

Middlesex County Times

STUDENTS IN THREE PLAYS AT QUESTORS

"Great Catherine" is merely a Shavian *bonne bouche* : yet it had no difficulty in being by far the brightest of the three one-act plays presented by the Questors students at Mattock-lane, Ealing, last week.

It never tries for either the visual virtuosity or the brilliantly macabre comedy of Sternberg's "The Scarlet Empress." But in the other comic field of intentional anachronism, Shaw of course leaves even Sternberg standing.

The piece's humorous technique is pretty close to that of another movie. "Ninotchka," with Russians constantly saying things like "little father," "little mother" and "darlink."

Catherine herself is certainly very Garboesque, revealed as not so much a scarlet, more a tickling empress, when she tortures in this fashion a true-blue young English officer to whom she has taken a characteristic shine.

Audrey Hewlett and Keith Godman made the most of their rib-cracking confrontation, whilst Jacqueline Hasland personified debutante disdain as the officer's fiancée. Best of the bunch, though, was Christopher Taylor's boozy, burly, cajoling portrait of the intriguer Patiomkin.

Molière's "Sganarelle," the second attraction on the bill, occupies an equally minor place in its author's oeuvre, but an equally unmistakable one, with its amorous rondo of fathers, daughters and misunderstandings.

ELEGANT

And once again the students provided several spry performances, notably Wendy Stone's plump little wrath as a suspicious wife and James Neil's wanly elegant, beautifully Scots mocking of a lilywhite boy of a lover.

Only Stanley Goodchild in the name-part lacked subtle wit.

The Questors producer; Michael Hoddell (helped by Reta Saxton-Howes), was at



ease in both pieces (despite rather arbitrary use of masks In the Molière): and John Rolfe designed each handsomely.

However, the last and longest item of the programme, Fry's "Thor, with Angels." proved much too much for everybody.

Fry's religious works are the less rewarding side of his output, and this particular specimen (better titled "Bore, with Angels") is arguably the least rewarding of the lot.

His obsessive theme of liberty and captivity here drowns in a clotted cream of strained metaphors and Ancient British jokes.

The cast, however, sweated the whole thing out manfully.

DOUGLAS McVAY.