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10th New Plays Festival 1969

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A PLAY TO CAUSE A FLUTTER

HOW MANY people have seen a play or film and longed to ask the director or playwright what on earth it was all about? About 50 of them had the opportunity on Saturday evening at the Questors Theatre, Ealing.

They had just seen *The Borage Pigeon Affair*, a play by James Saunders which opened The Questors New Plays Festival.

This play tells the story of two small-town councillors—one a pigeon-lover and the other a pigeon-hater. Through blackmail and a sensation-seeking press the trivial pigeon affair is blown up into a major controversy.

Two themes are transparent—the satire on local government and the equation of pigeons with coloured immigrants.

The absurd council committee meeting is exaggerated, but the barb hits home. This play should be compulsory viewing to all councillors.

Mr. Saunders' views on racial hatred are interesting and topical. He says the "kick out the blacks" mentality is in fact a personality defect using immigrants as a scapegoat.

Mr. Saunders' third, and presumably most important theme, is rather more obscure. He says he wants to show how words have become so prostituted that they are becoming meaningless.

He bears it out in the play with hints of the pigeon-hating councillor's real motives for his "keep Borage pigeon-free" obsession—and the web of deceit that spirals, all-embracing, from this Hitler-type figure.

And Saturday night's audience unwittingly bore out his theme themselves with self-conscious, permissive society, guffaws at the sparsely-sprinkled obscenities—whatever their context.

But Mr. Saunders did not only look at the hypocritical users of language. He went a step further and saw a girl who wanted desperately to be honest to herself and those around her. Because she was young and had lived in a dishonest society she couldn't behave naturally; she had to work honesty out intellectually, with bitter results.

The production was first-class. One word was on everyone's lips afterwards—fluidity. The play was "in the round," and there were no "scenes" as such. Instead chairs, beds, pedestals and other props would be moved around while the spotlight hit another piece of action.

Like some of the modern film-directors, director Bill McLaughlin seemed to want to impress upon the audience that it was watching a play. A sandwich-board man wandered around whistling cues, and on occasions deliberate mistakes were made.

It would be pointless to pick out names from the large cast. There were no weak links, and all the players with large parts acquitted themselves well.

P.C.