

THE DAY AFTER  
THE FAIR

1980

## Love by proxy

For just three nights last week, Teddington Theatre Club presented **The Day After the Fair**, an exquisite adaptation by Frank Harvey of a short story by Thomas Hardy. Not only does the play boast a plot of which Ibsen would not have been ashamed, but it is extremely well written and provides lots of opportunity for elegant late 19th century costumes.

It concerns the dilemma of Anna, a pretty country girl (employed as a servant by a wealthy West Country brewer and his wife) whose illiteracy threatens to thwart her plans to marry a bright young lawyer, Charles, whom she meets at the fair.

So she begs her employer, Mrs. Harnham, to pen some love letters to Charles, who is duly amazed by what he believes to be Anna's poetic imagination. For Mrs. Harnham, the correspondence is a welcome outlet for her frustrated romanticism. What she fails to realise is that Anna can never live up to the literary image she has created for her. Charles only discovers on their wedding day that Mrs. Harnham and not Anna, was responsible for the letters he prized so dearly.

At first glance, Robin Hope Johnstone's casting might have seemed ill-advised, but as the performance progressed you could see his reasons for choosing Laurie Coombs to play Mrs. Harnham, and Patti Bottomley as Anna. The former has never looked or sounded more refined, in a succession of attractive costumes, and

the latter might have stepped out of a commercial for Summer County.

Their scenes together were often truly affecting; and you could believe in the marriage of Edith (Mrs. Harnham) and Arthur, the bluff husband, played with the right air of insensitivity by Cliff Broad. Davina Andrews simpered effectively as Arthur's prissy sister, and Nick Harman made a striking impression of youthful assertiveness in a relatively brief appearance. Mr. Hope Johnstone's cleverly stylised set contributed to the overall charm and nobility of this production.

— N.S.