

There's more to the Merchant than this...

Not having had to put my thoughts and opinions down for a week or so has given me time to reflect just why I found the three previous productions by the Hampstead Garden Suburb Dramatic Society so interesting and enjoyable and "The Merchant of Venice" so disappointing. The company were able to cope with the complexities of Eliot and the style and wit of Goldsmith but the subtleties and richness of Shakespeare eluded them.

Perhaps it is unfair to ask for more than a straightforward reading of the play, given the short time there is probably available for rehearsal, but these days this is really unacceptable. We can no longer find enjoyment in a performance where no character has thought about his or her relationship to the other. What were the director's or actors' thoughts about the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio: how should the audience re-act to the bond the two agree to so that the impoverished Bassanio can woo the heiress, Portia? And what does she feel when the man she loves, and for whom she has done so much, gives away the only pledge she has asked him to keep? Then there is the affair of Lorenzo and Jessica — it may be enough that Lorenzo should simply love Jessica, but she betrays her father and the portrayal of the role should surely give some hint of the

turmoil created by the situation. There is the problem of Shylock. It is interesting that the play is called "The Merchant" and not "The Jew of Venice" or just "Shylock". One feels that Shakespeare originally intended him to be a stage villain like Marlowe's "Jew of Malta", but that the character grew, took over and really unbalanced the play to the extent that we are almost not interested in the fourth act. Shylock is not only an alien but successful in business and he carries with him the gloomy grandeur and implacability of the Old Testament. Shakespeare was not merely anti-semitic, but portraying the effect of an alien religion and life-style on a community. We have our parallels today in our own society.

These are some of the questions a director and his company have to talk over before the curtain rises. There

were moments of illumination. Fred Griessen's Antonio had a particularly good moment when he allowed his compassion to show at the end of the trial scene and Philip Grant (Bassanio) then also showed some passion but he, together with every other lover in the play, could hardly have been called "in love". Portia was allowed to make a most bad-tempered entrance but was, in spite of this, able to bring out the warmth and courage of Portia — she too like Nerissa (Caroline Wright) was most effective when dressed as a man. Bill Critchley did not find his way into the enigma of Shylock — he looked right, spoke well and conveyed the contempt and anger he felt for these Venetians, but was not able to reveal the passion and pain of the outsider betrayed even by his own child.

Some of the minor characters came over very well; Javid Punwar and Michael Sabine-Bacon made an amusing interlude as the two Gobbos and there was a very noble Prince of Morocco by Colin Albu. It was very heartening to see so many young people in the cast and Tom Albu stood out as Salerio, while the musical talents of Ben



Albu and Geoffrey Falk gave pleasure.

There were some attractive costumes designed by Diana Darrer, assisted by Kate

Atkinson, Diana Bromley, not "hang on her temples like a golden fleece". LS
Dorothy Kelly and Paula Morris, but it is astonishing that Liz Amiel agreed to wear that appalling wig — it certainly did
Photo: Portia (Liz Amiel) confronts Shylock (Bill Critchley) in the trial scene

MEETING NEIGHBOURS

We have lived on the Suburb for little more than a year, moving in to Oakwood Road in the autumn of 1983 and enjoying the atmosphere of the place right from the start. A short time after a very welcoming New Residents' Party we were asked if we would like to become Wardens. We hesitated thinking that we would be too inexperienced to wear the badge and too 'green' to ask for subs to the RA and donations to the Fellowship from residents who had lived in the Suburb much longer than us. Eventually we agreed, because having sat in on a few of the monthly Council meetings (out of curiosity) we soon found out just how much the RA did to make the area one of the nicest places to live.

In fact, newcomers as we were (and still are!), all the people we called on in our ward, existing or new members of the RA, were nice to meet and the few who

didn't wish to join were neither rude nor difficult. Inevitably some residents have criticisms or grumbles and with a 'Warden' badge on you are there to take a note of them and pass them on to the Chief Warden or relevant committee, but it was a relief to learn that it's not a requirement of the job to follow up the problems personally.

We are puzzled that in this very favoured area the RA needs more Wardens; aren't there some residents who, enjoying living here, who could give a little time (usually in early spring) to help the RA do its essential work either in their own road or a nearby patch? For that reason, or just because you like being invited into other people's homes and chatting a while with some very nice people (your neighbours!), please contact Alan Lawson at 68 Oakwood Road, telephone 458 3827.

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ABBEYFIELD ONE WORLD?

Until now the registered offices of Abbeyfield were the Trust Offices at 862 Finchley Road. They are now in the process of being moved to Abbeyfield House in Erskine Hill. All enquires concerning Abbeyfield should be addressed to Dr E. Rhodes at 42 Erskine Hill, NW11, Tel: 455 6293. The Trust will continue to retain close ties with Abbeyfield and Christopher Kellerman, the Trust Manager, sits on the Abbeyfield Committee.

INSTITUTE CRECHE

That Monday morning feeling? Bring your child along to our creche. Sixth formers at Henrietta Barnett will look after your child on Monday mornings between 10.00 a.m. and 12.30 p.m. while you attend Institute classes.

For further details telephone Victoria: 455 9060.

NEED TILES?

Recently the Trust purchased some second hand roof tiles for sale to residents. If you require the odd tile please call the Trust Manager, Christopher Kellerman, on 455 1066.

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Residents' Association will take place on Monday, 25th March 1985, at 8.00 pm in Bigwood Hall, Bigwood Road, NW11.

Any Motions submitted for inclusion on the Agenda must be received by last post on 8th February 1985.

Nominations for the posts of Officers and members of Council must be submitted in writing, signed by the Proposer and Second, and have the Nominee's consent. These must be received by 16th March 1985.

Notice of Motions and Nominations should be sent to the Assistant Secretary, Mrs. R. Goldstein, 1a Church Mount, N2.

ONE WORLD?

"Are we or are we not one world?" That was the theme of the Institute EFL Department's International Students' Service for Christmas celebrated at the Free Church on Dec. 9.

The Rev Peter Barraclough welcomed the students taking part, and the congregation, to a service of carols lessons and poetry.

Candlelight created a festive atmosphere for the Portuguese carol and for the procession of Scandinavian students singing 'Sante Lucia' and wearing traditional tinsel garlands.

Familiar carols were sung by French and Swiss German students and a joyful Spanish carol was accompanied by drum and guitar. A poem to guitar accompaniment was read by Cypriot and Turkish students.

The Rev Barraclough spoke of the need to study to be quiet in a world in tumult appropriately followed by 'Silent Night, Holy Night' sung in English, French, German and Japanese.

One world — an appeal for Ethiopia — a piece emphasising the gulf between nations was spoken by members of class 27 and introduced by Jean Barraclough.

The chorus 'When I needed a neighbour, were you there?' completed a very happy occasion. KAP

THE Social Committee aims to encourage good neighbourliness and community enjoyment in the Suburb by holding events from time to time.

In 1984 we organised a very successful Family Fete in Central Square and we are planning a similar event to be held this year following Institute Open Week in July.

We are always glad of volunteers and if you are interested in helping please contact James Websterr 458-5413.

Best let your house or flat with confidence through us.

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