

Middlesex
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Britain's answer to Brecht?

"Well, what did we really think of this man Arden, with his 'Serjeant Musgrave's Dance' which ran at The Qustors, Ealing, until Wednesday?

"He's very much the odd one out of the new people who've come along in the last few years. And you can't help feeling this is largely his own fault. He doesn't offer any concessions to fashionable taste at all."

"That's certainly true. I went to the opening night of 'Live Like Pigs' in 1958, and at the end the only thing I could say to myself was 'This little piggy should have stayed at home.' 'Serjeant Musgrave' strikes me as a bit of an improvement, but no more than a bit."

Same faults

Agreed. It's got exactly the same faults as 'Pigs.' Slow, rambling, obscure(episodic narrative-line for at least two acts, with sex and violence tossed in for no particular reason. And dialogue which continually see-saws between profanity and pretentious poeticizing.

In 'Pigs' the gypsy Ma informed us she had something called 'Glory of choice.' Here Musgrave waffles on about his duty to make 'God's word dance.' Not forgetting that fearful old bore of a Machiavel-
lian chorus, or whatever he's

supposed to be: the bargee, I mean."

"I know: wasn't he a yawn? But harking back to Musgrave, you must remember that Arden has a peculiar preoccupation with fighting man as a mythical - heroical-tragical-comical figure. 'Soldier, Soldier' is another example. In 'Serjeant Musgrave' this appears strongest in the third act, which is altogether better than the others."

The Tragedy

Yes. Musgrave and his fellow deserters are revealed as men sick of and sickened by war. The tragedy, as Arden sees it, is that they attempt to overthrow force with force. I admit, the last act's the best: he finally manages to put across a clear philosophical point in clear dramatic terms."

"Michael Cromar's production brought the climax off quite impressively, too. Vincent McQueen caught the right note of agonized disillusionment as Musgrave, and Pixie Laurie and Ned Gethings handled their snatches of verse and song touchingly, even though I find Arden's repeated use of these interludes both here and in 'Pigs' confectioned."

"Mightn't he be trying to recreate a stylized, epic theatre on epic subjects? Perhaps he's closest to Brecht amongst modern playwrights. I was reminded of 'Mother Courage.'"

"Sorry, we can't start dragging in Brecht at this stage."

DOUGLAS McVAY