

Albert-Reiner Glaap

Confusions to Roundelay

Stages in Ayckbourn's Creative Work

A Vademecum

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Preface

This booklet is a ‘vademecum,’ a handy book of reference, the Latin word meaning “go with me.” In the 16th and 17th centuries books of this kind were intended to be carried about and used to provide the facts needed on a specific subject. These days, you may just keep it with you because you find it helpful.

This particular vademecum wants to give insight into the ‘workshop’ of one of Britain’s most prominent director-playwrights. It does not provide detailed analyses of Alan Ayckbourn’s comedies, seventy-eight so far, but tries to point to and comment on stages in the development of this author’s creative work. To what extent have his later plays continued from where earlier plays left off? Which topics, structural means and dramaturgical concepts have been developed into new directions?

Ayckbourn’s plays are comedies on various topics and of different kinds. The ones written in the 1960s and ‘70s were comedies on English middle-middle-class characters, on the relationship between men and women, husbands and wives. His later plays are social comedies on life in the Britain of the time. In the more recent decades, Ayckbourn’s focus has been on prominent topics and issues of our ‘modern’ world, such as the influence of technology on modern life, or, as in *Surprises*, on human beings with replaced knees, hips or cardiac valves. How would these people cope with their daily lives in the next century? Longevity has become an important topic in Ayckbourn’s latest plays.

Not only new topical issues have cropped up in his plays; his structural inventiveness has become more and more faceted over the years. And, as regards his audience, he wants them not

just to receive and perceive what is happening onstage but individually conceive the intrinsic ‘message’ of the play.

Against this background, a series of five short plays has recently been produced under the title of *Roundelay*. These playlets can be performed in any order, leaving it to the audience to find out in what way, if at all the events and characters in these plays are interlinked. *Roundelay* (2014) is totally different from *Confusions* which was written back in the 1970s and has recently been remounted – a series of five short plays meant to be staged in a prescribed order.

Confusions to *Roundelay*, you – the readers – see for yourselves ...