

THE OLD
LADIES

1981

Geriatric war of nerves

Rich/Twick Times

A REVIVAL of *The Old Ladies* by Teddington Theatre Club this week seems unlikely to rescue playwright Rodney Ackland from the black hole of oblivion. Titles are always a problem for playwrights, but this one is uninspired to the point of indifference.

Mr. Ackland's old ladies, three of them, are locked not in the lavatory but in a war of nerves, thanks to a personality clash that would make Mrs. Thatcher and Tony Benn look compatible by comparison.

Nice benevolent Lucy (Joan Scarrott) is forced to take on the role of arbitrator between the mischievous, untrustworthy Agatha (Cynthia Scott Brown), and a newly arrived spinster, May (Lorna Richardson), whose nerve endings are practically visible through her quivering skin.

Agatha takes an instant dislike to the newcomer and resolves to make her life even more miserable than it is already.

May is quite unable to cope and cracks under the strain, despite Lucy's efforts to protect her from Agatha's harassment.

That's about it. In the absence of any great truths about the human condition, or an unexpected denouement, this play demands an outstanding trio of performances to offset the fact that it is both dated and inconsequential. It does not get them in Robin Hope Johnston's production, though it must be said that all three actresses work extremely hard and succeed at least in making it all plausible.

Joan Scarrott, however, is a little too sweet as Lucy,

and Lorna Richardson often overplays the nerviness of May to an irritating degree. Only Cynthia Scott Brown's performance, dispensing malevolence with muted relish, hits precisely the right note in this peculiar *menage à trois*. She reminded me of a weary old dog, picking endlessly at a bone long since bereft of meat.

An elaborate and sturdy set, designed by Robin Hope Johnston and Mart Stone-lake, must have taken weeks to assemble, and you couldn't help wondering if all those involved in the production felt it had been worth the effort.

Surely there are other plays by the neglected Mr. Ackland more deserving of revival than this?—NS.