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Questories
[The Second New Plays Festival \(1961\)](#)

The Guardian 7 June 1961

BACK-PEDALLING IN EALING

The Courtyard

Questors, Ealing

THERE is something Betjemanesque about leafy Mattock Lane in Ealing, where the Questors Theatre, lying back from the long road between Victorian villas, with its open-plan auditorium, its rehearsal and discussion rooms and its club, offers something like a poor man's Glyndebourne. We ought to be tempted down there more often, even if the Dorothy Perkins roses which gush over the walls are less fashionable than the trim borders of the Sussex sanctuary.

At present this questing group is performing a festival of three plays, the second of which is called "The Courtyard" by Antony Brown (who wrote "Paradise Street") and is given in the barn-like Stanislavsky room, a production in the round by Jeffrey Smith which is full of bustle. Umbrellas are waved, handcarts run in at full tilt, and bicycles are backed perilously into the knees of the slightly affronted-looking matrons of Ealing.

If all else fails, characters repair to a lavatory ; a joke which continues to whip up gales of hearty laughter in modern audiences. Perhaps it always did? I do not remember many lavatory jokes on the London stage before the war ; now they seem to be de rigueur; which may or may not be a sign of emancipation.

The bustle surrounds two typically feckless creatures whose tragedy it is that they get nothing accomplished. One is a tipling schoolmaster (Philip Wright) who fails to win an appointment; the other a hypochondriac auctioneer (Bernard McLaughlin) who has cold feet about the junk sale he is supposed to conduct. Droll characters come and they are like Jonsonian "humours" but even more like the regiment of stock figures from the seaside comic card.

Thus the beak is pursued by a tweedy virago, Mrs Archdale or good old Archie (Ruby Feast). A weeping spinster (Awen Griffiths) yearns for the auctioneer. A flippant young waiter (Ken Heggie) and the superstitious handyman (David Lorraine) and other gossips comment in the background in a style of English comedy which goes back farther than Shakespeare and would not seem out of period in "Gammer Gurton's Needle."

But we are also reminded that this is a post-Godot period; there is fashionable inconsequence and obsessional failure to "connect" and a henpecked husband (George Ritchie) instead of merely existing in dumb absurdity, acts out his private canine fantasies for us, barking and grovelling around the junk heap. The charade is not shapeless but it affords only variable pleasure such as may sometimes be derived from sitting mumchance in a bus shelter and eavesdropping. Not boring, if you are in the mood; but slightly exasperating to those in search of the solace and affirmation of the better kind of drama.

Philip Hope-Wallace.