

THE OBSERVER SUNDAY 16 AUGUST 1992

ARTS



The random selection from the stories leaves far too much unexplained in simple, theatre terms. I recommend a good read before you go, but go you must; not just to enjoy the athletic physicality of *Complicité*'s performance style, but also to encounter a strange and original literary imagination. And the music is great, too, compiled by Gerard McBurney from rabbinical chants, Vladimir Martynov, Alfred Schnittke and Tchaikovsky. Matthew Scurlfield is intermittently imposing as the biblical father given to importing rare birds' eggs and keeping false ledgers, and Cesar Sarachu (a Lecoq-trained Basque actor) tenderly convulsed as the Schulz hero-victim.

At the Royal Court, I thought *Hush* by April De Angelis (who has a good fringe track record) was so dreadful I should read the text. I did so, and on the page it seemed less dreadful, bright but without energy. Seaside and lounge meld (awkwardly, in Sally Jacobs's design) as background to Rosa's life-style dilemma: should she take harbour with her dead mother's bourgeois (augh!) sister or hang loose (oogh!) with the naked dogboy she has rather graphically jiggled up and down on in an early scene?

Max Stafford-Clark's uneven production is a compendium of modish Royal Court banalities: a pathetic antipathy to partition, some ghastly abortionist sensationalism, a grim exposure of a naked actor (the superb Andy Serkis) as the slobbering dogboy, the glib inclusion of a clever comedienne (the Glasgow Citizens discovery, Debra Gillett, as a patronised house-cleaner with Tibetan inclinations), a toothless satire on a post-modern novelist, and an almost computer-programmed reworking of the Caryl Churchill sister-war in *Top Girls*.

Is the dogboy someone expunged from somewhere else? Is he an unwanted life force, is he just good sex? Is the dog Jo? What happened to radicalism? Who cares?

titles: Debra Gillett as Denise and Derola Kirwan as Rosa in the Royal Court's uneven production of 'Hush'. Photograph by Sue Adler.

and Rotterdam, to name but a few. Stephen Boxer is a fine, sleeky Buckingham, and Simon Dormandy exceptional as a turbidly poetic Clarence and a sinister, death-dealing Ratcliffe.

The RNT has meanwhile continued its fruitful association with Théâtre de Complicité. *The Street of Crocodiles* in the Cottesloe is a brilliant but opaque distillation of the stories of Bruno Schulz (1892-1942), a Polish Jew whose literary reputation has been justly linked with Thomas Mann, Kafka and Conrad by latterday champions including V. S. Pritchett and John Updike.

His fictions are compellingly translated into English by Celina Wieniewska, and these texts are the source of Simon McBurney's RNT/*Complicité* production. There is a bright, hard physical texture to these strange scenes, but no conventional narrative luminosity. They hinge around the Kafkaesque representation of Joseph's struggle with his odd father. And with the secret life of a textile shop, the quest for an electric bell, a summer idyll, classroom tyrannies, a general sense of foreboding, and the Nazi occupation.

Schulz was an admired contemporary of such inter-war Polish theatrical notables as Ignacy Witkiewicz and Witold Gombrowicz, whom we know through the World Theatre Seasons. Their successor, the late Tadeusz Kantor, was directly influenced by Schulz, and *Complicité* consciously — self-consciously? — invoke the Kantor world (*Dead Class* and *Wielopole, Wielopole*) of uninhabited suits, spiritual deprivation and classroom desks.

Michael Coveney 16 August 1992

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ianharris

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