

## MAIL ON SUNDAY

KING LEAR

Northern Broadsides

★★★★

Georgina Brown

Call me a southern luvvie, but there's something bracing, indeed revelatory, about a Lear with a northern accent. When "Father" rhymes with "blather" and "shadow" with "madder", you can't help but hear the play afresh. Shakespeare's tragedy is about a family at war with itself, when Lear has enough of ruling and decides to divide his kingdom between his three daughters. All hell breaks loose. Staged at the home of Northern Broadsides in cavernous bowels of this vast Halifax warehouse, Jonathan Miller's revival, played out as a domestic rather than a cosmic drama, really does feel like "trouble at t'mill".

Unadorned and low key, this period dress production places the audience at banks at either side of the stage, up close and intimate. Stripped back to its bare necessities of clear storytelling, it has the Northern Broadsides' trademarks of accessibility and simplicity. Moreover, it's funnier than usual, with Jos Vantylor in particular draining every drop of comedy in hilarious turn as a camp courtier.

Detailed characterization is everything, John Branwell's Gloucester is a sweet gullible father, easily tricked by his scheming bastard son Edmund. Sea Cernow takes a lick smacking delight in being villainous. Nicola Sanderson's formidable Regan rolls her eyes impartiality and bosses everyone with the fierce cheeriness of a sadistic hospital matron. Barrie Rutter's stocky snowy-bearded old Dad has his smile wiped the moment his youngest daughter Cordelia (Catherine Kinsella candid rather than cloying) tells him she loves him according to her bond, no more, no less. Strikingly, in the storm scene, he rebukes the thunder and lightning rather than competes with his own histrionics.

I've seen rather grander Lears, but few have charted his descent into madness then back to sanity with such restraint and clarity.