

with rapt intensity. But the dream of Antony whose 'voice was propertied as all the tuned spheres' could not possibly refer to Paul Butler's catastrophically inadequate soldier hero. Her robe and crown at the last are a curious Edwardian Ascot outfit of gold lamé, yellow chiffon train and a flat wide-brimmed hat. The deadly worm is a wriggly serpent and the whole thing turns into a music-hall novelty act.

This most glorious of texts is mangled beyond recognition, and played on a hideous rubble-strewn exterior. The Romans (except Pompey and Lepidus) are all black, the Egyptians white, a decent enough idea. There is a lot of celebration of the death of Fulvia. Lepidus, whom Stephen MacDonald plays in a white beard that sticks out from his face like a frozen skate, goes literally blind drunk at the party. David Harewood is a sturdy Enobarbus, Aicha Nathalie Kossoko an affecting Octavia. But Redgrave's Cleopatra, her third, is sunk in its surroundings, a bundle of misdirected energy and charm that barely draws on the depths of the play, or indeed her own reserves of radiance and talent.

Alongside this muddle, in the second Riverside studio, Max Frisch's **The Fire Raisers** (1958) at least re-invents the point of the

Redgraves' Moving Theatre season, if not the passion. Without wishing to put you off, I'd say the play is both an anti-fascist morality and a Brechtian parable of death and destruction to the bourgeoisie, specifically Mr and Mrs Gottlieb Biederman. Gottlieb (Malcolm Tierney, erring on the side of dullness) is a magnate in hair-restorers whose former colleague, a sacked inventor, has committed suicide. His wife, Babette (Frances de la Tour in irresistible, carefully understated, form) is a colluding, hard-hearted snob. In a lovely touch, she implies hubby has dandruff, brushing his collar without fuss.

The rise of a new fascist terror (originally, the Nazis) is mirrored in the insidious occupation of the Biedermans' attic by a pair of criminal arsonists. The more blatant their tactics – they install petrol cans, wiring, incendiary devices – the more craven their hosts' hospitality. Although the Bolivian director Lenka Udovicki sets far too sleepy a pace, the play, and its surreal post-conflagration epilogue in Hell, hits home as a topical warning against the liberal toleration of new political terrors on the doorstep.

The summer season in Regent's Park is off to a flying start with

## Coveney on Fire Raisers

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