

The Ormond Chronicle

1966

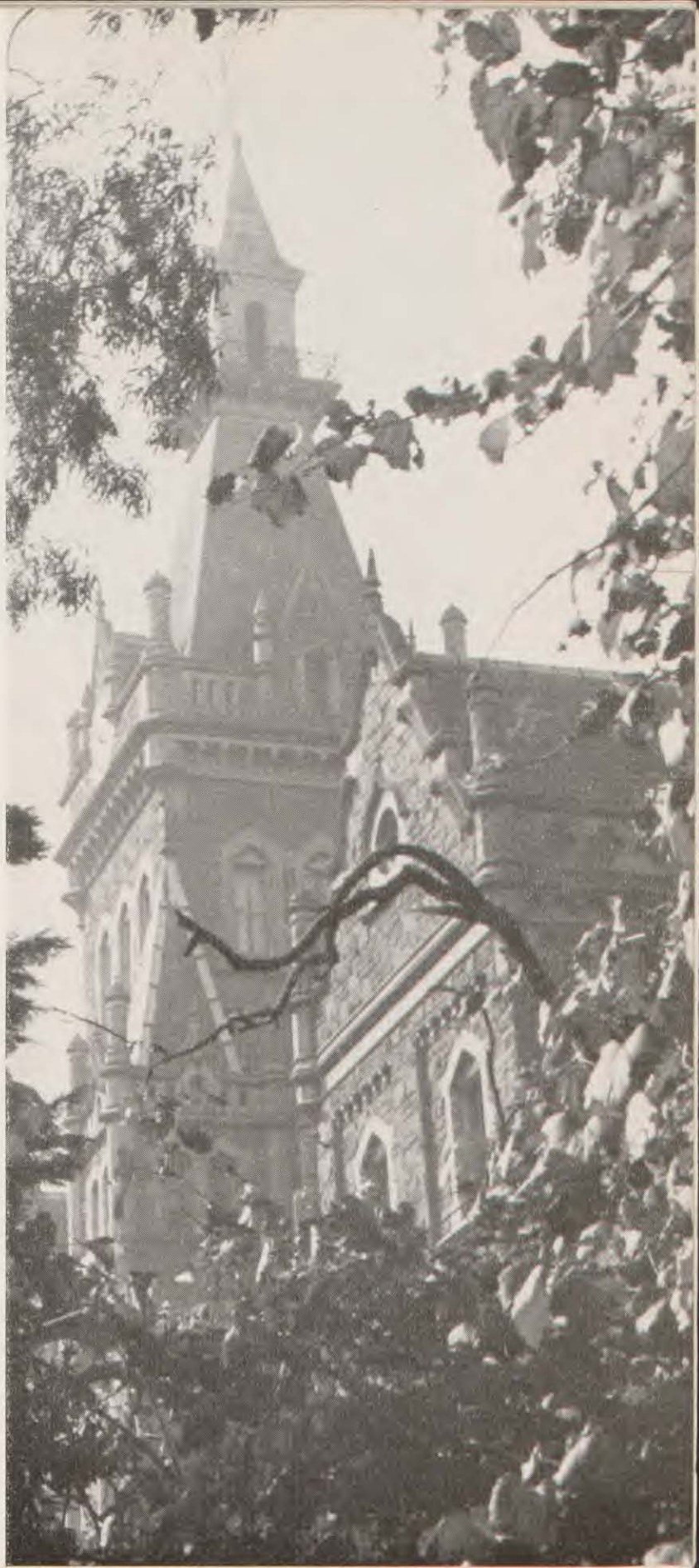
Editorial Committee :

K. B. O'Connor, Editor.

M. B. McK. Henry, Sports Sub-Editor.

The Chaplain, O.O.S.A. Representative.

Number Forty Six



“The Flies”

“The play chosen . . . was in keeping with the tradition of College plays — amusing without stimulating unnecessary thought.”

—CHRONICLE, 1929



“By Appointment . . .”

One of the most interesting and provocative questions facing a modern theatre in which dramatic form is breaking down is to what extent the development of a philosophical argument can create the basis for a cogent drama. Sartre was central in exploring the possibility of Existentialist dialectics as the skeleton for theatrical form. He only partially succeeded and in the end his dramas are interesting and important not because they are theatrically effective but because they engage in an exploration of Existential dilemmas.

It is easy to write a great deal on his first play “The Flies”, interpreting symbolism and analysing the development of the obsessive themes of freedom, guilt and alienation, but looking back on this College’s production of “The Flies” it is not the philosophy that one remembers. In fact the production was a constant battle with the wordy script—it is hard to say who won.

Brian Davies’ direction tried hard to work against the plodding arguments and he was particularly alive to the possibilities of sending up and cutting across the heavy crisis of the play. Consequently Orestes is not the anguished, deeply concerned philosopher cum hero, logically working his way into involvement of the Great Dilemmas

of Guilt and Freedom, rather Bill Garner played him as the bored and wandering rationalist who is looking for kicks. The director tried to make a play of ideas entertaining instead of gripping, he did not engage us with the vitality that can come from a clash of ideas—he distracted us from the central concern of the play.

In many ways this is valid when it is considered that not only is much of the script heavy handed, but its concern for moral action has lost the edge of topicality that it must have had in Nazi occupied Paris. However, even in its own right, as theatre, the production was seldom able to come alive—but when it did, it showed and uncovered a whole range of wit and vitality, not only in the script but also in the actors. Most of the scenes played between the urbane Orestes and the perpetually emoting Electra (Llewellyn Johns) struck the core of the contradictory relationship between the characters of the naive and petulantly neurotic kid sister and the cool philosophy student elder brother. At times their scenes developed like vaudeville routines, with both characters undercutting each other—Orestes by not saying much and Electra by never stopping.

It was generally true that most of the actors were very much stronger when acting in groups than when they were forced to hold the stage themselves. Greg Power, for example, was an impressive Zeus—understanding that Sartre sees God as a comic character. Zeus is a showman; a conjurer whose tricks aren’t what they used to be and one of the high points in the play was the crackling repartee between this faded showman and the disenchanted hipster of an Orestes. However, when Zeus had to deliver a long speech, for some unaccountable reason it was pre-recorded whilst the actor stood on stage conducting his own voice. Not only were the words lost, but the whole stage situation became ludicrously embarrassing. It may have been the result of poor direction because it was a general fault that actors simply could not control or hold a long

speech. Garth Browne's Aegisthus, for example, was also very strong and assured



in dialogue, but in monologue any sense of character was washed away in the flood of words. There was a general sense in the whole production that no one really understood what their words meant, or how they fitted into the general development of the play.

Consequently then, perhaps the most memorable parts of the performance came from the smaller cameo roles. Martin Munz as the tutor, for example, looking like a wandering scholar going to a Hawaiian barbecue, strongly caught the witty pedantry and exotic refinement of the part. Sandy Dawes as a twitching witch doctor a-go-go realized the send up of the showmanship of the clergy.

All this went to make up an interesting

wrapping, but there was nothing inside once you unwrapped the parcel. It may have had funny moments, but someone forgot to tell Mr. Davies that it wasn't a funny play—bad perhaps but not a comedy. Hence, whole slabs of the performance fell flat because of an original misconception. The scene of the unleashing of the spirits, for example, looked like American tourists on a Hayman Island picnic feeling sad because someone forgot to bring the mustard. The whole sense of the scene in the play is that it is slightly horrific, perverted and grotesque—it is the sight of this that finally engages Orestes' commitment. Once the scene is played gaily, Orestes' murder is the act of a killjoy. It was probably this central hard core of violence, incest and general nihilism which this production failed to capture, and this was probably why scenes which have the sort of vitality that is usually associated with self destructive violence came off as the most boring. The Furies, for example, only make sense if they are the embodiment of the ravenous and disgusting qualities of corrosive guilt, played as mod cuties in pyjama suits one wonders about the nature of Orestes' guilt. Despite all this, there was something gripping in the production—it was able to control and direct the dramatic tensions in a way which never allowed the audience to lose its interest.

In the end it is difficult to articulate the positive qualities that are gained by the College and the University at large, by the experience of a College play. It probably has something to do with the fact that a play is a social and creative work at the same time and the sort of experiences that come out of a play work on these dual levels. There is no doubt that this year's play was an all round success and as such the significance of a College play is well established.

E.A.M.