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MY RELATIONSHIP WITH JAYNE

by Garry O'Connor

As we all discerned at a lively informal discussion held afterwards, which is the admirable practice of this theatre in its annual New Plays Festival, the best way to approach David Mowat's piece is not to build up too many theories about it, but try to see if it penetrates at a sub-conscience, poetic level. It doesn't attempt to work, so much is clear, in an ordinary manner through plots or a conventional, naturalistic attitude to character. Nor indeed through any consistent style, however outlandish or avant-garde. Was it the faultiness of Brian Watson's production which brought about this undue sense of ambiguity; was it the author's deliberate striving for blurred, incomplete, effect?

Opinion seemed, and I write pluralistically, for it is difficult to reimpose a separate strand of opinion, after hearing critical members of the audience put their views, to feel that Mr. Mowat's author hero, named Timon, is confronting, or submitting, to a choice between life and art. Timon's father, dying while he scribbles, presumably, the last words in his notebook, advises him to stop writing, marry, and live a good life. Timon doesn't, at least for the duration of the play, which is mostly concerned with Jayne, his agent; he becomes rich and famous, by imitating Parker another successful author.

Jayne leaves him, in a highly improbable seduction scene with her partner, Mr. Danny, when he flatters her with amorous pursuits between the courses of a dinner served by Timon. But Parker's ex-mistress takes him over, and they live happily afterwards (we are told at the end), Timon abandoning his writing.

The production punctuates these disjointed events, some of them funny, some of them mildly disturbing (as when Danny tells how he came home one morning to find his family murdered) with stills of Timon going about his daily routine, and some tuneful, euphoric music. The acting of John Turner, Ken Ratcliffe and Caroline O'Reilly is thoughtful and competent, but may not on reflection be on the right lines. Much of it is designed to make the characters appear real, perhaps the very last thing they need.

If, as one possibility, the whole as Timon's fantasy, the having-your-cake-and-eating-it of the author, then the novelettish elements, the comedy, the cliché, would slip into place in a style that was both strong in itself, and a comment on the author's predicament. But somewhere, either inside this interesting play, or outside it, in the production, is an element missing.