

## Review: The Leader

[Lucie Parker](#) reckons *The Leader* will provide nutritious fodder for dinner party conversations

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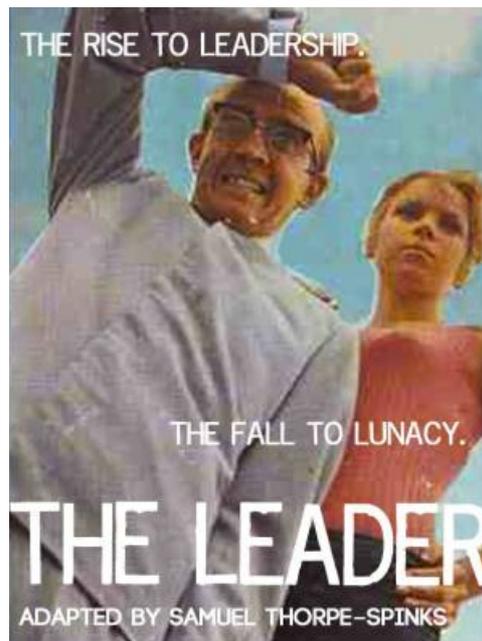


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**Directors:** Sam Thorpe-Spinks and Rosie Litterick

**Producer:** Thomas Ryalls

**Rating:** 3 stars

This week saw the barn held captive within the throes of fascist fanatic John Pearman and his struggle for power in 'The Leader', a reinterpretation by Sam Thorpe-Spinks of Gillian Freeman's 1965 novel.

We bear witness to Pearman's journey from a lowly IT consultant with no prospects and huge ideas, to a fully fledged party leader whose grapple for authority reverberates powerfully around the barn through his ideological exclamations and cackling laughter.

The ideology and purpose is set upon the foundation of a minimalist canvas; the barn remains entirely black save for a white square in the middle. As well as being a stimulating change from the usual cluttered sets of kitchen-sink dramas, it adds a dramatic aesthetic that runs perfectly alongside the dark undertones of the play. The bold contrast of black and white creating a powerful landscape to the delirium that unfolds upon it.

The acting is strong, with effortless and engaging performances from Declan Dillane as Mr Patterson and Sam Went as John Pearman. Dillane faultlessly captures the tangibility needed to emphasise to the audience the danger of the bridge between the deluded fascist ideology of the Leader and those ordinary citizens who relate to it. It is only then that we can understand the underlying essence of the problem at

hand: the engagement of ordinary individuals with nationalism due to disillusionment with their society.

The chemistry between the youth party boys (Cotter, Cornish and Botterell) also works well to highlight an uneducated and apathetic generation who long for change. Went gives a convincing depiction of the Leader, developing the nuanced quirks of a frenzied man over the course of the play to then combust when the perilous waters he is treading become too much, creating a metaphorical portrait of a deluded and broken ideology that mirrors Hitler's demise.

The problems with this play lie within the structure and content of what is shown. The first act is drawn out, taking too long to lay the groundwork and using some scenes that could easily be cut so as to maintain a faster pace. By contrast the second act is half the time, yet contains so many poignant moments that they ironically cancel the impact of each other out, resulting in an unrealistic ending of which it is impossible to grasp anything besides cynicism from.

Although the problem of public disengagement leading to nationalism is a topical tenet of modern British politics, the political undercurrent within this play appears stale, clichéd, and overdone. This results in a parochial portrayal that is weighed down by the force of the contentious roots of nationalism it attempts to engage with, such as loneliness and frustration. The audience is consequently left struggling to empathise with or understand the passions erupting from Dillane.

Nonetheless, this production is still relevant, given the recent focus on the nationalistic principles and immigration policies of UKIP and the EDL. It may not exploit the tensions of nationalism as well as productions such as the 2008 German film *Die Welle* (The Wave) or Sartre's 1948 play *Les Mains Sales* (Dirty Hands), but is still an interesting base for discussion. For sheer political implications alone it is worth a watch, and will provide nutritious fodder for dinner party conversations.



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