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Next issue Sat 24th November
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FRIDAY 23RD NOVEMBER 2001

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René Girard:
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Billy Hewitt, S. J.

Suitable for beginners and non-academics, as well as for students and academics seeking a clear and informed exposition of Girard's model-process and its potential relevance for our response to violence

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Reese Witherspoon becomes unlikely law student

ME WITHOUT YOU(15) Daily: 1.30, 4.15, 7.00, 9.45
Friends grow up in 70's/80's London

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Redford, Pitt star in espionage thriller

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CRESSIDA
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Nicholas Wright's latest

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THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD
Fri 23rd & Sat 24th: 8.00
O.U. Gilbert and Sullivan Society

REVIEW: THEATRE

CABARET

Chestnut Productions / Magdalen Players

The Playhouse, to Sat 24th

Berlin in the early nineteen-thirties teetered on the edge of a moral precipice. The city of cabaret, champagne and sexual freedom became a target for the Nazis' stentorian zealotry. It is into this world that the young Christopher Isherwood stepped: he sated himself on the city's cornucopia of fruit, and observed the maelstrom engulfing it. His writings from this period form the basis for the dark and beautiful musical *Cabaret*.

Director Simon Woods and his team of nearly 100 actors, musicians and technical crew succeed admirably in transporting their audience to this fraught, fragile world. This is a subtle, finely wrought production. On opening night already it seemed as if the generously talented cast and orchestra – like Fraulein Kost – did this for a living, *and* for pleasure.

Freddie Sayers cuts a fine, loping figure as Emcee. Straight out of a Modigliani portrait, Sayers bestrides the stage with easy confidence. He fuses beautifully in his portrayal the ambiguities of the city: he is at once androgynous and virile, totalitarian and decadent. Much of the success of this production rests on his dandy shoulders.

Iain Sawbridge is the befuddled, accidental Lothario Clifford Bradshaw. His performance is understated and crisp. He makes of a potentially stereotypical character – the ubitiquous American writer abroad – something truly interesting. Poppy Simpson is Sally Bowles, the vampish English songstress, whose life in Berlin is of such a flavour that she would prefer that her Mama didn't get wind of it. Simpson is undaunted by filling the huge shoes worn in the 1972 film version by Liza Minelli. Her performance is sensitive and thoughtful; her rendition of 'Life is a Cabaret' was simply superb.

Ed McGown is very funny as Ernst Ludwig, the initially bumbling German man of affairs. So does McGown endear his character to the audience that his gradual emergence as the villain of the piece creates a very real and necessary sense of moral tension and personal betrayal.

Karis McClarty's Fraulein Kost is memorable for a variety of reasons, not least for her abundant generosity. To sailors, that is. McClarty is exuberant and entertainingly naughty as this harlot with a heart.

In many ways, the focal characters in this production are those of Frau Schneider, the landlady of advancing years, played by Susan Hitch, and her Jewish grocer beau, Herr Schultz (James Methven). This pair of unlikely lovers are simply delightful, and tragic. Their initial bumbling attempts to don the lover's cloak are amusing and endearing; the inevitable foundering of their relationship conveys the frightening dehumanizing effect inherent in totalitarianism. In a studied performance, Hitch is the very pineapple of perfection. Methven is marvellous in this difficult role.

The chorus deserves especial commendation. They have clearly spent much blood and tears becoming such a very slick outfit. Liz Chan's commitment also cannot go unmentioned. William Gresford is a very funny, if unattractive, lady. And, Jarad Zimbler is very aptly cast as the love-lorn Gorilla.

The orchestra, led by Thomas Boden and Greg Sanderson, is excellent and Alex Beeley's choreography well designed and almost flawlessly executed. In their capable hands 'Tomorrow Belongs to Me' is rendered appropriately distressing and chilling. Delia Peel's set design is interesting and surprising.

Heed the Emcee's salutation: be sure to be welcomed to this excellent *Cabaret* this week.

Jean Meiring 21/11/01

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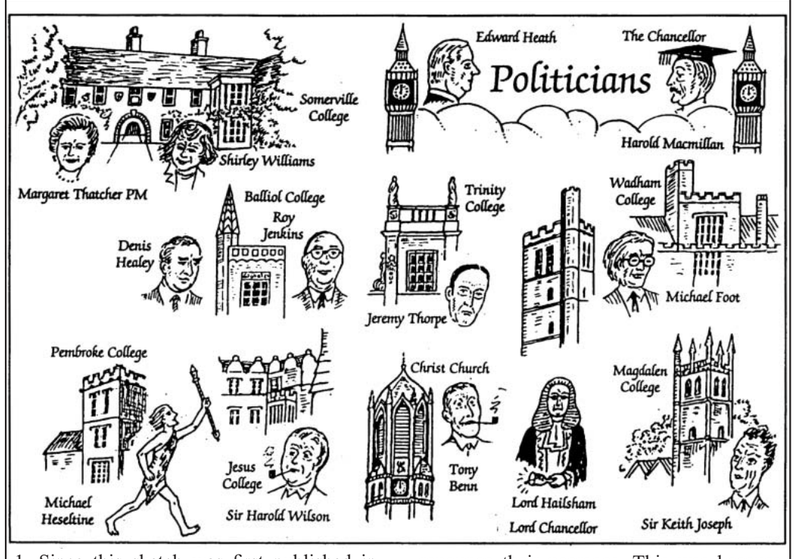

1. Since this sketch was first published in 1982, Lord Stockton has died, and **Roy Jenkins** has been elected Chancellor of the University. This is an honorary title, held for life. The actual administration of the University is the responsibility of the Vice-Chancellor, who holds the post for a four year term.

2. **Michael Heseltine** was known for his flowing golden locks and rousing orations. He was once so carried away during one of his Parliamentary speeches that he seized and shook the Mace, the symbol of the authority of the House of Commons.

3. **Tony Benn** started life as Anthony Wedgewood Benn, then became Lord Stansgate on the death of his father. He was the moving spirit behind the bill which enabled Peers to renounce their peerages. This was because Peers are not allowed to sit in the House of Commons, which has become increasingly the focus of Parliamentary activity.

4. The 1987 election of the **Chancellor** was a festive occasion, drawing graduates from all over the country. The colleges laid on hospitality, friendships were renewed, and a glittering array of V.I.P.'s queued outside the Sheldonian, in a variety of academic regalia. Some elderly graduates of St. Hilda's were heard to remark that this queue was very much like the cake queue at Oliver and Guerdon's Bakery in Summertown during the War, when rationing was in force, and the value you placed on your guest could be measured by the freshness of the cakes proffered at tea.

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REVIEW: THEATRE

Cressida

by Nicholas Wright.

Corpus Christi College to Sat 24th

In London, in the early 1630s, women are not allowed on stage so female roles must be taken by boys. John Shank, an actor himself, runs a combination of talent agency, boarding house and stage school for such boys. Shank, played marvellously by Tom Berrigan, is a strange contradiction: cynical but soft-hearted, buying and selling boys but showing genuine affection for them.

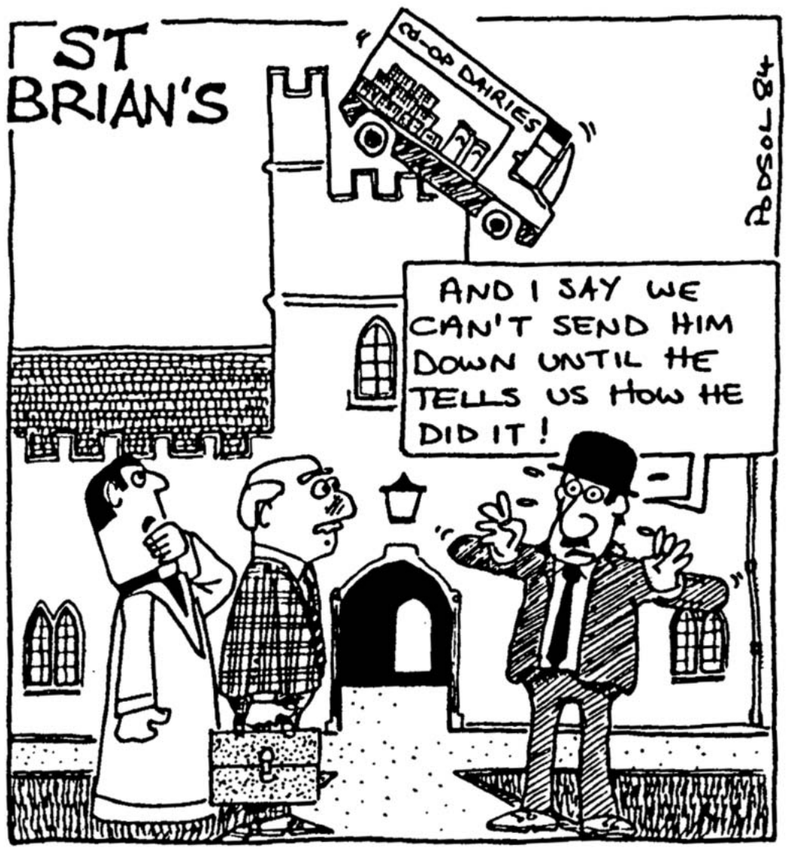
The play focuses on two of these boys in particular: Honyman is played with flair by Will Tosh as a star getting too tall and too old to continue playing women, who is idolised by new boy Hammerton (a convincingly twitchy David Sutcliffe), considered 'too girlish to be a fairy'. Their lives, and their relationships with each other and with Shank are changed forever by Shank's attempts to repay his debts.

'Cressida' is a new play by distinguished playwright Nicholas Wright. According to the programme, this is only the second ever production, and the first amateur one. It seems surprising, then, that it takes place in such an unprepossessing venue: a small room deep in the (very pretty) grounds of Corpus Christi College.

It is a tribute to the actors that this is the only incongruous element, as they do full justice to a brilliantly powerful and witty script. This is no mean feat, as all but one of the characters are or were actors themselves. The cast succeed in portraying these flamboyant, often melodramatic people while still allowing glimpses of the personalities beneath the facades.

This is an excellent production deserving of a grander venue and a wider audience. Thoroughly recommended.

Alex Williams 21/11/01



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