Anouilh Comedy at Baylor

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1956, anything but a comedy in its story of Jean d’Arc, then the delectable “Waltz of the Toreadors” the following year, the ethereal “Time Remembered” in the next season, then, “Becket,” most recently, last year’s “The Rehearsal” which won double acclaim for its presentation by an imported British cast.

All but the last two have been presented at Baylor Theater, in those days when the company numbered Ivan Rider, Romona Cottle, Jim Baines, Barbara Reynolds, Barbara Terrell, Claude Crowe, Charles Hathcock, Robyn Baker.

Now Patricia Cook of the dramatic faculty is returning “Thieves’ Carnival,” in which the characters play not only a part but also a part within the characterization.

Linda Liles will be seen as the domineering and scheming Lady Huff, who manipulates people for her own pleasure to combat the boredom of old age, who lives in a make-believe world.

The part of her niece Eva, who sees people as they are and, despite a desire to remain as naive as her sister Juliette, gradually plays a game with people and so becomes less sincere.

Barney Hammond has the part of the chief of the three young thieves, over-enthusiastic and impractical with his plots which could not possibly succeed, and extremely conscientious in trying to make better thieves of his younger accompanics, Hector and Gustave.

The youngest of them, Gustave (R. J. Bowen), is one of the few who does not play at life, an honest thief who wants to tell everyone his profession, and whose counterpart is Juliette (Sammie Earhardt), the only other character who does not wear a mask.

They all come together at Lady Huff’s palatial home, the scene of the carnival masquerade, where romance interferes with business and the youngest thief turns with vengeance against his job. But the object of his affection has a mind of her own and is even swifter in her wiles than he is in his. The division’s major production for the fall will open Monday at 8:15 in Weston Studio and will be repeated Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. Reservations may be made by telephoning Plaza 3-4511, extension 224.

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MAURICE VALENCY, one of the most successful of Anouilh’s translators, has noted that there may be someone somewhat cautious about that furniture, for the first play with which, in 1937, the Frenchman achieved success, “Traveller Without Luggage,” which tells of the plight of an amnesiac searching for his past, has the same theme as “Siegfried.”

Anouilh has rarely departed from that theme or derivations from it: the conflict of the individual against society, the pure soul versus the impure world, the struggle to cling to ideals in the face of the pressures of life.

Even with all the freshness and verve with which he invests his theme it has nothing new of itself, for it has absorbed most of the great dramatists of the past century, Ibsen, Shaw, Strindberg, Pirandello, Tolstoy.

But all the plays he has written are basically the same, in the principle of tension between the youthful ideal of what life should be and the adult realization of what life is, each is extraordinarily different, is presented in a rainbow of different moods, from the surface gaiety of “Thieves’ Carnival” to the somber meditation of “The Lark.”

Despite its early popularity on the Continent and in London, he feared less well in New York until, with “Thieves’ Carnival” in 1955, he achieved at least a success d’estime with an off-Broadway production.

But at that point, others were watched for with some anticipation as representing something elegant, witty, different and, as they turned out, non-commercial even with such marquee names as Julie Harris attached.

There was “The Lark” of