

The arts

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THE ARTS

The Theatre of Friedrich Dürrenmatt, by Kenneth S. Whitton. Oswald Wolff Ltd. 242 pages/£7.95.

WHEN I first came to England fresh from Switzerland, the frequent teasing question at dinner parties: "Does Switzerland have a cultural life worth mentioning?" never failed to provoke my anger. Indignantly I would say: "Yes, of course" and rattle off a list of names held in awe in Switzerland but unknown to the average educated English person who had not made a special study of Swiss culture as such.

The names Max Frisch and Friedrich Dürrenmatt were most likely to spark off a positive reaction, since most people had seen some of Dürrenmatt's plays at some time, translated into English, maybe "The Visit of the Old Lady" (1956), described by Max Frisch as "the greatest play in the German language since Brecht", "The Physicists" (1962) or "The Meteor" (1966).

Seventeen of Dürrenmatt's works for the stage have found

their way into the international repertoire.

Although Frisch and Dürrenmatt are often mentioned in the same breath as the best-known representatives of modern Swiss literature in German, the differences in style are very distinctive.

Both share a stubborn search for truth and individual freedom, but Dürrenmatt generally goes a step further in rather stronger and more truculent

language to describe the folly of men and the absurdity of fate.

He has a particular liking for macabre and political comedy which has on occasion angered the more conventional Swiss theatre audience considerably. Probably "Hercules and the Augean Stables" (1963) is the most satirical of his plays.

The author of the book, Dr Kenneth S. Whitton, is senior lecturer in German Studies at the University of Bradford and

chairman of the School of European Studies there. He has lectured all over Britain on Dürrenmatt and contemporary German literature to sixth form classes and universities.

Dr. Whitton's book is essential reading for students of contemporary German literature and of European modern theatre and also for the general reader who is fascinated by the controversial dramatist.

MHM

READERS' LETTERS

SEEING all the letters on the problems of teaching children Swiss dialects when they are abroad has finally persuaded me to write.

I am English, married to a Swiss. We left Switzerland

when our elder son was two and he didn't speak anything being, I think, rather confused as I spoke English to him and he heard Swiss-German outside. As we have always spoken English in the home — my husband's English being always better than my German — the children have never learnt Swiss-German.

Patrick, now eight, has never really shown interest, but Sarah would be quite amenable.

Anyway, we have decided that really the only way for children in this situation to learn their father's language is for us to actually live in Switzerland so, accordingly, we are returning next year, in the meantime trying to teach the children some dialect as a basis.

However, I have a feeling that, based on the experiences of other English women married to Swiss over there, that the English will slowly evaporate, thereby creating the same situation as the Swiss mothers find over here. —Yours faithfully, (Mrs) L. Habegger.

MAY I as a mere Englishman thank you for your reply to Pia Clarke-Roesch regarding printing your most excellent journal in the common language of this country.

I would venture to suggest that although primarily designed for the Swiss domiciled in Great Britain, you probably

have a large proportion of readers who like myself would not have sufficient command of their wife's or husband's mother tongue to fully comprehend the many diverse subjects and news you cover, did you print in one or other of the Swiss tongues.

When I think back to the first few years in the early sixties when we visited my parents-in-law in Lucerne, I can fully understand how disappointed and 'out of it' Mrs Clarke felt when the eagerly-awaited publication from home was not in the language she expected. I am as sure however that it will not take long wearing off, and just as Switzerland is to me my second home, and its people equally as much to me as my own compatriots, she will likewise get that feeling about England.

Speaking personally, I find the many varied topics, articles and news you print absorbing and interesting and keep me much more regularly in touch with my relations and many friends in Switzerland than our annual holidays and other occasional visits.

I too, Mrs Clarke, am exiled, and in fact can get to Zurich much more quickly than to my home town in the West Country, but regular newspapers from there and from Switzerland keep us both in touch and our hearts in both. —

C. Burrows-Koch, North Wales.

Hans

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Why not get in touch, and have a quiet chat with us. Before the rush starts.

Send SAE for further information:

Hans of Switzerland Ltd.
33 Southgate, Elland (Nr. Halifax)
West Yorkshire
Telephone: 0422 75476/7