

to reject the tender, but inadequate, loyalty of a devoted husband. Nicholas Jones rescues Sir William from traditional sleekness, so that the scenes with his wife become exploratory and freshly moving.

Rattigan's uncensoriousness as a dramatist has never been better demonstrated. The quality is equally apparent in the serene performance of Wojtek Pyszoniak (Wajda's Robespierre) as the alien (and alienated) Mr Miller, the struck-off doctor and bookie's clerk who is the persuasive agent of Hester's salvation. Like Hester, Miller is poignantly displaced from his cultural environment, though his sexual stigmata are more concealed.

Freddie alone refuses to be trapped by emotional commitment or social decorum, and it says much for the production that he seems as tragic and wasted a figure as does Hester. Linus Roache could not be more different from Kenneth More: restless, feral, self-destructive. He makes Freddie not only a believable source of Hester's passion and despair, but also a pathetic remnant of the clubroom hinterland that spawned him.

Reisz's meticulous period production, which uses an open, into-your-laps design by William Dudley and covering music from the wireless (Hester is discovered in her semi-conscious state to the strains of 'People Will Say We're in Love' from *Oklahoma!*), breathes a world of class-ridden guilt and sad recovery that still underpins our national psyche.

In Rattigan, characters gripped by the *vice anglais*

(emotional constipation) cannot express what they feel. In Marivaux, they can do little else. 'Now I see how my heart works', exclaims Silvia, as if catching up with her own palpitations, in *The Game of Love and Chance* (1730), intriguingly re-launched as a spoof 1930s comedy of manners by Mike Alfreds's Cambridge Theatre Company and Neil Bartlett's Gloria in the RNT's Cottesloe.

The RNT did an unaired studio version in 1984, translated by John Fowles to the Regency world of Jane Austen. At least the concept of an arranged marriage would have made sense. Once that anachronism is overlooked in Neil Bartlett's sporty text, the idea of two lovers separately adopting servile disguise in order to spy on the suitability of an opposite number, the farcical, if not the psychological, mechanics work very well.

Maggie Steed's Silvia is deliberately presented as an 'older woman', whose awakening to passion by Peter Wingfield's muscular, supposed chauffeur Birmingham ('Bourguignon' in Marivaux) is a cue for trembling desperation. The exclamatory elements of this lovely play have often been ironically sifted from the romantic essence; I once saw a Parisian production in which a raised platform was reserved for the amorous histrionics while the decidedly Sadean nitty-gritty was conducted among a flock of real sheep in a meadow glistening through a spectacular sheet of rain. There were no holds baa-baa-ed.

Here is no summeriness, and the distancing is achieved more scrappily in the over-worn

conventions of a theatrical fit-up: Paul Dart's grey-green interior opens like a book; actors retreat to make-up desks, and Stefan Bednarczyk as Silvia's brother leers at the audience from a grand piano where he knocks out a campy accompaniment while dropping sub-Cowardian aphorisms ('Funny how eloquent cheap music can be').

Some of this is excruciating. But Maggie Steed is always worth watching, and the evening becomes much better than bearable whenever the servants (disguised as the aristos) take over: Marcello Magni, from Théâtre de Complicité, is lecherously athletic as the Arlecchino, running away deliriously with the idea of Marivaux writing for his Italian comedians, while Caroline Quentin as the maid Lisette is raunchy, technically adroit and very funny.

Two flawed but distinctly promising new plays. *Waiting at the Water's Edge* (Bush) by Lucinda Coxon charts the friendship of two Harlech housemaids in 1923. Vi (Suzanna Hamilton) masquerades as her dead master and becomes a strike-breaking capitalist in Nova Scotia while Su (Helen Anderson) looks after the master's stricken mother. The structure is over-schematic with good moments. The references to Brecht's *Pumila* and *Good Woman* are carefully absorbed in the atmospheric staging by Polly Teale.

*Marching for Fausa* (Theatre Upstairs) by the young Nigerian novelist Biyi Bandele documents the persecution of a dissident journalist (Susan Aderin) caught up in riots after the imprisonment of some protesting schoolchildren, one of whom (the unseen Fausa) has been taken by a Minister as a concubine. Not exactly a West African version of *Sarafina!*, Annie Castledine's production is nonetheless strong and vivid. But the play is not really a play; there are hints of raw power, but not enough concentration. It attempts too much too skimpily and reeks of an item in *Index on Censorship*, not the chaos in Laos.

Simon Russell Beale's hilarious RSC *Richard III*, directed by Sam Mendes, now at the new Donmar Warehouse in Covent Garden, is not to be missed.



Marcello Magni and Caroline Quentin./Photograph: Sue Adler.

## Coveney Game Of Love & Chance

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Sun, Dec 8, 2019