



Ready and eager: Miranda Richardson in Wallace Shawn's provocative satire Aunt Dan and Lemon. Photograph by Neil Lambert

I am for all seasons

Theatre
by Susannah
Clapp

Aunt Dan and Lemon awards
The Winter's Tale
The Birthday Party

HOW DARE THEY attack him for killing peasants? or, one of the central themes in *Aunt Dan and Lemon*. The reference here is to Henry Kissinger and the Vietnam war, but Wallace Shawn's drama, revived at the Almeida 11 years after it was first performed in England, reverberates with echoes about current US intervention.

This is a wily piece of work. Its two main and lengthy monologues provide vivid and gripping accounts of uncommitted liberal opinions. One opens a pointed to the dependence of a comfortable civilian public on those who kill. Another stacks a 100-year resort to the ideal of compassion. In neither case is an effective response offered, but in each case a marital conclusion is undermined by the character of the speaker. The Aunt Dan of the title is a characteristically morally suspect

right-winger who thinks of Kissinger as "powerful" and who has a passionate lesbian affair with a murderer. The irritatingly nicknamed "Lemon" is an unstable young Israeli who thinks the Nazis had something to be said for them and who gazes peculiar fruit juices. All this is provoking and skilfully put together. But it doesn't really add up to a politically astute analysis. For all the sophistication of Shawn's language, his satirical targets are broad. His subtleties don't always justify his length. Not everyone will see a continuum between his Vietnam war and Wallace Shawn's drama, revived at the Almeida 11 years after it was first performed in England, reverberates with echoes about current US intervention. This is a wily piece of work. Its two main and lengthy monologues provide vivid and gripping accounts of uncommitted liberal opinions. One opens a pointed to the dependence of a comfortable civilian public on those who kill. Another stacks a 100-year resort to the ideal of compassion. In neither case is an effective response offered, but in each case a marital conclusion is undermined by the character of the speaker. The Aunt Dan of the title is a characteristically morally suspect

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And you know, such is the company working generally and closely together should see the Maly Drama Theatre of St Petersburg. Anyone interested in seeing how Shakespeare can be staged with a contemporary clarity but without obtrusively modernity would want to see his plays directed by Dechen Dabwalian and designed by Nick Ormerod. Under the auspices of the British Council, the Maly and Donmar have now come together for the first time for a production of *The Winter's Tale*, first seen in England at the handsome Warwick Arts Centre before moving to the Brighton Festival. Let's hope the directors of the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company are paying attention.

But the performance is in itself a total acrobatic feat about the transcendent power of theatre could claim that an English-speaking audience is getting more than two-thirds of the production: inflection and nuance in the speech are undetectable even a buffoon will have to look up at the stunts in some instances, and so miss some informative gestures on the stage. What you get is a powerful cartoon of each interpretation of a role.

Joe Harborne's production of *The Birthday Party* at the Picaresque proves the strength of Pinter's play, which has not had its forty-first birthday. It is not the most successful of stagings. The violence in the play, which breaks out when two men arrive at a musty seaside boarding-house apparently in pursuit of its sole resident, is never made to seem entirely natural, the glide from the costly ballet to the throbbing isn't smooth enough. What is striking is the sense that a joke can be a threat.

There is a division of acting styles here. Timothy West is credible and calm as one of the bullying intruders, but Priscilla Skelton, in pink, her hair bobbing with Junjo rollers, does one of her more burlesque comic turns. Tim, in a costume and design that is period detail, faded wallpaper and depressing pyramids, with a sort of ironic expression, the set is propped like a filmy wind-break on a bench, against a slacker seascape.

It's easy to imagine more penetrating productions, both more realistic and more abstract. But it's part of the point of the play that you'll never agree with any one. And its comedy sells through. So much has been made of Pinter's status

The constantly transforming Miranda Richardson can raise a comic storm with one flick of her eyelids

Aunt Dan Clapp Observer



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