestrated the movement of the performers to give the impression of travelling without progress.

Her direction is assisted by the dominant visual metaphor, a carousel, incorporated in to the set design. In a studied paralleling of movement, we see the weaker Estelle, delicately portrayed by Diana Glenn, being shadowed by the seemingly stronger Ines, a very convincing performance by Fiona Curnow.

As the women's heads are caught in a single beam of light we realise that their intense dialogues are merely variations on pre-determined themes — there is no possibility of a breakthrough. Sartre has created a situation in which, to use the American title of the play, there are "no exits".

Their personal histories, although seemingly dramatic and

different, are essentially the same, all variations on a triangle.

Each character depends on others to sustain his or her self-image. The flirtatious Estelle is the most obviously dependent, but the man, Garcin, for all his bravado is seen for the coward he is.

Actor Pierre Proske succeeds in showing the hollow man within, particularly in the climax, when Garcin cannot pass through the door he has clamoured to have opened.

Lighting design by David Jenkins featuring the blurred projections of old film suggests that these individuals have been "trapped in an image".

In Sartre's existential world there are no mirrors, no reflections, the individual is on his or her own.

In the end all three are "alone" in their stage set cell, hearing nothing but their own laughter — the ultimate existentialist joke of non-existence.

Caroline Stacey's original use of movement and lighting gives challenging insights into Sartre's script.

Recommended.