KIRKUS DISCOVERIES

Goetz, Curt
DR JOB PRAETORIUS: *A Story in Seven Chapters*
Trans. by Philippe Rixhon
L'atelier Spectaculaire (86 pp.)

A witty play on the human condition.

Though Goetz (1888-1960) gained wide popularity as a playwright, screenwriter and accomplished translator in his native Germany both during his lifetime and after his death, this play won him broader international acclaim when Joseph L. Mankiewicz adapted it as the 1951 feature film, *People Will Talk*, starring Cary Grant and Jeanne Crain. Rixhon's translation, the first in English, is delightfully playful, with brilliant repartee that artfully conveys Goetz's sophisticated explorations of the human psyche. The play opens with Sherlock Holmes taunting Dr. Watson as he pores over the details of a newspaper article describing the untimely deaths of revered gynecologist Dr. Job Praetorius and his wife in a car crash. Holmes gently chides Watson, who happened upon the accident and provided the newspaper with what Holmes quickly determines were errant assumptions about the cause of death. The scene then turns to the last few months in the professional life of the doctor, whose benevolent and charismatic personality radiates from the page. Because of his winning ways with women both as a man and physician, Praetorius is subjected to the absurd scrutiny of his peers, and his summoning before a board of ethics constitutes the climax of the drama. Undoubtedly, Praetorius's claim that "the man who learns how to die with humour will reach the peak of civilization" is one of the play's broader themes, allowing for the light, almost irreverent, treatment of the deaths of two compelling characters. But one can't overlook Goetz's underlying message of compassion for all individuals, regardless of social standing, a hallmark of a playwright who fled his homeland, refusing to contribute to Hitler's propaganda films of the early '40s.

Sassy, timeless social commentary, in a league with Oscar Wilde.

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