

Of kings and queens

Alan Frost is bowled over.

The ghosted autobiography is one of the literary world's travesties. A good example is that of *Shane Warne with Richard Hobson*. In other words the king of spin, who is suitably modest about his reading and writing skills, has spilled his heart out to Richard who has presented us with a history of a life which curiously lacks the soul of the man. His genius is beyond doubt. He and Adam Gilchrist have taken the game of cricket by the scruff of the neck and transformed it. But he is not the man in the book and the second and third Ashes tests told us more about him than 50,000 words. My dim recollection of cricket in the early 60s was that someone such as Ken Barrington would arrive at the crease and then, half an hour later, John Arlott would announce, very slowly, that his first run had been scored. The demise of dominant West Indian bowling, a fever of Australian aggression, different bats, and the rise of Twenty20 has given this football-sodden country real excitement. I have only one quibble about those dramatic tests which played as nail-biting film scripts. I wish that Brigitte and Keith had named their first-born son differently. The cries of the Australo-Greek chorus intoning 'noice one, Shine' or 'g'd barling, Shine' after each of the great man's deliveries make me wish he was called Henry or Rupert.

Sibling rivalry

Peter Oswald's new version of Schiller's *Mary Stuart* was a sellout at the Donmar and rightly so. The central scene is a meeting between Elizabeth and Mary which never took place, but is introduced by Schiller in order to draw out psychological nuances between the two women. The structure of the play is perfect; the production exemplary. Men are garbed in modern gear – grey suits! Queen Elizabeth wears a robe of gold and black, its opulence emphasising her power; Queen Mary, imprisoned, has a simple red dress exaggerating her relative beauty. Each is a queen – one constrained by her people and her duty; the other locked in a castle. In a memorable coup de théâtre Mary enjoys the freedom of a garden in pouring rain and with a soaked dress and dank hair girlishly relishes the moment. Suddenly, Elizabeth arrives, but the war of words which follows results in her humiliation, not that of the bespattered Mary. Elizabeth has the last word, of course.

Janet McTeer and Harriet Walter as Mary and Elizabeth are outstanding. The supporting male cast are subordinate in all senses. Guy Henry as

Leicester and David Horovitch as Burleigh made the best of the cards dealt to them but Schiller and director Phyllida Lloyd, quite sensibly, made the two women the centre of attention at all times. Coincidentally, as a respite from the tension of the cricket, I listened to *Woman's Hour* which contained an interview with the two actresses. They had thought long and hard about the similarities and differences between the protagonists. They were queens in a man's world and cousins. Elizabeth was insecure (her father Henry wanted a son and executed her mother, Anne Boleyn) and played hard in a masculine environment. She loved her people and although dubbed the 'Virgin Queen' had her favourites and strong passions. Mary had no doubt of her right to be queen and came from a contented childhood in France, but poor political judgement and what was seen as recklessness in her emotions led to her fall. The irony was that she died a Catholic martyr but her son, James, became the next king – of a Protestant state.

Mind games

Believe What You Will is also concerned with mind games between two strong antagonists and was written by Philip Massinger a few years after the death of the aforementioned King James. Sebastian, a king of Portugal, was defeated by the Moors, but after his apparent death reappeared some time later and a contemporary book described his persecution by the Spanish ambassador, his appearance before the Venetian senate, imprisonment, flight, and humiliation in Naples. Massinger's original idea was banned because the censor said 'it did contain dangerous matter... and there being a peace sworn between the kings of England and Spain.' Massinger switched the plot to imperial Rome and a tussle between King Antiochus of Lower Asia, who reappears after 22 years' absence, and the Roman ambassador to Carthage.

The play is a minor masterpiece and a poorly attended Swan theatre was riveted. Allusions to current events are rife but the audience is left to draw its own conclusion. The defiant, humbled majesty of the king played by Peter de Jersey was counterbalanced on stage by the arrogant oppression of William Houston as the Roman. Houston is an actor I have seen in different plays for the past seven years and he is magnificent, oozes charisma, and has a crisp baritone speaking voice and flaming eyes. He should be set loose on an unsuspecting world for all to see.