

"One true sentence, that's what I wanted to write." Twice, in playwright John de Groot's *Papa*, Ernest Hemingway articulates, in characteristically and deceptively simple prose, a man's struggle to wrest from life the few words that would express its meaning. He fought for them with a hunter's instincts, blasting his way through the world with a deadly weapon called booze and fending off his demons from under the camouflage of showmanship. His quarry led him on for 61 years until, in a stairwell in Idaho, it abandoned him to death.

De Groot's accomplishment is that every sentence in his one-man first play, which opened Thursday for a two-week run at the Colony Theater on Miami Beach, is true, each moment so nakedly honest, so enrichingly complete, that a Hemingway of remarkable dimension emerges from 26 years of silence to give us the real measure of himself. The language is briny and coarse, full of trenchantly humorous surprises and searingly precise expressions of a tortured masculinity. A gifted storyteller, the playwright also furnishes his literary friend with all the anecdotes and tall tales needed to keep an audience enthralled at *Papa*'s knee for two hours.

Actor William Hindman provides the personage, director Philip Church, the place, and together the three men create a remarkable reincarnation of the author who gave us *A Moveable Feast*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *To Have and Have Not*.

As one viewer was overheard to say at intermission: "You know what's so good about the writing? It makes you picture everything." And what a life to picture. Hemingway had four wives (six if you count the Africans), fought bulls, bullets and fear in several wars, hunted and fished with a champion's strength, lived in Cu-

stunted displays of bravery in the inflicted by a brow-beaten father war zone and in the conjugal bed; the sexual ambiguity of attraction to women with short hair and slim bodies; the anesthetizing addiction to alcohol; the retreat into words

## Theater Review

### Papa

CAST  
William Hindman.

CREDITS  
Playwright: John de Groot. Director: Philip Church. Scenic Design: Dean Kennedy. Score and Musical Effects: Dorothy E. Hindman.

At the Colony Theater, 1040 Lincoln Rd. at Lenox Ave., Miami Beach. Performances 8:30 p.m. today and Oct. 8-10; matinees 2:30 p.m. Sunday and Oct. 11. Tickets \$15; call 532-2806 or BASS.

ba, organized spies, chased women and held the daiquiri record of 15 doubles at the Floridida bar.

Yet if all that were happening in this play was the presentation of Hemingway in the customary one-man show format in which a legendary figure recounts his life, then *Papa* would be just another in a string of Mark Twains, Abe Lincolns and Rudyard Kiplings. But this play is different. Set in his home in Cuba one afternoon and evening in 1957, four years before his death, *Papa* successfully attempts to draw the arc of a man's metamorphosis. Hindman is the one on the line, and he rides it to the crest like a natural, establishing the man of the myths with such ingenuousness that when the image begins to disintegrate and the real man emerges in descent, the reasons for the decline are brilliantly illuminated.

Church directs *Papa* as unobtrusively as a whisper, and is assisted in the subtle mood swings of the play by Dorothy Hindman's gentle lighting and musical effects. Nothing is extemporaneous in Dean Kennedy's lived-in set, with its ubiquitous liquor bottles, hunting trophies and trinkets of war.

The degree of restraint exercised by everyone involved with *Papa* keeps melodrama at a safe distance, yet the landscape of the play is sweeping. The lifetime is there: the wounds of childhood, and a domineering mother; the

when feelings got too strong; the final, fatal emasculation of a failing body and mind.

De Groot's play is a strong frame for all these Hemingways, and Hindman's is an uncanny likeness.

*Papa* a remarkable reincarnation

Saturday, October 3, 1987

The Miami Herald Section B

# Living Today