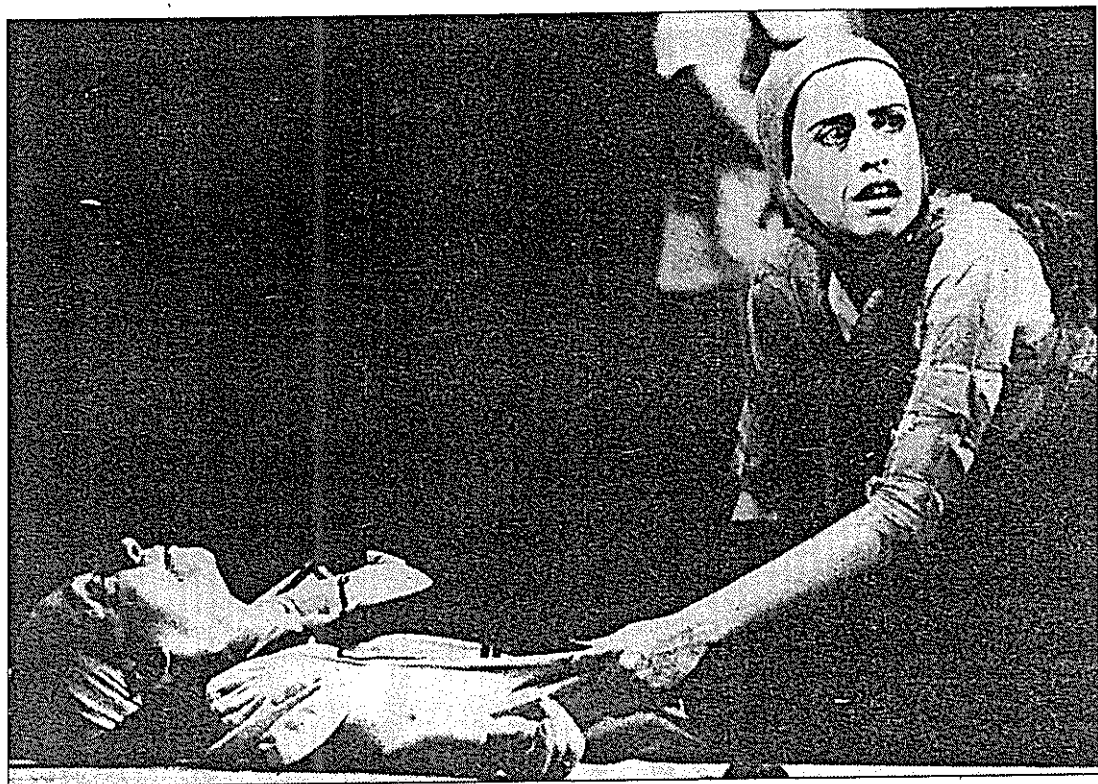


## REVIEW



Lenise Penheiro

Real-life mother and daughter Fernanda Montenegro and Fernanda Torres play parent and child on stage in 'Days.'

## Though Nearly Silent, 'Days' Is Disturbing

**THE FLASH AND CRASH DAYS.** Created and directed by Gerald Thomas, with Fernanda Montenegro, Fernanda Torres, Luiz Damasceno, Ludoval Campos. Set and costumes by Daniela Thomas, lighting and sound track by Gerald Thomas. Serious Fun! at Lincoln Center, Alice Tully Hall, Manhattan, on Tuesday and Wednesday. Seen Tuesday.

By Aileen Jacobson

STAFF WRITER

**S**URELY DIRECTOR Gerald Thomas could have found some more subtle image to represent a daughter's hostility toward her mother than to have the younger woman strangle the older one, then stab her, rip out her heart and later eat it.

This is cutting-edge theater all right, but not quite in the sense that Lincoln Center's Serious Fun! festival has in mind.

"The Flash and Crash Days," created, directed and acted by leading figures of Brazilian theater, reportedly opened in Brazil recently to glowing notices. Though largely wordless, it may well play better in Portuguese, or in another context.

Here, its flashy visual vocabulary merely seemed tired. Two beams of light (from miners' helmets, it turns out) aimed at the audience from a dark stage reminded one of the wittier, and quicker, use of a similar device in "Falsettos." The tossing around of a severed head, supposedly ripped from one of the characters, made one think of "Salomé," which features another such appendage.

A prolonged stare from an actress at the audience — so long that people started to whistle and applaud — recalled the entire '60s avant-garde movement. And a Wagnerian parody at the end reminded me of a send-up of "Swan Lake" performed by leaders of my son's Cub Scout troop.

Except to proclaim that some mothers and daughters don't get along, it's unclear what "The Flash and Crash Days" is about, other than poses, stage smoke and strangeness. Thomas' stark lighting and Daniela

Thomas' surreal set and costumes, along with many stop-action tableaux, lent visual interest that made one wish for more substance (or understanding of the substance in this aggressively obscure piece).

The play took a droll attitude toward its action, which added some comic relief. "How many times will I be choked and killed in this piece?" the mother, played by Fernanda Montenegro, stopped to ask. Montenegro, who, according to the program, is "regarded as Brazil's greatest living actress," does indeed command her craft. When she wanted to draw a laugh with a glance, she could, even when straitjacketed and with her mouth taped shut.

Playing the daughter was Montenegro's own daughter, Fernanda Torres, another accomplished actress who brought an impish air to her role as both terrified victim and gleeful victimizer. About the closest to good times these two divas got was over a game of cards: both cheated, but temporarily halted their murder rites.

Knowing the real-life relationship, on which, reportedly, the play partly draws, added a dimension. ("She stole from me," the play's mother accused, hinting at professional rivalry.) But anyone who didn't read the brochure ("a play about births, deaths, and resurrections . . . exploring the mother-/daughter relationship from hell") could have been thoroughly mystified.

**O**NE SEQUENCE, underscored by rumbling, seemed to be about birth. The mother writhed with an arrow through her neck as a recorded voice said, "Wherever I was, she was . . . even in my most intimate moments." The rumbling continued through a scene in which the mother sucked on what looked like a Tootsie Roll, pop and the daughter masturbated while being held down by two men. What that meant I don't know, and am not sure I want to. / ■