

Sir Charles was no gentleman

The Right Honourable Gentleman currently playing at the Citadel leaves one in a Macbethian tangle: fair is foul and foul is fair.

The play is a rapidly-changing chess game in which the players become pawns of one another. They move on a board black and red with their sexual fantasies and mentally mutated memories of sexual realities—a board venerated in 1885 British sexual mores.

As the curtain rises, an impeccably done set of a Victorian library is seen, and an impeccably done Victorian gentleman—Sir Charles Dilke, soon to be standing for re-election to the British Commons, soon to be made Home Secretary, soon to be married.

He is nothing but the right honourable gentleman. He affectionately greets his sparkling fiancée Emilia, discusses his political future with his best friend Joseph Chamberlain and handily tosses off a letter to the Cardinal about home rule for the Irish.

Exit fiancée, friend and secretary, who have reinforced our impression of Dilke as a proper, socially sinless man. Enter his sister-in-law's sister, Nia Crawford, come to pick up her nephews from their fencing lesson. They talk of her recent marriage, and Nia reveals she is bored with her husband. She flirts with Sir Charles, who kisses her ardently—just like old times, we are led to believe.

From there, we begin to wonder about the right honourable gentleman.

In the next scene, Nia Crawford demands her freedom from her husband and confesses to an affair with Charles Dilke. She embellishes her confession with various sexual perversions she claims Dilke forced her into.

Crawford sues for divorce, naming Dilke as co-respondent. Dilke solemnly swears every charge is untrue; Nia cries the story is all true—in one way or another.

From here to the end, by a process of grand confrontations,

the characters reveal themselves as deviant from their appearances. The audience is given hints of many possible illicit affairs involving Charles Dilke, and yet he maintains himself as innocent of Nia's charges. Instead he confesses to one with her mother.

Nia's sisters are angry at the scandal, and one expertly advises Nia on how to conduct discreet affairs. All beg her to retract, but she won't budge.

Slowly, each character reveals a new element of the involved situation. One cannot decide whether they are telling the truth or lying, dreaming of how they wished it had been or viewing it dispassionately.

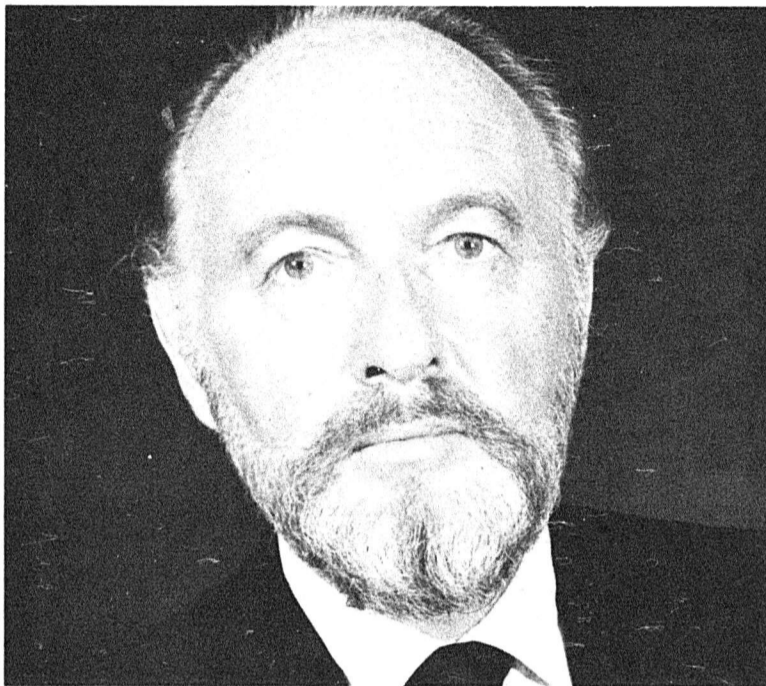
The play becomes complicated and ambiguous. Dilke finds himself "whitewashed by the law, blackballed by the press" as a court finds him not guilty of the adultery through a legal technicality, but grants Nia her divorce. His constituents re-elect him, but sing ribald songs and riot outside his door.

To disclose the resolution would be to destroy the play for any prospective attendant. Suffice it to say it is one of the better unresolved resolutions I have ever seen on stage.

Ivor Barry, as Sir Charles Dilke, handles his role well. His demeanor and movements epitomize the right honourable gentleman; he even stands with his feet and toes at the proper angles. His stiffness, making Nia's charges a little unbelievable, contributes to the intellectual exercise of deciding where truth lies.

Denise Fergusson makes the play. Her portrayal of Nia produces a believable and sympathetic young woman, emotionally evocative in the context of a rather mental play.

Sheila Haney as Lila Rossiter, the mother of Nia, is a tremendous grande dame in the finest tradition of melodrama. Her forcefulness sustains the play's intensity at difficult points. But her entrance



IVOR BARRY
... a right honorable gentleman

in the last act, in a glittering scarlet gown, is a bit much.

The role of Joseph Chamberlain offers little scope to John Bayliss, since Chamberlain becomes real by what people say in his absence more than by what he is on stage. But Bayliss does a fair job of looking many years older than he really is.

The production is, overall, a fine

entertainment. If the between-scenes music is scratchy and reminiscent of Oil-can Harry, and if Nia's scene with Captain Forster is too melodramatic to be stomach, these are only irritations that pass away in remembering the high quality of the whole evening.

A good production of a thoroughly excellent play.

—Elaine Verbicky

Leftovers

The campus is about to discover—or rediscover—who the infected minds belong to that have graced our Johns with all that sad graffiti. Disregarding all public opinion, the Med Show is once again upon us.

That any group of highly intelligent persons would come up with such witless nonplots, rotten nonacting, and pitiless nonjokes is inconceivable, yet years of experience prove the contrary. The medics invariably do the impossible: they burlesque nonhumor.

Medical humor seems to run the incredibly short gamut from venereal disease to circumcision. Year after year the same tired jokes—or their variants—are trotted out to give the audience the pseudo-titillation they came for. But even this impoverished vein is worked without taste, style or subtlety.

Whether they know it or not, the principle underlying the Med Show is that anything connected with sex must be dirty. Rather than making a healthy laugh of sexual hangups and taboos, the medics snicker. It is time they recognize a bad job for what it is, and say to hell with the whole thing.

A time of con/fusion is upon us, brethern, a time of noise and rejoicing. Let us raise up our eyes, let us raise up our voices, let us be children again, and innocent.

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