

BRITISH THEATRE GUIDE

Clocked

by Neill Flynn Warehouse Theatre

A man in a respirator and wearing what appears to be an anti-contamination suit makes an intriguing start to this new play, an extract from which featured in the Warehouse Theatre's International Playwriting Festival last year and which now gets its world premiere. He turns out to be Mr Quinn, who has been doing some painting, redecorating the house he has inherited from his mother, a rather elegant one that has seen better days it seems from Graham Constable's straightforward set with its rich red walls and heavy plasterwork. But the pilasters around the conventional French windows could be misleading. The sparse and rather odd assortment of furniture and the lace cloth on the table might tell us more, for this is a play that leaves you continually guessing.

Quinn we discover is a painter in the fine art sense as well and to help pay the bills he has let a room to Mr Moore who seems to be some sort of businessman. Moore talks about his boss, and meeting clients, but never reveals what he actually does and when he starts making mysterious and rather threatening phone calls in the middle of the night it begins to seem rather sinister.

Then there is Ray, a younger man who Quinn has taken on as his assistant after discovering him on the roof fleeing, he says, from aliens (perhaps I miss heard but it sounded appropriate, next time we heard the story they were Albanians) Quinn invited him to jump down onto his balcony and then painted him while he slept. One wonders about their relationship, though the homoerotic undertones are less evident in Ted Craig's production than they seemed when I saw the IPF extract, and when Mr Moore tells Quinn that he's met Ray before, some years ago, and that they had a sexual encounter you begin to wonder why Moore is there as well.

Jonathan Oliver manages to suggest the neurosis behind the boring ordinariness that Moore affects, spontaneously erupting into his occasional outbursts, and Lee Colley's eager and willing Ray has just that occasional blankness that suggests a man conditioned by medication but it is Robert Austin's fine performance as Quinn that is the solid centre of this production. You feel that this gentle and caring Irishman also has something that he is hiding.

This is Neil Flynn's first work for the theatre, though he has already written for radio, and it suggests a talent to be watched. There is an early Pinterish feel to this piece with its ambiguity and unexplained menace, and not least in the opportunities it gives its actors, but it is very much Flynn's own voice. It is a story without closure, though it ends with significant action. Ted Craig has given it a production that holds the interest while avoiding an imposed interpretation. It leaves the audience to make up their own minds what they have actually seen, for each person it will probably be different.

Howard Loxton