

dependence and subservience, of hospitality and rejection, of memory and instant amnesia. Richardson's cataleptic fit was a highlight of Peter Hall's production; at the Almeida, Pinter falls once, gets up, falls again in a corkscrew fashion, and crawls out the door on all fours. As theatre, it is almost unbearably exciting.

Which is more than can be said of John Caird's RSC revival of *Antony and Cleopatra* at Stratford-upon-Avon. There are inventive felicities: Sue Blane's mock Hollywood design of sliding walls and buttresses reveals Pompey (Toby Stephens) billowing into action on a huge black sail; the Alexandrian coronations are enacted in a golden tableau while Octavius (John Nettles, an Antony in the making) angrily recounts the usurpations; the soothsayer is hauntingly amalgamated by Jasper Britton with the death-dealing fig merchant.

But the central partnership of

Richard Johnson and Clare Higgins is not a success, though each has fine moments in the last act. Their passion is admittedly a husk, but there is too much shouting and ranting and not enough humour. Ms Higgins's old hippie costumes and Theda Bara wigs are a very big mistake.

The full bilious majesty of Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* eludes director Michael Attenborough in the Stratford Swan, but there is no great shame in that. The play's a monster, and it is nearly enough to have it done plainly and not over-pictorialised as was the RNT's Goya-esque version.

Malcolm Storry is superb as the inflamed intelligencer De Flores, huge and hulking with a genuine nobility of expression and a diamond-shaped facial birthmark which fascinates his doomed beloved. Cheryl Campbell is a bit mad as Beatrice-Joanna, better at charting the

moral dilemma than the actual lustful nitty-gritty.

The end-of-season Stratford triple-header is completed by a fascinating new play about Christopher Marlowe in *The Other Place*, latest fruit of the rich collaboration (five plays, now) between author Peter Whelan and director Bill Alexander.

*The School of Night* follows Charles Nicholl's fine book, *The Reckoning*, in placing the mystery of Marlowe's Deptford death in the context of the Elizabethan espionage network. Whelan complicates matters further by suggesting a body switch and a plot to graft Marlowe's work on to Shakespeare.

This does not quite come off, but the attempt is very entertaining, with Richard McCabe on blistering form as the impetuous playwright. Whelan even manages a wonderful near-anagram of the hero's name and works it into the plot: 'Worm(m)ale; hither corps(e).'

## Changeling, Antony & Cleopatra, Michael Coveney

Clipped By:



ianlharris

Sat, Dec 7, 2019