

Dream-merchants loom large in Terry Johnson's reasonably funny *Hysteria* at the Royal Court. Johnson's *Insignificance*, the play filmed by Nicolas Roeg, matched brains with beauty, Einstein with Marilyn Monroe. *Hysteria* elaborates a more factually correct encounter between Salvador Dali and Sigmund Freud. It is transplanted from Elsworthy Road, where Freud lodged for a month in 1938, to a stunning reproduction by Mark Thompson — all encased goddesses and buddhas, phallic totems, Persian carpets and Viennese furniture — of Freud's resting place, and today's Freud Museum, in Maresfield Gardens.

Doing for and to Freud what Michael Hastings did for and to T. S. Eliot in *Tom and Viv*, Johnson jumps on the feminist bandwagon which supposes that Freud's suppression of his findings in his brilliant 'Aetiology of Hysteria' lecture of 1896 was a cover for his own infantile sexual experiences and the source of his overriding attribution of rape and sexual violence to the female victims' fantasy.

The Dali/Freud confrontation is expertly threaded through the intervention of a living case history, Jessica, whom the astonishing Phoebe Nichols, too long absent from the stage, incorporates as dysfunctional victim, avenging daughter (of an abused mother), pliable model with an available armpit (hello, Dali), nemesis and sex-war bore. The farce episodes never quite gel with the argumentative core of the play, though I loved the Stoppardian sequence involving Anna Freud's knickers, a bicycle pump and a Wellington boot. Jessica's point (and Jeffrey Masson's in *The Assault on Truth*) is that Freud's rejection of his own seduction theory was a moral sham, not an intellectual advance.

Phyllida Lloyd's engaging production leaves Henry Goodman as the convincing Freud lookalike — white beard, thick accent, mean glasses — stranded in self-pity as the set melts in a Dali-esque landscape populated with a few unlovely nude models. Tim Potter is a spindly, frenetic Dali in humbug-striped jacket and long johns, but the character's existence is desperately contrived.

Stephen Jeffreys, like Terry Johnson, is one of our best new nearly-young playwrights, but *A Going Concern* at Hampstead Theatre is a severe disappointment. In this realistic work with power struggles, Jeffreys has plumbed part of his own past, in the manner of John

Coveney on Hysteria

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