

standard English accents, so that's all right.
I suspect most houses are infested with borrowers, and some of the slyly comic lines seem familiar from coded messages heard in my childhood; like "Your uncle has been seen on the mantelpiece," and "I hope your father's not been climbing any curtains."

THEATRE

Antony And Cleopatra,
The Changeling
Stratford-upon-Avon

Michael Billington

THE RSC's Stratford season reaches a strong climax with two studies of lust in action: John Caird's sensuously romantic *Antony And Cleopatra* in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and Michael Attenborough's savagely realistic version of *The Changeling* in the Swan. Shakespeare was the greater poet, Middleton and Rowley, I believe, wrote the better play.

Caird's production, however, solves many of the problems of *Antony And Cleopatra*: the defective construction, the geographical restlessness, the use of rhetoric to glorify sexual obsession. His designer, Sue Blane, has come up with a marvellous structure of sliding, ruse-tinted stone walls that evokes both Alexandria and Rome. Scene melts filmically into scene, underscored by Ilona Sekacz's music. Above all, Caird constantly reminds us that the protagonists have an historic past, a vivid present and no future except in the world of their own imagination.

Richard Johnson's Antony is a bit of a bluff overer but at least he has an aura of vanished glory; he frets impatiently when Pompey starts tactlessly going on about *pax* Cæsaris and honest Brutus and he strikes a moment of real pathos when he attacks Caesar for "harping on what I am, not what he knew . . . I was". And Claire Higgins's excellent Cleopatra is not only reckless, violent and impulsive, but also shrewd enough to know when it is diplomatic to invoke her affair with Caesar's father.

Much of the evening's pleasure lies in the voluptuous singing: as Octavius (admirably played by John Nettles not as the usual cold fish but as a man hungry for triumph) describes how the lovers publicly display themselves, we see them enthroned in gold surrounded by their bastard children. But Caird also cannily reminds us of the tale's tragic destination by making Jasper Britton's Soothsayer a ubiquitous figure who even turns up as the asp-bearing Clown. If I call his production romantic, it is because it ends with a glimpse of Antony and Cleopatra embracing in some Elysian future; but that seems to me consistent with a play that implies, as Shaw said, that sexual infatuation alone makes life worth living.

For a harsher view of these matters one has to turn to a Jacobean masterpiece like Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622), thrillingly revived by Michael Attenborough. Sex here is seen as a raging frenzy in that the heroine, Beatrice-Joanna, is so besotted by the noble Alsemero that she gets a disfigured, detested servant, De Flores, to kill her intended husband. In so doing she becomes enslaved to De Flores: as he savagely reminds her, "You are the devil's creature".

Attenborough's production succeeds on all levels. It locates the play firmly in the incense-filled world of Spanish Catholic ritual. It also explores every crevice of the text. De Flores is not, as so often, a vicious thug but, in Malcolm Storry's fine performance, a proud, hawk-profiled figure who "tumbled into the world a gentleman". Cheryl Campbell's Beatrice-Joanna is also a sexually ravenous aristocrat both haunted and horrified by her hit man over whose marked features her hand tremulously lingers: you really believe that she is reduced to a "shivering sweat" by her escalating guilt. Only Michael Silbry's gravelly-spoken Alsemero stands for moral normality.

In the main plot, sex drives the characters to madness. But Attenborough also skilfully handles the subplot in which two characters simulate madness for the sake of sex. Putting a lunatic asylum on stage is not easy in this day and age but, as fluttering hands appear through a grating and as the inmates rehearse a dance for the delectation of the aristocrats, one is powerfully reminded of Brook's *Marat-Sade*. It is a play that has something of the clammy excitement of film noir. And, while it lacks the poetic sublimity of *Antony And Cleopatra*, it delves far deeper into the feverish irrationality of lust.

CLASSICAL

BBC Symphony Orchestra
Royal Festival Hall

Meirion Bowen

ABY-PRODUCT of the repression that surrounded Shostakovich from the middle 1930s onwards is the lack of a fully authenticated edition of his works. The published scores of his symphonies diverge in important respects, and editions approved by the composer are not easily accessible since they were removed from the shelves of official shops.

Conducting Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony in this BBC Symphony Orchestra Concert at the Festival Hall, Alexander Lazarev seems to have had either special inside information or was manifesting determined views of his own. For he adopted tempi that were at variance with those in the available printed score: moreover, they were rarely convincing and disturbed the orchestra's security of ensemble. At almost

Changeling, Antony & Cleopatra Michael Billington

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