

Maids malady with m' lady

THIS is the lowborn French criminal-cum-playwright Jean Genet's macabre three-hander, penned in the 1940s and picturing two implicitly bisexual chambermaids who are working themselves up to a murder. They ritualistically fantasise and dress up in their domineering mistress's fine dresses whenever she goes out.

In this sometimes disturbing touring production directed by John Crowley, the master bedroom looks immaculate at first. "Our Lady's" sumptuous double bed has just been made, counterpane tucked in, pillows smoothed ready for her return. When we first see her maids (Niamh Cusack and Kerry Fox) they are standing

Theatre

The Maids
Donmar Warehouse

by the bed, heads bowed, as if at some sacred altar.

Next thing you know, though, the game has begun and Cusack's Claire is jumping on the mattress, stripping off her uniform and gyrating in a sexual frenzy. She soon starts playing the mistress, making Fox's more stolid Solange kiss her high-heels with more than a hint of the dominatrix. Solange (answering to the name Claire) initially responds obediently but then climactically rebels, her rubber-gloved hands raised to strangle her superior. This

turns out to be a routine the pair enact repeatedly.

This production's strength is the clarity with which it charts the maids' shifting interactions as they slip between pretending games and brutal reality in David Rudkin's highly stylised translation. The various implications of Genet's scenario are brought out lucidly enough, too, whether you see this as a vision of anti-Catholic or class revolution, or as a portrait of suppressed lesbian desires.

The most interesting suggestion here is that the maids are sexually abused youngsters, obsessed with and simultaneously angry at Our Lady. She is superbly played by Josette Simon who, arriving home in a suspicious mood, moves mercurially between frostiness and alarmingly sexual clutches.

But too many of the maids' personality switches seem schematic and superficially acted out. Theatrics are a crucial part of Genet's Pirandellian puzzle, but frankly they can also get damnably tiresome.

Tickets: 0171 569 1732

KATE BASSETT

WATCH
SILENT

Maids Bassett Telegraph



Clipped By:

ianlharris

Tue, Nov 15, 2022