

The Questors Theatre Archives
Questories
New Plays Festivals
17th Festival 1976

TRIBUNE

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[Extracts]

Work like John Norman's *Agitator* (Questors New Plays Festival), a dramatisation of the life of the nineteenth-century Liberal politician and pamphleteer which imaginatively splits the character into Holyoake as a young man and an old man, and makes them confront their "selves" over a lifetime's historical span. There is a less successful "actors-improvising" framework and some of the problems of conveying historical complexities without being overly didactic, but some splendid lines and moments — as when the young Holyoake is born out of the old Holyoake's coffin, the one announcing "I was born in Birmingham," the other, "I died in Brighton," and both, "It took 88 years to get from Birmingham to Brighton."

[Several paragraphs reviewing other new plays omitted.]

These were all new plays, some first plays, some foreign plays, produced from the far West to the far East of London, of varying lengths and overall quality (but no worse than half the National repertoire). Three of them (Ajibade's, Morrison's, Lovatt's) developed out of the Playwrights' Workshop I run at the City Literary Institute; one — Norman's — out of the Questors' encouragement of new writers.

The National could take note and consider: (1) regular New Plays Festivals, with discussion on the lines of the Questors tradition; (2) Playwrights Workshops out of which plays such as those at EAST could emerge into production, without commercial pressures (a public and popular spirited use of subsidy); and (3) regular seasons of work by foreign writers, whether major or new and minor (and Arrabel is a well-known tip of an unknown iceberg that could keep the National busy for a decade).

Catherine Itzin