



Rodney's Wife

Richard Nelson

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In 1962, on location in Rome, a fading movie star and his wife are entangled in an unraveling web of secrets, lies, and sexual impropriety that threatens to tear apart their family. "Irritation has never been given its full due as a dramatic emotion. You don't see a mask of irascibility scowling between the masks of comedy and tragedy. But with the right play ... sustained prickliness can be more affecting than a confrontational scam-off as you wait anxiously for friction to turn into fire. Eugene O'Neill's *LONG DAYS'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT* is probably the ultimate example of this phenomenon. But more immediate proof of the same powerful law of theater is available at Richard Nelson's *RODNEY'S WIFE* ... Seeming light conversation scrapes the skins of the characters in this sharply etched study of dislocation, loneliness and sexual betrayal ... And you are always aware of the strain and the snappishness that arise when people politely avoid saying what is on everyone's mind. Long before the unspoken is brought out for airing, Mr Nelson ... [has] created a full emotional geography of a family, with deserts and bogs and patches of quicksand. Over the last decade Mr Nelson, who has always had more of a following in London than in New York, has laid claim to being American drama's foremost living portrayer of what movie advertisements used to refer grandly to as 'illicit passion.' Mr Nelson, however, follows paths of erotic misadventure never mapped in *Peyton Place*. He has at least flirted with several forms of incest and what would legally qualify as pedophilia in *MADAME MELVILLE*, *FRANNY'S WAY* and the fearless *GOODNIGHT CHILDREN EVERYWHERE*, which won him the Olivier Award in London for best play. *RODNEY'S WIFE* manages to come up with yet another variation on the sexually taboo ... Yet like Mr Nelson's earlier works, *RODNEY'S WIFE* is never tainted by prurience, on the one hand, or puritanical head-shaking, on the other. What Mr Nelson offers instead is a deep and sorrowful understanding of how much loneliness there often is in lust. At the same time he has created what may be the most incisive, unsensationalized portrait of a Hollywood wife ever to grace a stage."

-Ben Brantley, *The New York Times*

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Edgar Workman:

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