

The Questors Theatre Archives

Questories

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'The Guy,' Fascinating Modern Morality

THE third and final play in the Questors, Ealing, New Play Festival 1966, Walter Lever's "The Guy", is an absolutely fascinating work written brilliantly on at least three interlocking levels. After more than one viewing Heaven only knows how many more would appear.

First and foremost the play is a modern morality. Traveller, seaman, from the seas returning is sinisterly accosted by a toutish character whilst travelling home on the Underground. Foy, the tout, claims that he is there to help the seaman but he seems to have an almost supernatural power and through him the seaman is led back through his entire life. His life is not just his life, he—Brown—represents man.

Man is shown through Brown to be a cringing, snivelling cheat. A startling climax to this section of the work comes when the "hero" is dragged before a mysterious tribunal. The judge asks Brown who survived Eden. He does not answer until the question has literally been pounded into him. And it is no straight answer he gives for he hisses and writhes serpentlike across the stage. An intriguing conjecture that man is no descendant of Adam but rather of his early persecutor.

On the second level Mr. Lever has plotted, planned and contrived a violent attack on all aspects of sex. The characters for this section comprise a goodly selection of sexual types—normal and deviate. All make advances to Brown. He in turn seems to be afraid of sex and shies away from this form of contact.

Really this is not surprising as in the context of the play sex appears as a grotesque monster.

PASTICHE

It is on the third level that the play is most stimulating. On this level Mr. Lever has written a brilliant and sustained pastiche on the avant garde theatre. It is here too that his academic training becomes apparent for it is this part of the drama that dramatic scholarship rears its head. His play looks like some jigsaw of the intelligentsia made up from bits and pieces of the writing styles of most of the modern dramatists. It is absorbing to sit and watch, and spot, the writer whose work is being used as a basis for the stylisation of a scene or speech. Easily discernable are about seventeen drama copies and I suspect that there are more than that.

The work includes the question of identity from Nigel Dennis and Pirandello, ritual murder from Rudkin, a Cocteau tribunal, Brechtian songs, drunken Irishman from Behan who wears a false nose from Ionesco, masks from Genet and others, sexual identity-switches also from Genet, a Beckett tramp, menace from Pinter—and a very giveaway borrow from "The Birthday Party"—an obvious queer from Delaney, incomprehensible accusations from both Kafka and Camus. They are just the easy ones to notice. More cunningly concealed are Shaw—the whole thing could be a sendup of one of the late Shaw plays—Weiss and Marat/Sade lunacy, Satre buried in the Cocteau tribunal and a play within a play device—here an allegory within an allegory—from Anouilh.

CONTROLLED

The direction was extremely, rigidly, controlled. Dotted throughout were scenes admirably played and directed which were pointers as to the true nature of the play. Notable amongst these was a scene in a schoolroom in which Brown is asked questions about a cap-pistol which is referred to in terms which could also be taken as slang sex expressions. In a similar vein and using the same setting Mr. Lever mocks up a French lesson which revolves around tongue twisters. Every scene was played in a key which prevented the work from going wild and becoming an hysterical muddle. Humour and drama nestle happily side by side. All of the performances were nicely moderate. Switches from identity to identity were admirably accomplished and, at all times, retained an element of surprise. Mention must be made of the excellent all-purpose set—an Underground station—which was cleverly used.

P.W.B.