

Caught in amateur trap

Glendon's Othello lets down fans of the Bard

By FORSTER FREED

With the growth of a viable professional theatre in Canada since the end of the Second World War, Canadian amateur theatre, both on and off the university, has been faced with a rather imposing

challenge. The tradition of amateur theatre in this country is a particularly strong one, with a good deal of the present professional activity having its roots in such amateur theatres.

Given a past which saw the

amateur movement as a central part of the Canadian theatrical experience, amateur theatre must begin to forge a new role for itself, one which will allow it to once again provide its participants and audience with experiences of

significance and value.

A case in point is the presentation of Shakespeare's Othello which was shown at Glendon College this past weekend. Mounted by the College's extra-curricular Dramatic Arts Programme the production exemplified amateur theatre at its worst with the problems that undermined the show such that the obvious goodwill and hard work of all those involved was simply unequal to the tasks at hand. And while I have not seen previous examples of the group's work, this much is clear: if Othello is typical of past productions, the Dramatic Arts Programme is in need of some thorough rethinking.

Unsuccessful in most departments, this Othello proved a largely unsatisfying experience. It's a shame, because of Shakespeare's major tragedies, Othello is the one that most demands theatrical presentation. In part, the challenge of the three central roles (and in particular the puzzles which the actors playing Othello and especially Iago must resolve) account for the play's long stage tradition. And Othello is unique in that the subject matter of the play concerns events of a far more private nature than any of the others. In production, the actors and director have the opportunity not only to make the choices that affect the central protagonists, but in addition, the responsibility of relating these choices to some larger pattern of significance, in order to clarify and strengthen the play's vision.

Unfortunately, questions of significance and larger meaning never really entered into the Glendon Othello. From the start, these actors were handicapped by

the challenge of using an arena stage, and by a lighting design that often left them standing in the dark. These factors, combined with a basic inability to handle Shakespearean language, as well as a failure to economically employ movement and gesture, meant that most of the energy was expended on simply getting through the text, with problems of characterization and motivation left largely untouched. The result fell short of providing a meaningful experience of (and insight into) Shakespeare's text.

DEVOTION

Perhaps the unhappiest aspect of such a production has less to do with its worth to an audience, than it has to do with its value to the young actors who devote their precious time and energy trying to make a success of it. Anyone who has ever participated in the theatre (in whatever capacity and on whatever level) will not seriously challenge the importance of the theatrical experience for the non-professional. What must be considered, however, is the kind of experience that the amateur theatre can and should provide.

HIGH STANDARDS

In a country such as Poland, amateur groups of students and workers are achieving standards that would put a number of Canadian professional theatres to shame.

If there is a lesson to be learned from Glendon's Othello, it's that our amateur theatre must begin to break out of the kinds of restrictions in which they have imprisoned themselves. The alternative, their extinction from the Canadian scene, would be a sad loss, indeed.

Anger fabricates bizarre dreams

By PETER SUPINO

Film-maker Kenneth Anger, at York last week with a retrospective of his work, grew up in the heart of the Hollywood scene. The Hollywood he knew was the proverbial "dream factory", where a curious level of reality and morality pervaded the daily lives of its stars-truck inhabitants.

SPURNS STARDOM

A forty-four year old native of Santa Monica, he can trace his involvement with film back to his cradle. By the age of nine, Anger was spurning the life of a child star to devote his life to work on the other side of the movie camera. By 1947, he had completed seven films ranging, in subject, from incest to the sexual excitation of a jubilant V-J Day gathering.

It was in 1947 that young Kenneth produced the film that marked his debut as an underground film maker of consequence. Fireworks, among the films shown last week, was shot in seventy-two hours on stock lifted from the navy by some sailor friends. It exemplifies its creator's fascination with a magical sense of reality, and a deep seated involvement with mutilation and violence.

The content of Fireworks (a homosexual fantasy involving a

pubescent boy and several burly sailors) is overshadowed by its brilliant surrealist tone and execution. There is a feeling that locations, attire, objects, the paraphernalia of our lives impose some uncontrollable restraints and urges upon us.

Eaux d'Artifice (1953), shot in the grandeur of the Tivoli Gardens, appears as a misty deeply hued game of hide and seek between a baroque courtesan and the opulent fountain heads, the streaming water, and the richness of the environment.

SCORPIO RISING

After a sojourn in Europe where Anger shot a documentary for the B.B.C. about one of his spiritual mentors, occult figure Aleister Crowley, and a now buried version of The Story of O, he returned to the United States to work on what has become his most profitable and best known film, Scorpio Rising (1962-64).

Moulding the elements of the blasphemy, violence, sex and passivity of the pop culture with his own unique view of the death of tradition at the hands of mysticism, Anger is at his most powerful and impressive in this film. Fusing such seemingly mutually exclusive material as a motor cycle rally, a

homosexual costume party, and a few days in the life of Jesus Christ, with such evocative pop standards as He's a Rebel and I Only Have Eyes for You, jolts the audience into a new awareness of those poses and forces we take for granted in everyday life.

HARD TIMES

If Kenneth Anger has anything in common with the mainstream of American film makers it is that he also has fallen upon hard times economically. He is currently attempting to finance the completion of his first feature film, Lucifer Rising, begun in 1966. A great deal of the footage had to be written off as one of his principle actors fell victim to the Manson Family.

The segment shown at last week's screening, though not nearly as accessible as Scorpio Rising, promises that at least it will be one of the most interesting films you are likely to see.

TINSEL DREAMS

"Interesting" sums up most people's reaction to Anger's work. If Hollywood is constructing dreams, Anger is on the other side of the backdrop, seeing them from within, building them out of discarded wardrobe, and vulgar costume jewellery.

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