

remains latent within a mundane, finally precious, dramatic construct.

Last week, in the Court's Theatre Upstairs, the extraordinary Wallace Shawn raised the tone, and the quality, in his own dazzling monologue *The Fever*. This co-production with the Royal National Theatre is now on tour (Hemel Hempstead and Warwick this week; Mold, Leicester and Harlow, next) before playing the Cottesloe on 8 and 9 February.

The Fever was written for private performance at New York dinner tables, its ideal setting. Shawn is a self-confessed pampered liberal familiar to theatre-goers for his frank and

blistering *Thought in Three Parts*, the subversively ethical *Aunt Dan and Lemon*, and the severely underrated Jules Feiffer-ish *Marie and Bruce*; and to cinema-goers for his appearances in Woody Allen's *Manhattan* and *Radio Days* and *My Dinner With André*. This is our dinner with Wally. He also played John Lahr, whom he resembles, in *Prick Up Your Ears*.

Shawn found himself in Latin America. A small war is going on and a man is to be executed. He contrasts this reality with the reality he knows and prefers, that of childhood, wrapped presents, his father (Harold Shawn, famed editor of the *New*

Yorker) in a chair reading about China. He is surrounded by 'followers of Marx' and reminded of the forbidden world of hooligans back home on First Avenue.

Making connections between slave labour and creature comforts, Shawn declares that we could not exist without the poor to do awful work. If the poor were paid like us, we could never afford an apple or a shirt.

This script is a real beauty, and it is delivered with un-actorish charm and technical virtuosity by its little, bald, lipping author, squatting on a chair, blinking at the light like a suddenly liberated mole.

Coveney on Fever

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