

The Questors Theatre Archives

Questories

Sixth New Plays Festival 1965

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FULL MARKS TO DAVID GOWER

THIS year's Festival of New Plays at the Questors Theatre has begun with Derek Marlowe's "How I Assumed the Role of the Popular Dandy: for Purposes of Seduction and Other Base Matters."

The "I" of the title, it appears during most of the piece, is a male nurse in an asylum, who impersonates Beau Brummell: ostensibly to fall in with the fantasy-world of his patient (an unhinged philanderer); but actually the better to torment him.

Ultimately, the supposed male nurse is himself revealed to be a schizophrenic inmate, and his "patient" to be the other half of his split personality.

Critics are notoriously prone to detect in a work echoes of earlier works, but I should be surprised if Mr. Marlowe hasn't been influenced by some of the following: "Don Juan in Hell", "Dr. Faustus," "Othello," "The Servant," "The Marat/Sade," and "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari."

SAYS LITTLE

The trouble, though, is not that he has borrowed from any of these, but that he has not assimilated the borrowings to any personal creative purpose. His play says little strikingly and individually profound or theatrically dramatic about either sadism or schizophrenia. It remains a self-conscious series of modish "Theatre of Cruelty" attitudes: and it is further weakened by a great many equally selfconscious puns and coarsely misogynistic jokes. Where the latter are concerned, I can't help feeling that the author, in calculating his audience's response, is attempting (unsuccessfully, to my mind) to have his corn and eat it.

Certain merits survive. But only two are provided by the playwright, and both owe something to Alan Clarke's vivid production. One is the moment when the guards clatter shouting along a catwalk, their movements caught in a spotlight. The second is the scene where the guests at a dinner given by the patient prove to be horribly masked ghouls, who devastate the table with hideous hissing, and spitting of food, before leaving the host pathetically collapsed amid the debris.

The evening's major asset is David Gower's performance as the "male nurse." Mr. Gower is a real discovery. Within his physical and vocal limits, he could play anything: Hamlet, Iago, Richard II, Richard III, Benedick, Cassius, Raskolnikov—or Garry Esscadine.

My other pleasures are Paul Imbusch's perfect miming of the philanderer's schmaltzy farewell to "Roma," which he turns into the night's single successful cliché; the clever faking of the patient's suicidal slashing; and a brief off-stage snatch of an instrumental jazz recording of "Nancy with the Laughing Face," one of the loveliest popular songs ever composed.

DOUGLAS McVAY.