

Man of the moment

## Modernising an Arthur Miller classic

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OF ALL modern dramatists, Arthur Miller can be the hardest to bring up to date. His plays are vivid portraits of the era in which they were written. As a result, few productions manage to go beyond presenting them as period pieces. “A View from the Bridge”, which opened at the Young Vic theatre in London on April 11th, is a rare exception. Directed by Ivo van Hove, a Belgian who is fast becoming known further afield, it is a striking new take on Miller’s work.

“A View from the Bridge” tells the story of Eddie Carbone, an Italian-American longshoreman living in Red Hook, Brooklyn. After he takes in Marco and Rodolpho, two men who have illegally arrived from Sicily, events begin to unravel: his young niece Catherine becomes infatuated with Rodolpho, disturbing the jealous and protective Eddie. As a play it can seem dated: Eddie’s belief that Rodolpho is homosexual seems forced (“I’m tellin’ you I know—he ain’t right”), while the structure of Miller’s play—loosely based on Greek tragedy, with one character, a lawyer, narrating events to the audience—can appear mannered.

Mr van Hove is known for his innovative approach to classic plays. Since 2001 he has been the director of Toneelgroep Amsterdam, Holland’s largest repertory theatre. With his long-term collaborator and partner Jan Versweyveld he creates stylised productions, often using video screens and experimental staging. Audiences in his productions often find themselves sitting onstage or being moved around an auditorium.

In comparison with some of Mr van Hove’s earlier productions, “A View from the Bridge” is relatively simple. The play opens with Eddie (Mark Strong) showering under a sliver of water and wringing out his shirt. Mr Versweyveld’s stage design is stark: a sunken monochrome set with few props, relying on subtle shifts of lighting to indicate scene changes. All the characters, with the exception of Catherine (Phoebe Fox), wear muted colours. Padding

around the stage in bare feet, the actors seem vulnerable. A requiem mass quietly plays throughout, building up to a crescendo at the end of the play.

Miller's play is perhaps an odd choice for a European director better known for his more avant-garde work. But Mr van Hove was attracted to the ambiguity of the play: how Eddie can seem sympathetic one minute and then monstrous the next. The play also echoes some of the anti-immigration rhetoric being bandied about in Europe. "It raises the issue of whether you should ask of people who come to your country that they should integrate and adapt—and if that is possible anyway," says Mr van Hove. His stylish staging strips away the affectations in Miller's play. In doing so, an American classic suddenly appears dazzlingly modern.