

The Questors Theatre Archives

Questories

New Plays Festivals

14th Festival 1973

AMATEUR STAGE,
July 1973

AMATEUR STAGE SURVEY QUESTORS' NEW PLAYS FESTIVAL

MY RELATIONS WITH JAYNE, by David Mowat.

The play opened with a scene involving Timon, a young writer, and his ailing father. They were at variance: the son immersed in his writing and the father concerned with dying in a welter of high-flown valedictory speeches which are some compensation for a life of second-rate achievement as a musician. His advice to his son is to give up writing—life is for living and not for recording. (The message of the play?) When his father dies, Timon demonstrates no grief before wheeling the body from the stage.

Thereafter we are set to follow Timon's career as a writer. He submits his work to a literary agency, where he falls for Jayne, one of the two visible members of the agency. He also meets the other agent, Mr. Danny (played by the same actor who represented his father) and is advised by him to write in the same style as Parker, the agency's star author.

Timon follows Mr. Danny's advice, becomes a success and so far out-Parkers Parker that the old writer, in despair, commits suicide by throwing himself from a tall building. Meantime Timon and Jayne are married, but their happiness is marred by Jayne's inordinate demands on Timon and her lack of sympathy with his work. Timon and Jayne entertain Mr. Danny to supper and, in Timon's absence from the room, he makes love to Jayne and persuades her to leave Timon. Deborah, a newcomer to the block of flats where Timon lives, enters almost immediately (the actress who played Jayne now wearing a blonde wig in her new character) and reveals that she was Parker's mistress.

The play ends with the disembodied voice of Timon telling us that he married Deborah, became a husband and father and lost all further interest in writing.

Question: Are women and domesticity death to creative work?

David Mowat is commendably attempting to find new methods of expression (using abrupt switches from naturalistic to impressionistic) and, hopefully, he has learned something from this exercise. There were two striking comedy passages: the office sequence between Mr. Danny and Timon, and the supper party episode. These lead me to hope that one day Mr. Mowat will give us a comedy which will be both amusing and significant.

WATCH ON THE WORKS, by Pierre Roudy. English ad. Pierre Roudy and Cyril Buhler.

The programme details could have hardly been more daunting: "2m. and a lonely gasholder site." Experience suggested that the audience was in for a long, trying session with boredom setting in early and persisting throughout. In the event the evening was remarkably rewarding in all aspects of this most unusual play. One must first congratulate Donald Waterhouse on his settings. The gasholder was a triumph.

The director, Carol Wiseman, had collaborated closely with the author and her contribution was considerable: her detailed and imaginative production reflected the continual shifts of emphasis and changes of mood and—an inspiration—she had decided (after consultation with M. Roudy) that the Watchman should be played by a Scot, with a fey quality which helped to make credible his maniacal attachment to the gasometer to the exclusion of all human relationships.

The Workman is a painter who comes armed with a permit to paint the gasometer and is reluctantly admitted to the site by the Watchman. While painting the outside of the structure the Workman falls and injures his leg. The Watchman refuses to telephone for a doctor and forces the Workman at gun point to explain away his continuing absence over the phone. The two are perfect foils for each other: on the one hand a man possessed, and on the other one who is a blend of stupidity and native cunning. There develops a curious relationship in the course of which the Workman come to appreciate the gasometer and there is a scene during which they discuss in all seriousness the possibility of propitiating the complaining, groaning monster with a human sacrifice. Each proposes the other for the role and an uneasy compromise is reached with the counter-proposal that they should sacrifice visitors (not more than two) summoned by a telephone call from the Workman. Nobody comes. Disappointedly the Workman descends from the platform of the gasometer to be followed by the Watchman who slips on purpose into the tank of water which supports the gasholder. He drowns and in doing so pays his supreme tribute to the gasometer.

It is a tribute to M. Roudy's craft that, from this seemingly unpromising material and setting, he has produced a play that, echoes loneliness, explores obsession and comments on man's conflict with the machine. The work is sad, moving, startling, often very funny and always entertaining.

N.H.