STAR-GAZETTE

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The World Looks Different to Them

By CONNIE WINKLER

CORNING — The world looks different than it did a few years ago to Elizabeth Perry and Kent Broadhurst. Miss Perry is the glamourous murderess and Broadhurst the red-faced clerk in "A Shot in the Dark", the French farce now at the Corning Summer Theater. Both of their lives are a study in change.

For Broadhurst the change came after he'd raised the money, received, directed, designed and produced "Dark Moon" on Broadway in 1970. After 150 shows he found himself looking at the world through different eyes. "I cleared the cobwebs out of my mind, got rid of obsolete information."

After the play he went back to painting, primarily portraits, which was what he had done during summers to put himself through college. "But as far as someone sitting at a desk with a blue print, I don't do that anymore."

What he does do now are giant oils, some as large as six feet tall, which in a college fashion tell many facets of the person. He calls his metnel a cosmic concept. It shows the subject of the portrait, but also something about that human being in terms of the universe.

"My objective is to overwhelm. I don't care if you people love or hate my work, as long as they're not the same as before they saw it," he said.

Painting and acting both draw upon the creative instinct, but with a different doing both is like the experience of the musician who plays two different instruments, Broadhurst said.

For Miss Perry the change came in her role as a woman.

She recently become involved in a short play which interprets Sylvia Plath's poetry. The production is being managed by a group called the New Feminists and will be done as a college tour. After the performance the actresses sit and talk with the audience, she said.

Sylvia Plath was an author-poet who wrote about women's oppression in personal terms before she committed suicide.

"I remember what it was like to be a woman in the 1950's — attempting to be a good woman, which really meant good servant," Miss Perry said.

"I didn't know I was playing a role. Sylvia knew. She knew something was unfair."

Miss Perry is married to Anthony Call, who stars in the soap opera "Guiding Light." When she was married eight years she wanted to spend as much time with her husband as possible. "I had the romantic concept of a relationship and togetherness, she recalled.

In career terms that meant she ended up doing a lot of commercials, which paid well and took little time. Now she is devoting herself to longer term projects. Until June she was in the revival of Clare Booth Luce's "The Women" on Broadway and would like to do more Broadway plays and a soap opera.

Miss Perry is also a painter. After listening to Broadhurst talking about his ideas of art, she defined herself as an emotional, modern expressionist. "My works usually have people doing something someplace in nature. I've noticed the people are usually alone," she said. This struck a familiar note with Broadhurst. "Solitude is such a precious thing. People don't trust being alone. The best growth comes to you when you're alone. Why be afraid of it?"

During this summer's eight week tour with "A Shot in the Dark" of which Corning is the final stop, Miss Perry has found she hasn't been able to paint or draw while backstate, because it takes too much concentration. Instead she's taken to crocheting what has grown from a few squares to a giant afghan. The afghan doesn't make her lose the continuity of the play.

Elizabeth Perry and Kent Broadhurst look over slides at lunch

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Review

Current WTC Play Powerful Poetry

by John Leary

"I am a pathological liar, I am vertical but I would rather be horizontal, I am red meat, I think I may well be a Jew, I am a pure acetylene virgin." Such are excerpts from an echoing vignette on Sylvia Plath which opens the current production of "A Difficult Borning" at the Washington Theatre Club.

As a play, this performance emerges as unique in every aspect from production to purpose. As entertainment, "A Difficult Borning" brings to life the works of one of contemporary poetry's greats with a power and relevance that no reading could equal. It is a play about a particular woman, but more importantly, it is a commentary on womanhood in general.

Appropriately, this production draws on the diverse poetry and prose of Sylvia Plath as the singular source of its dialogue. (Plath was a popular confessional poet who commited suicide in 1962 at the age of thirty-two.)

Her work, while deeply personal, touches on a wide variety of topics and ranges in mood from innocent levity to ironic tragedy. She has since become one of the "camp" poets of our time.

Widely read for a multitude of reasons, her popularity is now further enhanced by the emergence of the feminist movement.

Taken from her only novel, "The Bell Jar," and two of her books of poetry, "Colossus" and "Ariel," the lines used in "A Difficult Borning" are spoken exactly as written.

Actress Etain O'Malley joined Janet Gardner and Kayla Kazahn Zalk in the compilation that is responsible for the play's extraordinary arrangement. The merits of this collaboration are as much deserving of credit as the creation of the original poetry.

The depiction of Plath as four distinct women and the choice to focus on certain of her themes, such as childbearing, give "A Difficult Borning" an explicit relevance to female existence. The delicate balance of emotions brought forth by the presentation of these themes, however, can be appreciated by anyone who is sensitive to his own existence.

In short, although the play is created by women, about women, it is not restricted to women in its appeal. Only recently evolving from an informal poetry reading in New York, "A Difficult Borning" is still in its infancy as a play. The current engagement at the Washington Theatre Club marks its public debut and the actresses performing the play have all helped to cultivate its birth.

All veterans of New York stage, Margot Berdeshevsky, Elizabeth Perry, Etain O'Malley, and Lisa Richards express an unquestionable faith in the play. In an open discussion following the play each actress was quick to expound on her love of Plath's work. When asked if much of the tragedy and sickness of Plath's writing hadn't been circumcised to make the play more pleasant Ms. O'Malley quietly answered, "We didn't leave out the tragedy, we simply did not focus on it."

Other comments revealed that aside from being actresses of high caliber, these women are also dedicated emissaries of those reflections in Plath's work which they feel are applicable to all women. One actress quickly demonstrated this idea when the first question she put to the female members of the audience was if any of the poetry had brought to mind any personal experiences similar to those depicted, with courtship, marriage, identity, childbirth, and virginity among the topics of the poetry. In light of the excellent job done of conveying them, the question did not really have to be asked.

2 Troupes, 2 Views—Same Plath

By LAURIE JOHNSTON

Using much of the identical poetry and prose by Sylvia Plath—who became a literary figure of special interest after her suicide in 1963 at the age of 31—the British Royal Shakespeare Company and the American New York Tea Party, a tiny company that began as a feminist "consciouness-raising group," are presenting separate productions here within a few days of each other.

The British production, "Sylvia Plath," will be staged in the 400-seat Lepercq Space of the Brooklyn Academy of Music today through Jan. 27, sharing the Academy with the Royal Shakespeare's "Richard II."

"Three Women," a radio drama Miss Plath wrote for the British Broadcasting Corporation the year before she died by gas from her kitchen stove, has been given its first complete theatrical staging by the R.S.C. Preceding it will be excerpts from "The Bell Jar," Miss Plath's autobiographical (and only) novel, about an early mental breakdown, a book that was at first suppressed in this country by her family and later became a best seller; from four of her short stories and from her poems, including "Ariel," "Lady Lazarus" and "Daddy."

Sylvia Plath

Tea Party Collage

The New York Tea Party's production, "A Difficult Borning," is described as "a collage" of material from the radio play, the novel and the poems. It was staged with "four women, four stools and a box," last weekend in the 70-seat Clark Center for the Performing Arts, 840 Eighth Avenue, in the West Side Y.W.C.A.

"Maybe the timing suggests temerity — and as professionals, we're dying to see what the Royal Shakespeare has done with Plath," acknowledged Elizabeth Perry, producer of the Tea Party's Plath production and an actress who appeared in last year's revival of "The Women."

"But we started reading Plath to each other two years ago," she said, "trying to get inside our own heads as women, but specifically as women in the arts and communications. We found her saying deeply feminine things that even most female poets were afraid to say."

Since many in the group were in the theater, Miss Perry said, "we began to look for a form" and found much of the material, especially "Three Women," to be "infinitely actable" even though "the woman didn't live long enough to get into the full extent of her dramatic gifts."

Miss Plath is also one of six women represented in Viveca Lindfors's "I Am a Woman," also being done this month.

Barry Kyle, director and adapter of the Royal Shakespeare's "Sylvia Plath," said Miss Plath's work fitted in with the London company's "constant search for modern poetic material that exercises similar disciplines to our Stratford productions of Shakespeare."

Mr. Kyle described "Three Women"—all of whom are experiencing birth but never speak to or look at each other—as "still and spare" in style, "a sort of 'dramatic song' in the old Greek sense" as well as "a unique, illuminating work about a mysterious, almost mythic experience."

"This century has produced a great literature of death but very little literature of birth," he said. "The reason is simple: very few great poets have experienced birth."

The three British actresses who form the production's cast—Brenda Bruce, Estelle Kohler and Louise Jameson—arrived this weekend.

Both explorations into "who is Sylvia?" have received the blessings of Ted Hughes, the British poet who was Miss Plath's husband, though they separated before her death, and his sister, Olwyn Hughes, who are executors of her estate.

Born in Boston, Miss Plath graduated from Smith College summa cum laude in 1953 and been editor of its literary magazine.

Reflections of Self

Like the heroine in her novel, the young writer had found the demands of her male relationships silly and demeaning. Like her, too, Miss Plath entered a mental institution and—in what the novel calls "the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs" — underwent electric-shock therapy. Later she won a Fullbright scholarship, attended Cambridge University and remained in England.

"Any myth of Plath as a militant feminist," Mr. Kyle said, or as "an electrified, self-destructive personality of the Janis Joplin sort" would be "a distorted view of her work."

"People who knew her in England describe her as very coping, very practical, a good mother and good cook, who adored her children," he said. "So many of her poems are soliloquies that begin in the kitchen. Some of the strength of the writing springs from the tension between the coping side and the death-haunted obsession with suicide."

Feminist View

Miss Perry's group sees her as "a more conscious feminist than people knew."

"Being a brilliant as well as a sensual woman—we find her with deep emotional investment in her marriage, loving sex but recoiling from enslavement by it—put her personality into conflict, not just split in two but in many pieces," Miss Perry said.

The seven New York Tea Party women who have created "A Difficult Borning" do not visualize the poet as a "women's lib" activist or even a "joiner" but think she "would have gone right on writing—perhaps even more deeply," Miss Perry said.

"She would have responded with relief that she was not alone in her pain," Miss Perry said.

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Tragic poet's tender images

By CLIVE BARNES

New York Times

NEW YORK — Sylvia Plath was a poet with a vocation for death and a feeling for life. She was born in Boston in 1932 and she committed suicide — almost by accident — in London in 1963.

By ancestry she was part Polish and part German, and she found herself waiting in what she called "The Incalculable Malice of the Everday." But she listened, watched, noticed and lived.

I recall reading her, in that casual, preoccupied way most people read poets now, glancing through a here-or-there poem in a smart but unglossy magazine, reading a review, listening to a name on a wave of cocktail froth at an all-too-literary party. She was a same that was spoken.

I remember her marriage to the English poet, Ted Hughes — there was an element of Chelsea chic to it at the time. The separation — to the sound of subdued hyena trumpets in the London gossip columns — and then the suicide. In the past 10 years or so I have noted that her posthumous reputation was floating upward like Ophelia's hair, but I never re-read her. And now, suddenly in two theater performances in one week — one British in Brooklyn and one American in Manhattan — Miss Plath has taught me something about drama.

Poetry is what drama is about. It is the hard core of the dramatic experience — everything else is peripheral documentary.

The Royal Shakespeare Company has come to Brooklyn to give us its very rewarding, schematic Richard II. But Shakespeare, even in its wildest recensions, is not entirely what the R.S.C. is about. The company searches continually for the new that will offer an illuminatory contrast to Shakespeare. It has found one in its program. Staged by Barry Kyle, and called simply, Sylvia Plath.

Three women, a bare stage draped in white, a few chronological placards explaining time, place and event, a blown-up picture — sad-eyes and diffident brow — of the poet herself, the whole scene is bare-bone simple and almost arrogant in its skeletal statement.

Three women — they tell the story of Plath and demonstrate her music and her insights. They stress her odd love-affair with death. They quote A. Alvarez in his splinter-accurate book, The Savage God, that analysis on the life of suicide, as pointing out her ability to "transform disaster into art." Perhaps. It was not what I gathered. She seems, at least in this biographical dramatization, more aware than that. Her thoughts seem shallow and her insights seem deep. Possibly she transformed art into disaster.

Plath's words eat into the memory like musical phrases. She comes up with simple, transfixing words, such as "eye-pits," or will suggest, in motherhood, "my first squirming child." Why should "squirming,' so obvious, so bland, so conventional, be so right? If I knew, I would be a poet.

Listen to her talking about "the glass-heavy music of milkmen setting their bottles." It flies, it suggests, it defines. She talks chiefly about women's things. Church meetings where you might be unwelcome, maternity wards where you might be alone. Death is a terrible game to her, life is an awful mystery. Birth seems to be the secret.

At Brooklyn the performance ends with a radio play, Three Women. It is three voices desolate and defiant in a maternity ward. To a man it explains something of this happy-tragedy of birth, the one necessary agony that makes one question the processes of creation.

The Shakespeare Company, excellently staged by Kyle, has Three Women floating in a space, quoting a woman's journey. It is precisely done. The clarity of words, the blend of personality, the variety of poetic life and experience — everything is spun-out and perfect.

Brenda Bruce is the older woman — the mother-child figure, sometimes scolding, sometimes regretting. Estelle Kohler is the poet, her face reflects idle words like a stream reflects sunshine. Louise Jameson is the more direct, the more concerned, the more fearful. Three aspects of a strange and remarkable woman.

At the Clark Center in Manhattan, a company calling itself the New York Tea Party is also giving a Plath show — here called A Difficult Morning. It uses some the same material and it has much of the same sensibility. It has been directed by Anita Khanzadian, and is acted by Margo Ann Berdeshevsky, Mary Hamill, Etain O'Malley and Elizabeth Perry. It is nicely done — a moving anthology of a poet's voice. But the Shakespeare Company in Brooklyn gave me the moving anthology of a poet's gesture. It is the difference between meeting a poet and hearing her. In either version it is a presence and a voice to be cherished.

SPORTS METS LOSE, STAY TIED WITH CUBS IN WILD-CARD RACE **1D**

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Free show honors women's rights founder

Elizabeth Perry will bring her solo performance piece, *Sun Flower*, a biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for a free performance at 3 p.m. Sunday to the Watters Theatre at Binghamton University.

On the same program will be Fred Morsell in *Presenting Frederick Douglass*.

Perry, a Broadway and TV actress, plays more than 20 characters in this performance of an important Women's Rights founder.

Sun Flower has appeared in New York, Palm Springs, Washington, D.C., Atlanta and Seneca Falls at the 150th anniversary of the first woman's rights convention.

At the Seneca Falls commemoration with Hillary Clinton as guest speaker for the opening ceremonies, Perry delivered the Declaration of Sentiments, originally presented by Elizabeth Cady Stanton at the first Woman's Rights Convention in 1848 at Seneca Falls. There, for the first time, the controversial idea that women should have the right to vote was put to a public debate, one that raged for another 72 years when the 19th Amendment was finally ratified in 1920.

Sun Flower was directed by Los Angeles Drama Critics Award-winning director Anita Khanzadian. Perry has recently been appointed to serve on the Advisory Board of the National Museum of Women's History.

For information and reservations call Francine Montemurro at 777-2388.