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ACTING IN SPITE OF A SERMON

THE PLAY: Through the Garden Wall (Alexander).

THE PLAYERS: Margaret Inglis, Robert Langford, Kenneth Baker, Louis Iff, George Korelin, Gordon Wales, Susan Nellist.

THE DIRECTORS: Norah Caulfield and Robert Langford (MRA—Modern Theatre Productions).

By FRANK MORTON

ON REFLECTION the only significant connection I can perceive between this sort of play and drama proper is in its use of a stage, décor and actors.

Of the accepted dramatic values as such there is virtually no sign and whatever comedy exists must owe its realization mainly to the cast. The debt is, indeed, a formidable one.

The many fine, taut, performances on show certainly enable one to forget at times the play's paucity of content and over-emphasis on purpose.

GIVEN TEXTURE

Margaret Inglis as Mrs. Allways (even the name provokes comments from the author) brings on stage a sharp intelligence and authority so that the futile unpleasantness, not to mention emptiness, of the character in the author's observation, develops some texture of life in performance. It is an uncommonly gifted actress who can make, as Miss Inglis does, so much out of so little.

Robert Langford plays her stage-husband with restraint and exemplary comic control which, when matched with Miss Inglis's confidence, provokes an engrossing duel of personality and technique.

The two most adequately motivated characters, Uncle Easy and Samovar Stone, are tackled enthusiastically by Kenneth Baker and George Korelin respectively.

COMIC ENERGY

Both succeed in providing a genuine human interest by playing as forcefully as possible on the comic aspects. In particular, the sheer energy of Mr. Korelin's performance would be remarkable in any context.

Graham Brown's set, with stylistic echoes of Bernard Buffet, is pleasing no less than practical, except for that extraordinary multi-coloured wall in the last act, reminiscent more of the "Goonish" atmosphere of "L'il Abner." But it provides perhaps necessary scenic emphasis for one of the author's clumsiest and most heavy-handed symbols.

The play itself is the wall against which the talented cast and the audience must beat their heads.

Too bluntly the ideas speak

out of, rather than through, the characters, and the essential dramatic exploitation is therefore taken for granted rather than developed. In any case Mr. Howard's particular convictions lack authority or much relevance in the context of such a piece—frankly and crudely pure propaganda and little else.

Propagandist plays as such are not in essence undramatic, but what Shaw said about the theatre being a pulpit was hardly meant to be taken quite as literally as this.